

Athlete perceptions of recruitment strategies in Canadian men's basketball: A marketing perspective

by

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Abstract

Research into student-athlete recruitment has been focused primarily on identifying the most influential factors that contribute to the college choice decision. The impact of the head coach has been recognized as the most significant factor, and the nature of their influence is the primary point of interest in this paper. The strategies and tactics used by men's basketball coaches in Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) were considered from the perspective of elite student-athletes, as each participant drew upon their own experiences in order to identify effective recruitment practices. Eight semi-structured phone interviews were conducted with CIS men's basketball players who made significant on-court contributions during their first year of eligibility. The similarities between the college choice process and the consumer decision process were examined, and the impact of effective recruitment strategies was discussed from a marketing standpoint. Analysis of the data revealed that influence strategies used by head coaches focus on the information processing component of the Consumer Decision Process Model (CDP Model) in order to create positive recruit perceptions. Five themes emerged from the data: familiarity, seriousness, value, honesty, and influential agents. Each of the five themes is tied to a recruitment strategy, and within each strategy a number of tactics were shown to be effective in securing recruit commitment. While the inclusion of these tactics does not guarantee student-athlete commitment, their omission from the recruitment plan often results in a poor perceived fit. Results showed that head coaches who embodied effective personal selling through the use of various recruitment tactics were most effective in securing commitment from elite Canadian student-athletes. The investigation

of student-athlete recruitment through a marketing lens allows for business literature to be applied, as well as for the CDP Model to be used as a framework for the collection and analysis of the data. By using a sample of Canadian student-athletes attending Canadian universities, a new perspective on student-athlete recruitment is explored.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Jordan Baker. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Athlete perceptions of recruitment strategies in Canadian men’s basketball: A marketing perspective”, ID: Pro00066147, July 29, 2016.

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Student-Athlete Recruitment and the Canadian Context

In recent years there has been increased interest in the factors surrounding the effective recruitment of student-athletes to American post-secondary institutions. Having top-level athletes compete in sports like men's basketball is "important due to the impact that successful seasons may have on increased admissions and donations to the university" (Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003, p. 611). Due to the profitability of intercollegiate athletics in the United States, member schools of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) are making concerted efforts to produce athletes who can succeed on the national stage. At the Division I level, success in men's basketball often translates into an increase in program reputation and prestige. NCAA Division I is the top amateur intercollegiate sport classification in the United States, and it serves as a stepping-stone for many student-athletes who transition to professional playing careers.

Considering the high athlete turnover that occurs in collegiate sport due to eligibility rules and timelines, effective recruitment is essential in maintaining a high level of performance. In NCAA Division I men's basketball, an emerging trend within the past 10 years is the 'one-and-done' athlete, a talented individual who leaves for the professional ranks after only his freshman season. With impact players rarely staying a full four years, coaches are forced to recruit at an alarming rate in order to reload their rosters with talent. Though the impact of a talented coach is undeniable, it can be argued that even the most effective coach is limited by the raw abilities of his or her athletes.

That is why the recruitment of top-level players is such an integral part of running a successful athletic program.

In order to gain greater insight on effective recruitment, this thesis will be focused on a specific question within a specific context: from the perspective of the student-athlete, which recruitment strategies and tactics used by Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) men's basketball coaches are most effective in securing commitment from elite student-athletes?

In this thesis, athlete recruitment is considered from a Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS)¹ perspective. The CIS, despite operating on a significantly smaller scale, does share a number of similarities with the NCAA's Division I program. These similarities include elite nation-wide competition, the offering of athletic scholarships, and a competitive recruitment landscape. This allows for a number of NCAA-based research findings to be applied to the Canadian recruiting context. Currently, recruitment research is centered on the perspectives of the Division I student-athlete, focusing primarily on the college factors that student-athletes find most important when considering one institution over another. These findings certainly maintain their relevance for the purpose of this project, as student-athletes must consider similar academic, athletic, and institutional factors in both NCAA and CIS contexts. However, despite these similarities, the Canadian perspective does represent a unique approach to student-athlete recruitment research, as the results will focus on the strategies available to men's basketball coaches at Canadian universities.

¹ CIS was rebranded as USports on October 20, 2016. CIS will be used throughout the document, as primary data collection was completed before the rebrand.

While extremely valuable, the current recruitment research fails to capture the interpersonal interactions (and their influences on college factors) that occur throughout the recruitment period. Consequently, the area of research surrounding effective recruitment strategies and tactics is underdeveloped, especially within the context of Canadian men's basketball. The primary objective of this project is to evaluate CIS student-athlete perceptions of the recruitment process in order to identify these effective recruitment strategies and tactics. Despite the similarities between the NCAA and CIS, the recruitment tools available to CIS head coaches are considerably different, and as a result it is expected that a number of unique strategies and tactics may emerge from the interview data.

Literature Review

Recruiting Student-Athletes

College factors. In order to better understand the choices being made by prospective collegiate athletes, Gabert et al. (1999) developed a preliminary instrument for measuring the factors that influence a student-athlete's college choice. Potential factors included those specific to athletes, as well as general population factors that all potential college students face. Of the 23 factors suggested, the head coach was deemed to be the single most important variable (Gabert et al., 1999). Other significant factors reported by the study include location of school, as well as opportunity to play, and degree programs offered (Gabert et al. 1999).

Support for the importance of general population factors can be found in work by Klenosky, Templin, and Troutman, (2001) who argued that athletes choose the college

that best aligns with their personal values. In a number of semi-structured interviews, athletes reported the need for security in the years beyond college, indicating the importance of an institution's academic attributes (Klenosky et al, 2001). While there is evidence that student-athletes evaluate colleges based on some of the same factors as non-athletes, it is clear that athletic variables complicate the recruitment process a great deal. In addition to security, athletes reported that their college choice was based a need for achievement, belonging, and enjoyment (Klenosky et al. 2001). These three additional needs were satisfied almost exclusively by factors associated with the athletic program. Mentioned by 25 of the 27 interviewees in Klenosky's study, the head coach has the power to influence an athlete's perceived ability to improve athletically, feel comfortable, and earn playing time (Klenosky et al. 2001). It is argued that while academic factors should be addressed during recruitment, athletic factors represent a unique influence, especially that of the head coach (Letawsky et al., 2003).

While this research is able to uncover the attributes that factor into a young student-athlete's college decision, it is also important to understand how each factor contributes to the recruitment process. The head coach is clearly an important influence when considering a post-secondary athletic program, but why do athletes choose one head coach over another? How do athletes determine which school will provide the greatest opportunity to play? The recruit must make certain subjective evaluations during the recruitment process, and the ability to influence these evaluations is key to recruitment success.

Klenosky et al. (2001) are able to show that student-athletes value college attributes based on the perceived consequences associated with each attribute. In order to better grasp the source of the perceptions held by student-athletes, Ryan, Groves, and Schneider (2007) created a model to map the decision-making process of prospective collegiate basketball players. Understanding the subjective component of college attribute evaluation, Ryan et al. (2007) worked to identify the sources of influence that help shape attribute perception. Six “categories” and the relationships between them were used, and an increased focus was placed on the interaction between important influences, rather than on individual college factors (Ryan et al., 2007).

The student-athlete recruitment categories were derived through a meta-analysis of the previous research, and the relationships between categories were used to build a number of decision-paths (Ryan et al., 2007). The six categories and their associated impact on the decision-making process are:

- Academic Factors: What degree programs are offered, how likely is degree completion, and what future opportunities does this degree provide?
- Coach Influence: Can a strong relationship be built and will the coach help with the development and maturity of the athlete?
- Basketball Program: Is the program successful? Reputable? Will the athlete be recognized for their involvement in this specific program?
- Personal Influences: Whom can the athlete trust to help them make the right decision? Who is providing guidance and advice?
- Location: Does the location provide familiarity and comfort?

- Financial Influences: What are the financial demands of attending? What are the financial ambitions associated with future employment?

Although some of the categories on student-athlete recruitment proposed by Ryan et al. (2007) do show some overlap with factors suggested by Gabert et al. (1999), the focus has begun to shift towards identifying the type of influence each factor provides. The challenge for the lead recruiter (or head coach) is to develop a recruitment strategy that provides positive answers to each of the underlying factor questions. It should also be noted that according to prior research, ‘Coach influence’ is the most influential category when considering athlete recruitment (Gabert et. al, 1999).

Decision-paths. Relationships among the categories were isolated to develop decision-paths. Each decision-path is guided by the interaction of influences to determine a potential college fit (Ryan et al., 2007). Both long-term and short-term objectives emerged from the analysis, but the likelihood of college selection seemed to rely primarily on three factors:

- Quality of life after graduation
- Future dollar considerations
- Parental influence

The emphasis on life post-graduation indicates that athletes are heavily concerned with the future employment opportunities associated with their college choice (Ryan et al., 2007). For approximately 50% of NCAA Division I basketball players, this employment will fall outside the realm of professional basketball, indicating once again the importance of academic considerations (Wojtera, 2017). The most relevant finding

however is the impact of parental influence on an athlete's decision (Ryan et al., 2007). While it is not a measurable college factor, parental influence is important to consider as the subjective nature of college factor evaluation is considered. This influence is especially relevant in the complex case of the student-athlete, as parents are often less concerned with athletic variables and more concerned about long-term academic benefits (Ryan et al., 2007).

Influential agents. The university is responsible for developing a recruitment strategy that considers the important factor information, as well as the impact of influential agents in the decision-making process. An influential agent is someone who is trusted and respected by the recruit (often a parent or coach), and who uses his or her position to influence factor perceptions.

A successful recruiter is therefore able to “identify relevant college choice factors, consolidate this information into recruitment influence strategies, and communicate these strategies by using influence tactics in order to improve recruit and influential agent fit perceptions” (Magnusen, Kim, Perrené, & Ferris, 2014, p. 1265). The head coach is perceived as the most influential college choice factor due to the ongoing coach-athlete relationship, and also because of the role the head coach plays as a recruiter (Gabert et al., 1999). According to Magnusen et al. (2014), an effective head coach must be able to persuade the student-athlete and the relevant influential agents that the college in question represents the best fit.

Fit perceptions. Fit is defined as the compatibility between recruit and institution. This compatibility is evaluated by the recruit and is based on perceived

attributes and relationships associated with the school and basketball program. Fit perceptions can be divided into three subcategories: person-job fit, person-organization fit, and person-recruiter fit (Magnusen et al., 2014). This indicates that the head coach is responsible for influencing the recruit's perceptions of the both the academic and athletic programs, while also ensuring that the tactics and strategies being used during the recruitment process are perceived as positive. In order to engage in such socially effective behavior, Magnusen et al. (2014) argue that a coach must exhibit both political and social skill.

Political skill involves the use of knowledge about a recruit to influence recruit behavior and perceptions. This is especially useful in establishing positive person-job and person-organization fit. Social skill meanwhile, is defined by the ability to effectively interact and communicate with the recruit, helping to establish person-recruiter fit (Magnusen et al., 2014). The use of social skill is especially effective in moderating strong influential tactics, allowing a recruiter to leverage their political skill without compromising the recruit's perceived person-recruiter fit.

In terms of the actual information being presented to a recruit, it is the combination of athlete factors and program factors that determine what is relevant (Magnusen et al., 2014). An effective recruiter is able to identify, categorize, and package information that will exhibit significant impact on recruit and influential agent fit perceptions (Magnusen et al., 2014). In order to gather these appropriate influence strategies, the recruiter must be able to discern the values and objectives held by both the recruit and the relevant influential agents. Athlete factors such as age, gender, skill-level,

and the extent of a pre-existing coach-athlete relationship must be taken into account when developing a recruitment strategy (Magnusen et al., 2014).

Influence strategies. When considering program factors, Magnusen et al. (2014) divided influence strategies into three subcategories: athletic factors, academic factors, and external factors. This division is linked closely to Gabert et al.'s (1999) research that identified coach characteristics, the opportunity to play, and degree programs offered as key factors in the college decision-making process. Additionally, post-graduation employment opportunities and economic conditions feature heavily in Magnusen et al.'s (2014) influence strategies model, providing support for Ryan et al.'s (2007) research on the importance of long-term benefits. It can be argued that while our understanding of program factors is rather extensive, research on the impact of athlete factors is incomplete.

Influence tactics. A strong set of influence strategies must be supported by a recruiter's ability to effectively present the information. "The skillful organization and transmission of information should affect observers' perceptions of recruiters in desired and intended ways" (Magnusen et al., 2014, p. 1275). These influence tactics, when used correctly, can enhance a recruiter's ability to create positive fit perceptions by more effectively leveraging the relevant influence strategies. A number of proactive tactics are outlined by Yukl, Seifert, & Chavez (2008) and adapted for the athlete recruitment context by Magnusen et al. (2014). These tactics are described in depth in Figure 1 and in the 'Influence tactics: part II' section of this thesis. Proactive tactics are designed to generate support, commitment, and action from the recruit, often through the use of either

rational or emotional persuasion (See Figure 1).

Influential agent interaction. The final key consideration outlined by Magnusen et al. (2014) is the interaction between recruit and influential agent(s). When a consensus exists between the two parties with respect to the perceived fit of a college (either positive or negative), the resulting decision is often easy to predict. The alternative scenario however, produces what is identified as a “recruit-influential agent fit interaction” (Magnusen et al., 2014, p. 1277). This interaction stems from a disparity in fit perceptions and must be resolved before a college choice can be made. Magnusen et al. (2014) argue that due to the strong ties that exist between recruits and influential agents, a common ground or ‘cognitive consistency’ must eventually be achieved. Debate and discussion are typical ways for the two parties to re-establish relational harmony, providing a unified fit position from where a college choice can be made (Magnusen et al., 2014).

Research into college choice factors has identified a number of important program and college factors that contribute to a recruit’s decision-making process. While these factors reveal a great deal about student-athlete perceptions, how do interpersonal exchanges contribute and impact the process? Specifically, what characteristics, strategies, and tactics displayed by recruiters (head coaches) enhance perceived fit? Magnusen et al. (2014) indicate that further investigation of how effective recruiters tailor their recruitment strategies and tactics is required in order to gain greater insight on the creation of perceived fit. The needs and priorities of both recruits and influential agents must be considered, as well as the relationships between recruiter, influential

agents, and recruit. It is also significant to note that Magnusen et al. (2014) identify congruence between a recruit's attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioral perspectives as an important factor that influences recruit commitment. This concept will be revisited during a review of marketing literature pertinent to adolescent buyers.

Summary. In summary, the research on student-athlete recruitment suggests that the head coach plays the most significant role in influencing the college choice decision (Gabert et al., 1999). With that being said, a number of secondary factors such as post-graduation prospects, family influence, and fit perceptions also contribute to the decision-making process. An effective head coach is able to develop and present relevant recruitment materials in order to create a perceived fit between the recruit and the team, university, and head coach.

Due to the limited amount of student-athlete recruitment research, specifically the absence of established theories or models, marketing literature was used to give added structure and direction to the primary research.

Marketing Connection

Introduction. Recruitment effectiveness is highly dependent on the recruiter's ability to influence the perceptions, intentions, and behavior of a recruit. The head coach is charged with understanding athlete needs, communicating program benefits, and establishing a positive recruit-college fit. Quite simply, the head coach must market the athletic and academic programs of their institution in a way that inspires recruit commitment. The connections to marketing are clear throughout the literature on athlete recruitment. For example, both recruiters and marketers must consider environmental

influences and social stimuli (such as influential agents) when designing a communication strategy. If the college choice process is approached as a high involvement purchase (where head coaches act as marketers and the post-secondary institution is the product being sold), it allows for marketing research to be leveraged in order to promote a greater understanding of effective recruitment.

Involvement. Before any individual marketing strategies can be considered, the nature of the purchase must first be evaluated. Specifically, the consumer's degree of personal involvement is analyzed. Involvement is defined as the "level of perceived importance and interest evoked by a stimuli within a specific situation" (Blackwell et al., 2006, p. 93). Involvement is directly tied to personal relevance and is also linked to the needs and values of the consumer. Divided into three subcategories, involvement is the product of personal, stimulus, and situational factors (Zaichowsky, 1986). Deciding between post-secondary institutions can be classified as a high involvement decision due to the personal importance, product differentiation, and significant resource commitment involved. There is also a great deal of risk associated with this purchase decision, as a poor choice could limit future employment and financial opportunities.

Once the decision is determined to be high involvement, marketers can begin to implement strategies that leverage the consumer's increased attention and motivation (Blackwell et al., 2006). Rational, fact-based arguments are considered most effective in cases of high involvement, as consumers will engage in a significant information search and evaluation of alternatives. Additionally, marketing tactics that highlight product differentiation and risk mitigation are shown to be effective in influencing consumer

perceptions (Zaichowsky, 1986). In summary, the literature not only supports the argument that college choice is a high involvement decision, but it also introduces a number of key concepts to consider when marketing to high involvement consumers.

Personal selling. Research into marketing strategy has identified countless ways to influence consumer behavior. In order to successfully implement one or more of these strategies, the recruitment environment must be considered. For the head coach of a men's post-secondary basketball program, student-athlete recruitment rarely includes mass marketing techniques like print or television advertising. Instead, coaches rely primarily on personal selling, a technique that is built upon direct, personalized communication that encourages the development of long-term relationships (Weitz & Bradford, 1999).

Personal selling is used to create a unique investment that competitors are unable to replicate, often leading to a high degree of trust and commitment between parties. In order to provide such a unique opportunity, the marketer must be able to not only identify and meet the needs of the consumer, but also to add value as a part of the product offering (Weitz & Bradford, 1999). Considering the work of Gabert et al. (1999) on the importance of the head coach in the college decision process, it is clear that an effective head coach must be able to add value through their recruitment efforts.

Sales teams. Personal selling often requires the participation of multiple individuals on both sides of the partnership (Weitz & Bradford, 1999). By building a diversified sales team that markets the product to both the consumer and the appropriate influential agents, a stronger and more reliable partnership is formed. Head coaches often

include members of the academic, medical, and administrative staff in their recruitment efforts, constructing somewhat of an informal recruitment team.

While sales teams are important, the lead salesperson will consistently act as the primary contact and must possess the necessary skills to effectively manage to relationship. Weitz and Bradford (1999) emphasize the importance of having both relationship initiation and enhancement skills. By collaborating with the consumer (especially during conflict management), the lead salesperson is able to reinforce their commitment to the relationship and improve their standing with the consumer.

Declarative knowledge. Another key component of successful personal selling is the declarative knowledge of the salesperson. In this context, declarative knowledge refers to the ability of the marketer to identify and organize consumer attributes at each stage of the sales process (Szymanski, 1988). Each consumer has a unique set of needs and influences that must be considered when constructing a personal marketing strategy. By targeting viable consumers and accurately classifying them in a pre-existing cognitive model, a salesperson can maximize the returns on their marketing efforts.

Consumer categorization is a learned process that Szymanski (1988) attributes to both exposure and trial and error experience. Expert marketers rely on in-depth information that allows for differentiation and categorization of the consumer. In summary, declarative knowledge allows a marketer to tailor their marketing strategy to each consumer by understanding the needs and behaviors of the individual at each stage in the sales process. Classification is therefore an ongoing and continuous process until a decision has been made with respect to consumption (Szymanski, 1988). In the context

of CIS men's basketball, effective head coaches are able to predict the effects of specific recruitment tactics based on the recruit's individual and environmental characteristics. Szymanski's (1988) research also suggests that the most effective recruiters are those who display the ability to adapt to recruit reactions, a skill most likely developed after years of recruiting experience.

Influence tactics: part II. Now that the broad marketing environment surrounding athlete recruitment has been established, the specific influence tactics used by marketers in high involvement personal selling situations must be investigated. These tactics are specific influential tools that work in conjunction with fact-based arguments and sales teams in order to directly influence consumer behaviors. Research into influence tactics determined that tactic effectiveness is limited by a three factors: power relationship, reasons for influence, and resistance of target (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980). Initial research indicated that individuals used 8 different influential tactics to influence subordinates, co-workers, and bosses. Each tactic was used with varying degrees of frequency and effectiveness, and was highly dependent on the individual's reason for influence (Kipnis et al., 1980).

In the case of college choice, the recruit is in the position of power and the recruiter's reason for influence is that of personal/program benefit. According to Kipnis et al. (1980), the tactics of self-presentation and coalition forming are the most effective in this situation. Self-presentation is characterized by drawing attention to personal and professional competence by highlighting past accomplishments and successes. Coalition forming meanwhile, involves garnering support from other reputable sources to reinforce

the marketing position. This support will often include influential agents and members of the sales team. In addition, Kipnis et al. (1980) indicated that as the standing and importance of the target increases, the more the marketing material should rely on rationality.

More recently, research by Yukl, Seifert, and Chavez (2008) focused on the development of an Influence Behavior Questionnaire (IBQ) that determined the existence of 11 different proactive influence tactics. As seen in Figure 1, these tactics can all be applied to the athlete recruitment setting, albeit with varying degrees of effectiveness. Of the 11 tactics, Yukl et al. (2008) identified four ‘core’ tactics with direct ties to commitment:

1. Rational Persuasion
2. Consultation
3. Inspirational Appeal
4. Collaboration

These four tactics were all shown to be most effective when the reason for influence was to inspire commitment (Yukl et al., 2008). It was also found that these core tactics could be used together in the same influence attempt without compromising effectiveness. Figure 1 provides an excellent example of how each of the 11 influence tactics can be manipulated to suit the student-athlete recruitment context (Magnusen et al., 2014).

Figure 1: Influence Tactics in Athlete Recruitment

Influence Tactic	Basic Explanation of the Influence Tactic	How Recruiters Might Combine This Tactic With Influence Strategy Information
<i>Rational Persuasion</i>	Recruiters using real-world evidence and sound, if not commonsense, arguments to demonstrate the merits of their positions and/or offers to student-athletes.	“This program makes a lot sense. You’ll start your freshman year, we have the academic major you want, great weather, plus, your family and high school friends are less than an hour away. That’s win-win!”
<i>Exchange</i>	Offer of reciprocation, either in the present or future, by recruiters to student-athletes.	“I only have a partial scholarship this year. However, if you play well for me, I can offer you a full scholarship next year.”
<i>Inspirational Appeal</i>	Recruiters appealing to a student-athletes’ dreams, ideals, and values. Goal is to enhance student-athletes’ levels of emotional arousal in order to secure a pledge/commitment for an offer.	“We are building a tradition here and you have an opportunity to be a part of the foundation. You can go to a bigger program. Sure, you’ll be celebrated...but in time, you’ll be forgotten. Instead, you can come here, be celebrated and remembered as the legend that started it all.”
<i>Legitimizing</i>	Recruiters making it known to student-athletes they have the authority and ability to make good on their offers.	“Let me be clear. I’ve been here 20 years. I’ve won a lot of games and know a lot people on campus. If attending law school here is what you want, then study hard, play hard, and I know it will happen.”
<i>Apprising</i>	Recruiters explaining how their offers will personally benefit student-athletes and further their career ambitions.	“Our academic reputation is one of the finest in country. Coming here is one of the best ways for you to secure a great job upon graduating.”
<i>Pressure</i>	Recruiters engaging in persistent checking and reminders in order to influence student-athletes’ decisions. Can also be recruiters demanding recruits make a decision or risk the offer.	“The economy is bad, and I’ve got a lot talented kids that are hungry for your scholarship. We want you here, but if you fail to make a decision very soon, I cannot guarantee the scholarship will be around.”
<i>Collaboration</i>	Recruiters’ willingness to provide student-athletes with support, such as a full-scholarship, if they accept the offer.	“I am offering you a scholarship and I will personally see to it you get all of the tutoring you need to be highly successful in the classroom.”
<i>Ingratiation</i>	Recruiters use admiration, compliments, and flattery (i.e., “sweet talk”) to influence student-athletes’ college choice decisions.	“I’ve seen you play, and you are flat-out a walking, talking human highlight reel. Your skills can carry us to a national championship!”
<i>Consultation</i>	Recruiters seeking out student-athletes to help develop a plan of action for improving a cause or activity for which student-athletes’ support is desired.	“Our goal is to win the conference and make the post-season. We’re very close, but not quite there. How could you help us achieve this goal? What needs to get done for us to have your full support?”
<i>Personal Appeal</i>	Recruiters making it known to student-athletes how, by accepting the offer, they will be indebted to the recruit. Can also be understood as a personal favor request by the recruiter.	“We’ve known each other a long time. Heck, I remember watching you play sports before you could even tie your shoes. But you’re an adult now and I need your help. I want you to come here and play.”
<i>Coalition</i>	Recruiters enlisting and leveraging the help of others, such as influential agents, as they seek to influence recruits’ decisions about which school to attend.	“Your mother played for me. Your sister played for me. I wouldn’t be talking to you today if we all didn’t think this was the best place for you to develop as a student and an athlete.”

Source: Magnusen et al. (2014) Adapted from: Yukl et al. (2008)

Marketer image. Another key finding from the research on influence tactics is the importance of marketer image. Kipnis et al., (1980) highlight the importance of humility, respect, and charisma in their description of tactics like self-presentation and exchange. This consideration was echoed by Yukl et al. (2008), who argue that one of the over-arching goals of proactive influence is the creation of a favorable image and a strong relationship with the consumer.

Tactic effectiveness. The influence tactics outlined by Yukl et al. (2008) provide excellent examples of specific, direct forms of communication that can be easily applied

in a marketing or recruitment setting. A head coach who implements one or more of these tactics is attempting to influence commitment intentions by emphasizing key pieces of information through creative methods of transmission (Magnusen et al., 2014). It is important to consider that there is the potential for consumers to respond differently when faced with identical influence tactics. Each influence tactic (marketing stimulus) is interpreted on an individual level, and influences the decision differently for each consumer. Szymanski (1988) emphasized the importance of salesperson adaptability throughout the sales process, a quality that head coaches must also possess.

Additionally, an effective salesperson cannot rely simply on one marketing strategy to influence every consumer. Lead recruiters face an equally complex challenge, as individualized recruitment strategies are often required to satisfy the unique academic and athletic concerns of the recruit. By utilizing multiple tactics including those in Figure 1, a recruiter will be able to adjust his or her recruitment approach based on athlete responses.

Finally, when considering a direct marketing method such as personal selling, it is of utmost importance to gather as much information as possible about the consumer. Knowledge of consumer needs, goals, and social networks can allow for an accurate initial categorization and the development of a suitable marketing strategy (Szymanski, 1988). While it is difficult to make broad generalizations about specific consumer characteristics, segmenting the market can help to narrow down certain behaviors. For recruiters, the adolescent demographic is of particular interest, as it represents the source of all talented high school athletes. By gaining valuable insight on the adolescent

consumer, it may be determined which marketing/recruitment tactics are best suited to influence adolescent behavior.

Adolescent Consumer Behavior

When designing a recruitment approach, the head coach must identify and target the needs of the recruit. Age is often a significant contributor to differences in the decision-making processes, or consumer behavior, exhibited by the target demographic. Student-athlete recruits are often approached during adolescence (between the ages of 13 and 19), and respond differently to marketing stimuli than adults (Pechmann, Levine, Loughlin, & Leslie, 2005). Due to significant neurological changes that occur during the teenage years, adolescents are impulsive and self-conscious consumers who often seek out products that provide “immediate gratification, thrills, and/or social status” (Pechmann et al., 2005, p. 202).

Consumer skills. This impulsive buying behavior can be attributed to a lack of consumer skills, which are a set of consumption-related activities that promote rational purchase behavior (Moschis & Churchill Jr., 1979). These consumer skills allow a buyer to identify and filter advertising, as well as to recognize their cognitive and affective orientations towards certain marketing materials (Moschis & Churchill Jr., 1979). Another important consumer skill is the ability for critical thought, which often manifests itself in the form of an extensive information search.

Moschis and Churchill Jr. (1979) administered a questionnaire to 806 adolescent consumers in Wisconsin, USA to measure both direct (i.e. brand attitudes) and indirect (i.e. materialistic motivation) consumer skillsets. The findings indicated that older

adolescents are more likely to display “socially desirable consumer behaviors” (Moschis & Churchill Jr., 1979, p. 45) than their younger peers. Included in these behaviors is the objective evaluation of product attributes as well as the differentiation and retention of pertinent advertising content. Additionally, older teens showed a greater resistance to the information provided in advertisements, relying more on other sources to inform their purchase decisions (Moschis & Churchill Jr., 1979).

Cognitive maturation. These findings are congruent with the work of Pechmann et al. (2005), who determined that a number of relevant cognitive processes develop throughout adolescence. Individuals at the young end of the teenage spectrum are more likely to give into purchase urges associated with novelty, riskiness, immediate gratification, and social image (Pechmann et al., 2005). Consumer behaviors such as these are indicative of inhibited prefrontal cortex function, elevated hormone production, psychosocial immaturity, and underdeveloped impulse control. The effects of these neurological shortcomings are amplified during times of stress, often leading to irresponsible decision-making (Pechmann et al., 2005). Fortunately, teenagers begin to show signs of psychosocial maturity as they approach the end of adolescence. It was also found that in low-stress settings, adolescents used “adult-like” cognitive processes to complete risk assessment tasks (Pechmann et al., 2005).

External search. Another key component of the adolescent decision-making process is the external information search. Pechmann et al. (2005) argue that peer influence can have a significant effect on purchase behavior. Social anxiety can increase adolescent receptiveness to brand name products and status-based marketing messages.

Additionally, “adolescents often turn to peers to help them forge identities” (Pechmann et al., 2005, p. 209) and the presence of peers leads to a greater affinity towards risky decision-making. Despite these significant effects, the reliance on peer approval behaves in a similar fashion as psychosocial immaturity, and decreases over time (Pechmann et al., 2005).

Parents and family members also contribute to adolescent purchase behaviors, and it can occur in two ways. First, as traditional influential agents, they provide their opinion on product attributes, need satisfaction, and general product fit. Secondly, family members play a significant role in the consumer socialization process (Moschis, Moore, Smith, 1984). Consumer socialization occurs in three ways: observation and imitation, interaction, and consumption. It was found that adolescents who experienced overt communication about consumption showed strong consumer skills and understood their role as a consumer. The same results were observed in adolescents whose parents modeled socially desirable consumer behavior (Moschis et al., 1984).

Another intriguing finding addressed the aspects of consumption that parents stressed most often. Rather than discussing the cognitive processes supporting positive consumer behavior, parents often focused on encouraging the ‘correct choice’ or sanctioned purchase (Moschis et al., 1984). This indicates that parents could exert significant influence on the decision-making process by simply leveraging an adolescent’s need for parental approval.

Role models. The final influential agent discussed in this paper is the role model. Defined as anyone who can influence consumption decisions, a role model is someone

who may have direct contact with the consumer (peer or family member), or someone with whom the consumer has no direct personal relationship (Martin & Bush, 2000). Role models provide adolescent consumers with the opportunity to experience vicarious consumption, leading to the development of attitudes and behaviors through direct observation. A role model may also influence consumption behaviors through the use of positive reinforcement. This can occur in electronic or print media, as organizations employ successful public figures to support their product (Martin & Bush, 2000). Indirect or vicarious role models such as these are most effective when they portray characteristics with which an adolescent can identify. Martin & Bush (2000) determined three important characteristics of role model influence:

1. A positive relationship exists between role model influence and adolescent purchase intentions.
2. Direct role models will influence purchase intentions more significantly than vicarious ones.
3. Direct role models will influence purchase behaviors more significantly than vicarious ones.

Despite being free to choose their own vicarious role models, adolescents are still influenced most heavily by the direct role models ‘assigned’ to them. Parents were shown to be the most significant influential agents when considering both purchase intentions and behaviors (Martin & Bush 2000). Role modeling includes more than simply providing adolescents with observable consumption behavior, as the opinions and attitudes of role models also contribute to adolescent learning. It is interesting to note that

role model influence is not restricted to consumption behaviors. Adolescent career aspirations, educational objectives, and self-views all have the potential to be impacted by role model behavior and opinion (Martin & Bush, 2000).

Online socialization. In cases of high involvement purchases, an adolescent's information search is rarely limited to role model opinion and peer influence. Marketers must also consider the effects of internet-based socialization on consumer behavior. The Internet gives teenagers an opportunity to anonymously engage in a social system where consumption knowledge can be learned without direct observation or modeling (Lee & Conroy, 2005).

Adolescents are free to explore, construct, and discover meanings within consumption without parental restrictions or self-worth concerns. By actively participating in the sharing of information and ideas in online communities, adolescents are leveraging a previously untapped global network that can assist them in the development of consumer attitudes and skills (Lee & Conroy, 2005). These active interactions are also supplemented by the vast amount of readily accessible information online. For most teenagers, the Internet is the primary research tool in the independent collection of product information (Lee & Conroy, 2005). The availability of multiple sources allows the adolescent consumer to consider different viewpoints in a relatively stress-free environment.

Adolescents reported significant reliance upon online recommendations during product evaluation, an indication that Internet communities certainly influence consumption attitudes and behaviors (Lee & Conroy, 2005). Negative word-of-mouth can

be incredibly devastating online, as damaging reviews are often multiplied and spread among online communities. Unfortunately, teenagers often make assumptions about the credibility of online sources, and therefore risk basing consumption decisions on faulty information (Lee & Conroy, 2005). In general, the Internet provides additional influential information to the adolescent consumer through active (but often anonymous) socialization.

Summary. The characteristics of the adolescent consumer must be considered within the scope of this thesis. Recruits are faced with a high involvement decision months or years before any actual commitment is required. Provided with ample time for consideration, recruits will more than likely favor rational thought over impulsivity. With that being said, adolescent recruits will continue to be influenced by emotional connections to individuals or attributes throughout the decision-making process (Pechmann et al, 2005).

In most cases, choosing a post-secondary institution will be the most significant consumption decision of an adolescent's life. While the degree of independence may vary between recruits, research indicates that parental and role model influence will impact both consumption intention and behavior, especially considering the significance of the decision (Martin & Bush 2000). The external information search will expand to include online information, peer opinion, and expert judgment in addition to the marketing material provided by the recruiter. These findings certainly suggest that the influence tactic of coalition would be an effective way to inspire recruit commitment (Yukl et al., 2008).

The challenge for the recruiter is to identify and persuade influential agents and sources of information most likely to impact the recruit's decision. In the case of the adolescent recruit, the relevant influential agents include: parents, peers, role models, and online communities.

Prior research into adolescent consumerism indicates that the high level of involvement associated with the college choice decision will result in recruits displaying positive consumer skills (Moschis & Churchill Jr., 1979). As previously mentioned, these consumer skills include critical thinking, extensive information search, and impulse control (Moschis & Churchill Jr., 1979). In addition, recruits have a prolonged time frame in which to make a college decision, allowing for an extensive search and evaluation of alternatives. Adolescent student-athletes behave in ways that allow for the application of cognitive consumer behavior models (Pechmann et al., 2005). The Consumer Decision Process Model is used during the analysis, conclusion, and interview guide sections of this thesis, and the model's applicability is supported by the previous research into adolescent consumerism.

This thesis is focused on identifying the strategies and tactics used by head coaches in CIS men's basketball, and as a result, will not aim to contribute to the knowledge surrounding adolescent consumerism. With that being said, the importance of prior research identifying adolescent student-athletes as capable, mature consumers cannot be overstated.

Consumer Decision Process Model

Recruiting and marketing. Marketing research gives an in-depth analysis of the

motivations that inspire purchase behaviors, as well as the strategies and tactics marketers use to influence those behaviors. By using literature on personal selling, influence tactics, relationship marketing, and adolescent consumerism, similarities between effective marketing and effective recruiting can be established. The academic and athletic programs represent the product, and the head coach (acting as lead recruiter) is the marketing agent.

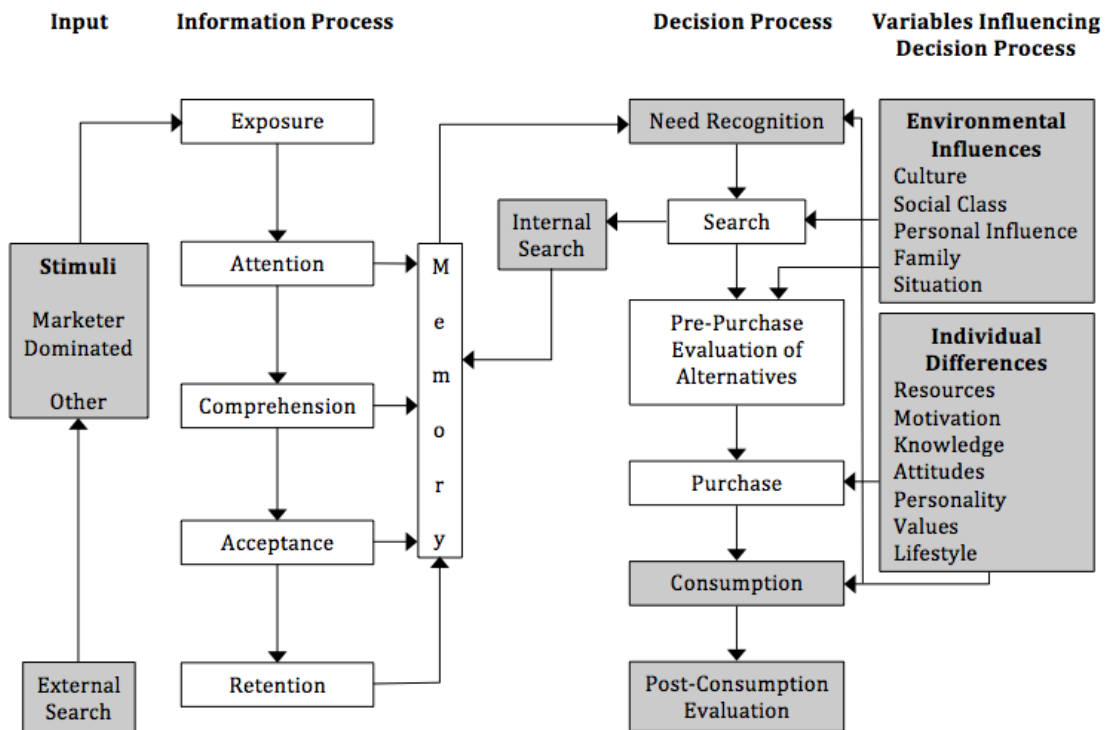
The Consumer Decision Process (CDP) Model allows for the mapping of the decision-making process as well as the various internal and external factors that impact the recruit's choice. Additionally, the model outlines the way that information processing influences the choice process. Finally, the CDP Model serves as an effective framework upon which to build the interview guide, as it outlines the key steps and inputs of the decision-making process.

The model. The literature on athlete recruitment indicates that there are a number of factors and considerations that contribute to a student-athlete's decision. In order to appropriately address the complexity of the recruiting process, a model that accounts for the effects of various internal and external influences must be considered. The CDP Model is a framework built upon rational, cognitive processes, decision variables (or factors), and the relationships between them. While it is a relatively simple depiction of the consumer decision-making process, the CDP Model can still be applied to high involvement purchase decisions that rely upon a number of complex variables. Despite being designed to map the decision-making processes surrounding the purchase of consumer goods, this model serves as a suitable framework for the college choice

decision due to its flexible design and manageable layout.

Developed and refined by Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel (2006), the purpose of the CDP Model is to provide marketers with a greater understanding of consumers' psychological processes during purchase decisions. Backed by research in cognitive consumer behavior, the CDP Model is a theoretical framework designed to map how individuals organize facts and influences in order to make logical and consistent decisions (Blackwell et al., 2006). By using the CDP Model, marketers are able to refine their product mix, promotional communications, and sales strategies in order to influence consumers most effectively (Blackwell et al., 2006). Analytical models such as the CDP are valuable due to their ability to identify important decision factors and the broad relationships between them (Bray, 2008). Additionally, the CDP Model is well laid out and fairly easy to compare to recruitment literature, making it an ideal choice for this thesis.

Figure 2: Consumer Decision Process Model



Source: Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel (2006)

As shown in Figure 2, the CDP Model is divided into specific decision processes. For the purpose of this project, specific attention will be given to the decision processes most relevant to recruiters: search, internal search, pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives, and purchase. While athlete retention is certainly an important aspect of coaching (represented by consumption and post-consumption evaluation processes), it falls outside the scope of this project and will therefore not be discussed at length. The CDP Model is able to accommodate complex consumption (such as college choice) by adjusting the weight given to each of the seven processes. In an extended problem-solving situation, the external information search and the evaluation of alternatives will

see an increase in importance (Bray, 2008).

In order to give structure to the primary data collection, specifically to the design of the interview guide, the CDP Model is used to represent the decision-making process faced by elite student-athletes. In doing so, it ensures that the role of the head coach at each stage of the college choice process is addressed.

Need Recognition. The starting point of the CDP Model is need recognition, and like many of the decision processes, is influenced by both internal and external factors. Need recognition occurs when a difference exists between a recruit's perceived ideal state of affairs and the actual state (Blackwell et al., 2006). This disparity can be brought to light in a number of ways, including individual goals and desires, situational requirements, and external sources. Head coaches often attempt to raise recruits' awareness of unperceived needs through the use of recruitment materials highlighting their school's ability to fulfill the need of post-secondary competition. In this study however, need recognition is a fairly insignificant stage in the decision-making process, as elite student-athletes often aspire to compete at the university level long before recruitment ever begins.

Search. Once need recognition occurs, recruits begin the search for information in order to determine the best way to satisfy their needs. Information search is divided into two processes: internal search and external search (Blackwell et al., 2006). The internal search relies on past experiences and memory to inform the decision-making process. Recruits often draw upon on internal sources of information, such as existing perceptions of teams, leagues, or schools, to influence their decision. With larger, more important

decisions, the information search will typically also involve a more extensive consideration of external sources (Blackwell et al., 2006). The two major external sources of information are recruiter-dominated (influential agents, coaches, administration) and non-recruiter-dominated (family, peers, friends, media). The degree to which a recruit relies upon each type of external source of information is dependent on a number of 'Individual Differences' (see Figure 2).

College recruits fall under the category of adolescent consumer, and represent a unique challenge for marketers. The external sources of information that most significantly influence adolescents is outlined above, but regardless of which external source is being considered, in order for the stimuli to be retained as information it must go through a number of processing steps (Blackwell et al., 2006). Exposure, attention, comprehension, acceptance, and retention are the five stages of information processing that transform simple stimuli into information that can influence purchase behaviors. A head coach's ability to provide relevant, engaging promotional material is essential in capturing the attention of the recruit. Once that has been achieved, the completion of the final three processing steps is dependent on the quality and perception of the recruitment content being presented (Blackwell et al., 2006).

Information processing. A key component of the search, information processing relates to the way stimuli are perceived by the recruit. In an effort to help the recruit build positive perceptions, head coaches must consider the stages of information processing that contribute to the creation of those perceptions.

Information is presented to recruits throughout the recruitment process. Each new piece of information must pass through these five stages in order to be converted to memory and leveraged during the internal search (see Figure 2). In order for the information to contribute positively to the decision-making process, it must be presented in a way that encourages maximum acceptance and retention. Recruitment strategies and tactics determine the content as well as the delivery of these recruitment messages.

Exposure. In order for information processing to begin, the recruitment stimuli must actually reach the recruit. This involves the activation of sensory receptors, allowing the recruit to recognize that information is being presented in a direct fashion (Blackwell et al., 2006). Unfortunately for head coaches, recruits are often exposed to stimuli originating from unregulated sources, such as friends, family, and other influential agents.

Attention. Once the recruit has been exposed to the information, he must make a decision on the amount of processing capacity to allocate to each incoming stimulus (Blackwell et al., 2006). Attention is given to the recruitment messages that provide relevant content with respect to the needs of the recruit (MacInnes & Jaworski, 1989). The information must also be presented in a way that captures the attention of the recruit. Elite student-athletes are often bombarded with stimuli from a multitude of sources, resulting in the need for selective attention. As a result, some stimuli will be disregarded and will fail to enter into the latter stages of information processing.

Comprehension. Comprehension is the stage of information processing where the content of the recruitment message is analyzed. Greater attention results in a greater level

of processing resources being allocated to the stimulus (MacInnes & Jaworski, 1989). By comparing the information to pre-existing concepts stored in memory, the recruit is able to interpret the information on an individual level. Head coaches must be clear in the delivery of their recruitment messages in order to ensure accurate comprehension from the recruit.

Acceptance. Based on the analysis that occurs during comprehension, the information can either be accepted or dismissed (Blackwell et al., 2006). In order for the information to modify existing beliefs and attitudes, it must first be accepted (Blackwell et al., 2006). Again, the delivery and legitimacy of the message's source can influence the likelihood of the information being accepted.

Retention. The new information is accepted and stored in the recruit's memory (Blackwell et al., 2006). At the relevant moment, the recruit will leverage this new knowledge to inform the college choice decision. As the amount of cognitive capacity allocated to the stimulus varies, so does the impact of the new memory on the recruit's decision-making. By using more processing resources when evaluating a stimulus, a deeper understanding develops, and the resulting memory weighs more heavily on future decisions (MacInnes & Jaworski, 1989). An effective head coach is able to inspire the recruit to retain positive information about the university, resulting in a favorable evaluation during the latter stages of the decision process.

Pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives. The third stage, the pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives, is extremely important to consider in the context of this thesis. With over 55 CIS schools to choose from, a college recruit must identify a subset of

candidates to seriously consider and evaluate. This subset is known as the consideration set – goal-satisfying alternatives salient or feasible for the recruit (Shocker, Ben-Akiva, Boccara, & Nedungadi, 1991). The consideration set often develops during the information search, and can guide the external research efforts of the recruit.

A number of factors can influence whether or not a specific school or basketball program is included in the consideration set, and a recruit will often rely on evaluative criteria to determine cutoff points (Blackwell et al., 2006). These criteria depend on individual and environmental factors, but tend to center on the school's ability to satisfy the relevant needs of the recruit. Shocker et al. (1991) argue that third-party support of an alternative may also contribute to its inclusion in the consideration set. A trusted peer or family member testimony is an effective recruitment tool that could inspire a more comprehensive information search and result in the consideration of an alternative.

In most cases, the recruit will assign specific values to certain institutional attributes, allowing for trade-offs to be made during the evaluation process (Blackwell et al., 2006). Head coaches are therefore faced with the challenge of not only breaking into the consideration set, but also understanding and satisfying the needs of the consumer.

Purchase. Once the recruit has decided upon an alternative, commitment must be made. Unfortunately, a number of complications can arise during this stage, including academic restrictions, interpersonal issues, or personal barriers (Blackwell et al., 2006). In order to avoid losing a recruit, both the coaches and administration must ensure that the recruitment material matches the program offering. Additionally, the recruit should feel as though extra effort is being given to accommodate their needs, especially with

respect to high involvement purchases. For example, when a recruit commits to a college program, there are a number of administrative details that need to be taken care of before enrollment is finalized. In order to secure the recruit, the coaching and administrative staffs often work in conjunction to expedite the enrollment process. When commitment intention does not translate to commitment behavior, it is typically the mismanagement of the recruitment experience that is to blame (Blackwell et al., 2006).

Consumption and post-consumption evaluation. The two final stages – consumption and post-consumption evaluation – are important to consider due to their effect on future commitment behaviors. In the context of this thesis, negative word-of-mouth or poor athlete retention can negatively impact future recruiting efforts. As seen above, certain marketing techniques (specifically relationship marketing) are effective in managing the student-athlete experience.

Summary. The CDP Model allows us to study the decision-making pathway of the college recruit by linking key consumption stages to both internal and external factors. It also provides a map of the cognitive and information processing components that drive the consumption process (Blackwell et al., 2006). For the purposes of this thesis, special attention is given to the ‘Inputs’ (leftmost column), as recruitment strategies and tactics are the primary sources of ‘Marketer Dominated Stimuli.’ Additionally, the ‘Information Process’ is featured heavily during the analysis of recruitment messages and student-athlete testimonies. By using the CDP Model as a foundation for the interview guide, specifically the ‘Decision Process’ column, this project aims to uncover the most effective ways that recruiters influence young student-

athletes at each stage of the recruitment process.

Method

Qualitative Framework

In order to gain a deeper understanding of recruitment effectiveness, the specific human experience must be examined. Each recruit is faced with a unique set of social and cognitive challenges that they must navigate during this complex decision-making process. The humanistic interpretive paradigm provides an excellent perspective from which to qualitatively investigate the behaviors and experiences of a college basketball recruit (Markula & Silk, 2011). This subjective approach recognizes the interaction between researcher and participant, which will lead to the creation of a recruitment reality from which knowledge can be acquired.

Marketing theory, the CDP Model, and the researcher's past experiences will combine to frame the line of questioning and consequently influence participant responses (Markula & Silk, 2011). All parties involved in the research process will therefore contribute to knowledge creation by engaging in social interaction. The interpretive paradigmatic approach is centered on understanding human experience within a specific social context. As a result, recruitment knowledge is defined as a collection of subjective individual experiences from within the socially complex recruitment environment (Markula & Silk, 2011).

Participants

The underlying purpose of this study is to uncover strategies and techniques that most effectively attract top-level basketball talent. The participants of this study must

therefore be considered elite and impactful players. At the end of every CIS basketball season, coaches vote to select the top first-year athletes from their respective conferences. Each year, 25 male athletes are honored across four conferences as members of an All-Rookie Team’.

The participants of this study represent a subset of these award-winning athletes from the past two seasons (2014-15 and 2015-16). It was determined that athletes who had made an impact during their rookie season were more likely to have been heavily recruited by multiple CIS schools. While this assumption may not hold for every All-Rookie Team member, it did allow for a number of strong candidates to be identified. In order to qualify, the athlete must comply with a number of criteria:

- He must have Canadian citizenship. This may include dual-citizenship. The purpose of this study is to investigate the recruitment tactics of Canadian universities on Canadian athletes. International athletes often face much different financial, regulatory, and recruitment scenarios.
- He must have been between the ages 17 and 19 (inclusive) at some point during his first year of CIS competition. The focus of this study is on high school student-athletes and their responses to recruitment tactics.

While these two criteria are the only requirements to be eligible in the study, there are a few additional attributes that would make a participant’s perspectives especially insightful. Athletes who are recruited by multiple schools must decide between a number of alternatives, and are more likely to engage in the various steps of the CDP Model. This increased decision involvement will assist the research efforts in determining the key

decision-making components at each stage of the recruitment experience. A greater number of alternatives also creates a more complex decision environment, which may lead to richer, more complete participant responses. A student-athlete who satisfies the following conditions is considered an ideal interview candidate:

- Recruited by at least three post-secondary basketball programs.

In order to provide valuable insight on the decision-making process as well as effective recruitment tactics, the athlete should have to choose between at least three viable options.

- Took part in at least two on-campus visits.

On-campus visits provide recruiters with the opportunity for prolonged exposure to marketing materials and tactics. These visits are a vital recruitment tool where head coaches can showcase their full arsenal of recruitment strategies and tactics.

A final feature to take into consideration is the financial compensation offered by each institution, as top-tier recruits will more than likely be offered an athletic scholarship during the recruitment process. While being selected to the All-Rookie Team indicates a certain level of excellence, this study is focused on investigating the most sought-after recruits. In most cases, All-Rookie Team members will be offered the maximum amount of financial support allowed by CIS rules. This helps to eliminate the significant influence of financial incentives on college choice.

Sampling

The head coaches of the basketball programs with athletes who were named to the All-Rookie Team were sent an e-mail requesting the contact information of the relevant

players. The athletes were then sent a package that included project details, as well as confidentiality and anonymity information. Once an athlete expressed interest in participating in the study, further information regarding interview scheduling was delivered. In an attempt to gain a nation-wide perspective, the first athlete to respond and qualify from each conference was included in the study. Additionally, the next four athletes who responded (regardless of conference affiliation) were also included. Figure 3 summarizes the pertinent information about each of the eight participants.

Figure 3: Participant Information

Note: ROY – Rookie of the Year (Major Conference Award)

Participant	Birth year	Previous School		Conference	All-Rookie Team	Citizenship
		Location	Type			
1	1996	United States	Preparatory	A	Conference	Dual Citizen (Canada/USA)
2	1996	Canada	High School	B	CIS, Conference ROY	Canadian
3	1995	United States	Preparatory	A	Conference	Canadian
4	1995	Canada	High School	A	Conference	Canadian
5	1996	Canada	High School	B	Conference	Canadian
6	1996	Canada	High School	A	Conference	Canadian
7	1995	United States	Preparatory	C	Conference	Canadian
8	1996	Canada	High School	D	CIS, Conference ROY	Dual Citizen (Canada/USA)

Data Collection

The focus of this study is on the recruitment of adolescent male Canadian basketball players from either Canadian high schools or CEGEP programs. Approached after either their first or second year of CIS competition, athletes are in an excellent position to remember specific recruitment experiences. Semi-structured interviews were used in an effort to gain a deep understanding of the college choice process. A detailed account of the cognitive and emotional activity experienced by a number of college

recruits can only be feasibly obtained through the interview process. Participants were asked a series of questions regarding:

- The recruitment strategies and tactics used by various coaches
- Cognitive and emotional responses to recruitment tactics
- Influential agent impact

As seen in the literature review, the head coach has been identified as the most influential factor in the college choice process. As a result, the interview questions focus less on the ranking of institutional factors, and more on how the head coach was able to market the basketball, academic, and university experiences. With that being said, there is an understanding that additional college factors do play a role in the decision-making process, particularly when a recruit has assigned equal value to two or more competing head coaches. In those cases, probing questions will be used to uncover not only the relevant secondary factors, but also the ways in which the head coaches highlighted those factors.

The CDP Model was used as a guide in the development of the interview questions, as the stages of the ‘Decision Process’ were examined to determine the level and nature of influence from both internal and external inputs. Increased attention was also given to the ‘Search’ and ‘Pre-Purchase Evaluation of Alternatives,’ as recruits were asked about how certain influence strategies and tactics affected their perceptions of each university in their consideration set.

Formal electronic interaction was used (Skype) due to the geographical spread of the participants. Each participant was interviewed individually in a controlled setting

where the controlling leader (interviewer) encouraged discussion through open-ended questioning and additional probing questions. One individual interviewer conducted all eight interviews, and in order to gain in-depth knowledge of the participants' recruitment experiences, interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour.

This interview style is congruent with the interpretive paradigmatic approach and recognizes the influence of the interviewer on participant responses (Markula & Silk, 2011). The development of the interview format and was guided primarily by prior recruitment research as well as the CDP Model, but the interviewer's past experiences as a recruit also contributed to certain aspects. Due to the interviewer's first-hand knowledge of recruitment tactics and responses, he was able to direct the line of questioning towards relevant influences. This interviewer influence is recognized by the interpretive paradigm as a co-creation of knowledge by both the participant and the interviewer (Markula & Silk, 2011).

The goal of the interview was to uncover significant recruit perspectives that would be impossible to capture through the use of other data collection methods. In order to do so, the interviewer leveraged his past experiences in an attempt to inspire the participant to engage in an in-depth description of the decision-making process.

Ethical Concerns

The primary ethical concern associated with this type of project is the need for anonymity. In order for athletes to give full and truthful responses, they must feel confident that their identity (and the identity of their coach and program) remains protected. This is especially important when considering recruitment tactics that may be

considered unethical. Athletes are not identified in the report and are not required to notify their coach when they are selected to participate. This ensures that no negative repercussions are handed down by coaches or administrators based on athlete involvement. Coaches and institutions also needed an assurance of anonymity before they passed the project information onto their All-Rookie Team members.

The recruitment of student-athletes in Canadian basketball is a competitive environment, and programs may be hesitant to participate if their confidential strategies are revealed. Schools and participants are coded throughout the report in order to facilitate audience understanding, but are not directly identified in any way. Each participant was given an informational package outlining the purpose and method of the study, as well as a consent form outlining the aforementioned guarantee of anonymity. Athletes were also able to withdraw or amend their responses during a one-month window following their interview. Any athlete withdrawal during interview or post-interview stages did not result in any consequence to the athlete. It should be noted that no participant chose to amend their responses or withdraw from the study.

Analysis of Empirical Material

The interview data was transcribed and “cleaned” in order to eliminate the conversational utterances (um, like, ah, etc.) and allow for a naturally flowing piece of text (Markula & Silk, 2011). The resulting transcriptions were analyzed using the method developed by Richie and Spencer (1994) that aligns with the interpretive paradigmatic framework. The process is divided into five analytic stages:

1. Familiarization
2. Identifying a Thematic Framework
3. Indexing
4. Charting
5. Mapping and Interpretation

Familiarization. Familiarization is the process of becoming immersed in the data. Reading and rereading the transcripts, studying observational notes, and listening to raw audio recordings allows the researcher to become exceptionally comfortable with the empirical data (Richie & Spencer, 1994). It also allows for the researcher to gain a greater understanding of the richness, depth, and diversity of the participant responses. During this stage, the researcher makes note of any key ideas or themes that appear throughout the data. These notes will expedite the indexing and charting stages by highlighting key passages within the transcripts.

Identifying a thematic framework. Independent from the CDP Model used to frame the interview, identifying a thematic framework is the second stage of analysis and is defined by the researcher isolating key concepts and themes that reoccur throughout the data. A thematic framework is often based on insight provided by prior theory, insightful participant responses, or a patterning of views and experiences (Richie & Spencer, 1994). Once the most relevant themes have been identified, they are subdivided to create index categories.

Indexing. Index categories are used to link specific participant responses back to the major thematic concepts. This is known as indexing, which is also defined as the

process of systematically applying the theoretical framework to the textual data (Richie & Spencer, 1994). Participant responses are coded by index category and tied back to broader emergent themes, as well as evaluated for meaning and significance. This is often accomplished through the detailed annotation of transcribed interviews. An indexed transcript will often reveal that one speech passage can be linked to multiple thematic concepts. This connectivity between themes is formally addressed during the charting stage of analysis.

Charting. Charting is the process of making comparisons within and between themes (Richie & Spencer, 1994). As the name would suggest, charts with specific headings are used to compare data from various index categories. The data is studied, referenced, and summarized before being included in the chart, facilitating the comparison of empirical data between themes. Charting is essentially the process of lifting interview data from its original context and organizing it based on thematic reference (Richie & Spencer, 1994).

Mapping and Interpretation. The final step in interview analysis is mapping and interpretation. In order to begin this stage, the researcher must first adopt a qualitative research framework for analysis (Richie & Spencer, 1994). This project operates primarily within the providing explanations framework, but the developing strategies framework will also be considered. The mapping and interpretation stage therefore attempts to leverage the thematic framework in order to explain or illuminate certain attitudes, motivations, or behaviors (Richie & Spencer, 1994). The providing

explanations objective also tries to account for patterns of behavior based on thematic analysis.

This framework is well suited for the research on athlete recruitment, as the sources and magnitudes of behavioral influence are of particular interest. With that being said, the developing strategies framework could assist in the advancement of effective recruitment tactics, as its mapping and interpretation stage is focused on using participant attitudes and behaviors to inform policy decisions (Richie & Spencer, 1994). In summary, this analytic approach proposed by Richie and Spencer (1994) relies on the researcher's ability to establish thematic salience, relationships, and meaning from the empirical interview data.

This thesis is focused on the recruitment strategies and tactics used by head coaches in CIS men's basketball. As a result, the analysis will focus on identifying themes that contribute to a greater understanding of recruitment as it relates to the head coach.

Analysis and Results

Introduction

The eight participants who completed the study offered a number of insights with respect to effective recruiting and their individual decision-making processes. An analysis of those insights allowed for five primary themes to emerge, each with ties to prior research on consumer behavior, marketing tools, and student-athlete behavior. As described above, the analysis method developed by Richie and Spencer (1994) was used to identify salient concepts from the interview data.

The primary researcher listened to the recording of each interview before any transcription was completed. During that time, he made notes on key tactics, strategies, recurring responses, and overall interview tone. He then transcribed each interview, adding to the notes and comparing his initial insights to the textual representation of the data. After a second reading, a thematic framework began to emerge as participant responses contributed to a number of impactful recruitment experiences. As expected, each experience was tied to the head coach in some way, and the varying nature of those connections allowed for differentiation between themes. Quotations that embodied each of the emergent themes were then identified from the eight interviews, and the theme headings were created using language from both prior recruitment literature and primary interview data.

Themes

This thesis is focused on uncovering the most effective recruitment strategies demonstrated by CIS head coaches, and as a result the themes are very closely tied to specific tactics and strategies outlined across the eight interviews. It is important to define each of the themes, as well as to identify how the head coach can modify their recruitment style in order to effectively implement the underlying tactics. The themes are:

- Familiarity
- Seriousness
- Value
- Honesty
- Influential Agents

The five themes help to provide a greater understanding of the relationship between marketing and recruitment by highlighting the most effective ways to impact the decision-making process. While the ‘Decision Process’ column of the CDP Model was used in the design of the interview guide, the emergent themes were linked more closely to the ‘Information Process’ component. These links are of particular interest due to its impact on the creation of memory, and the resulting effect on the ‘Search’ stage of the ‘Decision Process.’ As shown in Figure 4, the themes are directly linked to certain steps of the CDP Model, and represent strategies to best inspire positive information processing and retention. By creating these links, the CDP Model has been refined to better represent the decision-making process faced by Canadian student-athletes in CIS men’s basketball.

Familiarity. From a Consumer Decision Process Model perspective, a student-athlete choosing between a set of potential post-secondary institutions undergoes a thorough information search. Recruits mentioned doing “research on both teams,” and “searching online” in order to supplement the recruitment literature provided by the head coach. The reason for this intensive search is not only due to the importance of the decision, but also due to the uncertainty and risk involved. By building familiarity between the recruit and the institution, a head coach is able to expose the recruit to as much of the program as possible in order to reduce some of that uncertainty. The participants described three primary methods of how familiarity was developed during their recruitment periods: coaching exposure, peer interaction, and school reputation.

Coaching exposure is the most impactful source of familiarity. As seen in prior research, the head coach is the most influential factor in the college choice process (Gabert et al., 1999). The student-athletes in this study only confirmed these findings, as many of the respondents reported having an existing relationship with the head coach of the program they committed to before the recruitment process even began. One recruit stated, “I felt like it was a really good fit, especially from a coaching standpoint because I had known him for a while already, so I knew I would have a pretty good relationship with him coming in.” This level of familiarity encourages the recruit to commit by eliminating a great deal of the risk surrounding the future player-coach dynamic. Another participant echoed the sentiment, asserting “I knew what kind of coach I was going to get from the get go, before I even had to do any research on him.” He even went as far as to say he only considered his school of choice because of the pre-existing relationship with the head coach.

For head coaches recruiting new athletes (athletes who fall outside of coach’s pre-existing network), additional opportunities to build familiarity occur throughout the recruitment process. One recruit noted that in order to put his coaching style on display, “[Head Coach] ran my high school team through... a practice... so that helped me a lot too.” In most cases however, these opportunities for familiarity present themselves most clearly during the official campus visit, through on-court workouts and in-season exposure. In a decision so heavily influenced by basketball-related factors, it benefits a head coach to expose their recruits to as much on-court interaction as possible. “I definitely think the on-court part is valuable,” stated one recruit, despite “being pretty

nervous.” Student-athletes in this study described the on-court workout as a key component of the campus visit, as it allowed them to build familiarity with the style and demeanor of the head coach. One participant described a particularly powerful moment after his on-court workout: “What [Head Coach] basically said to me at the end was, ‘This was 30 minutes worth of training, I want you for four – give me four years. Let me show you what I can do.’” In cases like this, even a small amount of familiarity can have a resounding effect on recruit perceptions.

The second way recruits are exposed to coaching style is through in-season observation. The most effective way to organize such exposure is to schedule a recruit’s campus visit on the same day as a league game. In doing so, the recruit is able to observe the head coach in action. This may include being exposed to game-day routines, preparation, and communication in addition to the in-competition behaviors demonstrated by the head coach. One participant claimed that this in-game exposure showed him that his choice of coach was “a really intense coach who demanded a lot from his players, and I wanted to go in and get better so that was something I was excited about.”

Head coaches who are able to help recruits develop a sense of familiarity often use peer interaction as an effective recruitment strategy. First, being able to effectively schedule a campus visit is paramount in exposing a recruit to potential future teammates. A campus visit held during the school year allows the recruit to interact with members of the basketball team during day-to-day activities, as well as to experience the social dynamic of the team outside of practices and games. “I was getting to know them, they were getting to know me, I felt very comfortable,” describes one recruit. From the

decision-making perspective of an adolescent male, the ability to mesh socially with a pre-established group of friends is an important factor to consider.

It is fairly common during campus visits to have some sort of social gathering to showcase the nightlife of the school and to an extent, the city. The head coach often leaves the organization of this aspect of the campus visit to his players, as one respondent noted: “It was all led by the players. They were really the ones who had me feeling welcome and had me wanting to go there. Yea, we went for food all together, the [veterans] and all the recruits... it felt like I was one of the boys.” When social connections are made during the campus visit, it allows some of the risk associated with a certain college choice to dissipate. One recruit mentioned how “it was nice to know some of the people you are going to be playing with before you play with them.” This effect is comparable to the positive influence head coach familiarity can have on the decision-making process.

Continuing on with the importance of campus visit scheduling, it was found that participants who shared their on-campus visit with other recruits developed a connection with athletes who faced the same college choice decision. Head coaches will bring in a number of high-level recruits simultaneously in order to emphasize the possibility of a strong core of incoming players. In doing so, the head coach provides the recruits with an opportunity to visualize their future with the program in a more detailed way. One student-athlete described how his campus visit was shaped by the presence of other recruits: “These are the guys I’m going to be playing next to. I was impressed with what I saw [and] it definitely influenced my decision. Because coming in, I knew we were going

to be a young team and I was looking forward to growing together. Seeing that these might be [the] guys I'll be playing with definitely helped my decision.”

On-court workouts with fellow recruits also help to build familiarity, as playing styles, strengths, and compatibility are evaluated and considered. One participant who shared his campus visit with another recruit said that “I knew if I [came] in with this guy we're both going to have five years together. He's really good, I'll be able to play with him, and we both get along really well.” He also reported that he and his fellow recruit stayed in touch after the campus visit, and that “he committed before I did... that helped me a lot once he did.”

Peer familiarity can also be established outside of the campus visit. One effective recruitment strategy is to open the lines of communication between recruits and veteran players. “I remember I asked [veteran captain] all kinds of questions about the conference, about the schedule, about how it would work, about how the balance of school would be.” This communication allows the recruit to feel comfortable with the current players, and also enables the recruit to leverage sources of information independent of the coaching staff.

Open gyms are another way that respondents reported building familiarity with the current members of the team. Defined as informal summer scrimmages, open gyms are an excellent opportunity for recruits to evaluate their compatibility with the member of the team, both on-court and in a social setting. “Over the summer they invited [me] to scrimmage with them, so [I] got to know some of the players through that,” reported one of the recruits who took part in the study. Open gym familiarity however, gives a distinct

advantage to hometown universities. It is extremely rare to see recruits travelling significant distances to participate in weekday open gyms, resulting in a limited scope for this particular method of developing familiarity. Despite this drawback, head coaches who are interested in local talent often begin inviting recruits to open gyms as early as two summers before they would become CIS eligible. “We know some of [the players] because we had played with them over the summers previous, just scrimmaging with the team.” The familiarity built through open gym exposure is invaluable, however it must be paired with a personalized recruitment plan in order to positively influence a recruit’s decision.

The final feature of familiarity is the most difficult for a head coach to control: school reputation. Based on more than simply the history and level of success of the basketball program, school reputation includes the academic, community, and social standing of the post-secondary institution. Participants mentioned national prestige as an additional factor that influenced their decision to include certain schools in their consideration set. For the scope of this study, this section will focus on aspects of the school reputation that a head coach can control, such as community involvement, program development, and on-court success.

The most obvious way to build the reputation of the basketball program is to achieve success on the national stage. Prolonged periods of poor performance can influence recruit perceptions and ultimately impact consideration sets: “[School] was always a bit weaker... they never had a good reputation about them.” Meanwhile,

conference championships and CIS Final 8 appearances help generate media attention and will expose the program to a larger audience of potential recruits.

Community involvement is the second way to develop familiarity between the basketball program and young local talent. Basketball camps, club programs, and outreach initiatives will expose athletes to the university brand at a young age, creating a certain degree of familiarity even before any recruiting is being done. Participants in this study described the positive influence of pre-existing relationships during their decision-making processes, specifically with assistant coaches who were able to establish meaningful connections through youth programs and informal off-season training sessions. One student-athlete described his assistant coach as someone “who coached in the [league] for a long time... everybody knows him in the [hometown] basketball community.” This is a great example of the power of influential agents (which will be discussed more in-depth in the following section), but also shows the effect familiarity can have on athlete recruitment.

The last component of school reputation is the concept of program development. Many of the recruits interviewed mentioned the importance of growth and improvement of the basketball program in the years leading to their commitment. This could involve a coaching change, a change in the style of play, or a specific example of individual player development. “[I] just liked the direction that the program was heading in with the new coach... [I] definitely liked the way they were playing.” This description is an indication of how familiarity with a basketball program and the improvements being made can help influence a recruit’s decision-making process.

Familiarity with school reputation is shown to have the most significant effect on the decision-making process of local student-athletes. They are the ones who will take part in the youth initiatives, who will attend CIS games, and who will bear witness to the growth and development of the university's basketball program. It can be argued that the greatest advantage of the head coach recruiting local talent is the comfort level and familiarity that the recruit has developed with the program's brand through years of exposure and positive experiences.

Exposure and familiarity are very closely linked. As seen in Figure 4, exposure represents the first stage of information processing, and is essential in the development of positive memories. As recruits develop familiarity with the program, they are constantly being exposed to additional recruitment materials that may influence their college choice decision. The role of the head coach is to ensure that the recruits are exposed to positive information that will favorably contribute to the decision-making process.

Seriousness. Seriousness refers to the level of involvement and interest that the head coach shows towards the recruit's commitment decision. This theme is shown to be important throughout the recruitment process, as seriousness encompasses a number of strategies and tactics that capture recruit attention and influence the college choice process. In order to demonstrate a high level of investment and dedication in the student-athlete, the head coach must show rather than tell. As a result, seriousness can be described as action-based, with a great deal of involvement and effort being consumed over a considerable amount of time. Seriousness also is important in capturing and sustaining the attention of the recruit. In theory, a head coach could show the same

degree of seriousness towards a potential future CIS All-Canadian as to a role player who may never enjoy significant playing time. One participant noted in his interview that his decision to commit was heavily influenced by the fact that the head coach “was obviously very serious about me coming to his school and about my progression.” The specific recruitment tactics that led to those thoughts (among others) are described below.

Seriousness is evaluated by student-athletes as early as the initial phone call or e-mail, and continues to be analyzed until the college choice has been made. A head coach must continuously show serious dedication to the recruit, and this can be done in a number of ways. The first (and often most important) method to show investment is through a well-designed first contact. Recruits consider a professional e-mail or phone call directly from the head coach to be the most effective first contact, and as one participant explained, “[Head Coach] e-mailed me right off the bat, it was a little more formal, [and] he’d given me a lot of information right from the get go.” By providing more details about the program, the head coach is able to provide a viable post-secondary option while also expressing a high level of seriousness. Conversely, an instant message is perceived as too casual, and a stand-alone informational booklet fails to show any sort of personal involvement from the head coach. One participant account embodied this idea, as one “[Coach] contacted me through Facebook Messenger and would send me a text: ‘I got your number from so-and-so, just thought I would say hey.’ That seemed awfully informal to me.”

Participants in this study reported that a formal first contact was essential in order to generate enough interest for a campus visit. A strong first contact must also show a

legitimate personal investment from the head coach. Without head coach involvement, a university will often struggle to capture recruit attention and to even enter into the recruit's consideration set. As one participant indicated, "I never even spoke to their head coach, it was just always their assistant coach so that's why I ruled them out." Another recruit agreed: "It was easy to cut out all the ones who didn't make a good attempt." Effective initial contacts often include a personalized message indicating a level of familiarity with the recruit's basketball background. Head coaches can leverage the viewing of a recruit's performance (live or on film), speaking with the recruit's current coach, or drawing on past experience with the recruit to craft this personalized message. This approach indicates a high degree of priority and importance, and expresses to the recruit that the head coach is willing to spend valuable time developing a personalized recruitment strategy. For one respondent, "when it came down to narrowing my options, it wasn't very difficult because they were only a select few that made the formal [effort]... They really showed a lot of interest like they had a chance."

In relation to the CDP Model, a strong first contact can inspire attention from the recruit, which may propel the university (and recruiter) into the more advanced stages of the information processing and decision-making process. This is evidenced by one student-athlete's testimony, as the school he chose "was actually the first school to show interest." The timing of the first contact is also very important. In most cases, if a head coach has not made initial contact with a recruit before the start of the senior/grade 12 basketball season, the ability of a school to enter into a recruit's consideration set is very

limited. For one of the participants, a school “showed interest really late... they were e-mailing my high school coach after I had... decided to go to [School of choice].”

Recruits are influenced by the perceived amount of time and effort that has gone into the design of the campus visit. A professional, organized itinerary indicates that the head coach has not only prioritized the campus visit, but also the experience of the recruit. Three recruits made specific reference to the visit structure, as one noted that “it was very planned out, and I needed to impress because [Coach] already had his stuff laid out,” while another mentioned that “[Coach] was really organized about his pitch to me.” Finally, the third participant valued how his head coach “put out a page explaining what we were going to be doing and what his vision for me was... he was right on time with the itinerary, ... following it to a T.”

Head coaches can also demonstrate a high level of seriousness through extra effort or memorable moments. Extra effort refers to instances during the recruitment process where the head coach has exceeded recruit expectations by noticeably investing more time and thought into a certain aspect of the recruitment. For example, an effective recruiter will “organize a meeting with the President of the university” in order to portray to the recruit “how much effort they were putting in and how close the community was.” Another participant was impressed: “The fact that [Head Coach] brought the Mayor to come and see me I thought was very above and beyond.” It is fairly common for a head coach to schedule time with a prominent community figure during the recruit’s campus visit, and this kind of tactic not only shows seriousness, but also a willingness to involve influential agents. When third party individuals make an effort to welcome the recruit to

the campus, it is certainly a special experience for recruits, and many of the participants noted the effectiveness of these extra effort strategies.

Memorable moments meanwhile, refer to more significant actions that demonstrate to the recruit the level of investment and seriousness that a head coach maintains. One student-athlete recounted a positive experience when a head coach said; “I heard you were playing in this tournament so I came all the way out, four hours, just to watch you play. Because that’s how serious and dedicated I am to you coming to my school.” Travelling a long distance to watch a recruit play (as in the previous quotation), or visiting a recruit’s home to help ease some of the concerns expressed by family members are both excellent examples of memorable moments. These memorable moments are what participants repeatedly refer back to as tipping points in their decision-making processes.

As previously discussed, the timing of the first contact is an important piece of the recruitment plan. For elite players, talent identification occurs at a young age, and post-secondary institutions often begin recruiting more than two years before a student-athlete is eligible to compete in the CIS. This extended recruitment period now presents a secondary challenge to head coaches, as they must continue to prove their commitment over a longer period of time.

Recruits expressed that frequent contact with the coaching staff was a strong indicator of a high level of seriousness. Coaches who communicated via text message on a weekly basis were described as invested and dedicated to their recruits. “Honestly [Head Coach] was just on my ass. He was always texting, always calling to check in on

me. At some point I was just thinking to myself, ‘How am I going to say no to this guy? He has put so much effort in to bring me here.’” There is a strong correlation between seriousness and time commitment, as it indicates that the head coach has prioritized the recruitment of the student-athlete.

Each of the aforementioned recruitment strategies requires a more significant investment of time from the head coach, but also demonstrates an increased level of commitment to the recruit. It is also valuable to note that assistant coach contact is an effective way for a head coach to delegate recruitment duties while maintaining top-of-mind position and a high perceived level of commitment to the recruit. As one participant noted, “[Assistant coach] would text me all the time and ask me what I’m thinking.” Assistant coaches and their utility will be described in greater detail within the ‘Influential Agents’ section of the analysis.

The impact of seriousness is felt most strongly within the ‘Attention’ portion of the information processing in the CDP Model (See Figure 4). Each piece of recruitment material must be presented with a certain degree of seriousness in order to capture the attention of the recruit and as a result, contribute positively to the recruitment efforts. The first contact is an excellent example of the importance of seriousness in information processing. Without a legitimate display of investment and interest, the recruit will disregard any recruitment materials from a particular school, regardless of the level of exposure. In order for recruitment materials to weigh positively on the college choice process, seriousness must be on full display in order to capture the attention of the recruit.

Value. In order to best describe value as a recruitment tactic, it must be compared to seriousness. Seriousness is action-based, with time and effort being consumed in order to show a high degree of investment in a recruit. It has very little to do with the actual message being delivered to the student-athlete. Value meanwhile, is the explicit expression and comprehension of the importance and impact of a recruit's decision to join a particular university's basketball program. For top recruits like the ones who participated in this study, this value description must go above and beyond simply having a spot on the 12-man roster. The participants described three major ways head coaches were able to effectively highlight the value of a recruit: impact, foundation, and role description.

Impact players are not only the most talented players on the court, but they often are responsible for deciding the outcomes of games. If an impact player performs well, more often than not his team will emerge victorious. When a head coach is telling a recruit that his future with the program will be one of an impact player, there are certain inherent promises being made. "He wasn't shy about telling me that he thought I could have a big impact off the bat," one participant described. Impact players are often given more freedom and opportunity within the team's offensive systems, are the focal point of the game plan, and most importantly are given the most amount of playing time. Another recruit was swayed by the head coach's pitch: "You're going to be the main guy, you're going to be the go-to guy for this team." The recruit's response to these promises: "I can tell he wants me to be in that role and wants me to succeed." Highly recruited players are

used to a certain degree of success and opportunity, and are reluctant to join a program where older, more experienced players overshadow their personal efforts.

Promises of playing time, meaningful contribution, and offensive involvement are therefore three very effective recruiting strategies for head coaches who are looking to attract a high-level recruit. Participants in the study also mentioned the effectiveness of tying their performance to the team's success. One head coach was described as saying, "We're going to win because we have you."

The second tactic used to highlight a recruit's value to the program is the emphasis on creating a winning foundation. Often used by head coaches with teams who have not performed particularly well for a number of years, the foundation approach sells the recruit on the opportunity to rebuild the program. "[A] big thing was that [Head Coach] was going to be building from my year, so we would be the foundation for the program going forward," stated one participant. Not only will the recruit be an impact player, but he will also be credited with changing the reputation, culture, and future of the basketball program. One recruit was heavily influenced by a recruitment strategy that promoted "this big turn-around project at the school," which he perceived as "exciting to be a part of ... going forward."

Because this recruitment technique can seem unrealistically ambitious to an individual recruit, head coaches will often involve two or three top-level recruits in the process. "When I came on my trip here, they had two other recruits down," remembers one student-athlete. This foundation of players upon which a successful program will be built will all visit the campus at the same time, build familiarity with each other, and

align their perceptions of the possibility of a successful rebuild. One recruit fell in love with the concept: “I thought that was really exciting, to come in with some people I had known... just help rebuild the program... that was a vision he put in my brain that I really liked at the time.” Realistically, a struggling basketball program has no better recruitment tool than the foundation for a rebuild valuation method.

The two previous methods of expressing value are effective in giving the recruit an initial indication of their involvement in the team’s success. In the later stages of the decision-making process however, recruits may seek out a more detailed description of their role as an key piece or impact player. Head coaches will detail certain situations or schemes that will leverage the strengths of the recruit, a clear indication that a recruit’s commitment will result in noticeable strategic changes from the coaching staff. Role description is a method that not only specifies to the recruit their involvement in schemes and strategy, but also their involvement in relation to the other players on the team. “[Head Coach] had his depth chart there, and he said, ‘This is exactly where I see you fitting in right now.’ I knew there wasn’t going to be that many questions coming in here,” said one recruit.

Multiple respondents mentioned being given access to the depth chart for both potential recruits and also current members of the team. This type of access gives the recruit an immediate report on the head coach’s evaluation of the talent available. This can also be tied to seriousness, as one recruit was told, “you [are] the top in your position that we are recruiting.” As a result, the recruit “knew [the head coach] was very interested in [me].” Participants reported that a physical representation of value such as a

depth chart was an effective recruitment tool as it gave legitimacy to the promises made by the head coach.

Value refers to the explicit expression of the head coach's expectations for the recruit. Upon receiving these expectations, the recruit will compare them to ones laid out by other head coaches, as well as to their own individual aspirations. This assessment is closely linked to the 'Comprehension' stage of information processing in the CDP Model (See Figure 4). By providing a clear and enticing valuation, head coaches are able to present recruits with an opportunity for positive memory association.

Honesty. The third theme that emerged from the interview data relates to the authenticity of the communication between the head coach and a recruit. All participants reported honesty as being a critical factor in their decision-making process. "I just wanted someone to be honest with me," remembers one recruit. More specifically, recruits valued the honesty shown by the head coach in the one-on-one meetings held during the campus visit. "We sat down in [Coach's] office and he just laid everything out for us... I just remember he was very honest about it." In those meetings, the head coach delivers their in-depth recruitment pitch including role description, playing time expectations, and the potential impact of the recruit in the program's future. These valuation strategies are most effective when expressed in a way that exemplifies openness and authenticity. Participants commented on the fact that some of the coaches they met with had made unrealistic promises with respect their playing time and impact as a CIS rookie. The acceptance of recruitment promises is a crucial component of both valuation and seriousness, and as a result, it was deemed that the most effective recruitment messages

are delivered in an honest and realistic tone. Two distinct tactics that assist in building such a tone: skill development and no guarantees.

In the previous theme, the valuation of the recruit was discussed. This valuation however, is only one component of an effective recruitment strategy. Head coaches who are able to combine a realistic valuation with an honest and open critique of the recruit's abilities are perceived and accepted as being the most genuine. One participant explained that, "The thing that ... sold me ... was that coach talked about developing the other parts of my game." By discussing potential areas of improvement, head coaches are able to show a level of thoughtfulness and investment that cannot be achieved through valuation alone. One recruit was "intrigued" after the one-on-one meeting with his future head coach, as they discussed "a side of my game that I always wanted to develop."

An action plan for specific skill development is a form of appraisal (Yukl et al., 2008) that outlines how a recruit will benefit from joining a certain basketball program. These benefits often include the achievement of long-term career goals. One participant was very impressed with "the focus [Head Coach] put personally on me and my development, and how I was going to be doing." He followed that by outlining how the head coach said, "I can see you making money off this sport." For a student-athlete who "had never previously thought of going pro," this was a very powerful and effective recruitment strategy.

The second component of honesty is the concept of no guarantees. Each of the student-athletes interviewed in the study understood the difficult transition from high school basketball to CIS play, and were therefore skeptical of promises that seemed too

good to be true. The most effective valuation techniques combined the methods described in the previous section with an effort-driven results structure. The participants of the study appreciated and accepted when a head coach was honest about the reality surrounding the amount of hard work required to reach personal and team goals. One recruit recalled a specific instance in his one-on-one meeting with the head coach: “He never said, ‘You’re going to get this many minutes[.]... You’re going to have to work for it.’ Which I liked. And then he was saying someone at my size with my skills could be very good.” This type of conversation occurred in the majority of the one-on-one meetings described by the student-athletes in this study. The primary challenge in valuing a recruit is finding the balance between two things:

- An attractive description of the recruit’s potential.
- An outline of the effort and improvements that need to be made to reach that potential.

For example, a student-athlete responded very positively to this recruitment message: “I think you could be really successful here if you work hard and buy in to what we do.” By making personal success contingent on effort and dedication, a head coach is able to add authenticity to the promises and predictions offered during the valuation process.

Honesty is a quality that head coaches can exhibit not only during one-on-one meetings, but also throughout the recruitment process. Recruits responded positively to head coaches who provided constructive criticism rather than simply saying what they thought the recruits wanted to hear. One participant was especially impressed during his

on-campus on-court workout: “[Head coach] was also trying to coach... when we aren’t even his players yet, and we might not ever be his players. That really intrigued me. So I knew he had our best interests in mind.” When a head coach is able to convey that type of authenticity to a recruit, it establishes a certain degree of comfort within the relationship. For a student-athlete making a high involvement decision, any degree of comfort and certainty acts as a positive influence. By establishing honest and open lines of communication throughout the recruitment process, the head coach gives the recruit a positive impression of how the future player-coach relationship will operate.

Honesty is a tactic that must be present throughout the recruitment process in order to establish the head coach as a credible and reliable source of information. This is especially important for information processing, as recruits will be more open to accepting recruitment messages from a credible source. As shown in Figure 4, acceptance is tied to head coach honesty due to the impact of source reputation on positive information processing. The head coach must ensure that recruitment communications are perceived as authentic and honest in order for the recruit to accept them as truths and store them as positive memories.

Influential agents. The term influential agent applies to any individual who has the ability to impact the decision-making process of the student-athlete. For the purpose of this project, the influential agents being discussed will be divided into three categories:

- Program Agents: Individuals directly and primarily involved with the basketball program (coaches, players)

- Institutional Agents: Individuals who work within the university, in athletics or otherwise (athletic director, academic advisor, medical staff)
- Personal Agents: Individuals within the social network of the recruit with no formal ties to any basketball program (family, friends, youth coaches)

Program agents. Before the recruitment process officially begins, an effective head coach will evaluate all potential influential agents and their impact on the recruit. From that list, the program and institutional agents most likely to positively influence the recruit will be selected as part of the recruitment team.

An effective recruitment team is led by the head coach who strategically delegates responsibilities to specialized members of the coaching staff, team, administration, and faculty of the university. Each member influential agent provides unique insight on a certain component of the college experience, and also helps to interrupt the monotony associated with a single recruiter. For example, assistant coaches are often tasked with maintaining constant communication with recruits: “[Assistant coach] would text me all the time and ask me what I’m thinking.” Meanwhile, academic advisors supplement the campus visit with proposed class schedules and information regarding deadlines and requirements.

The role of the assistant coach as a program agent in the recruitment process is extremely important. Many of the respondents spoke about how their relationship with the assistant coach grew throughout the recruitment period, and how the assistant coach often provided a more relaxed and informal point of contact for the program. “One of the assistant coaches that I had formed a pretty good relationship with, he was the one who

was pretty heavily recruiting me... so I was pretty excited for him to be around,” noted one of the participants. The assistant coach is also relied upon to execute a number of the aforementioned recruitment strategies, especially during the campus visit. Respondents mentioned that an assistant coach would often accompany them during the campus tour portion of the visit, as well as during the on-court workout. One recruit remembered meeting, “a new assistant coach” on his visit, “so we did a workout with him.”

Assistant coaches were also identified as being the facilitator of the campus visit itinerary, driving the recruits between venues and eating meals with the student-athletes and their parents. This managerial role was especially important during in-season campus visits, where the head coach and the players were focused primarily on winning the scheduled conference games. “I spent a decent amount of time with the assistant coach,” mentioned one recruit whose campus visit fell on a competition weekend in February. It was noted that the most effective assistant coaches were easy to talk to and were knowledgeable in three areas: student-athlete life, head coach expectations, and program direction and development. One head coach was described as “not very good at getting his message across,” but was effective in his recruitment efforts because he “used... his assistant coaches to that extent.”

Outside of the campus visit, the assistant coach is also responsible for off-season training sessions, open gyms, and maintaining constant communication with the recruits. Many of the participants in this study reported the head coach as being the initial contact point, but it was the assistant coach who consistently phoned or messaged the recruit

throughout the recruitment period about various topics (including but not limited to commitment status).

Returning players are also an important piece of the recruitment team as program agents, as they often serve as the point of contact when the recruit has questions with respect to student-athlete life. The degree to which players are used in the recruitment process is up to the discretion of the head coach, who will gauge the personality of the recruit before making a decision. In one particular case, “[Player] was very influential. He spoke to me for a long time... and he was telling me how much [Head Coach] wanted me to come.” The similarity in age is a distinct advantage presented by players on the team who are able to relate and communicate effectively with the recruits. As discussed in the ‘Familiarity’ section, building relationships between the current players and the recruits can ease a great deal of uncertainty surrounding the college choice decision. “That’s probably what I felt best about. Just the players on the team, I felt really comfortable with them.”

Institutional agents. The institutional agents meanwhile, fall under three categories:

- Informational
- Developmental
- Memorable

Informational members of the team provide just that: information. While the program agents are able to answer any basketball-related questions, informational team members specialize in academic, housing, and campus life areas. Appointments with

academic advisors are commonplace during campus visits, and as one recruit noted, “we met with an advisor... and he was a huge help, talked to me about how first year [academic faculty] would go... [and] why it might be a good fit for me, which I thought was very, very helpful.” Meetings with academic advisors are also very effective if a parent is accompanying a recruit during their campus visit. Often more concerned about the academic side of the post-secondary experience, these personal agents play a key role in the decision-making process, and their influence will be discussed in the following section.

Other examples of informational team members include athletic directors, residence hall directors, and facility managers. Effective head coaches are able to manage their recruitment team in order to provide incoming student-athletes with enough information to build a certain level of comfort and familiarity without overwhelming them with information.

Developmental team members are individuals who strive to enhance the performance (both on and off the court) of the recruit. These include sport psychologists, strength and conditioning coaches, doctors, training staff, and tutors. During his campus visit, one participant “saw the weight room, met with [Strength Coach] a little bit, and talked about the strength and conditioning side of things.” Another recruit echoed the positive impact a developmental team member can have: “We met with the strength coach, I liked that.” While the interaction with these team members during the campus visit is rarely more than a simple introduction, recruits value the time and effort put forth

to showcase the basketball program's commitment to player development (see 'Honesty' and 'Seriousness' sections).

Finally, in order to create those memorable moments (see 'Seriousness'), memorable team members are included as part of the recruitment team. Respondents reported meeting university Presidents, Deans, notable alumni, and other local figures during their on-campus visits. Although these memorable parties are only able to provide relatively superficial insights into university life, recruits often perceive the inclusion of these individuals in the campus visit as a significant display of commitment and dedication.

Personal Agents. Due to the complexity of the college choice process, the leveraging of multiple influential agents is essential in providing student-athletes with the attention and information required to secure their commitment. As outlined by Weitz and Bradford (1999), the head coach must align the goals of each team member before any contact is made with the recruit. Using a recruitment team is a complex and time-consuming process, but if executed correctly, can enhance the effectiveness of a number of recruitment strategies. There is however one key component of the recruitment team that remains absent from the current analysis, and it is that of the personal agents. The most effective head coaches are able to convince the recruit's parents, peers, and youth coaches that their program represents the best fit for their son, friend, or player. In doing so, the head coach is able to influence the decision-making process of the student-athlete in two ways:

- Directly: Through program and institutional agents, recruitment tactics and strategies, and communications
- Indirectly: Through personal agent communications and interactions

Of the eight participants in the study, seven reported that their decision-making process involved an in-depth conversation with their parents and other family members about the benefits and drawbacks of each alternative. It should be noted that the one student-athlete not included in that tally said, “family played a big role in my decision, not necessarily in talks, but they were always in mind for sure.” Parents (and other family members) acting as personal influential agents are extremely important to consider when developing a personalized recruitment plan.

Their ability to frame certain aspects of the school, basketball program, or head coach could sway the decision of the recruit a great deal. Many of the respondents reported that one or both of their parents joined them during their campus visit, and as a result were able to significant input about various aspects of the institution. “My mom is a really big fan of [Head Coach]. I think since she met him on the visit she has been a big fan of his,” noted one recruit. The most definitive concern expressed by personal agents however, is the academic qualifications of the university. It is therefore important to utilize the informational members of the recruitment team to ease the most pressing concerns of parents and siblings. In a conversation with his mother, one recruit remembered, “She said the prestige of the university is something you have to take into account too. So that factored into my decision too.”

The second group of personal agents is a more basketball-oriented group, and is made up of high school coaches, club coaches, and personal trainers. These are the individuals that the recruit trusts with questions regarding the makeup of the team, the head coach, and the history of the basketball program. One participant spoke about the impact his high school coach had on his decision: “He was a big influence in my decision, played a huge role. He is the one who got me to write the pros and cons list... he knew what I was going through and knew the decision process.” Establishing a strong connection with a recruit’s high school or club coach is beneficial not only in the short-term, but also for future prospects. This type of connection is most common between CIS coaches and local high school coaches, but a larger coaching network can be a significant asset to any recruiter.

Now that the key personal agents have been identified, what content should the head coach provide to them? One participant noted that the head coach “talked about the crime rates... stuff for my parents more or less.” Another recruit mentioned, “[Coach] came to my house for a visit... I know my parents appreciated it[.] It was more so for my parents than me I would say.” It is certainly difficult to identify what recruitment messages were being delivered to the influential agents, but based on the accounts of the eight student-athletes interviewed, parents are attracted to schools that are accessible, academically reputable, and have opportunities for student-athlete growth.

A number of the recruits indicated that their parents showed bias towards hometown universities due to the proximity to home, as well as due to a greater level of familiarity with the institution’s standing. “[Mother] would always say a line, ‘that it’s

rare to have a school in your backyard as good as [University].” Participants reported that basketball-related personal agents were attracted to head coaches who valued honesty and player development while maintaining a respected reputation. One recruit spoke to his other coaches about the head coach recruiting him: “The name [Head Coach], they knew who he was... so I knew he had credibility and so on.”

While many of the student-athletes were able to generalize the advice given by influential agents, few were able to characterize the relationship or level of communication between personal agents and the head coach they eventually chose. This head coach-personal agent dynamic is certainly worth investigating, as it may reveal new information on how head coaches can tailor their recruitment strategies to influence not only the decision of the recruit, but also the relevant influential agents.

Influential agents contribute to the decision-making process in a variety of ways. Program and institutional agents are represented in the CDP Model as ‘Marketer Dominated Stimuli,’ but their influence goes beyond simply providing recruitment information. As described above, head coaches often leverage their recruitment team to help show seriousness and build familiarity. Personal agents meanwhile, are represented as ‘Other’ stimuli, but also contribute to the ‘Individual Differences’ of each recruit while also acting as ‘Environmental Influences.’ Daily interactions with influential agents shape the personality, value system, and motivation of the recruit to a degree that falls outside the scope of this study. The ability of influential agents to support or negate recruitment messages is very important, and it impacts the decision-making process during both the ‘Search’ and ‘Pre-Purchase Evaluation of Alternatives.’

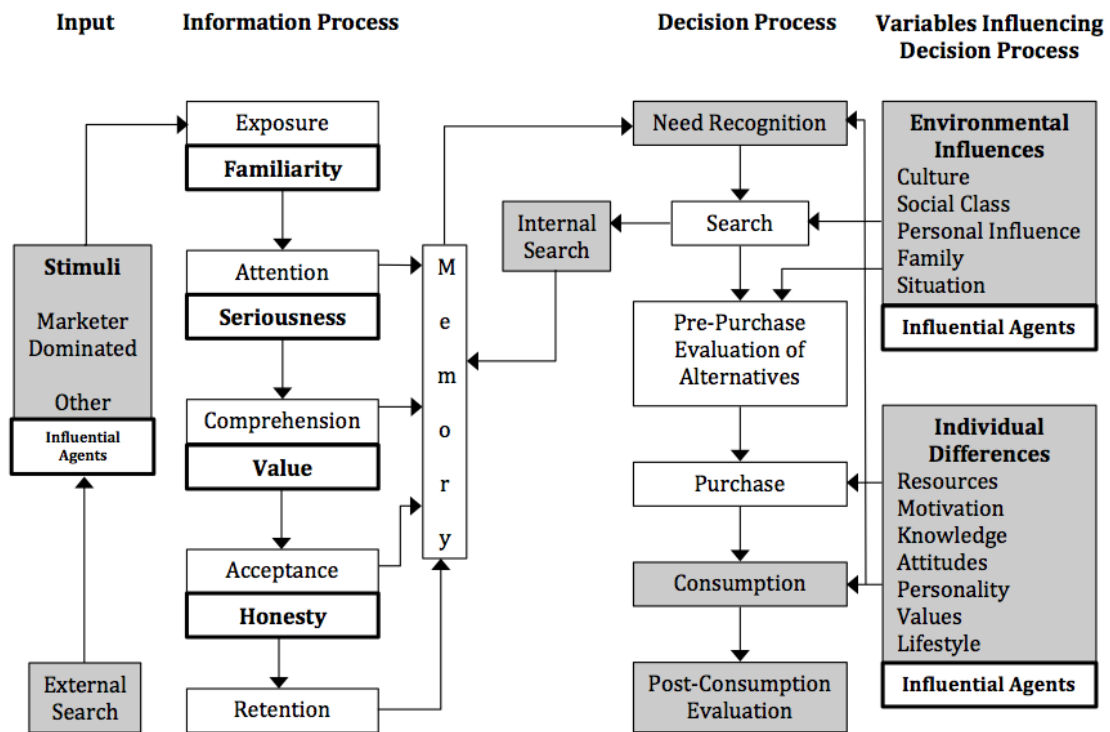
Conclusion

Discussion

The focus of this thesis is to identify effective recruitment strategies and tactics within the context of CIS men's basketball. While each interview exemplified a unique recruitment experience, similarities within the data helped highlight the most effective recruitment strategies.

Based upon what was found through the analyses of the interview data, figure 4 shows how the CDP model can be amended to apply to student-athlete recruitment. The most significant change to the model occurs within the 'Information Process' component, as recruitment strategies are used to create positive information reception, comprehension, and storage. By presenting recruitment materials in an effective way, head coaches are able to create positive recruit perceptions that will influence the 'Decision Process' component of the model. This influence is most prevalent during the 'Search' stage, as recruits draw from memories created throughout the recruitment period.

Figure 4: Consumer Decision Process Model (Modified)



Source: Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel (2006)

Each of the five themes plays an important role in recruitment effectiveness. As familiarity increases, so does the recruit's exposure to positive recruitment stimuli. Seriousness meanwhile, is the head coach's way of capturing the recruit's attention by presenting relevant, personalized information in a way that conveys commitment and dedication. In terms of the actual content of the recruitment message, a positive and enticing valuation of the recruit allows for accurate information comprehension. This information is accepted more readily when the source is perceived as being honest and

reliable throughout the recruitment period. Finally, the recruit will leverage their network of influential agents in order to make an informed decision. By providing influential agents with the necessary tools and information to positively influence the recruit, a head coach is able to solidify their program's position in the consideration set.

As noted in previous recruitment literature, the head coach is the single most influential factor in the college choice process (Gabert et al., 1999). In order for a university to enter into a recruit's consideration set, it is imperative that head coach establishes a positive connection with the recruit. The reason for this importance is that no combination of other positive college factors will outweigh a negative recruit-coach dynamic. With that being said, a recruit may enjoy a positive relationship with multiple head coaches from multiple schools. In that case, secondary factors begin to play a larger role in the decision-making process, and the ability of the head coach to effectively highlight those secondary factors becomes paramount in achieving student-athlete commitment.

It was found throughout the interview data that recruits have come to expect particular recruitment strategies. The presence of these strategies within the recruitment plan may not set one program apart, but their absence will eliminate that program from the recruit's consideration set. The responsibility of the lead recruiter is to consider student-athlete perceptions at each stage of the recruitment process in order to avoid negative associations. It is no surprise that the head coach, acting as lead recruiter, plays a significant role in each of the effective strategies, either through well-designed delegation or direct interaction with the recruit.

Effective Strategies and Tactics

Each item on the list below directly relates to one of the themes presented in the Analysis & Results section. The head coach must ensure the influential agents are properly prepared for recruit interaction in order to maintain full control of the recruitment message being delivered at each step of the recruitment process.

- Professional and personalized first contact – (*Seriousness*)

The head coach should contact the recruit directly with information about the institution as well as the basketball program. E-mail and phone calls are best suited for first contacts.

- Organized and well-designed campus visit – (*Seriousness & Familiarity*)

The timing of the campus visit should allow for recruit interaction with players and other recruits. The itinerary should be clear and the schedule adhered to.

- Extra efforts – (*Seriousness*)

Involve high-ranking members of the university or community in the campus visit in order to enhance the recruit's experience. This adds value to the standard campus visit template.

- On-court workouts – (*Familiarity*)

Create familiarity by exposing the recruit to other players in the program as well as to the coaching style and philosophy.

- Valuation – (*Value*)

Based on the success of the program and talent available, describe the impact the recruit will have in his rookie season. This may include describing the blueprints for a program rebuild, or using the depth chart to support recruitment promises.

- Skill development plan – (*Honesty*)

Indicate basketball-related opportunities for individual growth. Design a detailed development plan unique to this particular program that will lead to the improvement of specific skills.

- Link work ethic and results – (*Honesty*)

Ensure the recruit understands that all successes must be earned. This contributes to the creation of an authentic and honest tone.

- Leverage influential agents – (*Influential Agents & Familiarity*)

Players and assistant coaches represent a more casual contact point for the recruit.

Change the delivery method but not the recruitment message. This also helps to build familiarity with the program.

Institutional agents can help to provide credibility to assurances being made by the head coach with respect to academics, athletic therapy, and strength training.

- Memorable moments – (*Seriousness*)

Show an elevated level of dedication to the recruit by engaging in unique recruitment behavior. This will also contribute to positive differentiation within the recruit's consideration set.

- Engage personal influential agents – (*Influential Agents*)

Interact with the recruit's family, friends, and coaches in an effort to influence the non-marketer controlled external stimuli.

- Capitalize on local advantages – (*Familiarity*)

Invite local talent to open gyms, youth programs, and other events/initiatives in order to build familiarity with the program. Recruitment of local talent requires less effort due to greater accessibility, but ensure these recruits are not taken for granted.

- Constant communication – (*Seriousness*)

Stay in touch with the recruit directly or through an assistant coach. Ensure the recruit is aware of the interest and investment being made with respect to his commitment to the program.

The impact of the campus visit cannot be understated. Participants mentioned it as the primary opportunity for them to collect and process information about the program, school, and city. By implementing an effective recruitment strategy during face-to-face interaction with the recruit, the head coach is able to present material that passes through all five stages of information processing. The recruit is then able to create a positive memory of the campus visit, and this memory will influence the recruit's decision-making process during the pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives stage of the CDP Model.

Future Research

One of the most prominent similarities that emerged throughout the analysis of the interview data was the attractiveness of the NCAA Division I. Many of the

respondents (especially those who attended preparatory school in the United States) reported that they made an attempt to pursue Division I opportunities before considering CIS options. This would indicate that high-level Canadian basketball players have two separate consideration sets: Division I and CIS. Recruits reported that during their evaluation of Division I schools, no CIS schools were simultaneously considered. It was only after the Division I opportunities fell through that CIS schools became legitimate options for post-secondary destinations. One recruit noted, “I didn’t decide that I was definitely going to stay in the CIS until about April... I said, ‘you know what, enough with Division I, it’s just not going to happen for me, ... I’ll see what I have here in Canada.’”

This finding represents a new challenge for CIS coaches looking to recruit top Canadian talent. Not only do they need to promote their program over other CIS schools, but they also need to promote the CIS over other post-secondary leagues.

The primary obstacle that CIS head coaches need to overcome is the stigma surrounding the level of competition in Canada. Of the interviewees who first considered Division I, all reported being shocked with the quality of basketball they faced during their rookie seasons in the CIS. “I really underestimated the level of competition in the CIS. And that’s just because I didn’t know, I didn’t watch a lot of the games,” noted one participant, “I struggled in my first year.”

The concepts of league reputation and the retention of Canadian student-athletes in the CIS provide exciting potential for the future of athlete recruitment research. Is it possible to keep the best Canadian talent away from the allure of Division I? What

advantages exist to playing in the CIS versus NCAA Division I? Are athletes open to comparing CIS and Division I schools within the same consideration set? These questions are relevant to CIS head coaches who must decide which recruits they can realistically attract to their program.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Research question. What recruitment strategies and tactics used by CIS men’s basketball coaches are most effective in creating a perceived fit between the athlete and the institution?

Important aspects to consider.

Athlete Expectations

Coach Strategies

Campus Visits

Influential Agents

Information Search

Evaluation of Alternatives

Consent statement. “Before we begin, I need to verify a couple things. First, have you read the information and consent letter I emailed you? [Yes] Do you have any questions or concerns with respect to the study or any of the data collection methods? [Resolve any issues]. Do you consent to participating in this study? [Yes]”

General information.

- Name
- DOB
- Birthplace

- High School

Introductory questions.

- How did your first year go at (University)?
- Were you happy with the decision you made to attend (University)?
- What other schools tried to recruit you?

Campus visits.

- Can you tell me about what your on-campus visits were like?
- How did your visit at [school of choice] differ from the others?
- What role did the head coach play during the campus visits?
 - Time spent
 - Nature of interactions
 - Individual workout (?)
- Did the coach delegate responsibility to current players?

Information search.

- What did you know about [college of choice] before they started recruiting you?
- How did you go about finding out more about the school/program?

Influential agents

- Who else did you talk to about your decision?
- How did they help you make your choice?
- Can you talk about the relationship between [influential agent] and the

head coach at [college of choice]?

Evaluation of alternatives.

- How did you narrow down your choices?
- What was the tipping point that led to your decision to attend [college of choice]?
- What was the most important criterion in your decision? Why?

Coach strategies.

- How did the head coach try to persuade you to commit?
- How did he describe your future with the program?
- What features of the University did he try to emphasize?

Appendix B

Prototypical Steps Involved in the Recruitment Process

1. The head coach will contact the recruit either directly or via the recruit's high school or club coach. This intermediary is often used to determine the viability of the student-athlete with respect to character, aspirations, and academic standing.
2. If the recruit is viable and interested in the university, the head coach will follow up with information about the school, the program, and potential campus visit dates.
3. During this period between first contact and the campus visit, the coaching staff will remain in contact with the recruit via phone, e-mail, or face-to-face interaction.
4. The recruit will make a campus visit which will typically involve the following (in no strict order):
 - Campus tour of academic and athletic facilities
 - Social interaction with current members of the basketball team
 - An on-court workout or scrimmage
 - Meeting with academic faculty
 - Private conversation with the head coach in order to discuss financial

compensation, expectations, and future role with the team

- All meals and accommodation provided by the university
5. The recruit will often make a number of campus visits during their recruitment period, each to a different institution. Once they have completed their campus visits, they will decide between the potential destinations.
 6. During this period between campus visit and commitment, the coaching staff will remain in contact with the recruit via phone, e-mail, or face-to-face interaction.
 7. The recruit will sign a letter of intent, indicating their commitment to a specific university program.