

Do Foreign Tours Provide a Competitive Advantage for Men's Division I Basketball Teams?

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Every four years, NCAA Division I men's basketball teams are allowed to take a foreign tour during their off-season (NCAA 2009a). While many teams utilize this opportunity, some coaches and administrators have suggested such excursions are a competitive advantage for the teams involved (Decourcy, 1996; Katz, 2009; Wolken, 2008), an advantage not all Division I programs can afford. This fall, the Pac-10 conference sponsored NCAA legislative proposal 2009-87 which would ban all such foreign tours (Katz, 2009; NCAA 2009b).

The primary purpose of this study was to determine if teams taking these foreign tours do indeed gain a competitive advantage over other teams. No prior studies have examined the effect of off-season tours on in-season winning percentage for sport teams, although the impact on winning percentage from several other variables, such as stadium newness (Quinn, Bursik, Borick, & Raethz, 2003), managerial quality (Kahn, 1993), team cohesion (Carron, Colman, Wheeler, and Stevens, 2002), and strength-training regimens (Groves, Gayle, & Brunet, 1989), have been investigated.

Data was compiled from NCAA Division I athletic departments and several online sources. Results of the current study indicate that over the past 10 years, 56% of NCAA Division I men's basketball teams have gone on at least one foreign tour. Performance analysis of the previous two seasons, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, indicates that going on a foreign tour does not result in a significant improvement in winning percentage. To further consider the factors that might influence the change in winning percentage, difference scores between current and previous seasons were computed for change in strength of schedule, non-conference strength of schedule, player experience and bench minutes (a measurement of depth), and were included in the model as covariates. Analyses including other variables will be presented. Of the variables included in this analysis, only decreases in strength of schedule (for 08-09 season $F=9.003$, $p=.003$; for 07-08 season $F=19.600$, $p<.001$) and increases in experience (for 08-09 $F=17.828$, $p<.001$; for 07-08 $F=8.331$, $p=.004$) were significantly related to improved winning percentage for both years. An increase in bench minutes significantly improved winning percentage for the 08-09 season ($F=5.834$, $p=.016$).

Overall, the results of this study indicate that teams do not gain a competitive advantage from participating in foreign tours; rather changes in other performance factors are better predictors of improved performance. Further results and implications from this study will be discussed.