

## *Qualitative Analysis of International Student-Athlete Perspectives on Recruitment and Transitioning into American College Sport*

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International student-athletes play a prominent role in NCAA competition (Brown, 2004; Drape, 2006; NCAA, 2008). Understanding their perception of the recruiting process and how well they transition successfully to university life in America would be valuable information for NCAA coaches and administrators. The researchers examined the most difficult barriers for international student-athletes to overcome in their sojourn to the U.S. and investigated how international student-athletes compared their experience at an NCAA university to other options they had available. Comparisons were also made between athletes hailing from different regions of the world.

Written answers to survey questions returned by 193 athletes from 57 different countries attending 15 NCAA Division I universities were examined to identify themes. Two raters examined the data and codes were developed to categorize written responses. Scott's Pi inter-rater reliability exceeded .8 for all but one question, which yielded .77.

Results indicated the most difficult aspects of international student-athlete experience are: (a) homesickness (25%), (b) adjustment to U.S. culture (20.7%), and (c) adjustment to English language (14.6%). European athletes were more likely to note language and cultural adjustments ( $\chi^2 (4, N = 278) = 12.1, p = .017$ ), while Canadian athletes were more likely to identify financial and logistical difficulties ( $\chi^2 (4, N = 278) = 29.8, p = .001$ ). Individual sport athletes were more likely to identify language and cultural adjustments than team-sport athletes, while team sport-athletes were more likely to cite homesickness ( $\chi^2 (4, N = 278) = 11.4, p = .023$ ).

In rating importance of factors for a successful transition to their NCAA school, international athletes identified: (a) strong support systems from teammates and coaches (34.1%), (b) strong support systems from friends and family back home (20.2%), and (c) possession of key personality traits such as desire and work ethic (18.4%).

Three-fourths of the responses indicated they would be living in their native country if they were not playing college sports in the U.S., and over half of the responses indicated they would be attending college in their native country. International athletes rated the opportunities and facilities better in the United States than in their native country (90%).

A discussion of results and implications for practitioners involved with recruiting and transitioning international student-athletes will also be examined.