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Stakeholders' Perceptions of Parent Involvement in Young Adults'

Intercollegiate Athletic Careers: Policy, Education, and Desired Outcomes

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Parent involvement is an integral, but potentially problematic, aspect of this transition. Therefore, the need exists for campus-level parent education in the context of intercollegiate athletics. The present research was designed to address key stakeholders' perceptions of parent involvement in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletics, as well as their perceptions of core design components, barriers to feasibility, and expected outcomes of parent education in the setting of intercollegiate athletics. Four senior administrators, 25 coaches, and one team director from two NCAA Division I member-institutions took part in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Data were synthesized to create a grounded theory highlighting types of negative parent involvement, policy considerations for NCAA administrators, and barriers to implementing parent education. Additionally, structural elements of educational programming for parents at the NCAA Division I level, barriers to achieving positive parent involvement, and desired outcomes for student-athletes are discussed. A range of demographic factors (e.g., class in school, student-athlete gender, sport culture) were also identified that may impact the implementation and efficacy of campus-level parent education. Recommendations and considerations for institutions wishing to implement campus-level educational programming for parents are provided.

Keywords: intercollegiate athletics, parent involvement, educational programming, policy

The transition from high school to college is a prominent ecological shift in emerging adults' lives that has implications for student success and well-being (Dyson & Renk, 2006; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Because this transition occurs during the developmental period of *emerging adulthood*, it often accounts for some delay in traditional markers associated with the achievement of adult criteria (e.g., marriage, parenthood, steady employment) (Arnett, 2000; 2004). Parents, then, remain key socialization agents during this period because young people rely on them for support as they gradually transition toward independence in decision-making and financial stability. While maintaining supportive connections to parents is normative and facilitates a successful journey into adulthood, these connections may complicate the balance between emerging adults' endeavors to achieve self-sufficiency and an equal relationship with their parents (Fingerman & Yahirun, 2015). As such, difficulties may arise between emerging adults and their parents when deciding how parents can remain involved in a way that is appropriate during the transition to college (Sax & Wartman, 2010).

This process is potentially more complicated for student-athletes who perceive a tremendous pressure to succeed athletically and academically (Kirk & Kirk, 1993; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). For instance, researchers have found many student-athletes experience academic difficulties due to inordinate time and energy demands associated with their sport involvement (De Knop, Wylleman, Van Houcke, & Bollaert, 1999; Hosick, 2005). Student-athletes are also at a greater risk than non-athletes for both internalizing (e.g., depression and anxiety) and externalizing (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse) problems (Gill, 2008; Maniar, Chamberlain, & Moore, 2005; NCAA, 2012; Watson & Kissinger, 2007). According to the developmental model of sport participation (Côté, 1999; Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007), parents play an important role in providing support for their children during emerging adulthood. Despite this theoretical and conceptual understanding, empirical work has yet to define key involvement factors among parents of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) student-athletes. Without such research, the development of parental educational programming to support student-athletes and their families during the transition to intercollegiate athletics could be problematic. Before the development of campus-level parent education, however, there is a need to investigate key stakeholders' perceptions of parent involvement in NCAA athletics. Furthermore, researchers and practitioners need to better understand parents' ideas for effectively structuring campus-level parent education programming.

Since parents are core constituents of student development, colleges and universities have tried to accommodate the increasing presence of parents in students' lives (Wartman & Savage, 2008; Sax & Wartman, 2010). The University of Minnesota's biannual survey of parent programs reveals a sizeable increase in the number of institutions providing parent services (Savage & Petree, 2011, 2013). Despite the University of Minnesota's efforts, large-scale research entities such as the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and the University of California Undergraduate Experience Study (UCUES) note scholars have failed to fully define parent involvement during college (NSSE, 2007; Pryor, Hurtado, Sharkness, & Korn, 2007; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Wolf, Sax, & Harper, 2009). Thus, it remains unclear what factors constitute parent involvement during college and how they may be linked to student development (see Dorsch, Lowe, Dotterer, Lyons, & Barker, in press).

In sport, a number of programmatic interventions have been implemented with NCAA student-athletes (e.g., *Making the Jump, Athletes in Transition*); however, these programs have focused on education and intervention at the student-athlete level and have yet to account for the role of parents in student-athlete development. Indeed, as the primary governing body of intercollegiate athletics in the United States, the NCAA has yet to offer campus-level resources to parents of student-athletes in print or on its various web-based platforms. This is an important gap to address as parent involvement has been linked to both young student-athlete distress (Zaichkowsky, King, & McCarthy, 1997) and success (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004). Across this small body of literature, findings associate higher levels of parental emotional support, sport-related advice, and respect for youths' developing autonomy with higher levels of athletic performance and positive feelings about transitions across competition levels (Würth, 2001; Wylleman, De Knop, Ewing, & Cumming, 2000). However, there remains a lack of a measurable and clear definition of parent involvement, especially among student-athletes, as well as the mixed findings regarding the impact of parent involvement on student-athlete outcomes (Dorsch et al., in press). Therefore, research is warranted to clearly identify key parent involvement factors that are associated with positive student-athlete development. Such research would inform campus-level programming aimed at facilitating positive parental involvement, thus enhancing the NCAA's mission to promote enhanced student-athlete development, well-being, and mental health.

The jump from high school to college is a prominent transition in emerging adults' lives during which parents are inherently linked to students' move toward maturity (Arnett, 2000, 2004; Perna & Thomas, 2008) and sport domain mastery (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2007). While parents are identified as key sources of support during this transition, at present, there is a lack of empirical knowledge of those aspects of parent involvement that predict positive developmental outcomes in student-athletes, which limits the ability to develop parent programs to support student-athlete's college transition. To address this gap, the following three research questions guided the present work:

- (1) How are parents involved in the lives of their NCAA Division I student-athletes?
- (2) How does this involvement impact NCAA student-athletes' experiences? and
- (3) What kinds of campus-level programming or learning strategies should be offered to parents of NCAA student-athletes?

Method

Design and Methodology

Given our social constructivist epistemology (Schwandt, 2000) and our desire to highlight the experiences and understandings of key stakeholders, a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was used to gain descriptive insight into parent involvement in intercollegiate athletics. Grounded theory is a particularly useful approach when building knowledge inductively from participant understanding, and as such is commonly employed as an inductive approach to theory building (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this qualitative study, participants took part in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews lasting between 23 and 51 minutes. Interviews were guided by six primary questions, and follow-up probes were used to shape our understanding of parent involvement in the lives of NCAA Division I student-athletes.

Sampling and Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants who could provide varied and detailed insights into the potential impact of campus-level parent education in the setting of intercollegiate athletics, while maintaining a manageable sample size for in-depth qualitative analysis (Bruce, 2007). Senior administrators, coaches, and team directors from two NCAA Division I member institutions were recruited to participate in the study. These participants were recruited as key stakeholders for two reasons. First, it was important to gain insights from individuals with experience interacting with parents of NCAA student-athletes. Because individuals in these roles are involved in student-athletes' daily lives for four and sometimes five years, they are in a unique position to observe a range of parent involvement practices. Second, the successful implementation of educational programming for parents will require the targeted commitment of these individuals on their respective college campuses.

Ultimately, 30 participants (23 males and seven females), ranging in age from 27 to 65 years ($M = 44.50$, $SD = 9.90$), participated in the study. Participants were four senior administrators, 25 coaches, and one team director. Of the 26 non-administrators, participants reported being associated with eight men's sports and six women's sports at the NCAA Division I level. Participants reported having been at their current institution for an average of 9.11 years (range = 1-37; $SD = 10.17$) and reported having worked in a similar capacity at a different NCAA-member institution for an additional 11.92 years (range = 0-37; $SD = 9.60$). The sample was comprised of a fairly homogeneous racial subset of participants as 27 identified as White or Caucasian and three identified as African-American. The sample also represented a primarily educated cohort of individuals with all 30 participants having earned a bachelor's degree, 11 participants having earned a master's degree, and one participant having earned a doctorate.

Data Analysis

Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and cross-checked for accuracy against the original recordings. In cases where discrepancies existed, the cross-checking author adjusted the transcript prior to analysis. Data were analyzed inductively allowing researchers to code specific themes and higher-order categories of participant responses through the processes of *open, axial, and selective coding*. Open coding is the analytic process of understanding and breaking down data, while watching for similar and differing themes (Holt & Dunn, 2004). In this step, the fourth and fifth authors, who were trained in grounded theory methodology, extracted raw data from interview transcripts independently in an effort to develop a series of themes. They then met with the first author in a consensus meeting to finalize the list of 19 inductive themes. Once consensus had been achieved, the fourth and fifth authors moved to the axial coding phase of grounded theory. Axial coding is the analytic process of aggregating similar themes and creating higher order labels inductively or deductively to classify the themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the present analysis, this involved the fourth and fifth authors aggregating each theme that emerged during open coding into one of seven mutually exclusive categories. The fourth and fifth authors again met with the first author in a consensus meeting to finalize the categorization of inductive themes. Subsequent to this consensus meeting, the fourth and fifth authors, together with the first author engaged in a selective coding process. Selective coding was used to polish the data into a grounded theory, encompassing all the themes and categories that emerged from open and axial coding, while presenting the relationships between them in a descriptive way.

Quality Considerations

To address the quality of the present research, *relativistic standards* (i.e., foundational criteria that can be used to distinguish good from bad research) were considered in five areas (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). First, the authors established extensive trust and rapport with participants that enhanced the trustworthiness of study data. Second, the interview guide, constructed to be relevant to the area of interest, was informed by the study's research questions, and afforded ethical collection of interview data. Third, to ensure various experiences would inform researchers' interpretations, the perspectives of multiple stakeholders in intercollegiate athletics were sought (i.e., senior administrators, head and assistant coaches, and team directors). Fourth, to strengthen the interpretation of study data and limit the inherent bias associated with qualitative interpretation, the first author critiqued and challenged the assumptions and interpretations of the fourth and fifth authors. In multiple cases this resulted in a modified interpretation of the data, less influenced by the potential biases held by the fourth or fifth authors. Finally, the resultant grounded theory: (a) is based on participant experiences, (b) evokes multiple dimensions of participant experiences, and (c) offers opportunity to test specific questions about the parent involvement in the lives of NCAA student-athletes.

Results

The present research is descriptive in nature as it builds inductively from the experiences and understandings of key stakeholders (i.e., administrators, head and assistant coaches, and team directors) at the NCAA Division I level. Nineteen inductive themes emerged from open coding illustrating numerous factors that may impact the implementation of campus-level parent education in intercollegiate athletics. Each theme is structured hierarchically in one of seven categories identified during axial coding.

A grounded theory of campus-level parent education in intercollegiate athletics – the product of selective coding – is offered in Figure 1. The grounded theory connects parent education to the other seven categories sequentially depicting administrator, coach, and team director perceptions of parent involvement in intercollegiate athletics. Starting at the upper-left of the figure, participants spoke about the pervasiveness of negative parent involvement and the need for policy creation at the university/athletic department level. Moving down the vertical axis of the figure, despite the need for new policies, participants recognized there could be barriers to the implementation of parent education in the context of intercollegiate athletics. Participants spoke at length about how they would structure parent education if given the opportunity. However, moving from the bottom-center to bottom-right of the figure, they also understood that a second set of barriers might hinder the impact of parental educational programming on positive parent involvement. Still, participants felt positive parent involvement was a key factor in achieving desired outcomes through participation in intercollegiate athletics. In describing this process, participants also suggested several external factors that may shape positive and negative parent involvement (represented by two arrows influencing the feedback loops in the figure).

To further elucidate participant experiences, a narrative description of the findings is presented below. The narrative is organized around the grounded theory depicted in Figure 1. Participant quotations are used to support researcher assertions within each category and theme,

and the role of the speaker (i.e., administrator, head or assistant coach, or team director) and sport (when applicable) are acknowledged in parentheses.

Negative Parent Involvement

The majority of participants highlighted the importance of parental support and involvement throughout a student-athlete's career. However, most participants also expressed concern that the prevalence of negative parental involvement is increasing in intercollegiate athletics. This was largely due to cell phones, which have given parents more direct and immediate contact with college students. According to the participants, this ease of access provides parents with the opportunity to be more involved. Importantly, these key stakeholders noted that negative parent involvement has the potential to inhibit student-athletes' positive developmental experiences and described negative parent involvement as related to two primary involvement styles: (1) over involvement; and (2) under involvement. Both are described briefly in the subsequent subsections.

Over involvement. Over involved parents were described as providing too much support (especially in an intrusive manner) that inhibited student-athletes' emergence as adults. Participants honed in on the support being intrusive and indulgent. The most common behavior associated with over involvement was the lack of respect parents demonstrated for coaches' roles. One assistant coach (Men's Basketball) noted, "I think over involved parents are too vocal." He continued, "Over involved parents are the ones that are always trying to contact you as a coach, to find out why their kid is or isn't playing, to find out why they're not having plays for them." Participants described the unnecessary pressure that over involved parents can impose on student-athletes. In doing so, they highlighting these parents' emphasis on achievement and performance outcomes. A head women's swimming coach shared an experience in which a mother and father were talking with their daughter about her performance after a race. In describing the parents' behavior, the coach revealed that the student-athlete felt added undue pressure in subsequent events. Indeed, all participants agreed a focus on achievement and performance might detract from student-athletes' experiences in intercollegiate athletics. As a counter example, one head coach (Women's Tennis) shared, "At the collegiate level, the parent needs to be a fan, because that is all the athlete really wants anyway."

Under involvement. Participants also described parents who offer little or no support and indicated this was likely to impact student-athletes in a negative way. Under involved parents were described as not physically or emotionally present, and often unavailable for communication. A senior administrator described under involved parents as those, "who aren't plugged in and are at least perceived by their son or daughter as someone who doesn't care." The primary issue regarding under involved parents was the concern that student-athletes would start to internalize the lack of support and feel uncared for, which may then negatively impact them on and/or off the playing field. To exemplify this concern, an assistant coach (Football) recalled instances in which student-athletes got in trouble either socially or academically and the coaches tried to reach out to the parents for support to handle the issues. However, the parents were unresponsive and therefore the student-athletes kept engaging in the same destructive behaviors. Indeed, a head coach (Men's and Women's Track and Field) noted many parents are simply under involved by nature: "Parents really just want to get their children's education paid for. They don't want to deal with anything. When you have a problem, don't call them." He

continued, “In my mind, those are the parents who ‘As long as I don’t have to pay anything out of my pocket. As long as they aren’t hurt, I don’t really care.’”

Policy

Participants were generally in support of creating campus-level policies to address negative parent involvement in intercollegiate athletics. Specifically, they discussed wanting parents to become more aware of the potential negative and undesirable implications of their involvement behaviors. Participants also hoped to expose them to positive involvement strategies and the outcomes associated with those behaviors. According to participants, there were three primary themes participants thought could guide policy creation: (1) delineate sport performance as the coach’s domain; (2) facilitate parent-child communication; and (3) educate parents. Each is described briefly in the subsequent subsections.

Delineate sport as the coach’s domain. Participants depicted over involved parents as those who have a tendency to overstep boundaries in training or competitive settings, including taking on roles that should fall to the coach and her/his staff. Stakeholders acknowledged that parents’ roles in the coaching and recruiting of their child prior to college complicates parents’ abilities to take a step back when the student-athlete transitions to intercollegiate athletics. A head coach (Men’s Golf) shared an anecdote about what he said to a father who overstepped his boundaries. “I said, ‘We aren’t going to do it the same way you did it in your own house for the last 18 years, but we are doing it the right way or we wouldn’t be in the position we’re in.’” after a report from the parent, he continued, “Let us do our jobs and know that we’re not perfect and let your kids feel that it’s okay for your kids to not be perfect.” Most coaches admitted they empathize with parents and understand letting go of a child is hard. However, coaches reiterated they are the coach for a reason and that their ultimate goal is to create an environment where individuals can thrive and develop in and out of sport.

In line with this, many coaches noted a key way to facilitate more amicable and less aggressive communication between parents and themselves was to create an environment where student-athletes are able to advocate for themselves. A head coach (Men’s Golf) relayed this desire directly to parents, sharing, “I let (parents) know the role that I have, the role that the student-athlete is going to have, and the role the parents are going to have, and it’s worked pretty well.”

Facilitate parent-child communication. One area stakeholders felt parents needed to improve upon was their communication skills. Specifically, participants felt parent-child relationships would benefit from enhanced communication strategies such as how to offer constructive and time-appropriate feedback rather than constant criticism. As one head coach (Women’s Softball) said, “Most parents don’t have the education. If we get our butts kicked, that is not a time to tear them down more; instead it is a time to build them up a little bit.” On the other side of the equation, stakeholders noted student-athletes often create a fictional picture when talking with their parents to appease them. One coach described a conflict with a parent that arose from a lack of honest parent-child communication. Specifically, the student-athlete told her parents she was performing exceptionally in practice, but in reality she was not putting forth effort and thus did not receive much playing time in subsequent competitions. Coaches and administrators suggested that teaching parents more effective communication skills might be one way parents could be more appropriately involved because it would reduce the

likelihood of miscommunication in the coach-athlete-parent triad. An example of an effective strategy to improve communication in this triad was provided by a head coach, in which the presence of all parties was required to resolve conflicts. The coach noted the response used when parents call to discuss issues: "I'm more than happy to speak with you; however, I would like your son or daughter to be present when we have this discussion so we're all on the same page."

Educate parents. Many participants expressed a certain level of empathy for parents of intercollegiate student-athletes because they know it is a novel experience for parents in most cases. In light of this, participants discussed the need for parent education to be implemented in a way that adequately prepares parents of incoming student-athletes for the journey ahead. Common topics included the recruiting process, NCAA rules, and the institutional expectations of student-athletes once they arrive on campus. Coaches felt that helping parents visualize expectations of the student-athlete *before* the child is on campus may help parents better understand their role within intercollegiate athletics. As one head coach (Men's Wrestling) stated, "I think it's about understanding what (the student-athlete's) time commitments are going to be and what their schedule is going to look like." The coach then recounted a conversation he had with a parent, "This is when we are going to have some downtime; this is when there is an expectation for training." He then continued, "I think most sports at the Division I level expect (student-athletes) to be here during summer training, and I think understanding what that calendar looks like is big for parents."

Barriers to Educational Programming

In spite of their verbalized desire for new policies, coaches and administrators recognized three main barriers related to the implementation of campus-level parent education in the context of intercollegiate athletics: (1) feasibility; (2) timing; and (3) funding. Each is described briefly in the subsequent subsections.

Feasibility. Participants discussed the potential difficulty of gathering parents in a common location to take part in any form of in-person educational programming. A head coach (Women's Soccer) said, "You are never going to get all the parents together, with out-of-state kids. We have about two-thirds that are from in-state, but even with that (some) parents can't afford to come more than once a year, for a game." In light of this, most participants felt that the most efficient form of educational programming would occur online through videos, presentations, and example vignettes.

Timing. Participants debated the age and/or class level of student-athletes whose parents should be targeted. Participants noted younger student-athletes have parents with less accumulated experience, but sometimes parents of older student-athletes are the ones who feel more "invested" in the program and/or entitled. An assistant coach (Women's Basketball) conveyed that parents are going to be more willing to participate in parent programming while their student-athlete is new to the program rather than after they have settled into their roles in the second or third year: "I think freshmen parents would be the best targets because they are almost like freshmen themselves. They always have big eyes, and a lot of questions and they want to do what they are supposed to do." Most participants also described parents as becoming less involved as their student-athletes develop and become more independent. Therefore, when considering potential campus-level programming, most participants thought the greatest impact could be made by focusing on parents of first-year student-athletes (freshmen and transfers).

Funding. Participants noted a lack of funding already limits the scope of most intercollegiate athletic programs. Therefore, stakeholders questioned where funding could or would come from to implement parent education on a recurring basis. An assistant coach (Men's Basketball) said, "Obviously funding, money is always an issue, especially when you don't have any." Indeed, despite the fact that the majority of participants were excited about the potential positive impact of parental educational programming, they were also concerned about where funding would come from on a recurring basis.

Barriers to Positive Parent Involvement

Stakeholders discussed a number of potential barriers that need to be overcome to achieve positive outcomes from parental educational programming. These barriers fell into three themes: (1) appropriate voice; (2) appropriate message; and (3) parent buy-in. Across the board, it was the common opinion of participants that each barrier could be overcome at an institutional level to foster positive parent involvement in the context of intercollegiate athletics. Each is described briefly in the subsequent subsections.

Appropriate voice. More important than the actual content of the presentation, participants described the person or "voice" behind the information as being of utmost significance. However, participants had wide-ranging opinions of who the best voice to implement parental educational programming would be. A number of stakeholders felt that it should come from athletic administrators because parents trust them as a direct source of information. As one senior administrator shared, "they have the 'pulse' of the student-athletes." A smaller subset of participants suggested that academic support staff members would be the best individuals to implement parent education because they have constant interaction and access to student-athletes throughout the year. An even smaller group of participants suggested that head coaches would offer an appropriate voice for parent education for two reasons: (a) coaches and parents have an established rapport, and (b) coaches' authority would serve as a great foundation for parent buy-in. The second of these seems likely as parents attempt to keep their student-athletes in the good graces of a coach. Participants noted that if coaches were in charge, each could present the university athletic department's parent policies in a way that was relevant to her/his specific team. The coach could also then enforce the policies throughout each student-athlete's career. As a head coach (Men's Football) shared, "I think it has to come from coaches, because sometimes the message is lost if it's coming from someone else." A head coach (Women's Soccer) concurred, stating that the presenter needed to be someone who "understands the dynamic of the team" in terms of the specific roles coaches, parents, and student-athletes play in a given sport. This participant suggested that programmatic education should cover how parents interact with their children as well as the coaches of the children's teams.

The smallest subset of participants offered third party sources, such as a former student-athlete, as the most appropriate voice for parent education. According to these participants, these sources would impact parents by offering a well-informed and proximal perspective of the impact of parent involvement on student-athlete well-being. As a senior administrator shared, "I think a former athlete talking to the parents can convey, 'This is important for me. I needed my Mom and she wasn't there,' and the moms are going to be like, 'Oh God, I don't want to be that mom!'"

A final participant suggested that former sport parents would serve as the most appropriate voice, largely because current sport parents would be able to identify with those who

have already been through the system and could attest to the high and low points as a parent in intercollegiate athletics. This assistant coach (Women's Basketball) suggested, "A lot of parents learn best by hearing stories from other parents. So, I think it (should be) a video or a pamphlet of parents of student-athletes that tells us the five things you wish you (did) different [sic]."

Despite disagreement regarding who would be the most appropriate voice, nearly all participants agreed on the characteristics of the individual who should engage parents: credible, relatable, and charismatic. Participants noted that a speaker embodying these characteristics would be able to grab the attention of parents and drive home the importance of positive parent involvement in intercollegiate athletics.

Appropriate message. Stakeholders emphasized that the message delivered in the educational programming must align with the voice of whoever presents the material and must remain focused on promoting positive parental involvement strategies. A head coach (Women's Softball) stated, "If the message is conveyed correctly, it would definitely be beneficial. I enjoy watching other coaches coach because I can take something from them." She continued, "Same thing, parents want to listen and take something, but don't want to be told how to parent."

Parent buy-in. Stakeholders believed that once parents become accustomed to participating in an educational program, the majority would be willing to do anything in their power to help their child be successful. However, participants noted that getting parents to buy into the program would be the first and largest barrier to overcome. As a senior administrator noted, "I think you will get a great response from athletes, but I think you will get a percentage (of parents) that just don't do it because of time."

Positive Parent Involvement

When the above barriers are overcome, participants noted that parent education has the potential to enhance positive parent involvement. Stakeholders shared two distinct themes of positive parent involvement that should be targeted through parent education: (1) appropriate support; and (2) facilitative involvement. Both are described briefly in the subsequent subsections.

Appropriate support. Fostering student-athletes' independence, facilitating the mission of the coaching staff and team, and being present to advocate for the student-athlete when necessary were all components of appropriate support. A head coach (Men's Golf) noted that appropriate support occurs when a parent "gives quality encouragement, support, and unconditional love for their child, regardless of their rate of achievement." Stakeholders suggested that parents who offer appropriate support provide a level of intrinsic motivation to their children over the course of their intercollegiate athletic careers. Appropriate parental support was also described as integral to fostering a positive dynamic among parents, coaches, and student-athletes.

Facilitative involvement. Stakeholders freely spoke about the positive impact on student-athletes and teams when parents facilitate, rather than direct, their children's athletic participation. Facilitative behaviors included parents' consistent promotion of independence and maturity in their children. Such behaviors seemed to occur most regularly when coaches communicated frequently with parents about how to help their children while also maintaining enough space so coaches could coach effectively. As a head coach (Women's Soccer) stated, "Somewhere along the lines your child is going to have a very difficult time, and you're not going to be there ... They're going to reach out to you and let you know that (being a student-

athlete) is difficult.” He continued, “You have to be the person to support them, listen to them, and at the same time say, ‘You have to learn to deal with it.’ That’s essential. That’s the challenge, and that’s what facilitates growth.”

Desired Outcomes

Participants emphasized that positive parent involvement enhances the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes for student-athletes. Two desired outcomes were identified: (1) student-athlete excellence; and (2) transition to adulthood. Both are described briefly in the subsequent subsections.

Student-athlete excellence. Nearly all participants discussed “excellence” (on and off the playing field) as the primary mission of working with student-athletes. The link between excellence in athletics and excellence in life was a common theme, highlighting that both are directly impacted by positive parent involvement. A senior administrator exemplified this in asking the rhetorical question: “What is our mission? Excellence in the classroom, and excellence on the fields of play ... (therefore) we are trying to improve the student-athlete’s experience, the wellness aspect, the mental healthiness piece, and their experience while they are in college.” She then added, “I feel (parent education) will be one more tool in the tool kit to advance our mission!”

Participants acknowledged that positive parent involvement is a key factor in promoting student-athletes’ on-field performance. As a head coach (Men’s Baseball) stated, “Ultimately it comes down to the performance of the student-athlete, (and) the development and the mental maturation of the student-athlete,” adding, “I think if there is more understanding between a parent and a player, there is more developing taking place and more maturity being learned. So, I think there is a lot to be gained (from positive parent involvement).”

Transition to adulthood. Participants spoke pointedly about the goal of producing self-sufficient adults capable of entering the professional world after their time on campus. A head coach (Women’s Softball) spoke directly about the importance of facilitating this transition: “Our goal in the four or five years we have them is to have them learn to make the right choices.” When pressed further, he stated, “It’s our job to transition them from a young adult living with (parents) to a young adult who is capable of excelling and living on their (sic) own.” A second head coach (Men’s Wrestling) stated, “I believe athletics teaches you all the lessons you cannot get in the classroom – effective communication, discipline, teamwork – (That’s what I love about college athletics!” Importantly, participants argued that this process is hindered when parents are not able to “let go” of their student-athletes. As a senior administrator stated: “More positive (parent) involvement during the college years could make the student-athlete more independent and better prepared to deal with their professional experiences.”

External Factors

Stakeholders noted three external factors that may influence how student-athlete outcomes impact parent involvement and the implementation of policies, including (1) family location; (2) class in school; and (3) cultural norms. Each is described briefly in the subsequent subsections.

Family location. The physical distance between player and parent seems to have a significant impact on the level of parent involvement, as it may impact parents’ abilities to attend

athletic contests and engage in in-person communication with their participating student-athletes. A head coach (Men's Tennis) compared international and domestic student-athletes and their parents: "American parents, because they are closer and they visit more, they will once in a while be calling and seeing what is going on. So those differences make the dynamic a little different."

Class standing. The consensus among participants seemed to be that older student-athletes (i.e., juniors and seniors) seek less communication with their parents simply because they are working their way toward adulthood. As discussed by a head coach (Men's and Women's Track and Field), "The interaction differs from how long they have been here." When probed further, he shared, "Someone who's a freshman, I might communicate with the parent a lot more than someone who is a senior. They don't need the information because the older the student gets, the less they want the parent involved." Communication between parents and coaches was also noted to change over time as well as parents progress from "learning to let go" to "coaches just wanting to deal with athletes" when the child advances on the team.

Cultural norms. Participants agreed that parental educational programming could be generalized to all intercollegiate athletics, but also felt that specific aspects of the program would need to be tailored to specific sport needs. As a head coach (Men's Wrestling) stated: "I honestly believe that every sport is different. They have their own little tendencies. Not always, but (different sports) can be different, so I think you have to tailor (parent education) a little bit."

Participants also agreed that the current parenting culture in sport is that of a helicopter parent (i.e., parents who are involved at developmentally inappropriate levels, albeit with good intentions). A head coach (Men's Football) said, "It's out of control," when talking about the current sport parenting culture in intercollegiate athletics, and another head coach (Women's Softball) acknowledged that both parents and student-athletes undergo a difficult change in their relationship patterns during the college transition: "I think just the entitlement idea has taken over. I think this generation (of parents) has everything at their fingertips. They have to be connected all the time." She continued, "(Parents) want to go out and buy the fix, (but) we need to educate them that part of learning is failing and it's ok to struggle and it's ok to fail."

The 19 themes depicted herein illustrate stakeholder perceptions of the numerous factors related to parent involvement in the lives of NCAA Division I student-athletes. Collectively, these themes are structured hierarchically into seven higher-order categories and results inform a grounded theory of the need for campus-level parental education in intercollegiate athletics. The grounded theory connects the categories to one another sequentially, depicting key stakeholders' perceptions of parent involvement in intercollegiate athletics.

Discussion

The aim of the present research was to document key stakeholders' perceptions of parent involvement in the lives of NCAA Division I student-athletes. Specifically, three research questions guided the present work: (1) How are parents involved in the lives of their NCAA Division I student-athletes?; (2) How does this involvement impact NCAA student-athletes' experiences?; and (3) What kinds of campus-level programming or learning strategies should be offered to parents of NCAA student-athletes? In line with its aim, the present research offers an initial grounded theory linking salient categories of parent involvement together sequentially, helping to clarify the role of parents in intercollegiate athletics. The grounded theory forwarded herein complements existing theoretical understanding of parent involvement in student-athletes' college transition (Arnett, 2000; Côté, 1999; Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007; Dorsch et al., in

press). Practically, it may offer researchers a descriptive starting point from which to consider the many impacts of parent involvement in NCAA athletics. In achieving this aim, the present research forwards the NCAA's stated mission to promote enhanced development, well-being, and mental health among its student-athletes (NCAA, 2012).

As depicted in the grounded theory, key stakeholders from both institutions spoke about the growing incidence of negative parent involvement in intercollegiate athletics. From these experiences, participants discussed the need for policy creation at the university and/or athletic department level. Policies could be informed by interpretations of the present interview data, as well as existing suggestions for parenting in elite sport settings (e.g., intercollegiate student-athletes) (Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007; Dorsch et al., in press). Despite the need for policies emerging as a priority, stakeholders recognized many potential barriers to the implementation of educational programming for parents of intercollegiate student-athletes. Participants shared a number of strategies for best practices to structure educational programming; however, they also acknowledged an additional set of barriers that could obstruct the impact of this programming on positive parent involvement. Regardless, the majority of stakeholders felt that fostering positive parent involvement was paramount to achieving desired outcomes for intercollegiate student-athletes. These links, as represented in the grounded theory, offer follow-up avenues for researchers who wish to explore the impact of parent involvement on NCAA student-athletes (see Dorsch et al., in press). At the very least, they offer a starting point when attempting to understand some of the potential antecedents and outcomes of parent involvement in this context.

Implications

This research has many implications, namely its potential to inform parent involvement in the context of NCAA Division I athletics. Many barriers to structuring parent education in intercollegiate athletics exist in parent programming designed for the general student population (Savage & Petree, 2013). One such barrier -- noted in a recent national review of college and university programs for parents -- is that there are discrepancies regarding which university offices are in charge of programming. This has led to multiple offices providing programs and inconsistent messages about the goals and intentions of parent involvement. Although many programs have developed web-based platforms to facilitate communication with parents, institutions report they have difficulty providing resources to maintain, monitor, and update these platforms. Indeed, in Savage and Petree's (2013) study, only 10 percent of responding institutions reported conducting empirical assessments to investigate whether parental engagement in educational programming was related to student outcomes.

To justify the need for parent programming on college campuses, more vigorous research is warranted to validate the potential impact of parent education on student outcomes. These issues echo those identified by athletic stakeholders in the present study, and thus help provide guidance to intercollegiate athletic departments who wish to implement parental educational programming. In line with past research (e.g., Wartman & Savage, 2008; Savage & Petree, 2011; 2013; Sax & Wartman, 2010), present data indicate that parent programming should originate from one office and should be staffed by individuals whose primary role is to run the program. Doing so would allow for consistent messaging for parents while offering a point of contact for parents of NCAA student-athletes.

From a practical standpoint, the present research offers a mechanism for the design of campus-level programming for parents of NCAA student-athletes. Specifically, these and other

data have been used to create a manual for NCAA administrators (Dorsch, Lowe, Dotterer, Lyons, & Barker, 2015) as well as a guide for parents of NCAA student-athletes (Dorsch, Lowe, & Dotterer, 2015). Both of these products are grounded in best practices for parenting emerging adults (Arnett & Fishel, 2014), and can be used to guide the implementation of parental educational programming at the campus level. Therefore, they hold the potential to enhance the strategies employed by administrators, coaches, and parents as these individuals aim to improve student-athlete well-being and mental health.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the contributions made by this descriptive research, the present work is not without limitations. Specifically, three remaining gaps exist that should be addressed before the present grounded theory is used to systematically develop, disseminate, and implement parental educational programming at both the overarching level of the NCAA and the individual level of its member institutions. First, present data only represent the perspectives of key stakeholders from two universities at the football bowl subdivision (FBS) level of NCAA Division I athletics. Because there are presently 744 colleges and universities at the NCAA Division II and III level, and more than 200 Division I universities in the football championship subdivision (FCS), researchers should design studies to provide evidence of parent involvement and its relationship to student-athlete development across the spectrum of NCAA Division I, II, and III levels.

Second, although data from the present research were used, in part, to design campus-level parental educational programming, those materials have not yet been evaluated in an intercollegiate athletic setting. It is plausible that the materials, which were generated from a fairly homogenous sub sample of administrators, coaches, and team directors would not generalize across a diverse set of NCAA institutions. To address this gap, longitudinal intervention research should be designed and executed at a range of NCAA member-institutions using the initial versions of the *Parent Guide* and *Administrator Manual* designed by Authors (Dorsch, Lowe, Dotterer, Lyons, & Barker, 2015; Dorsch, Lowe, & Dotterer, 2015). This would allow researchers and/or practitioners to evaluate the effects of parental educational programming with a representative pilot cohort of parents at a range of NCAA member institutions.

Third, the voice of parents has yet to be recognized in the *Parent Guide* and the *Administrator Manual*. To address this gap, researchers could conduct surveys and in-depth interviews with parents of NCAA student-athletes, synthesizing parents' experiences and desires with the present research that targeted administrators, coaches, and team directors. Such work would give voice to parents and would offer a key perspective in future revisions of the *Parent Guide* and *Administrator Manual*. Additionally, because coaches and administrators are involved in student-athletes' daily lives for four and sometimes five years, they are in an ideal position to observe a range of parent involvement practices. However, they also *influence* these practices. Future work could be designed specifically to examine the impact of administrator and coach behaviors on patterns of parent involvement.

In addition to addressing these three gaps, it should be recognized the present research was carried out at only two of the 345 NCAA Division I member institutions. As such, the present findings represent a starting point rather than a definitive understanding of stakeholder perceptions of parent involvement in the lives of intercollegiate student-athletes.

Conclusion

Despite the exploratory nature of this research, it meaningfully contributes to the knowledge base on sport parent involvement by answering calls for an empirical focus on student-athlete families and their relationship dynamics (Bremer, 2012). Accordingly, the grounded theory stemming from the present work deepens knowledge of factors that may contribute to well-being and mental health, an area of work with considerable promise for extending understanding of the student-athlete experience. The present findings suggest that parents' positive involvement may be enhanced both by policies and through campus-level educational programming in an intercollegiate athletic setting. Despite this, further research is needed prior to the creation and implementation of such policies and programming at the level of the NCAA or its member institutions. In pursuing this end, researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders who desire to create and implement such policies and programs must be cognizant of specific barriers and external factors that may shape parents' and student-athletes' experiences. In conclusion, the present study builds on previous work examining college student transitions and affirms that parent involvement in the lives of NCAA student-athletes warrants further attention by researchers and practitioners.

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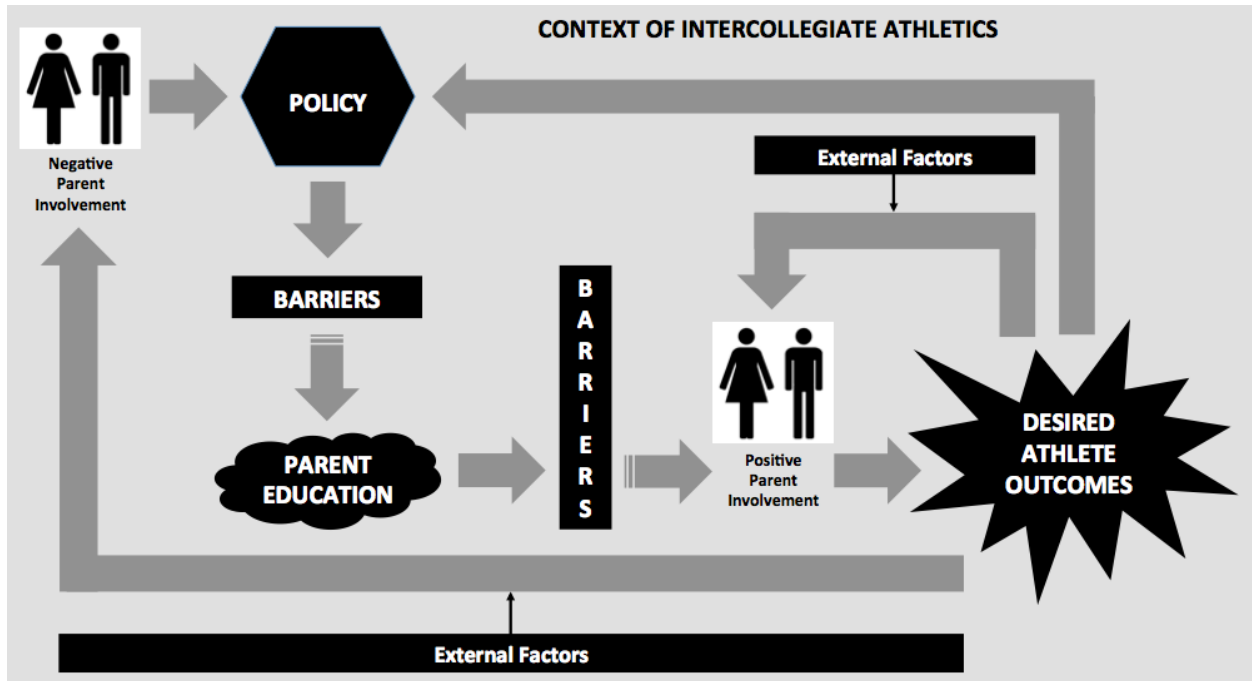


Figure 1. Grounded theory model of parent involvement in intercollegiate athletics connecting the need for parent education to the seven other categories sequentially.