

Seminar Paper

The attached seminar paper, by Travis Erickson, entitled, The Positive and Negative Effects of Club-Based Athletics on Interscholastic Athletics in Wisconsin, when completed, is to be submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science in Education Degree in Educational Administration, for which three credits shall be allowed, is hereby

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THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF CLUB-BASED ATHLETICS ON
INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS IN WISCONSIN

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ABSTRACT

More and more of today's youth athletes are choosing to specialize in one sport as opposed to becoming a multi-sport athlete. Because of this, the popularity of club sports is at an all-time high. At the same time, interscholastic athletics is at point where it must continue to monitor how to keep their multi-sport athletes and not let them transition into focusing on only one sport. The purpose of this literature review is to review the negative and positive effects that club-sport participation has on interscholastic athletics. The literature supports the ideas that athletes can grow from both their experiences in club athletics as well as being a multi-sport athlete in their high schools. Further research on this topic will give student-athletes and parents a better understanding of what's best for them.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In thirteen years as a high school athletic director in the state of Wisconsin, I have witnessed the growing popularity of club-based athletics and many of the effects it has on interscholastic athletics and student-athletes. According to Haddix (2015), three-sport athletes are becoming more of a rarity in schools today as opposed to twenty years ago. Each sports season finds more students faced with the dilemma of either competing on a travel team of their choosing outside of their school district or participating on their school's next sports team. When faced with the issue of getting better in one sport through specializing, or becoming a role player on the next school team, a relatively high number of student-athletes are choosing to specialize (Van Milligen, 2014).

At the same time, state athletic associations have continued to modify their rules in an attempt to make interscholastic athletics more appealing for students to stay on their school's athletic teams. In the last ten years, the athletic governing body in the state of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA), increased the number of games that teams could play in basketball from twenty to twenty-two. In addition, the WIAA also changed its game structure from quarters to halves to lessen the amount of stoppage time between quarters. The high school game of two halves now closely resembles the college game. These are just some of the policies that have been implemented in the last decade to try to retain student-athletes in interscholastic athletics.

High schools continue to see both the negative and positive ripple effects of club sports. School districts are losing participants in school-related sports because of opportunities presented

to them to participate on club teams (“What Effects Do AAU,” 2014). Not only are schools losing these student-athletes, but some schools have also made it more convenient for student-athletes to participate on these teams by allowing club teams to use their facilities for practices and/or events, mainly for the financial benefits that these club teams bring to school districts. Districts have recognized that there is a financial benefit to their district if they allow club teams to hold large tournaments that draw a number of people to their facilities during the summer months or over a weekend. Not only do schools charge a facility usage fee, but they also encourage their school groups to hold fundraisers, such as concession stands, to capitalize on the number of people who will be using their facilities. However, districts are now considering, or have already implemented, incentives to combat decreased multi-sport participation numbers, such as three-sport athlete awards to recognize those students who participate throughout their high school careers on their school teams.

Statement of the Problem

A problem currently exists between interscholastic athletic teams and club based/travel teams. Over the past several decades, club-based athletic teams and interscholastic athletic teams seem to be in constant competition with one another over high school athletes and the impact that each may have on a student-athlete’s future. In addition, there seem to be reasons why youth athletes choose to participate in club sports instead of participating on multiple sports teams at their respective schools. This paper examines the positive and negative effects that club-based athletics and interscholastic athletics have on high school student-athletes and attempts to find out why students choose to specialize in one sport instead of becoming a multi-sport athlete.

Definition of Terms

- Interscholastic Athletics: a partner with other school activities in the total education process whose purpose is to create policies that will develop the ideals of good citizenship and sportsmanship; they exist to provide teaching and learning experiences that relate to life and education through athletics for those who choose to participate.
- WIAA: Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association is an association of high schools in the state of Wisconsin whose purpose is to organize, develop and control an interscholastic athletic program that will promote the ideals of its membership and the opportunities for member schools' participation (WIAA, 2018).
- Club teams: organizations that create opportunities for students to compete specifically in a given sport outside of school control.
- NFHS: The National Federation of State High School Associations is the national leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts activities (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2018a).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of researching this topic is to examine the issues arising between interscholastic athletics and club teams that are competing against one another for high school athletes. Though there is not specifically direct competition between the two groups, both must continue to sell the benefits of their program over the other. This research will attempt to find out why some students choose to specialize in a sport through the club model as opposed to becoming a multi-sport athlete in their school, and if schools need to enhance their strategies to recruit and

retain students in their athletic programs instead of losing those athletes to sport-specific clubs. It will also take a look at some of the positive and negative effects of choosing to specialize in one sport as opposed to becoming a multi-sport athlete. Finally, the research will examine what the Wisconsin state athletic association is doing in order to attract and retain students in their interscholastic athletic programs.

Significance of the Study

Those impacted through this study will be students, parents, coaches, administrators and state athletic associations. Through this research, students who are faced with questions of specializing or joining a club team may be able to use the research referenced in this study to make informed decisions as to whether or not to join a club team or remain within their school-based athletic program. In addition, the research may allow schools, conference athletic associations, state athletic associations, and the National Federation of High School Sports to make informed decisions on how to work together with club teams to improve their relationships with one another.

Delimitations and Limitations of Research

The research conducted for this paper included finding general, primary, and secondary sources that contribute to a more complete understanding of interscholastic and club-based athletics. Information on the two topics was found mainly in current publications of popular magazines, articles, journals, case studies, and dissertations. The information from these resources was reviewed, summarized, and cited throughout this paper. The amount of information on this topic is limited as there appear to be very few studies on the correlation

between interscholastic athletics and club-based athletics. Because of the sheer number of opportunities for student-athletes to compete on a club, or travel, teams, there is no way to fit each organization and its model into a general group to make an overall generalization about the impact that club sports has on interscholastic athletics. Thus, this paper will use research that can relate to the interscholastic model used in the state of Wisconsin.

Method of Approach

This seminar paper covers information found in the literature on the topics of interscholastic athletics and club based sports. Most of the information gathered was from research studies that were reviewed and summarized over the various internet websites found on the topic. Research for this topic was primarily collected using the EBSCOhost database from the University of Wisconsin Libraries search engine. The articles referenced were compared to others in order to make various conclusions on the topics of the positive and negative effects of club sports and interscholastic athletics. The following keywords were used to identify research that related to this completed study: interscholastic athletics, club teams, travel teams, sports specialization, and burn out. This paper functions as an integrative review of the two topics.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Launch of Club Athletics

There is no current model for club sports. In fact, because of the large number of club teams that exist in each sport, the models for club-based athletics often vary, not only within each particular sport, but also from sport to sport. The research that has been published on club sports primarily references the sports of basketball, volleyball, and soccer because they are the among the most popular sports of male and female high school student-athletes in the United States (NFHS, 2018b).

Club sports essentially began when the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) was established in 1888 as a program designed for the teenage amateur athlete to continue to develop their skills. Initially, its primary function was to serve as a pathway to develop amateur athletes into future US Olympic prospects. Thus, without coming out and directly stating it in its mission statement, its purpose was to develop the elite athlete for more prestigious athletic competitions beyond the high school level. However, during the 1970's, AAU began to modified its vision to include all participants, regardless of ability, at an even earlier age than before.

In 1996, the Amateur Athletic Union joined forces with Walt Disney World. There were two primary reasons for this significant merger. First, Walt Disney had the financial means and resources to build a complex in Orlando to support several AAU national tournaments. In addition, Walt Disney purchased ESPN, the TV network, later in 1996. ESPN provided the marketing ability to promote AAU athletic opportunities to youth athletes around the world. Together, they have allowed ESPN to air more than 2,000 hours of content on ESPN networks from the Walt Disney complex in Orlando ("Six Reasons to Compete," 2018).

The Beginnings of Interscholastic Athletics

Given that each state and the District of Columbia has its own athletic association, there is no standard model for interscholastic athletics. However, all state athletic associations function under the guidelines set by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS). The NFHS is in charge of developing minimum standards for eligibility with the intention of having states adopt standards similar to the NFHS (Morton, Richardson, & Vizoso, 1993). For this paper, the research will focus primarily on the state of Wisconsin and the way it has attempted to regulate the sports that have a high number of participants on club teams.

Wisconsin's high schools operate under the direction of the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA), which takes pride in proclaiming itself as the first organized athletic association in the United States. The WIAA began in 1895 as a way to promote, but not necessarily regulate, athletic competitions between high schools. Today, the WIAA serves as the governing body of 511 Wisconsin high schools and 47 middle schools. In 2018-19, the WIAA will sponsor a total of 27 state championship series for its membership schools (WIAA, 2018).

Reasons Students Choose to Participate in Club Sports

Youth student-athletes choose to participate in club sports for a number of reasons. Feeley, Agel, and LaPrade (2016) noted that reasons include the desire to give the young athlete an edge in competition, a pursuit of scholarships, and a potential professional status, as well as the ability to label a young athlete as elite at an early age.

At the top of the list is the idea that club sports have the ability to develop a player at a higher level in that particular sport and prepare them for the next level of their sport, particularly

the college level. While often choosing to give up other sports. Voight (2016) notes that with individualize training, young athletes have a better chance of earning a college scholarship.

According to Jim Strommen (personal communication, July 29, 2018), Athletic Director for 31 years at Pecatonica High School, club sports have very few restrictions on the amount of time athletes may train with their coaches or teams, unlike high school sports. Outside of the regular high school sport season and particular state regulations, athletes can train individually or with their travel team as much as they want. For student-athletes with the financial resources and access to high-quality coaches and athletic facilities, they will typically opt out of other school sponsored sports and focus their time on getting highly specialized training in their particular sport. Cimbollek (2014) observed that participation in year-round programs almost demands that a commitment be made that eliminates participation in other sports.

Furthermore, club sports have the unique opportunity to promote the athletic abilities of the student-athlete to potential college institutions. During the school year, college coaches are limited in their ability to get out on the recruiting trail to see many of the nation's top recruits. Drotar (2015) noted that college coaches are more likely to recruit at larger venues like AAU basketball tournaments where the talent is more prolific. Because college coaches are limited in the amount of time they can spend recruiting, youth athletes may choose to play club sports for this exposure. In the summer of 2018, more than 4,000 fans traveled to see an AAU game that featured the nation's top two basketball prospects compete against one another in a summer tournament in Las Vegas. The game was also featured on ESPN. As Bill Self, basketball coach of the University of Kansas noted, "This is unreal. Never seen anything like it." (Schnitzer, 2017) These tournaments allow athletes to compete against the best in the nation. Thus, they, and college coaches, have the unique ability to get out and observe how athletes stack up

competitively against other elite athletes while having the opportunity to compete against each other in tournaments located across the country. Another key factor in many students' decisions to play on club teams is the lack of academic eligibility restrictions and attendance requirements that are placed on athletes in club-based athletics. First, unlike all state athletic associations, club teams do not have to enforce academic or attendance requirements to participate on their teams since they are not run by academic institutions. These requirements can have a dramatic impact on student participation levels on high school teams. Those who struggle to meet these requirements are more inclined to play on a travel team to increase their skill level and to promote themselves to colleges and universities for athletic scholarships. Gehring (2002) noted that this was the case in Arkansas in the late 1990's, when interscholastic athletic participation dropped by over 40,000 students because its state legislature instituted a minimum of a 2.0 GPA in order for athletes to participate on their school's athletic teams.

Youth athletes may also be more inclined to participate on club teams because of the ability of major corporations to sponsor club-based teams. While often overlooked, several of the nation's top recruits often choose to play for a club team that is sponsored by any one of the nation's largest athletic manufactures, including Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour. While not only paying the entry fees for club teams in national tournaments, many of these companies provide uniforms, shoes, and other athletic apparel for club teams through sponsorship. McDaniel (2017) noted, "Nike, Adidas, and now Under Armour have been pouring loads of money into AAU programs for years, and they're using every tool in their arsenal to influence highly coveted recruits." The funding provided to these club teams with elite athletes may lead to future endorsement opportunities for those high school athletes if they make it to a professional league. Thus, major companies like to get their foot in the door with many rising young stars by

marketing their products to these elite athletes so that they have the potential to make money off their likeness further on in their athletic careers, as is the case with top basketball recruit Darius Bazley. In the fall of 2018, Bazley signed a million-dollar contract with New Balance instead of going to college. His contract with the shoe company can go up to \$14 million if he meets certain performance standards within his professional contract (Paul, 2018).

Positive Effects of Club Sports

There are benefits provided to youth athletes for participating on club teams. Networking with college coaches and major corporations have already been stated. Competition between the nation's elite athletes may be the most obvious reason that youth participate on club-sport teams. Medcalf and O'Neil (2014) noted that without this level of competition, youth athletes often feel that the high school scene does not provide the necessary means to see how an athlete stacks up against others in his/her given sport. Their work cited D'Angelo Russell, an NBA player, saying,

“If you're not playing AAU, you'll be lucky to get out of your own city. AAU helps any kid. You get to play in front of top colleges, play with the top players, against the top players. You get to make a name for yourself every day you play.”
(Medcalf and O'Neil, 2014).

Club teams also provide athletes and their families an opportunity to travel that many student athletes do not get through participation on their high school teams. This varies greatly from traveling across a large city to play another high school, or over to the next town in your county for a conference game. Wisconsin requires its school districts to meet several requirements in order for a high school team to compete nationally during the sport season. These requirements include getting an approved waiver from the WIAA for any interstate

competition and/or event in which four or more schools participate, including events hosted by WIAA member schools, and any interstate competition and/or event, which involves schools from three or more states, including events hosted by WIAA member schools (WIAA, 2018). Most often, these barriers prevent schools from providing these unique opportunities to their high school athletes. In addition, the potential to visit colleges and universities seldom exists through high school athletics alone. Thus, the ability to expose their talents to coaches in large club tournaments, and potentially earn a college visit throughout the country, can often be reason enough for a student to join a club team.

Positive Effects of Multi-Sport Athletes in Interscholastic Athletics

It is the belief of high schools that participation in interscholastic athletics promote opportunities that enrich a student's total education experience. Not only does a student experience a sense of community pride by positively representing their school in a public arena, but they are also taught a number of life lessons through interscholastic athletics. Additionally, Whitley's work stated that those who participate in high school athletics have higher grade point averages, better attendance, fewer discipline problems, and a lower dropout rate (Topper, 2009).

The National Federation of State High School Associations (2018c) states that students who compete in high school activity programs have better educational outcomes, including higher grades, higher achievement test scores, and higher educational expectations beyond high school. All fifty states have eligibility requirement for students to participate on high school athletic teams. "The purpose of these eligibility rules are to emphasize excellence in academics over athletic performance and to enhance academic performance of athletes. Emphasis on academics over athletics as a stated policy is clear by virtue of the existence of academic

eligibility rules” (Morton et al., 1993). The state of Wisconsin requires that student-athletes be full-time students in their respective schools and meet minimum academic requirements in credits that are accepted by each member school.

Students who participate in interscholastic athletics also experience lower absentee rates. Students are often more successful academically because of less time lost academically. Born (2007) noted in his study of the Minnesota state high school league, the average student athlete misses only 7.4 school days in a year; however, a non-athlete in the same study missed approximately 8.8 days of the school year. This statistic demonstrates a slight increase in student-athlete attendance when a student participates on their high school athletic team(s).

Interscholastic athletics also encourage students to have a stronger sense of community through the policies that encourage multi-sport athletic participation. These policies are implemented to encourage students to see the value in representing something far greater than themselves. For example, schools like Mahomet-Seymour High School in Illinois recognize their multi-sport athletes through their tri-athlete award. Not only do they hope to encourage others to participate in high school sports, but they also realize that this puts their high schools in a positive light because of their high participation numbers (A. Janecke, personal communication, July 18, 2018). Similarly, the WIAA encourages a sense of loyalty to one’s school by limiting the number of competitions that an athlete may participate in to two non-school events during their specific sport season (WIAA, 2018). Dave Anderson, WIAA Executive Director, said that Wisconsin’s policies are in place to encourage students to remain loyal to their school team during their season (Haddix, 2015).

Often overlooked is the level of oversight that high school athletic programs provide student athletes through athletic directors, particularly when hiring highly qualified coaches.

High schools place much higher expectations on their coaches. In the state of Wisconsin, contracted high school coaches not only must be certified to coach, they also must have both a certification in basic first aid, CPR, and AED. These programs must be fulfilled by the time a coach begins their second year of employment (WIAA, 2018). In addition to coaching certification, schools require that coaches are evaluated and monitored by athletic directors. Athletic directors are forced to follow employee handbooks and state regulations to ensure that their coaches are fulfilling their obligations as a coach in an interscholastic athletic environment. However, it is worth noting that because of the number of challenges presented when hiring coaches, high schools can find it difficult to find highly qualified coaches.

Negative Effects of Club Teams

The number one concern of high schools with club teams seems to be the competition for student athletes. These young adolescents are faced with the idea that in order to be the best, they must compete against the best only in their particular sport. For this, they often give up opportunities in other high school sponsored sports to pursue their dreams of chasing a college scholarship, and potentially, a future professional contract. Not only are high schools concerned that they are losing potentially two and three-sport athletes to these club teams, but the athletes are missing out on the positive benefits that schools can provide to their student-athletes. In the end, both high school athletic teams and student-athletes suffer because the best athletes are labeled as being elite in their particular sport.

One of the most glaring negative effects of club teams does not have any impact on high schools at all, but in fact puts a huge dent in the pocketbooks of parents in order to fund club teams. These organizations often rely on the financial resources of parents to support their

programs. A survey conducted by TD Ameritrade in 2016 concluded that parents spent between \$100 and \$500 per month on their children who are involved with club teams (Skidmore, 2016). When parents are forced to hand over large amounts of money to clubs for the potential future success of their children at a young age, they are often giving up their future resources to support a simple life after their student or child has finished athletics. It's a large investment when one considers that only about 2 percent of high school athletes earn sports scholarships every year at NCAA colleges and universities (O'Shaughnessy, 2012).

One way that club teams support their team members financially is through the use of corporate dollars from large corporations like Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour. Often, the large athletic companies fund club teams. However, with this comes several risks. First and foremost is the potential for universities to be linked to potential recruits early in the recruiting process. Not only is this an NCAA violation, but also can hurt both the student-athletes and university's image. In addition, it can cost universities major corporate dollars when there are sanctions placed on them for violating the rules of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). For example, in 2015 the University of Louisville was found guilty of using its assistant coaches to send money to potential recruits by using the dollars from Adidas. This was an NCAA recruiting violation. Today, Louisville has been dealt NCAA sanctions for its illegal use of corporate dollars given to potential recruits.

Another potential impact of club teams is student-athlete burnout. In the state of Wisconsin, basketball season for high school athletes begins in November and ends in late February or early March. Most often students begin trying out for club teams in mid-March to train and compete with during the spring and summer months. Once the club season has come to a close, typically in late July and early August, students often have a little over two months to

prepare for their high school athletic season. When you consider that student-athletes can begin club basketball as young as eight years old, they will have followed this routine for more than ten years by the time they are eighteen.

Club sports often have been perceived negatively by those who don't buy into the mantra of getting students ready to play at a higher level or providing additional opportunities for competition outside of the school-sport season. NBA coach Steve Kerr (2012) is noted for his thoughts on the negative culture of AAU basketball:

Even if today's players are incredibly gifted, they grow up in a basketball environment that can only be called counterproductive. AAU basketball has replaced high school ball as the dominant form of development in the teen years. I coached my son's AAU team for three years; it's a genuinely weird subculture. Like everywhere else, you have good coaches and bad coaches, or strong programs and weak ones, but what troubled me was how much winning is devalued in the AAU structure. Teams play game after game after game, sometimes winning or losing four times in one day. Very rarely do teams ever hold a practice. Some programs fly in top players from out of state for a single weekend to join their team. Certain players play for one team in the morning and another one in the afternoon. If mom and dad aren't happy with their son's playing time, they switch club teams and stick him on a different one the following week. The process of growing as a team basketball player — learning how to become part of a whole, how to fit into something bigger than oneself — becomes completely lost within the AAU fabric.

Wojtys (2013) noted that specialized groups, similar to AAU, do not have the goal of encouraging athletes to have fun and developing lifelong interests in athletic activities.

An additional effect of sport specialization is the alarming injury rates of teenagers in today's world. According to Neeru, Pinkham, Dugas, Patrick, & LaBella, (2013) early sports specialization increases the likelihood of injury. Dr. Tim McGuine from the University of Wisconsin Department of Orthopedics and Rehabilitation notes, "Specialization is the biggest predictor of a previous lower-extremity injury in these high school kids (Voigt, 2016). The recent spike in injuries to today's youth athlete is triggered by the overuse of the same muscles because of the amount of time athletes spend doing the same type of drills in their particular sport.

Club team coaches are volunteers made up of parents or local sports advocacy persons who are trying to fulfill the role of a coach. Often overlooked is that fact that the goal of these coaches is to charge a fee for these services in order to provide them with credibility (Buchanan, Odenheimer, Prewitt-White, 2016). The only club sport that requires a coaching certification is USA football. USA football requires coaches to be certified in the basics of coaching and requires coaches to attain a certification in concussion programs called Heads Up. This program is designed to teach athletes about the dangers of tackling incorrectly while playing the sport of football. No other sport requires the level of sport certification that youth football does.

Finally, students who focus on a single sport often suffer from social isolation. At a young age, athletes are often separated from their same age and sex groups because of their unique athletic ability. This potentially changes the relationships they have with their peers, parents and families. Malina (2010) noted that social isolation may occur when children in early adolescence are pulled from non-sport development opportunities including peer interactions, social activities, and independence.

GAPS/FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

Many conclusions can be drawn from the literature reviewed for this paper. Both club sports and interscholastic athletics show no promise of going away anytime soon. Since 2010, America's youth sport industry has grown by 55% (Gregor, 2017). According to the annual High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the National Federation of State High School Associations (2018b), during the 2017-18 school year, the overall number of participants in high school sports increased for the 29th consecutive year. In order to continue to function in their entirety, both school and club teams must work alongside one another to actively promote a healthy relationship for the benefit of the children with whom they have direct relationships.

Without outside resources to develop student athletes, schools are often placed at a disadvantage for developing student-athletes for the next level of competition. In addition, both national and state athletic association by-laws hinder an interscholastic coach's ability to develop athletes within their athletic programs to the highest level possible by the time they graduate high school. In the meantime, without the help of outside developmental programs, like AAU, schools will be forced to come up with new systems to support their athletic programs.

In order for high schools to encourage athletic participation and retain student-athletes, they must provide more incentives to participate and show the value of participating in multiple sports during the same academic year. Without incentives in place, more and more students will continue to opt towards club teams or participate in only one high school sport in order to maximize their potential in their best sport. In addition, it is in the best interests of schools to promote their athletic teams and the values that they can foster in youth.

It can be concluded that more research needs to be done on this topic. There were some limitations on the research found on this topic. The majority of the literature focused on the

number of students who participate on both club teams and interscholastic athletic teams.

However, it is worth noting that there was no research on the socio-economic status that these young people come from. This lack of research demonstrates only the perspective of those who do choose to participate on these teams and who can afford to participate.

In addition, there were no studies that discussed the access to club teams based on where one lives. It could be that there are young athletes who have limited exposure to these types of club opportunities because they do not live in proximity to areas that do have club or travel teams. As Barnone (2017) asked, “How many Michael Jordan's or Michael Phelps are out there who don't have the opportunity?” There have also been no longitudinal studies done to discover the success rate of those athletes who choose to specialize or participate on club teams at the youth level. Given the growing number of opportunities that are offered to today's youth, it would be interesting to discover the actual number of athletes that earn a scholarship to a college or university, or go on to sign a professional contract.

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