

**UNCOVERING THE DISCOURSE OF CANADIAN ATHLETES IN THE
AMERICAN POST-SECONDARY SYSTEM**

by © Matthew Ferreira

A thesis submitted to
the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Physical Education

School of Human Kinetics and Recreation
Memorial University of Newfoundland

July 2020

St John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

Abstract

The fields and training facilities may exist in Canada, but the chase for an athletic scholarship leads many of our young athletes on a path to the United States. Many Canadians who embark on this migration go on to have successful careers in athletics. Others do not experience similar success and they return home before they had expected. There are many reasons why this might happen. These reasons, which are to be teased out of individuals' accounts of their experiences, are the topic of this study. In examining why Canadian student-athletes return home earlier than expected from the United States without completing their education, the individual experiences of the athletes are key to understanding their story. In examining the interviews conducted as part of this study, each athlete was treated as an individual case study.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the experiences of Canadian student athletes who earned a scholarship to a U.S. institution to play collegiate sports but returned to Canada without completing their intended program of study. This raises the question of why their plans were not realized. Specifically, I was interested in understanding their individual decisions to terminate their studies and intercollegiate athletic careers in the United States. Key findings include the potential of being unprepared for the transition to become self-dependent, relationships with coaches and teammates as well as the expectations student-athletes had about what their experience would likely be as opposed to the reality that they encountered. This study seeks to understand how and why these initially unanticipated outcomes came to pass.

Acknowledgements

It took a lot more mileage than initially anticipated to get to a point where writing this acknowledgement was realistic. It seemed that there was always a life milestone that rose to the surface simultaneously while writing- buying a house, getting married, the birth of our first child, Beckett, accepting the position of Athletic Director at a college shortly after Beckett's birth. Inevitably, this document took a back seat to other pressing concerns at different points. Its completion is something I am very proud of.

To Dr. Card – you started me down the right path and helped me gain momentum. You were always a positive voice. To Dr. Sullivan and Dr. Dyck – you took me under your wing during a time of uncertainty. I'll forever be indebted to you for seeing value in the work I was doing and agreeing to continue my mentorship.

To my wife Lauren, I can only imagine how tired you became of hearing me say I needed to complete this. Your unwavering support and love helped push through the finish line. Beckett, this brings a close to one chapter of my life with you opening the door on a world of possibilities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Glossary	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Insider-Outsider Perspective.....	2
1.2 Overview of American Athletic Scholarships	3
1.2.1 Recruiting Process	3
1.2.2 Recruiting Rules and Regulations.....	6
1.2.3 Scholarship Framework	8
1.2.4 Maintaining the Scholarship	10
Chapter 2: Review of Literature	12
2.1 Benefits of Playing Intercollegiate Sport in the United States.....	13
2.2 Benefits for American Academic Institutions.....	15
2.3 Why do some Athletes Remain in Canada?.....	18
2.4 Going to School in Canada but Competing in the United States	20
2.5 What have Other Scholars Noted About this Migration?	22
2.6 What are the Consequences of this System?.....	24
2.7 The Romanticized Narrative of Student-Athletes in the United States.....	25
2.8 Where do Gaps Exist?.....	28
2.9 Long-Term Athlete Development Plan and the Collegiate Athlete	29
2.9.1 Stages Crossed	30
2.10 Why do Athletes Return to Canada?.....	33
Chapter 3: Methods.....	35
3.1 Participants.....	38
3.1.1 Participant Selection	38
3.2 Description of Participants.....	39

3.3 Interviews.....	41
3.4 Data Analysis.....	41
Chapter 4: Becoming Involved in Youth Sports and the Journey to a Scholarship	43
4.1 Becoming Involved in Youth Sports.....	43
4.2 The Journey to a Scholarship	46
4.2.1 Am I Good Enough?	47
4.2.2 Influencers.....	48
4.2.3 Deciding Between the United States and Canada	52
4.2.4 Visiting Campus.....	58
Chapter 5: Life as a Student-Athlete in the United States	62
5.1 The Coaching Carousel.....	62
5.2 First Impressions.....	64
5.3 Relationships.....	66
5.3.1 Player-Coach Relationship.....	66
5.3.2 Relationships with Teammates	70
5.4 Academics.....	71
5.5 Challenges Experienced.....	73
5.6 Moments of Doubt	80
5.7 If the Student-Athlete Could go Back and do Things Differently	82
Chapter 6: Leaving the United States and Moving Back to Canada.....	85
6.1 Becoming a Canadian Student-Athlete.....	85
6.2 If Only I had Known.....	88
6.3 Paying it Forward.....	90
Chapter 7: Discussion	93
7.1 Unpopular Narrative to Discuss.....	93
7.2 Entering the Unknown	94
7.3 Not Going on a Campus Visit Increased the Unknown	96

7.4 The Player-Coach Relationship	97
7.5 Demands	100
7.6 Opportunities for Canadian Institutions.....	102
7.7 Conclusion	103
References.....	106
Appendix A: The Interview Questions Guide.....	113

Glossary

ACAA: Atlantic Collegiate Athletic Association; a collegiate sports conference within the CCAA.

ACAC: Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference; a collegiate sports conference within the CCAA.

Academics: the shorthand term commonly used to describe formal college or university academic programs and classes.

AUS: Atlantic University Sport; a Canadian university sports conference within USports.

CCAA: Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association; the governing body for collegiate sports in Canada.

Club team: in the hierarchy of amateur sports, club teams are the highest level that an amateur athlete can compete at. Club teams generally employ former collegiate and professional athletes to train current athletes. There is a financial cost involved in being part of a club program. Each family is responsible for covering their team fees.

Combine: an athletic event organized by a sport-specific company where athletes come together to perform tests specific to their sport and compete against each other.

Attendance is paid for by the athlete or the family of the athlete. The format of a combine can include having college coaches present for the purpose of recruitment or employees of the combine service tracking results and writing reports that are released online to the sports community.

Committed: when an athlete signs a letter of intent to accept an athletics scholarship award from a post-secondary institution.

CW: Canada West University Athletic Association; a Canadian university sports conference within USports.

Exit meeting: in collegiate athletics, a meeting that takes place at the end of the season between the student-athlete and coaching staff. Topics of discussion can include performance of the student-athlete both academically and in their sport as well as team performance. This is also a time to discuss future scholarship commitments.

Full scholarship: covers tuition and fees, room and board and books. The ability to grant full scholarships will depend on the funding level of the institution, the specific sport and the level of collegiate athletics that the sport competes in.

Fully funded: NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) Division I and II institutions have a maximum number of athletic scholarships that they are permitted to distribute by sport (e.g., a fully funded Division I Baseball program can distribute 11.7 athletic scholarships). Being a fully funded institution means being able to distribute the maximum number of athletic scholarships permitted to your institution by NCAA regulations. An institution may compete at the Division I level but not be able to offer the full allotment of scholarships based on the institutional support required to qualify to be fully funded.

House league: the most basic level of community sport at the amateur level. All team members belong to the same league and participate against other members within their own league. Families pay a membership fee to have their child involved. The emphasis is not so much competitive results as on participation and learning.

JUCO: acronym for Junior College; the two-year system of community and vocational colleges in the United States.

NAIA: acronym for the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA); the NAIA is a collegiate athletic association for small colleges and universities in North America.

NLI: National Letter of Intent; a binding scholarship agreement that is signed by both the student-athlete and the institution. This document is used in both the U.S. and Canada.

National Team Top 50: a training camp that brings together the Top 50 athletes in a specific sport to compete for a roster spot on a specific team at a determined age group (ex. 18U Provincial team, 18U National team). Eligibility for the National lacrosse team Top 50 mentioned in this study is restricted to athletes with Canadian citizenship.

NCAA Division I: Division I level of the National Collegiate Athletic Association; the highest level of sanctioned intercollegiate sports in the United States. NCAA Division I schools can offer full athletic scholarships but not all have the funding to offer the maximum number of athletic scholarships permitted in each sport.

NCAA Division II: Division II level of the National Collegiate Athletic Association; NCAA Division II schools can offer some athletic scholarships.

NCAA Division III: Division III level of the National Collegiate Athletic Association; NCAA Division III schools cannot offer athletic scholarships.

NJCAA Division I: Division I level of the National Junior College Athletic Association; NJCAA Division I schools can offer athletic scholarships.

NJCAA Division II: Division II level of the National Junior College Athletic Association; NJCAA Division II schools can offer some athletic scholarships.

NJCAA Division III: Division III level of the National Junior College Athletic Association; NJCAA Division III schools cannot offer athletic scholarships.

NVivo software: qualitative data analysis software package designed for qualitative researchers working with very rich text-based or multimedia information.

OCAA: Ontario Colleges Athletic Association; a collegiate sports conference within the CCAA.

Official visit: when a student-athlete is invited to visit a campus for the purpose of recruitment and has their permissible expenses paid for. Items that are eligible to be paid for by the institution include transportation, accommodations, meals and certain types of entertainment, including tickets to a home sporting event.

OUA: Ontario University Athletics; a Canadian university sports conference within Supports.

PACWEST: Pacific Western Athletic Association; a collegiate sports conference within the CCAA.

Partial scholarship: a scholarship that covers a portion of tuition and fees, room and board and books.

Recruitment process: the process by which a student-athlete is recruited and commits to a post-secondary institution.

Representative: in the amateur sports system, refers to a level of play above “house league”. Players attend tryouts and teams are selected from these tryouts. Teams are put together to represent their club in competition with teams representing other clubs.

RSEQ: Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec; a collegiate sports conference within the CCAA.

Showcase: an event coordinated for the purpose of having prospective student-athletes recruited by post-secondary institutions. A monetary transaction takes place where a participant pays a fee for the opportunity to attend a showcase. Coaches or representatives from post-secondary institutions are invited to attend a showcase. These can be organized by for profit entities or club programs.

U17: abbreviation for the seventeen-and-under age group in amateur sports.

USports: the governing body for university sports in Canada.

Unofficial Visit: when a student-athlete takes the initiative to visit a campus for the purpose of recruitment but does not have their expenses paid for,

Verbal commitment: when a student-athlete has a verbal agreement in place to attend a post-secondary institution but has not signed a National Letter of Intent.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The fields and training facilities may exist in Canada, but the chase for an athletic scholarship leads many of our young athletes on a path that lies outside of our country. More specifically, the goal for some young Canadians is to leave Canada and secure an athletic scholarship to compete at the collegiate level in the United States (Gilgunn, 2010). Many of the Canadians who embark on this migration go on to have successful careers in athletics. The definition of what a successful athletic career looks like takes on different meaning for each participant. While some would consider being part of a collegiate team a success in and of itself, others may deem that success comes in the form of personal achievement and statistics. Perspective will play an important role in defining success and failure. Others do not experience similar success and subsequently return home before they had expected to do so. There are many reasons why this might happen. These reasons, which are to be teased out of individuals' experiences, are the topic of this study. In examining why Canadian student-athletes return home earlier than expected from the United States without completing their education, the individual experiences of the athletes are key to understanding their story. Each of these people had a unique narrative to share. In examining the interviews, each athlete was treated as an individual case study (Small, 2009). By using this methodological approach, I was able to draw parallels across the various stages of the student-athlete lifecycle. This will be explained further in the Methods chapter. As I progressed through each of these individual case studies, certain trends and themes emerged.

1.1 Insider-Outsider Perspective

One of the distinctive elements that helped shape this study throughout its various phases is the insider perspective I possess with respect to my field of study. I consider myself fortunate to have been able to live the experience of being a collegiate baseball player. Despite a rather average collegiate career statistically, I gained life experience and perspective that will inform a lifetime worth of decisions.

The insider perspective I have acquired created a unique opportunity to gain access to a subset of participants that may otherwise have been very difficult to find. The narrative of being unsuccessful in something is not an easy topic to peel back and is generally one that people are hesitant to discuss. In this instance, my insider perspective enabled the participants to share their stories without fear of being judged harshly for what others might consider a failure. As a college athlete, I was unable to play my last year due to an injury. This injury led to the loss of my athletic scholarship. At the time, I was filled with feelings of failure. I was able to gain access to participants who were willing to discuss these sensitive matters with me by utilizing network connections and other contacts that I sought out. Despite having had feelings of failure near the end of my tenure as a student-athlete, I now see the experience as a tremendous success that has helped shape my career today. The ability to feel failure but demonstrate success helped build a positive rapport with my participants.

As a researcher with an 'insider' perspective, I had to take into account certain potential biases that might be attached to this status. One of those involved avoiding making assumptions about the lived experiences of my participants. I had certain similar

shared experiences with every individual's case that I studied. A conscious effort was made to have my own experiences help build rapport with participants but not to serve as the framework for my understanding of the athletes' narratives. Probing and further questioning were important means for avoiding premature generalizing on my part. Further, I sought to protect against any biases by utilizing my career experience as a collegiate coach and athletic administrator. By utilizing a combination of these three lenses – student-athlete, coach and administrator – I was able to consider the same information from various perspectives. Having an informed understanding of the landscape that exists in collegiate athletics, I was able to create the framework for an impactful study where student-athletes were comfortable in delivering and discussing their narrative.

1.2 Overview of American Athletic Scholarships

An American athletic scholarship is a highly sought-after commodity in some sporting circles. There is certain background information that readers need to put these scholarships into context. The process of acquiring an athletic scholarship can be overwhelmingly complicated and difficult to navigate for the student-athlete. Readers may find it helpful to comprehend the order of events involved in this process. The following section outlines these processes and seeks to provide some clarity about the provisions involved.

1.2.1 Recruiting Process

The recruiting process involves two distinct stakeholders: the institutions that recruit young athletes to play for their teams and hopeful young athletes who seek to be

recruited by these institutions. The recruitment process for each of these types of stakeholder may begin as early as the beginning of a youth athlete's enrolment in high school. Those athletes who have demonstrated a special talent in playing their sport may begin to be recruited by colleges and universities almost immediately upon entering high school. The recruitment process will start a bit later in high school for other promising but not yet outstanding athletes.

In order to attract the attention of college athletic recruiters, young Canadians may seek to play on club teams that travel to tournaments in the United States. Participating in these tournaments provides opportunities to be seen and scouted by college recruiters. The athlete may also attend "showcase" or "combine" events organized using a for-profit framework by companies. These events are transactional in nature with participants paying a fee for the opportunity to perform in front of an advertised group of recruiters. The purpose of a showcase is to bring large numbers of athletes together in one central location where college coaches can maximize their recruiting time and resources by simultaneously evaluating a large number of athletes. These events usually include a workout portion where metrics are recorded for individual athletes. Metrics will include body and performance measurements. The athletes will also compete in a scrimmage or game situation. The components that are measured by recruiters at a showcase will vary from sport to sport. For example, a baseball showcase might include compiling the times recorded for players running a forty or sixty-yard dash time, their throwing velocity and batted ball exit velocity. Following such an event, some companies may include a "scouting report" or video analysis as part of the cost of

participation. Other companies may use this as an opportunity to sell these items as an add-on purchase. In either instance, there are more and more showcase companies originating as for-profit entities that are looking to capitalize on the market of young athletes with a desire to be recruited.

Another avenue for connecting with college coaches is through an athlete-initiated written expression of interest sent to college coaches by a player. In this case, the athlete will reach out to schools they are interested in attending and would ideally provide some type of athletic resume or profile as well as video of the athlete's sporting performance that the coach can review. The video clip that a player would send to a coach should include an introduction by the player and provide a set of his or her performance highlights. This can include footage captured in competition or taken in a staged setting specifically for the purpose of recruitment. There should be enough footage provided for the coach to make an initial evaluation of the athlete's embodied abilities.

Recruiting platforms have also become widespread in the chase for an American athletic scholarship. The simplest way to think of these is as a recruiting version of Facebook or Instagram that connects athletes with coaches. Coaches are able to view profiles and make requests in order to connect with selected athletes, while athletes have the opportunity to express their interest in a particular school and potentially have their profile reviewed by that coach. This can be a viable way to connect with coaches and to seek out opportunities. In most cases, the coach or team official must verify the athlete's profile to ensure that his or her account is legitimate and capable of serving as a potential reference.

1.2.2 Recruiting Rules and Regulations

To provide an exhaustive explanation of the full range of recruiting rules that govern intercollegiate athletics would be a time-consuming undertaking. Each of the governing bodies in the United States (NCAA, NAIA and NJCAA) have their own operating manuals that can easily be found online. As it is not feasible to go through each rule, I will focus on some basic matters that will assist in explaining recruiting rules and regulations. To streamline things further, I will focus on the NCAA Division I level and outline sources of information that the reader should be aware of across all levels. I have selected the NCAA Division I level as it is the one that will be most familiar to readers and receives the most media attention. This overview will include rules concerning when coaches are permitted to contact young athletes, the sanctioning of official visits, unofficial visits, and arrangements concerning young athletes verbally committing to a school and subsequently signing a national letter of intent (NCAA, nd).

At the NCAA Division I level, a college coach cannot contact a player before the summer following the end of their grade eleven year. The NCAA has a detailed recruiting calendar that outlines four periods: a contact period, an evaluation period, a quiet period and a dead period.

Contact Period: the time when coaches can be the most active with potential student-athletes. They can have face-to-face contact, watch athletes compete, and are free to have written or verbal communication with the athlete.

Evaluation Period: the time when coaches can watch the athlete compete and have written or verbal communication with him or her but cannot have face-to-face contact with the student-athlete or their parents except at the college campus.

Quiet Period: the time when a coach can no longer watch the student-athlete compete. Only on-campus face-to-face contact with a student-athlete or their parents is permitted. They can continue to have verbal or written communication with athletes or their parents during this period.

Dead Period: the time when the coach can only maintain verbal and written communication. No face-to-face contact is permitted in any capacity nor may the coach watch the student-athlete compete.

Throughout these periods, the coach may attempt to invite the student-athlete either formally or informally, on to campus for a visit. A student-athlete may visit a college campus on either an official or an unofficial visit. The visit is considered an official visit if the school covers costs related to the trip such as transportation, accommodation, meals and certain types of entertainment, including tickets to a home sporting event. It is considered an unofficial visit if the student-athlete (or his or her parents) pays the expenses related to a visit.

When an athlete has made their way through the recruiting process, has been offered some form of an athletic scholarship, and is at the point where they feel comfortable about coming to a decision, the athlete will make a verbal commitment followed by the signing of a National Letter of Intent (NLI). The two commitments don't always follow the sequence of moving from a verbal commitment to signing the NLI. In

the big picture, the NLI is the official agreement binding the student-athlete and institution to a scholarship agreement. A verbal commitment occurs when a student-athlete indicates their intention to accept a scholarship and play sports at a school before they become eligible to sign a NLI. This is a non-binding commitment between the student-athlete and school that can be made at any time. To accept a formal scholarship offer, a prospective student-athlete must sign a NLI, which is a binding agreement that is signed by both the prospective student-athlete and the institution. Details that are included as part of an NLI are the scholarship amount and whether it is for a single year or is a multi-year scholarship. Most NLI's are for the period of one year. At the NCAA Division I level, multi-year scholarships are available but seldom offered. An NLI can only be signed during the senior year of the student-athlete's high school career. Each collegiate sport governing body has different signing dates with many sports able to open their respective signing periods in November. The signing of a NLI concludes the recruiting process with a copy of the document being registered with the respective athletic conference office. The athlete's name is then entered into a database that can be referenced by all institutions. Other institutions are not permitted to contact a student-athlete once she or he has signed a NLI.

1.2.3 Scholarship Framework

There are significant differences in the athletic scholarships offered by the three major governing bodies for collegiate sport in the United States. Within the NCAA, the three divisions are distinguished by the amount of athletic scholarship money available to student-athletes (NCAA, 2018). At the NCAA Division I level, multi-year full athletic

scholarships are possible. When an athlete receives a full athletic scholarship, the institution will be responsible for paying for tuition, applicable fees associated with tuition, books and accommodations. A full scholarship does not cover transportation, including flights to and from the institution or food outside of the agreed upon campus meal plan. Each sport has a maximum number of scholarships available for distribution. For example, a fully funded NCAA Division I basketball program will have 13 full single-year scholarships to distribute amongst its players. A full roster can be up to 15 players. This can make it very difficult to secure a “full ride”. Partial scholarships are popular and exist across NCAA Divisions I and II. A partial scholarship can come in almost any percentage. In a situation where an institution is not fully funded, coaches may need to become creative in how they structure scholarship offers in order to spread their resources. Any partial scholarship offered should be reflected on the NLI. Athletic scholarships are not, however, available in NCAA Division III programs.

A similar divisional structure exists in the NJCAA (NJCAA, n.d.). At the NJCAA Division I level, schools can offer scholarships to student-athletes in the form of tuition, books, fees, room and board and up to \$250 in course-required supplies and transportation costs one time per academic year. Similar to the NCAA, each sport has a maximum number of scholarships available as mandated by the NJCAA. For example, a fully funded NJCAA Division I basketball program will have 15 full scholarships to distribute amongst a roster of 15-20 players. In NJCAA Division II, schools can offer tuition, books, fees and up to \$250 in course-required supplies. Athletic scholarships are not available at the NJCAA Division III level.

In the NAIA, schools can offer up to a full scholarship that includes the cost of tuition, fees, books, supplies required for courses along with accommodation (NAIA, n.d.). Similar to the NCAA, each sport program has a maximum number of scholarships it can distribute. For example, a fully funded NAIA baseball school has 12 full scholarships. They can split this scholarship pool up however they like. For example, a coach could use their scholarship allotment as 12 full scholarships or 24 scholarships of fifty percent each.

1.2.4 Maintaining the Scholarship

Scholarships are reviewed at the end of each year unless a multi-year scholarship has been signed with a NCAA Division I school. Common practice is for an “exit meeting” to take place which includes the coaching staff and each individual player. This meeting tends to happen prior to the end of the academic year. This is when the discussion of scholarship renewal will likely happen. The decision about whether or not to renew, reduce or take away a scholarship is left to the institution. Reasons for not renewing a scholarship can vary and may include poor on-field performance, poor academic standing, academic ineligibility or a pattern of breaking team rules.

Alternatively, a student-athlete may be in a position to have their scholarship increased in the case of outstanding performance academically, athletically or a combination of both.

The intention of this section was to dive into the complicated world of U.S. athletic scholarships. The athletic scholarship framework was reviewed as well as the recruiting process stages and timelines and the scholarship variables at different levels of U.S. college sports. Now that a baseline understanding of the scholarship has been

outlined, the thesis will turn to the narratives of a number of a number of Canadian student-athletes who experienced the joy of reaching their dream of “going South” only to return home without having fully realized their individual dreams. Towards that end, it is necessary to take account of particularly pertinent parts of the existing published literature on athletic scholarships.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

When people hear about an athletic scholarship, it is not uncommon for them to think first of the prestige and fame this is likely to garner for the student athlete. The perception of the “full-ride” scholarship and what is televised on ESPN “College Game Day”¹ can be quite alluring. Despite what we see on television, the experience of a Canadian student-athlete in the U.S. system can be quite different than he or she might have initially expected. This raises the question of what happens when things do not go as expected? What are the factors at play that young athletes exploring the U.S. post-secondary system ought to be aware of? The possibility that the experience of being a student-athlete may not unfold as the athlete anticipates is not well understood since much of the popular focus on this topic is on success stories.

The choice that a young athlete makes to pursue the goal of attaining an athletic scholarship can start early in her or his life and become all encompassing. There can be internal and external pressures to pursue this goal including pressure from parents, family members, and coaches in addition to the expectations that athletes have for themselves. This often starts when an athlete moves away from playing a number of sports and focuses on specializing in one sport. This includes playing with high-level club teams that seek to prepare their athletes to be in a position to secure a scholarship. The parents of highly driven young athletes may seek extra training for their child that addresses the physical or technical aspects of their sport. All of these elements come at a financial cost

¹ “ESPN College Game Day” is a college football preview show aired on ESPN. The show is set on a different, prominent campus each Saturday morning during the college football season. It acts as a catalyst to raise awareness and attention for college football.

that many parents are willing absorb in order to support their child's future athletic aspirations. Throughout my experiences, the resources expended by families can also include time spent taking children to and from sport, relocation of parental careers in order to be closer to training facilities, or enrolling the child in a school that places an emphasis on athletic development. This may include enrollment at a secondary school which specializes in athletics or that has an academic pathway that has athletic development integrated into the curriculum. Financially, there can be a large cost to supporting these additional resources and the extra training.

The movement of Canadian student-athletes to the United States to play post-secondary sports has become a significant trend. Every year, we see approximately 2,000 young Canadians, aged 17–23, move across the border to pursue their education in the United States as student-athletes (Barnes, 2008). Perceptions can, however, be misleading. Members of the public, naïve young people, parents and coaches may perceive fame, prestige and financial gain when they think about collegiate athletics. What they do not see is the number of athletes who do not experience this level of success. Because lived experiences can tell a different story, the purpose of this study was to explore the reported experiences of a set of Canadian student-athletes who travelled to the U.S. to play college sports but returned to Canada without completing their post-secondary education.

2.1 Benefits of Playing Intercollegiate Sport in the United States

As noted above, substantial numbers of Canadian student-athletes move thousands of miles from home to pursue playing their sport at the collegiate level in the

United States. The imagined benefits can seem enormous. The possibility of gaining access to multi-million-dollar training and playing facilities as well the hoped-for benefits of uniform endorsement deals, future professional opportunities, public prestige and status are some of the driving factors that persuade Canadian student-athletes to move to the United States. Dyck (2010) suggests that state of the art facilities and branded college athletics apparel create an identity that paints U.S. collegiate sports as being prestigious.

CNN Business (2018) reported that in 2017, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) produced revenue in excess of one billion dollars. Independently, intercollegiate athletic conferences also have the ability to acquire tremendous revenue windfall based on how their respective teams do in the NCAA football and basketball playoffs. The Southeastern Conference (SEC) is one of the top conferences in those two sports. In 2013-14, the SEC distributed a then record \$309.6 million in revenue to its 14 member-institutions. This amounted to \$20.9 million per school (Long, 2014). These numbers do not include the profits that each department accumulated through their own operations for the fiscal year but just their share of conference revenue from the NCAA.

For those who aspire to play professional sport, the NCAA operates as an unofficial “farm-system” for three of the four major professional sports in North America. This includes football, baseball and basketball. The Canadian Hockey League (CHL) remains the predominant development league for hockey in the world, sending players into the National Hockey League (NHL), but American collegiate programs also send many players to the NHL. The opportunity to play at these levels of intercollegiate sport and gain exposure to professional scouts can influence a young athlete. The thought

of future financial security and stardom are also enticing factors. Despite these factors, the realities of being lucky enough to earn a professional contract are rather scarce. The NCAA (NCAA Recruiting Facts, 2018) is very transparent about noting this fact in its marketing materials. They do this by noting that fewer than two percent of NCAA athletes progress to become professional athletes. Given that that NCAA is the largest and most prestigious governing body in U.S. collegiate athletics, it is safe to say that there are many fewer athletes who compete in the NAIA and NJCAA who are likely to land a professional sport contract.

2.2 Benefits for American Academic Institutions

Research has been conducted on the benefits for American institutions of attracting international students to come to the United States for their post-secondary studies. These benefits can include an increase in enrollment numbers (Davis, 2000), an increase in revenue from international tuition rates (Coudriet, 2019), the enhancement of the reputation of an institution to be able to attract the top student-athletes from across the globe, and the positive economic impact in the community directly surrounding the institution.

The number of international students enrolled at American institutions is staggering. In the year 2000, over half a million international students were enrolled in American post-secondary institutions (Davis, 2000). These students add a cultural blend to American campuses with the catalyst for their move being the premise of building a better life. They also bring with them impressive intellectual abilities that contribute to the academic vitality of colleges and universities. According to the NCAA website

(NCAA, 2019), over 20,000 international students competed in the NCAA. International student-athletes diversify campuses and bring with them an appreciation for the opportunity presented to them. Connell (2007) referenced Director of International Services Pat Burak of Syracuse University in the publication *Foreign Student Affairs* (Connell, 2007, p. 58) where he wrote, “These students don’t come with an attitude of entitlement. They are so glad to have this opportunity to come here and practice their sport.”

Differences between international and domestic tuition rates can be substantial. In 2016, the average tuition rate for a domestic student in the United States was \$8,202 at a public institution and \$21,189 at a private institution (Coudriet, 2019). The rates charged to international students are much higher. College Board (2018), an organization that represents post-secondary institutions around the globe, reported that in 2018-19, the average tuition rate for an international student at a U.S. college was \$26,290. The practice of utilizing international student enrollment numbers to hit enrollment goals appears to be dwindling in the U.S. The same report outlined a steady decrease in the number of foreign students enrolling on U.S. campuses. The reasons for this framework include tougher American laws about being able to study in the U.S. that apply to international students, assistance programs for post-secondary changing in foreign countries and the steady increase of international tuition rates. These rates do not consider any financial assistance that a student may receive.

Recruiting top-level student-athletes from across the world can enhance the global reputation of an American institution. It is evident that it is a big deal to be a student-

athlete for Canadians and other international athletes who share the drive to pursue an athletic scholarship. There are different reasons and ways for an international student to find their way to an American college or university, many of which have nothing to do with athletics (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). But there are some international athletes who are interested in American intercollegiate athletics. According to the NCAA, there were over 20,000 international student-athletes participating in at the Division I and II levels in 2019. Canadians made up the largest percentage of first-year international student-athletes at over 22%. Comparatively, this percentage was 28.5% in 2013. This illustrates that NCAA schools are expanding their reach across the world. NCAA women's tennis and men's soccer have the largest percentage of international participation.

Some of the U.S. coaches who recruit student-athletes may have contacts or a 'pipeline' to these international athletes. From a broader perspective, post-secondary educational institutions have international recruitment teams whose objective is to recruit students from across the globe to create a diverse and talented learning community. Simultaneously, they infuse additional revenue into their institution in the form of international tuition. These recruitment teams are part of international student departments that service the unique needs of international students. In my experiences as a student-athlete, coach and athletic director I have found that these departments assist students from outside of the U.S. in a number of ways, including the processing of student visas, navigating international tuition rates and finding housing accommodation. Once the student has arrived on campus, the role of international departments is to support a successful transition for the student including helping students to access various

resources on campus. From an athletics program's standpoint, the pressure is on coaches and recruiting coordinators to find the best student-athletes regardless of whether they are domestic or international.

Post-secondary institutions in the U.S. come in all shapes and sizes. Community colleges generally have smaller populations while NCAA Division I schools may or may not have large enrollment numbers. Regardless of size, an influx of international students will carry a positive economic impact in the community which the institution is located in. International students will be paying for amenities such as housing (on or off campus), meals (on-campus dining halls, local restaurants and grocery stores), clothing and transportation amongst other things. At smaller schools located in remote locations, the economic impact of international students can be profound. According to a report published in the *International Educator* (2016), international students contribute \$30 billion annually to the U.S. economy.

2.3 Why do some Athletes Remain in Canada?

Despite the allure of the United States, some student-athletes decide to remain in Canada to compete and complete their post-secondary studies and athletic careers. Some non-Canadians also decide to come to Canada to pursue post-secondary athletics (Clemencon, 2014). Some of the rationales for staying in Canada include the strength of the Canadian education system as well as the reduced cost of a Canadian education as opposed to the international student rates charged at American institutions. A new athletic development includes options to be able to study in Canada while competing against American schools. There have been Canadian institutions (UBC 2019, SFU 2019,

UVic 2019) that have affiliated with U.S. sport governing bodies to provide American athletic opportunities while gaining a Canadian education.

One of the points for Canadian student-athletes to consider when deciding where they will attend post-secondary schooling is that the Canadian education system is globally respected with many excellent post-secondary institutions located across the country. The Times Higher Education website (2019) releases World Education Rankings. In reviewing these rankings, 14 Canadian institutions were ranked amongst the Top 300 globally.

Cost is a factor when evaluating all of the elements that go into reaching a decision about where to study at the post-secondary level. Statistics Canada data (2018) indicates that for the country as a whole the average cost of university tuition across Canada was \$6,838 per annum in 2018-19. This average is a baseline cost and does not factor in additional financial aid that a student might be eligible for. Statistics Canada (2018) reported that the largest increase in year-over-year provincial tuition rates occurred in Manitoba (6.5%) with the lowest rate of change in Alberta (0.1%). Overall, there has been a steady increase in the cost of post-secondary tuition across the country. The high cost of post-secondary tuition has been reported in the news with some provinces adopting a tuition freeze over the last few years.

The baseline gap in tuition rates for a Canadian attending school in Canada as opposed to the U.S. is staggering. Based on the numbers illustrated throughout this review, the difference between the two tuition rates is over \$20,000.00 USD without

factoring in any type of financial aid, including athletic scholarships. This number carries significant financial implications.

2.4 Going to School in Canada but Competing in the United States

In recent years, there has been movement by some Canadian universities to bridge the gap between the caliber of collegiate athletics in Canada and the United States. This development has led to a handful of Canadian institutions in British Columbia affiliating with American collegiate sport associations and becoming conference members.

Currently there are three institutions in British Columbia – Simon Fraser University (SFU), the University of British Columbia (UBC) and the University of Victoria (UVic) – that have affiliation agreements with athletic associations that govern sport in the U.S.

In 2012, SFU was approved as the first international member of the NCAA (Brown, 2012). The institution holds NCAA Division II status in the Great Northwest Athletic Conference (GNAC). Currently, SFU stands as Canada's lone NCAA affiliate. According to the SFU athletics website (2019), the institution sponsors seventeen varsity teams. In reviewing their varsity rosters, the overall athletics program has a large number of Canadian student-athletes who compete for SFU. Overall at SFU, 76% of the student-athletes are Canadian. Men's sport participation is approximately 70% Canadian with 153 Canadians amongst the 220 male athletes. The roster with the largest number of international athletes is football, which carries 38 American athletes. Women's sport participation at SFU has a higher rate of recruitment in Canada as compared with their male counterparts. Approximately 86% (134 of the 156) of female student-athletes at SFU are Canadian.

UBC holds athletic affiliation with the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). According to the UBC athletics website (2019), the institution sponsors six varsity teams that compete in the Cascade Collegiate Conference (CCC) of the NAIA. UBC holds dual affiliation in both American and Canadian athletic conferences with the remainder of its varsity teams competing in in the Canada West conference of USports, the governing body for Canadian university sports. In reviewing the varsity rosters of NAIA affiliate sports at UBC, approximately 95% of the student-athletes are Canadian. Men's sport teams that hold NAIA affiliation include baseball, golf, and track and field. Amongst these three teams, 97% of the male student-athletes are Canadian (84 out of 87). The women's varsity teams that are NAIA affiliates include softball, golf, and track and field. Amongst the three women's teams, 93% of the female student-athletes are Canadian (56 out of 60).

UVic has an athletic affiliation with the NAIA as part of the Association of Independent Institutions. According to the UVic athletics website (2019), the institution sponsors two NAIA affiliated sports –men's and women's golf –with the remainder of its varsity teams competing in the Canada West Conference of USports. In reviewing the rosters of the two golf teams, 81% of the athletes are Canadian. This includes 83% on the women's golf team (5 out of 6 athletes) and 80% on the men's golf team (8 out of 10 athletes).

Overall, the development of some Canadian institutions affiliating with American collegiate sport governing bodies has redistributed the athletic opportunities in the country across additional athletic conferences. From a holistic view, there are 440

Canadian athletes in American affiliated sports as compared to 10,000 athletes competing in USports along with an unspecified number in the CCAA. The opportunity to combine an excellent education with enhanced athletic opportunities might be viewed as a catalyst in keeping some of the premier student-athletes in the country. This along with recent changes to the Canadian university sports landscape provides concrete evidence that some of our institutions are trying to take a proactive approach towards levelling the playing field with our American counterparts. Won (2017), a sports journalist, quoted USports chief executive officer Graham Brown speaking about this shift, noting:

But we are brainwashed to think that every single [sports] program in the NCAA is good. ... I think you can have an equal experience here or better, and get a Canadian university education with all the alumni connections that comes with it. We haven't fought for that experience until now.

2.5 What have Other Scholars Noted About this Migration?

Given the allure of the American post-secondary sports system, especially at the NCAA Division I level, the attainment of the U.S. athletic scholarship by a Canadian student-athlete can be perceived as “making it”. As stated by Gilgunn (2010), a “personal distinction” is achieved when a scholarship is earned. Medic (2003) also researched the motivation in athletic scholarship attainment. This achievement should not be defined solely in terms of the signing of a NLI in formally accepting a scholarship. The lead-up to this accomplishment has been viewed as a veritable “career” in its own right by Dyck (2006), with parents facilitating the career and incurring substantial costs to support a son or daughter’s sport activities from a young age. He goes on to refer to a form of

accomplishment that can be experienced by parents and coaches when a child earns an athletic scholarship. The investment of time and resources can be validated and the entire experience branded a success. The costs can include team fees, extra training, travel, equipment and more. Given this investment, there is a sense of accomplishment among the parents and coaches of scholarship winners (Dyck, 2010). Further, he states that the decision by young athletes to relocate to the U.S. depends crucially on the assistance provided by parents, other family members, coaches and teachers.

Ali (2014) analyzed the experiences of Canadian student-athletes in the NCAA and concluded that the NCAA is the “gold standard” for competition. He outlined the challenges faced by the athletes once they arrive in the U.S. system, which include injuries, difficult relationships with coaches and overwhelming athletic demands. Gilgunn (2010) framed these challenges as financial, time and competitive costs. Despite these costs, the athletes in the study claimed, “obviously it’s worth it” when they were asked about their experience. Along similar lines, Wells (2012) claimed that the American scholarship was the “only” post-secondary option considered by young Canadians. This is not to say that USports and CCAA scholarships don’t exist in Canada. His point was that they are not viewed as being equal in prestige to the prospect of the U.S. scholarship. James (2003) studied a subgroup of African-Canadian basketball players in speaking to the point of the athletic scholarship being the primary driver of Canadian student-athletes. He sought to establish why, despite low odds of attaining an athletic scholarship and intense competition, the student-athletes thought that it was possible for them to earn a scholarship. James found that in order to realize their goals,

his participants navigated and negotiated school. These tactics were informed by the construct that portray Black youth as good athletes. Falls (2009) also examined the experiences of Canadian female student-athletes in the U.S. She examined standard transitions as well as sport-specific transitions that the student-athletes encountered. Overall, she found that women's decisions to attend college were framed by an interrelated set of sport-related and non-sport related factors.

2.6 What are the Consequences of this System?

A noted consequence of the desire of some Canadians to move south to pursue post-secondary opportunities in sport is the depletion in the number of talented student-athletes competing within the Canadian post-secondary athletics system. Bale (1991) summarizes this phenomenon in the "Brawn Drain" where he outlines that 1,800 student-athletes left Canada for the NCAA in 1997. These numbers do not factor in the number of Canadian athletes competing within the NAIA or National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). A natural consequence of the number of high-level athletes migrating south is the dilution of Canadian post-secondary sports. Further, there are many challenges standing in the way of the Canadian post-secondary sport system being able to remain relevant in the conversation with its American counterparts including funding constraints, a lack of media coverage and athletic scholarship restrictions. These are some of the challenges that make American college sports such a priority for some young Canadians – the robust budgets at the major NCAA Division I level, large television contracts and full-ride scholarships. Nevertheless, in neighboring countries with similar economic profiles, a question that emerges is why athletics are viewed quite

differently depending which side of the border you are on. Despite the attention that this question warrants, it ultimately lies outside the scope of this thesis.

Dyck (2006) wrote about the gap in knowledge that appears to be present among Canadian student-athletes and their families when discussing the realities of the cost of attending an American post-secondary institution. It is not uncommon for a Canadian family to put themselves in a position to pay more for their child to attend an American institution on a partial scholarship than they would if their child was attending a school in Canada with no scholarship. Part of this cost could be better understood by stepping foot on-campus and asking questions while on a visit. This would give a family a better perception of cost and fit of the campus for their student (Hubbard, 1999).

2.7 The Romanticized Narrative of Student-Athletes in the United States

The investment by families whose children are in pursuit of an American athletic scholarship can be enormous. From an early age, parents are enticed and expected to pour resources of time and money into participation in travel and club teams, extra and specialized training, equipment and participation in showcase events. Parents are guided towards ensuring that their child has the best opportunity “to be seen”. The added expenses incurred can be viewed as “opportunity cost” or as an “investment” in one’s child’s future. For some parents, providing this opportunity is the goal in itself, while for others nothing short of their child earning an athletic scholarship could be viewed as a successful outcome. The latter parental goal can place substantial pressure upon a young athlete. Yet, putting your signature on an NLI and securing an athletic scholarship is really just an early part of the story. This narrative continues through the lived experience

of being a collegiate athlete. This experience has the potential to be unforgettable, whether from a positive or negative standpoint. Therefore, we need to shift our analytical attention to what happens once an athlete secures a scholarship and arrives on-campus.

Ali (2014) studied two sets of Canadian student-athletes who had travelled to the United States to take up athletic scholarships: the first group was comprised of athletes who successfully exhausted their athletic eligibility in the United States, while the second included athletes who returned home to Canada before either graduating or exhausting their eligibility as intercollegiate athletes those who started their careers in the United States and then moved back to Canada.

Boucher (2017) looked at the obstacles and barriers of international swimmers on the rosters of NCAA Division I schools. She found that the complexities experienced by an international student-athlete are much vaster than those encountered by a domestic athlete. The three themes that Boucher outlined were the feeling of being ill-informed/having to overcome unanticipated tasks or issues, difficulty with completing the necessary paperwork and cultural barriers.

Miller (2013) launched his research with an aim towards studying black Canadian student-athletes who had returned from the U.S, prior to exhausting their eligibility. After being unsuccessful in securing participants, he adjusted his study to a participant base that was easier to secure. Ultimately, he studied a participant pool of black Canadian student-athletes who had secured U.S. scholarships and returned to Canada within the last 5 years having completed their degrees before returning.

The relationships developed during the initial period of a student-athletes post-secondary career can have a tremendous impact on them (Rezania, D. & Gurney R, 2014). The nature and quality of these relationships creates a framework for what the next four or five years might well look like. The stakeholders involved in these relationships include coaches, teammates and parents. The resulting relational framework has the potential to be either positive or negative and is dependent on the quality of relationships that are created.

Often, the mooted successes of the NCAA and its athletes are romanticized by the mainstream media. Many fewer reports of what happens when an athlete returns home are discussed publicly. Throughout the recruiting process, Canadian student-athletes may view a Canadian post-secondary institution as merely a fallback option to take up should American scholarship options not materialize (Dyck, 2011). If things do not work out as planned for individual student-athletes in the U.S., they may again turn to Canada as an option. There may also be additional relevant circumstances that may prohibit transferring to a Canadian institution such as athletic and academic eligibility parameters. Pritchard (2005) views these circumstances as prevalent stressors in the life of a student-athlete. Dyck (2006) shone a light on the uncelebrated situation that unfolds when an athlete returns home prematurely prior to exhausting their academic or athletic eligibility. For all the press that is devoted to the initial chase for a scholarship, very little has been written about what happens when things do not go as planned and student-athletes return home before they intended.

2.8 Where do Gaps Exist?

The pursuit and attainment of an athletic scholarship is generally viewed through a singular and rather particular lens. It tends to focus upon the personal distinction and prestige involved in securing a scholarship. A secondary lens is, however, necessary in order for families to make well-informed decisions. This lens would ideally equip them with an ability to accurately evaluate what happens when experiences that student-athletes encounter are rather different than had been advertised.

It was difficult to find published narratives that discussed the experiences of student-athletes who competed outside the NCAA in the NAIA or NJCAA. Of the three, the NCAA is the most decorated and heralded collegiate sports governing body. It would be fair to assume that the elite of the elite compete at the NCAA Division I level. Nevertheless, outside of this top bracket of athletics, there are many more athletes who compete at the NAIA and NJCAA levels. The institutions within these governing bodies do not possess the same type and level of resources that a NCAA Division I institution would enjoy. These resources include overall budget, state of the art facilities and caliber of paid athletic staff personnel. It would not be a stretch to suggest that the experiences of Canadian student-athletes who participate at the NAIA or NJCAA level may be different than those of athletes who have competed within the highest levels of NCAA Division I. According to the NCAA (2019) there are approximately 179,200 student-athletes competing at the NCAA Division I level. Beyond that, there are an additional 312,800 competing within the NCAA Division II and III ranks. Looking outside of the NCAA, there are 65,000 student-athletes competing in the NAIA (2019). To provide a more

global perspective, there are an additional 59,000 student-athletes in the NJCAA (2019). There is a very small percentage of NCAA Division I schools that work with a large, robust budget. Overall, the majority of Canadian student-athletes are not attending this upper echelon of NCAA Division I institutions.

The website *CB Players* (2019) is a database for Canadian baseball players competing at the collegiate level in the U.S. In 2019, 130 Canadians played NCAA Division I baseball with another 117 playing at the NCAA Division II level and 46 playing at the NCAA Division III level for a total of 293 Canadians competing in NCAA baseball. Further, there were 169 Canadians playing NAIA baseball and another 244 Canadians playing at NJCAA affiliates across their three divisions with 143 playing Division I, 77 playing Division II and 24 playing Division III. Overall, 576 Canadian student-athletes competed in baseball at the NCAA Division II and III, NAIA and NJCAA levels with 130 appearing at NCAA Division I schools. A 1:4 ratio exists between those playing at the highest level as opposed to those playing at other levels. It cannot be assumed that this trend would necessarily hold true across all sports but this does show the differing levels that exist in intercollegiate competition at the school's that Canadian baseball players are attending. These range across all levels of the U.S. system from the elite of NCAA Division I to the lower levels of college baseball.

In reviewing these numbers, an emerging matter that is worth looking into further is the narratives of experiences of NAIA and NJCAA athletes. Providing their narratives offers a more complete picture of the so-called average student-athlete experience.

2.9 Long-Term Athlete Development Plan and the Collegiate Athlete

It can be said that all youth athletes go through a “childhood sport career” prior to ever setting foot on a college campus. Given the early age at which some athletes and their families commit to pursuing a scholarship, there may be gaps in the development of these youths as they are geared towards athletic achievement from such an early age. The enjoyment of sport may be lost in order to frame success and achievement as the purpose of sport. A question that comes to mind is whether these youth are developing broadly or narrowly from a mental, cognitive, social and emotional perspective. An understanding of the Canadian Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model is used to look at this question in more detail.

2.9.1 Stages Crossed

The Canadian Sport for Life Association (2019) provides a statement of the LTAD model. The model includes eight stages so that participants in youth sports are counselled about doing the right things at the right time to develop in sport or athletic activity. These stages include: Awareness and First Involvement, Active Start, FUNdamentals, Learn to Train, Train to Train, Train to Compete, Train to Win and Active for Life. The stages that are most pertinent to this research are “Learn to Train” and “Train to Win.” There are certain assumptions that I am making made within these two stages about potential college athletes and the LTAD model. First, it is assumed that the majority of young Canadian athletes who are being considered for post-secondary athletic scholarships will have successfully completed the stages of Awareness and First Involvement, Active Start and FUNdamentals. Secondly, three of the final four stages- namely, Train to Train, Train to Compete and Train to Win- are geared to elite athletes

who are working through the system from the Provincial to National levels of their particular sport.

The Learn to Train and Train to Train stages are important for gaining a better understanding of the concept of the youth sports “career”. It is during these two stages when the influence of parents and coaches can become dominant. Parents and coaches shape and mold the “careers” of young athletes and influence the lens through which a young athlete views sport. Adults’ influence should be positive and supportive of both success and failure all the while providing continuous encouragement. It can be expected that the athlete will progress through the LTAD stages confidently and at a proper pace if this type of support is displayed.

In looking at the Learn to Train stage, one of the key points is that training should be balanced with competition. The Canadian Sport for Life (2019) recommendation is 70% training and 30% competition. In today’s world of amateur sport, there are instances where actual percentages are mirror opposites of this ideal with more emphasis at a young age on playing competitive games and less on training and development. Coaches or sport associations may push for more games and fewer practices, thereby risking the overall development of their athletes. The risk lies in not providing adequate training time to learn and develop skills. Parents may also decide to move their child from one association to another seeking out those that will provide them with the most robust game schedule. A study conducted by Beaudoin, Callary and Trudeau (2015) supports this. They looked at a group of coaches who were either using or implementing the LTAD model and found that one of the barriers to coaches successfully accomplishing this was

that “some coaches feel that a paradox exists in the current sports culture. The model represents a long-term approach to meet the growth and development of young athletes, whereas organizational sport structures encourage them to engage early in competition and often leads to their overspecialization” (Beaudoin, et al. 2015, p.10). They go on to explain that certain sport cultures “pushes coaches and athletes to look for shortcuts, recipes, or interventions to attain high-level but short-term performance” (Beaudoin, et al., 2015, p.10).

The reasons for specializing at a young age can seem compelling. According to Malina (2010), several factors may contribute to the desire of young athletes to specialize in a single sport. These include the pursuit of scholarships or professional contracts, being labelled as talented by parents or coaches, the retailing industry and media reports. Conversely, Neeru, Pinkham, Dugas, Patrick and LaBella (2013) disagree with early specialization and suggest that “for most sports, there is no evidence that intense training and specialization before puberty are necessary to achieve elite status”. The potential glamour of developing a young elite athlete can become all encompassing, but at what cost?

Malina (2010) summarized the potential risks of early specialization as social isolation, overdependence, burnout, manipulation, injury and compromised growth and maturation. These are severe consequences in a system especially when the earning of an athletic scholarship is the statistical anomaly rather than the norm. As noted by Pennington (2008), the “scholarship divide” is quite substantial. He reported that in 2003-2004, NCAA institutions gave athletic scholarships to what amounted to approximately 2

percent of the 6.4 million athletes who were playing those sports in high school four years earlier. These numbers do not consider the substantial numbers of Canadian student-athletes as well as the total number of high-school athletes that will not receive scholarships in addition to international student-athletes from countries other than Canada. The risk versus reward ratio in this scenario is quite large. There ought to be a clear perspective concerning the probabilities of receiving an athletic scholarship from which informed choices about early specialization might be viewed in terms of the realities of the actual number of available athletic scholarships. Malina (2010) observed that “few individuals who specialize in sport at young ages make it to elite levels and reap the social, economic, and other benefits associated with success. The overwhelming majority drop out along the way. Nevertheless, specialization in sport at relatively young ages is a fact of life for many children” (Malina, 2010, p.369). The experience of a young athlete can become compromised if there is an abundance of pressure put on the athlete by the adults in their lives. Overdependence can occur, with the athlete relying on their adult influencers every step of the way throughout their “career”. Failure is inevitable for the majority of young athletes who set their sights on this objective.

2.10 Why do Athletes Return to Canada?

The desire for Canadian student-athletes to migrate south and chase an athletic scholarship has been outlined thus far. What was of interest in this study was the general lack of research that has been conducted on why many of these same athletes return to Canada prior to graduating or using all of their American sports eligibility. This topic is much less glamorous to talk about, which makes it a far more difficult matter to have a

conversation about with those who are involved in child and youth sports. A starting point would be the work of Ali (2014), which identifies four mechanisms that drive student-athletes to return to Canada: injuries, financial viability, conflicts with coaches, and intensity and volume of training. The matters behind why athletes return home to Canada will be looked into but first, we must turn out attention to the methods employed in this study.

Chapter 3: Methods

The priority in this study has been to collect and analyze detailed data about the individual experiences of Canadian student-athletes in the United States and to employ qualitative approaches to do so. The aim has been to gather data that offers depth and understanding rather than to focus primarily upon the numbers or statistics from the interviews conducted. Qualitative interviews generate substantial amounts of information that the researcher must then transcribe, synthesize and review. This study was designed to be exploratory, so its focus has been placed on gaining understandings of individual student-athletes' experiences and understandings. Placing a limit on the number of interviews conducted made this process viable and allowed the researcher to make full and appropriate use of all research materials collected from the participants. Obtaining access to participants was also an important factor. The potential participant pool was limited from the outset due to the particular criteria that were set for suitable participants. These criteria included being a Canadian who had participated in youth sports in Canada before going on to participate as a student-athlete at a U.S. institution governed by one of the three American associations for collegiate sport. Moreover, research participants would have left the United States prior to completing a Diploma or Bachelor's Degree and transferred into or started a new academic program in Canada while continuing to participate as a student-athlete. The importance of continuing their athletic career illustrates the importance of athletics in their own personal student experience. This is not always the case as there are some athletes that return having experienced "burnout" or other extenuating factors that keep them from returning to their sport. I have not

differentiated between whether they received any athletic financial assistance from the institution in which they enrolled. Retired Canadian athletes who met these criteria were eligible to participate if they had also graduated from a Canadian academic institution in the last two years with a diploma, degree or certificate.

Qualitative methods provided the most direct means for eliciting and recording the experiences of Canadian student-athlete experiences both in intercollegiate sport and academics during their stays in the United States. Their reasons for moving to Canadian college sports was a matter of particular interest. In total, nine in-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide to shape the interviews. The interviews were recorded using two electronic devices- an audio recorder and a mobile phone application. Transcription took place using a word processing platform. Transcripts were then uploaded to the NVivo software platform for analysis.

A narrative approach was utilized to complete this study. Narrative research provides a way to systematically code individual differences in the ways that participants tell stories about crucial events in their lives to understand the extent to which these create meaning and purpose (Grysmann & Lodi-Smith, 2019). Elliott (2005) elaborates on this and suggests that allowing respondents to provide narrative accounts of their lives and experiences can help to redress some of the power differentials inherent in the research enterprise and can provide good evidence about the everyday lives of research subjects and the meanings they attach to their experiences.

As a qualitative study that examined the experiences of members of a distinct population of student-athletes, the emphasis was placed on the collection and analysis of

stories and experiences. There is a defined maximum span to the career of a collegiate athlete of between four to five years. If the student-athlete completes this program as expected, then these four to five years can go by very quickly. If things don't proceed as planned, then a student-athlete's career may end much sooner. The demands of being a student-athlete are immense and can leave little time for deep thought and reflection. The participants were provided an opportunity to re-examine their experiences and consider the meaning of these through their involvement in this research project. Unlike quantitative research, there was no intention of seeking to generalize findings statistically. Small (2008) explains the differences between qualitative and quantitative research, noting that "most quantitative researchers employ the language of frequentist or classical statistics; qualitative researchers often employ the language of participant observation or the different language of in-depth interviewing" (p.1). A semi-structured interview format was used that allowed for fluid, uninterrupted dialogue. The use of a narrative approach facilitated these discussions and provided a means to systematically analyze the particular experiences of the nine student-athletes.

Rather than look at the nine interviews as one large sample, I approached the data as nine separate "cases". Small (2009) details the inappropriateness of "samples" in qualitative research and the advantages of working instead with "cases," even when these constitute cases of one. A difficulty that too often ensues is that of attempting to design qualitatively descriptive research using a sample logic which is drawn from quantitative approaches, that seek statistical representivity. With the focus of this study being on investigating the journey through the time spent in an intercollegiate athletics career in

the U.S. using the narratives individual student-athletes shared with the interviewer, the onus for this project moved away from the pursuit of statistical norms and being able to generalize data statistically. Rather, by viewing each of the interviews as an individual and complex case, these were independently analyzed without judgement as to whether or how they should fit in a data set. The shift in framework from “sample” to “case” facilitated accounting for the complexity of the experiences being detailed by each of the participants.

When thinking about the popular understandings of what the student-athlete experience likely involves as opposed to the reality that the student-athlete may face, the narrative approach allowed each participant to describe his or her own experiences and feelings in detail. By reconstructing their experiences through stories, each participant was able to paint a candid picture of their life as a student-athlete in the United States.

3.1 Participants

The following sections will outline participant selection criteria as well as provide character sketches of the participants.

3.1.1 Participant Selection

The recruitment procedure employed purposive sampling as participants had to meet very specific criteria (Etikan et.al, 2016). Purposive sampling should be used and is most effective when “one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within” (Tongco, 2007, p.147). Given the specific inclusion criteria required, potential participants were identified using publicly accessible information from past and present collegiate athletics rosters. There was a small pool of possible participants that

were targeted for recruitment. I personally recruited all participants with the assistance of varsity coaches and a varsity coordinator. The potential subjects were contacted to explain the nature of the study to be conducted and to gauge their interest in participating in it. Nine participants emerged from the potential participant pool of approximately 20 student-athletes that I was aware of. The purposive sampling method aligned with Small's (2009) use of "cases" as opposed to "samples". In effect, I was able to gain access to nine individual "cases" by utilizing purposive sampling.

3.2 Description of Participants

The participants included six males and three females, aged 19-30. They played a variety of sports including soccer (3), baseball (3), basketball (1), golf (1) and lacrosse (1). The participants came from across the governing bodies of U.S collegiate sports including NCAA Division I (3), NCAA Division II (1), NAIA (2) and the NJCAA (3).

The following brief biographic sketches will give the reader a better understanding of the participants. Note that actual names and individually identifying characteristics of the participants have been omitted throughout the thesis. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants.

- "Jessica" was a women's soccer player who secured a scholarship to a NCAA Division I school in the Mid-South of the United States. She was a recently retired athlete at the time of the interview.
- "Kendra" was a women's lacrosse player who secured a scholarship to a NCAA Division I school in the Northern United States. She was a recently retired athlete at the time of the interview.

- “Rosie” was a women’s soccer player who had verbally committed to a NCAA Division I school in the Southern States. In January of her grade twelve year, the coach who recruited her was terminated. When this happened, she decided to remain in Canada for her post-secondary education. She had a family member that played soccer at the institution that she went to school to. Her case was included in this study as she had lived the recruitment experience and worked tirelessly towards earning a college commitment, which she had in fact secured. She was a current Canadian student-athlete at the time of the interview.
- “Tom” was a men’s golfer at a NJCAA Division III school in the Southern United States. He was a current Canadian student-athlete at the time of the interview.
- “Jim” was a men’s soccer player at a NJCAA Division I school in the Central United States. He was a current Canadian student-athlete at the time of the interview.
- “Keith” was a men’s basketball player at a NJCAA Division II school in the Central United States. He was a current Canadian student-athlete at the time of the interview.
- “Dave” was a men’s baseball player at a NAIA school in the Northern United States. He was a recently retired athlete at the time of the interview.
- “Troy” was a men’s baseball player that went to a NCAA Division II school in the Northern United States. He was a recently retired athlete at the time of the interview.

- “Gabe” was a men’s baseball player that went to a NAIA school in the Central United States. While at his NAIA, he was a two-sport athlete that competed in both soccer and baseball. He was a recently retired athlete at the time of the interview.

3.3 Interviews

A semi-structured interview guide of twenty questions (See Appendix A) was developed and used throughout the interviews. The questions asked about demographic information (the part of the U.S. where they went to school), relationships with coaches and school officials and experiences. Each of the interviews was conducted face-to-face in a location convenient and comfortable for the participant. Interviews lasted between 25-60 minutes. The interviews were immediately transcribed verbatim.

Each interview was audio-recorded using a tape-recording device. A secondary device was also used to capture the interviews and ensure that there was not a glitch with the data collection. Participants were made aware that two devices were being used at the beginning of each interview and were asked if they had any objections and all agreed to being recorded. Additionally, participants were reminded that they could choose not to respond to questions or withdraw from the study at any time. Field notes were also kept during the interview process. It took approximately four months to complete the nine interviews.

3.4 Data Analysis

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim digitally using a computer as soon after the interview as possible. At the suggestion of a previous committee member,

NVivo software was used to splice and code the transcripts. After all transcripts were uploaded to NVivo, splicing and coding of the transcripts took place.

Open coding was used to analyze the data. Williams and Moser (2019) describe coding in qualitative research as being “comprised of processes that enable collected data to be assembled, categorized, and thematically sorted, providing an organized platform for the construction of meaning” (Williams & Moser, 2019, p.45). They also state that open coding is used to identify distinct concepts and themes for categorization. Further, Blair (2015) found that the open coding system helped develop a bottom-up approach that reflects key concepts found in the participant data. Common words, phrases and themes were identified by using open coding. Given my inexperience with coding, the open coding method worked well since it provided flexibility in the manner the data was analyzed. Coding provided the data with meaning. As the coding was completed, meaning units and subsequent themes emerged. Themes were derived by analyzing the coding that was produced and splitting information into buckets. The buckets, or themes, made the information manageable and easier to work with. The buckets provided the framework for analysis of the thesis.

Chapter 4: Becoming Involved in Youth Sports and the Journey to a Scholarship

Over the course of the nine interviews there was much information offered about individuals' experiences of being Canadian student-athletes in the U.S. collegiate sports system. To organize the data, it was classified with respect to the four periods that correlate with the career of a student athlete. These are discussed in the following order: "Becoming Involved in Youth Sports", "The Journey to a Scholarship", "Life as a Student-Athlete in the United States" and "Leaving the U.S. and Moving Back to Canada". Within each category, there are sub-categories that pertain to specific themes that emerged.

By reviewing this information in the chronological order through which these student-athletes' careers unfolded, we begin to get a sense of the layered trajectory of an athlete's journey from being a youth athlete to becoming a collegiate athlete, including the various decisions and experiences that are faced in the quest for a scholarship.

4.1 Becoming Involved in Youth Sports

The participants in this study experienced their first contact with sports at various points during their childhood. For some, exposure to sport happened at an early age. For instance, Rosie started playing soccer at the age of three. In contrast, some of the participants did not get involved in sports until much later. Keith had his first formal involvement with basketball in high school.

There are different levels of competition within youth sports in Canada. Ambitious young athletes will usually follow a progression from less competitive environments like "house league" to competitive levels such as "rep" or "club" play.

House league competition is open to all in the sense that players do not have to try out for a limited number of places on teams. Each family pays a registration fee and their child is subsequently placed on an age-appropriate team. House league sport is meant to be fun and inclusive for all participants. It is participation-based and provides a means for children of all talent levels to take part in sport. Generally, players get the opportunity to try different positions and figure out which they enjoy most. In contrast, “rep” or “club” sport is intended to be more competitive in nature. Players are selected through a series of tryouts with the unsuccessful being cut from the pool of those ‘trying out’ along the way. For example, a youth soccer organization may have twenty house league teams at an age group but only one rep team. The rep team allows athletes to refine their skills as the experience becomes more competitive in nature. Some participants started playing at a more competitive level quite early while others played only one or two seasons of club sports while in high school. This illustrates the various trajectories that athletes can take in earning scholarship opportunities. When asked about his basketball club sports experience, Keith commented “(I played) once in the ninth grade and I didn’t really play. I didn’t get a lot of minutes.” Despite this rather slow start to his club sports experience, Keith eventually went on to win a scholarship that took him to the U.S.

Some of the participants had excelled in their sport to a point where they were considered for selection and subsequently participated in provincial and national teams. Jessica was selected for the women’s provincial soccer team at age 14 and subsequently worked through the national team pool. She was an active member of her provincial team and was included in a pool of players considered for the junior national team. She spoke

of her experience candidly when she said, “A lot of us wanted to play for Team Canada. And I think again, you were expected to get a scholarship because how are you going to play on Team Canada if you’re not coming from some Div I school?” Similarly, Rosie was also an active member of the women’s provincial soccer program.

Illustrating that athletes develop at different rates, Kendra’s experience with the national lacrosse program² was somewhat different than those of Rosie or Jessica. Kendra spoke to this when she said,

I only played house league at the beginning. And then I got the invite to try out for the U19 Team Canada tryouts. I actually made it to the top fifty. But I wasn’t associated with any rep team at that point.

When asked to elaborate on her experience, she went on to say, “It was a big change and everyone was very surprised that I didn’t play rep at all. They would all ask where I was playing and I’d say house league (laugh).”

Gabe was successful in earning a roster spot on the men’s junior national soccer team. After playing in a large-scale international event with Team Canada, he signed a contract with a developmental academy. In youth soccer, developmental academies exist to provide what might be referred to as a streamlined foundation. These academies are aligned with a professional team and share some of the resources that the professional team possesses. Upon signing a developmental contract, youth soccer players are given the opportunity to train with coaches from the professional organization. There may or

² As per 2020 data, the Canadian Lacrosse Association has 80,000 active members. In reviewing the roster of the U19 women’s team, it appears that all members play in the US, mostly at the NCAA D1 level.

may not be a fee associated with being a member of one of these academies. There can be a handpicked main team where there is no fee required of players chosen for it.

Additionally, there can be regional teams where players pay to play. This developmental academy system provides a potential pathway to professional soccer, university scholarships and Canadian national teams. With the support of a developmental academy, Gabe signed a professional contract with a club in France. In speaking about his experience in France, he said “They sent me to France and I went for a month and I hated it because I just couldn’t see myself doing that.”

When asked to elaborate on their youth sports experiences, it emerged that some of the participants were multi-sport athletes throughout their early involvement in youth sports. Tom played baseball, hockey and golf while Kendra was involved in soccer, lacrosse and softball. Gabe played high-level baseball and soccer. Others focused on a single sport. The multi-sport athletes all referenced there being a time when they had to decide to pursue one sport. According to Kendra, “I actually started with soccer. And then went right into rep softball. And then switched to lacrosse because my gym teacher was the lacrosse coach. She saw potential in me I guess.”

4.2 The Journey to a Scholarship

The road to an athletic scholarship can take on various trajectories. For the five-star recruit, the offers may start coming in upon entering high school. Athletes that generate less attention may only end up with a handful of offers at most to pick from. The perceived standing and value of individual athletes can change nightly based on their performance. This is why college coaches will make an effort to see prospective student-

athlete perform multiple times. This gives them the opportunity to evaluate a player's abilities and potential on the basis of a more complete body of work as opposed to a single extraordinary (or very average) performance.

4.2.1 Am I Good Enough?

A common theme that emerged involved when the athletes felt they were “good enough” to make something of their sport and pursue further opportunities. Each of the athletes cited a particular experience or event that made them feel as if their dream could become a reality. For some, it was a culmination of several events. Dave explained,

I guess it was kind of, for me, it was more cumulative rather than one game. I was, you know, on the pitching staff for that team, I was, I had the least raw, the lowest level of raw talent- velocity, command, whatever. But I put up the best numbers.

Troy speaks to a similar experience:

Around when I was sixteen, I grew into my body. I was less awkward. I was tall and lanky for a while so my athleticism did not get a chance to catch-up until around that age. I started to become faster, stronger. I was able to do things that I wasn't doing in previous years.

For others, there was a single moment that stood out when they felt that they were closing in on their dreams. For Keith, it was an end of season all-star game in which he excelled. When asked about this experience, he commented,

I was elected to be in the all-star game and I won the dunk off [competition] that year at halftime of the all-star game. It was in front

of the largest crowd I've ever played in front of. That was my ok, you know, the pressure did not get to me. The moment wasn't too big for me.

Jim shared a similar experience:

When I was fifteen or sixteen, a scout from [the University of] Syracuse came, and I couldn't talk to him because I was too young. But he talked to my coach. My coach said he was interested in me. I knew I had what it takes; it was just a matter of finding the right place to go and getting to know the right people.

Many of the participants spoke about people who shaped their decisions and factors they considered as they developed as athletes. These influencers will be described in the next section.

4.2.2 Influencers

In general, a variety of factors influenced the participants' desire to pursue a scholarship. Some of these included their relationships with their club program and coaches, the culture of the youth sports organizations they came up in, and family influences.

At one point or another, every student-athlete who participated in the study was part of a club program. Club programs exist to drive development and competition. Each club program has its own vision, but a common thread between programs is to provide an outlet for athletes to continue to pursue opportunities. As a member of a club program, young Canadians are exposed to many of the elements of the United States sport system.

Travelling to the U.S. for tournaments and “showcases”³ becomes something that young athletes look forward to. Coaches use this as a way to test their teams against American competition that may be perceived to be stronger than that found in Canada. Tournaments and ‘showcases’ are also looked to as means for building team unity and exposing players to the next level of their sport. The notion that U.S. competition is stronger is not, however, always accurate. This popular belief is present for many reasons including the emphasis placed on U.S. amateur sports from a financial perspective and the attention amateur sports generates through digital mediums such as ESPN. Given the expectations of Canadian players and parents about the caliber of U.S. players and teams, Canadian teams relish the opportunity to compete against and beat U.S. competition.

Some U.S. events are large in scope and present an opportunity for young Canadians to be recruited by American schools. One such event is the Disney Soccer Showcase which takes place in Orlando, FL and draws players and teams from around the world. Rosie attended this event with her club team and talked about the planning experience behind it:

this trip: I remember in December, grade eight, he [the coach] was planning so that when we were in grade ten we’d be doing that really big Disney Showcase. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of it. It’s huge, for soccer at least. It always happens in December. I remember being

³ “Showcases” are events that bring college coaches and student-athletes together for the purpose of recruitment. Players are measured through a battery of tests and competitions. Many showcase events will also include a game. It is common for the players performance to be videotaped and be posted online along with a report of their results.

in grade eight planning for two years in advance. I was like, this is crazy.

Amongst the interviewees, there were mixed feelings about whether or not there was pressure placed upon them by their club programs to pursue scholarship opportunities. Overall, there was a sense of gratitude expressed concerning the experiences their affiliation with club sports provided.

On the one hand, there was a definite push from club programs. Kendra made it clear that the reason she played on the lacrosse team was to explore scholarship opportunities. For Rosie, it was apparent that her coach was trying to put his team members in the best position possible to be recruited. To illustrate her coach's initiative, Rosie remarked,

He'd be taking us over to the States in grade seven. That was when we first went. We were playing against teams a year older than us and two years older than us. From there, I remember him saying, he's like, 'these will be you girls when you are in grade twelve. You will all be going to the States.' That was his goal for us. He wanted each and every one of us to go to school in the States.

In contrast, many of the athletes felt there was no added pressure from their club program. When asked if he felt any pressure from his club program to explore U.S. opportunities, Dave remarked, "It was more kind of nonchalant where[as] other programs were known for drilling it into your head, you need to go down." These participants felt as if their club program was supportive of their dreams without being overbearing with

respect to expectations of attaining a scholarship. When Troy was asked whether he had felt pressure from his club team to seek a scholarship, he responded “Not at all. Not that it wasn’t an option. It was something that was if I wanted to pursue it was dependent on how much work I wanted to put in.” Another theme that emerged was that the sports culture an athlete was raised in influenced their post-secondary decision-making process. Gabe outlined this in his statement, “it was kind of something you just did.”

For some, family members played a large role in supporting and motivating an athlete to pursue a U.S. sports scholarship. In some cases, the athlete felt added pressure to live up to the expectations that their family had of them for fear of letting them down. When asked about this, Jessica responded with,

Ironically enough, I think a lot of it (pressure) came from my family. And so I think it was just said that I’m good at soccer and I’m going to get a scholarship. So I think I didn’t even honestly think whether I actually wanted it. It was just kind of, this is what was always going to happen.

Further into the interview, Jessica commented, “My dad was very, ‘you’re going to the States’ and my mom was very ‘I don’t want you to go to the States, I want you to stay here.’ It was a torn household.”

Keith came from a sport-centric family that included other siblings who were talented athletes. Given the success of his siblings, he felt an internal pressure to succeed. He outlined this pressure in his statement,

Even though I did not play (club basketball), I had a family background in basketball. When other people in my family were, you know, being prosperous and doing a lot of big things in this game, I felt pressured within myself that I kind of needed to follow-up.

Gratitude was expressed across the interviewees for the support that family members generally showed in providing the opportunity and resources to progress through the amateur sport system. Within the narratives that the participants provided there seemed to be a balance about the pressure placed on them externally as opposed to that which they put on themselves.

4.2.3 Deciding Between the United States and Canada

The decision to move away from home for post-secondary education can be a daunting one, especially with respect to the new responsibilities and commitments faced by student-athletes who venture away from home. In addition to attending school and playing sports, there are a number of life changes that take place. Being able to cook, clean, do your own laundry and generally take care of yourself can seem overwhelming for a young person. When we spoke about the prospects of staying in Canada for their post-secondary education, six of the athletes reported that they had applied to Canadian institutions. Their reasons for applying to schools in Canada were varied. Several of the athletes placed a high value on a Canadian education while others stated they were comfortable with the combination of academics and sport offered in this country. Jessica presented an interesting perspective. She noted, “I wasn’t even going to apply to Canadian school. My mom was the one that made me [apply to a Canadian school] just

as a back-up plan, just in case.” Overall, it appears that there was more attention paid to the perceived future sports experience as opposed to the likely educational experience. At the time, the driving factor in their post-secondary decisions appeared to revolve around sport and what it could do for them moving forward.

Ultimately, all but one of athletes interviewed for the study had landed in an athletic program in the U.S. at either a college or university. The exception (Rosie) had a candid story to tell about her experience. Initially, she had verbally committed to a NCAA Division One soccer school while she was in tenth grade. As time progressed and Rosie went through grade ten and eleven, she started to question the academic choices that might ensue from her earlier decision. She had not factored in the caliber of the academic programs offered at the institution to which she had made a verbal commitment. Admittedly, the chase for the “full ride” had, she explained, initially clouded her judgement of academic programs. A comment that really stood out to me was when she asked, “What am I going to do when four years are up at this school and I’m left with this degree or whatever they give me that I really can’t use?” In the end, Rosie cited three factors that led to her decision to stay in Canada:

1. In an email from the coach, she was informed her that she might not be able to get the full-ride scholarship she expected.
2. The coach emailed her and two other recruits in November of their senior year. He indicated that the coaching staff had over-recruited and that these three

recruits might be looking at a redshirt⁴ their freshman year. This contradicted what Rosie had been led to expect and took a toll on her emotionally.

3. The coach called her in January of her senior year to let her know he'd been fired and that the new coach, when in place, would be given her number and be in contact.

Rosie was distraught and in a panic. Given the timing of the coach's firing, her options to go to school in the U.S. were limited. Slowly, she began to look at Canadian options. One of her family members played at a Canadian college and Rosie knew the coaching staff at the college fairly well. She attended a few practices, found the team enjoyable, and committed to attending the college as a student-athlete.

The rest of the participants identified the various factors that led them to decide to attend an American institution as a student-athlete. Factors that emerged from these narratives included the opportunity factor related to competing in front of coaches and scouts with ties to the professional levels of their sport, relationships with the coaching staff, life experiences, the presence of former teammates at the school they would be attending, and the prospects of earning respect within their respective Canadian sports communities.

It would be foolish to dispute the fact that some segments of the U.S. collegiate sports system provide an athletic opportunity that is difficult to match in Canada. In North American professional sports, the "Big 4" revenue drivers include basketball,

⁴ Redshirt: a redshirt is a member of the team that is not on the official competition roster. They can practice with the team but not play.

baseball, football and hockey. Throughout these sports, the U.S. collegiate sports serve as a farm system for their respective professional counterparts in basketball, baseball and football. Although players can be drafted from across the globe, the vast majority of draftees come from the U.S. collegiate sports system and specifically, the NCAA. NCAA men's basketball and football are two cases that exemplify this. According to the NCAA Estimated Probability of Competing in Professional Athletics (2019), there were 60 draft picks in the 2018 NBA draft with 53 coming from the NCAA. This accounted for 86% of NBA draft picks coming from the NCAA. The 2018 NFL draft produced nearly a 100% rate with 255 of the 256 draft picks coming from the NCAA. Of the big four, the one sport where this pattern is not so prominent is in hockey. Of the 217 draft picks in the 2018 NHL entry draft, 65 (approximately 30%) came from the NCAA. This extends into the U.S. collegiate ranks where the level of competition is unquestionably greater across the board than it is in Canada.

This is not to deny that some Canadian schools might be able to compete with some of their American counterparts. The point, however, is that on average, the U.S. sports system has a greater talent pool to draw upon and more resources to pour into athletics (Tsitsos & Nixon, 2012). The 2019 Major League Baseball (MLB) draft is a good example. Overall, two Canadians who played at the post-secondary level in Canada were drafted. In contrast, twenty-three Canadians who played collegiately in the United States or were currently in their grade twelve year of high school and had signed with an American school for the fall of 2019 were drafted. The perception is that to be able to position oneself for the best opportunity possible in sport, one should play in the U.S.

This notion of the U.S. being the primary destination for student-athletes seeking athletic opportunity was also present throughout the interviews. Dave referenced this in an interesting way when he said

I guess what made the difference in choosing to initially go down to the States over staying back was just eyeballs. It was more people, I saw it as more people can see you in the States as opposed to Canada.

Further, when asked about the factors that led to him attend school in the U.S., Gabe said “opportunity, affordability, those were the two biggest...and experience.”

For many student-athletes, college is the first time in their lives that they have had to fend for themselves. A factor that emerged across multiple cases was the life experience that the student-athlete hoped to gain in moving away from home. There was a desire to get out on their own to experience different things and, to a point, “leave the nest”. Jim spoke of gaining independence and freedom by being on his own away from his parents. Gabe framed this in another way when he spoke of the factors that led him to his American school: “I wanted to move away from home. (Pause) I wanted to move, like I was a dumb teenager in my head, moving away farther carried more value in your sport.”

Many firsts go along with a student-athlete moving away from home. One of the deciding factors that emerged in the decision-making process was the presence of a former teammate at the school an athlete would be attending. It was evident that there was a comfort level present in being able to share new experiences with a person they already knew. Troy, Jim and Kendra signed at schools where a current or former

teammate was also attending. This can be a common occurrence, one of the outcomes of previous patterns of recruiting. A school will recruit a player from a program and when that player does well, this opens the door for recruiting more players from the same program. Kendra summarized the situation well when she said, “Two girls actually that went there, they’re a couple of years older than me, they...one went to my high school actually. So I knew her. That kind of helped knowing someone going to the school.”

Athletes may feel that they have earned a certain level of status or respect within their sports community after they’ve earned the opportunity to play collegiate sports in the U.S. This was especially prevalent with Keith. He displayed a tremendous sense of pride in what he had accomplished in going from being a fringe player on his team in ninth grade to earning a junior college scholarship:

Another big thing was being the worst on my team in the ninth grade. By the time I hit my thirteenth⁵ year, everybody that I played on that same team with didn’t have the opportunity that I did. I actually beat them out in terms of longevity. Just to say this is where he’s going and have them call me and say I’m proud of you, that was...helped push me. I wanted to not only continue to prove everybody wrong but to prove myself right.

In his opinion, the basketball community he grew up in was driven on the ideal of going to the U.S. and, in the process, gaining respect. “Nobody that I could remember

⁵ In Ontario, there were five years of high school until 2003. Since then, Ontario has moved to a four-year high school system. There are instances where students will elect to enroll for a fifth year for personal reasons.

looked forward to playing at a collegiate level in Canada because it was frowned upon. It wasn't a major accomplishment." Tom also spoke to gaining a sense of respect from the golf community. He witnessed other players from his area getting U.S. scholarships and wanted it for himself.

Strong ties can be built between the student-athlete and different coaches and administrators in the U.S. throughout the recruiting process. Jessica and Troy pointed to relationships that were forged with the respective coaches at the schools they signed with as a driving factor in committing to their American school. It is important to note however that these coaches are trained professionals who are skilled in facilitating the creation of these type of relationships and who excel in player recruitment. Their job is to attract the best possible athletes. Jessica valued the relationship she had built with the head coach. Troy spoke about stepping on campus and realizing that the whole situation, including the coach, was the right fit for him: "It wasn't until I got to stand on campus, meet some of the people that were around, meet the head coach himself, just the feel the overall feel felt very comfortable to me."

4.2.4 Visiting Campus

As part of the recruiting process, prospective student-athletes can tour various campuses on "official" or "unofficial" visits. This is an opportunity to step on-campus and get a sense of what the people, facilities, community and culture are like. Only Jessica, Kendra, Troy and Dave indicated that they had gone on a campus visit prior to enrolling at their school. Kendra, Dave and Troy paid the expenses associated with their visits whereas Jessica's visit was paid for by the institution. A coaching staff must be

selective about who they bring in on official visits given the financial resources that an institution expends in bringing an athlete in as well as the rules they must follow from their governing body. Those participants who had not made official or unofficial visits relied upon resources such as the internet to gain knowledge about the schools that they were interested in. Nonetheless, it appeared that the athletes who did not go on a visit were at a somewhat greater risk of not being as fully informed about the school that they were committing to as might otherwise have been the case. Without going on a visit, the athletes were relying on the feeling they received from the coaches whom they spoke to by phone or in person at showcase, or their respective club or high school games. They also relied upon the information they found online as opposed to the experience of visiting the school. Despite the fact that all of the participants in this study ended up coming home from their U.S. institutions prematurely, those that did go to visit before committing to a given school subsequently spent an average of 2.25 years at their institution compared to 1.25 years for those that did not go on a visit. Overall, four participants went on visits while four did not. Moreover, this extra year of experience had the potential to have broader-reaching impacts. From an athletic perspective, an extra year of development could positively shape future athletic experiences. The largest impact was likely to be felt in the life experience gained by these student-athletes over the course of this year.

For Kendra, Troy and Dave, going on a visit introduced the next stage of their lives and what they would be getting themselves into. For Jessica, the visit provided a blurred sense of what she would be living moving forward:

When I actually went on my visit and when I actually got there and lived there, it was like I didn't even know where I picked, it was night and day. The area where I went to school, the surrounding area was posh, was a little more high-end. However, where my school was [was] not. And it actually ranked really high, I think it was crime against women. Like top five or ten in the nation. And so when they took us around and did the recruiting trip I was like, 'this is a nice area.' I was looking at nice neighborhoods and my mom is thinking, 'Ok, this is like a nice place.' They [mom and dad] came on my recruiting trip. So everything they saw looked cool at first... I am crying that I'm leaving my family, they get there, and I'm like, 'where are we?' I was like this is...I don't remember any of this. This doesn't look like the recruiting trip. It was like, night and day and I was like what is happening? So I asked my coach that. And she goes, we have a route that we take the recruits on because we don't want them to see what it kind of looked like in certain parts here.

Jessica referenced that she did not feel safe on campus and felt it necessary to use services like the campus walk program to get around at night.

This brings forward an interesting point. On an official visit, coaches and administrators can heavily influence the perspective that the student-athlete walks away with. This is to say that they can highlight specific things and choose to neglect others. Overall, an unofficial self-funded visit might be an appealing option for student-athletes.

This provides a less structured visit where they would potentially be able to get a better sense of what the reality of a campus will be.

Jim, Keith, Tom and Gabe indicated that they did not make a campus visit prior to enrolling. This raises some concerns and suggests a gap in their understanding of the recruiting process and how things “should” work. It also raises questions about the naivety shown by these athletes and information they received from their club coaches about the recruiting process. It is unknown if any of them had discussions about the potential risks involved in electing to attend a school “sight unseen.” You start to ask what, if anything is gained in this situation. Could this be a tactic employed by the student-athlete to potentially hide any deficiencies in them from a performance standpoint? Alternatively, could it be a that the coaches pushing these youths to attend U.S. schools were doing so for their own gratification and to show that in some capacity, they were more accomplished in what they did than other coaches?

Chapter 5: Life as a Student-Athlete in the United States

The participants in this study had enrolled at institutions in the United States that were distributed across the Northern, Midwest and Southern States. They participated at various levels of collegiate sports including the NCAA (Division I and II), NAIA and NJCAA (Division II and III).

After years of working towards a common goal, each of the interviewees eagerly pursued the opportunity of being a student-athlete at an American institution. In reviewing the cases presented, it is helpful to consider the career of a student-athlete by breaking it into two segments: experiences that led to signing with a school and experiences that ensued once they attended chosen school. Each of the participants started their career in the U.S. and returned to Canada subsequently to continue their studies. With that in mind, the aim is to gain an understanding of what happened during their time as a student-athlete in the U.S. that resulted in the decision to forego this key part of the athletic dream they spent much of their lives working towards.

5.1 The Coaching Carousel

Two of the athletes arrived on campus to encounter an unexpected change. Troy and Kendra were both tasked with adjusting to a new head coach as the coach who had recruited them was not the coach they met when they arrived on-campus. The coach they had communicated with throughout the recruiting process had been terminated during the summer prior to their arrival. This change in coaching personnel presents incoming student-athletes with some distinct challenges. The months, sometimes years, of building a positive rapport with your future coach is suddenly lost and the comfort level the athlete

had expected to be present due to the relationship they had forged is gone. This can lead to other stresses associated with a feeling of entering into the unknown. Part of this unknown was a new head coach with their own ideas, values and ways of doing things. Depending on the timing of the coaching change, the new coach may inherit a roster of recruits that he or she did not select. There is, therefore, likely to be an evaluation period during which the new coach assesses and takes stock of the incoming athletic resources they are inheriting. As this inventory is taken, there is the opportunity for sudden changes to take place. There are numerous challenges facing both the coach and a new recruit. Having personally lived through this situation, I can attest that it can be quite unsettling. Troy spoke to this when he said, “So I had to create an entirely new relationship with a coach that had no hand in recruiting me whatsoever. I was just there”. He went on to say

It was like meeting a new boss for the first time. It was...I understood that I had to make a good impression from the start knowing that I wasn't, as college athletes would put it, I wasn't 'his guy,' someone that was recruited by him.

Kendra interpreted meeting her new coach as an opportunity for a fresh start:

Well, at the beginning it was different. She had to meet a completely new team. So even the new players didn't know who she was. So I guess it gave us a chance to prove ourselves. There was no prior opinions or anything of the old people or the new people coming in. So I guess it was a fresh start for everyone, which was interesting.

Overall, the experience of arriving on-campus to encounter a new coach was met with a positive mindset for one student-athlete with the other exhibiting concern.

5.2 First Impressions

When the student-athletes were asked about their first impressions upon arriving on-campus, a theme that emerged was that of having minimal expectations. Because many of the participants did not visit the campus before deciding to attend the university, they did not have specific expectations upon arrival. Some referred to this as going in “blind.” Tom described the experience as being awkward and tried to connect the dots, stating:

I mean the golf is going to be pretty much the same anywhere.

Everything else I didn't really have expectations for. It was all completely foreign to me. I remember the first couple of days I was there, and I was like I don't know if I can do this.

Troy had gone on a visit but subsequently still went in with an open mind. When asked about his first impressions, Troy remarked:

I didn't have this big delusion of what college sports really was in the States before going. It was a completely new experience for me regardless because the idea of being a college athlete didn't really set in until I was seventeen which for most people is relatively late.

Location was another salient factor that emerged in interviews with the student-athletes. Dave went to school in farm country in the Midwest while Kendra attended an

institution in a large city in the northern states. Both were born and raised in mid-sized, blue-collar places. The transition for each of them was difficult. There were distinct cultural changes to which they were forced to adapt to. Dave went to school in a place with limited resources, including institutional facilities and finances. As he put it:

The change in impression from that to the first visit was pretty significant because the school I went to was in farm country. It had very little money and very little...the facilities they had were decent, nice but there wasn't a lot of them.

This was a stark contrast to Kendra who went to school in a large, metropolitan area. She summarized her first impression by saying, "The campus itself was kind of intimidating being where it was and it was like caged in basically. There was only one entrance that you could get into (laughs). So yeah, it was a little intimidating at first."

Speaking about these factors prompted conversations about mixed feelings that emerged from being in new places and dealing with unfamiliar circumstances. Kendra was blunt in recalling that "It was kind of scary to be honest." Jessica was taken back by the culture prevalent at her school and the living conditions as opposed to what she had felt she was getting into by way of her recruiting visit. Others transitioned well. Keith felt that he received what he was told he would. His institution's coaching staff was accountable, making sure that he lived where they said he would, that he was enrolled in the academic program they spoke about, and that he had the opportunity to play his preferred position on the court. Troy recalled his mindset going into the experience and summarized it by saying:

I was going in relatively fresh and just taking it in as a new experience and when I got there it was...for me it was like an extension of high school because of the size of the college itself. It was a relatively smaller school. It couldn't have been more than 2,000 people at the time. Predominantly athletes. I felt relatively more than comfortable because it was such a family feel to the atmosphere.

5.3 Relationships

The participants in this study all travelled quite a distance away from home to attend school. This life transition made it essential to form new relationships with coaches, administrators, teammates and friends. Without immediate family support, these new relationships were developed to form a “new family” for each of the athletes. Accounts of the range of lived experiences emerged as the discussion turned to relationships. The two most prominent relationships that emerged were with coaches and teammates.

5.3.1 Player-Coach Relationship

When dealing with young collegiate athletes, the role of the coach can stretch across a broad spectrum including that of mentor, friend, parental figure, motivator and leader. On a case-by-case basis, each of the participants spoke candidly about their relationship with members of their coaching staff, specifically the head coach. This relationship emerged as an especially important one throughout the research. As such, we will review the relationship of each athlete with his or her coach.

Dave documented a fractured relationship with his coach from day one. The coach that he met on his recruiting trip seemed a completely different person than the person he subsequently interacted with daily. As he put it, “The coach that I saw at the visit was not the same coach I saw when I went down there.” He admitted that their relationship was downhill from day one. On Dave’s previous visit, the coach had come across as being fair and honest. Dave and his parents left feeling positive about his future prospects of playing for the coach. Prior to leaving Canada for post-secondary school, Dave received a phone call indicating that the scholarship money he was told he would receive was no longer available. During his first week on-campus he had another eye-opening experience,

It was about a week in and the coach had his first blow-up at everybody. It was kind of foreboding when I was talking to a senior who was also Canadian at the school and he kind of looked at me. He’s like, ‘You haven’t seen anything yet.’ It was kind of like the drill sergeant in *Full Metal Jacket* (a Hollywood movie released in 1987) where when it was kind of like, there was a lot of yelling. It was just no, there was no effort. He saw people, he saw his players as commodities.

He expressed his personal sense of serving as a “means to an end” for the coach. The power relationship between them was prevalent. This only got worse when Dave was involved in a couple of minor disciplinary issues for which his coach belittled him. He remembers feeling torn down as a human being. He elaborated on this feeling by saying,

I changed how I viewed myself because I thought it would help me get ahead with the person that had power over me. If I was talking to eighteen-year-old me again I guess that's the one thing I would say. Don't compromise your standards. Don't compromise your view of yourself.

Jessica shared a similar experience. She was frank in her assessment of her relationship with her coach saying, "I trusted him and when I got there it was like I didn't exist." She went on to speak about having been promised the world, yet being realistic in her expectations as a first-year player. She dove into the fact that she had based her decision to sign with the school on the rapport she felt had been built with the head coach. She explains a communication gap existing upon her arrival. She reflected on this when she said,

... so that kind of frustrated me because I wanted somebody that was approachable that I could talk to. I felt like I had a sergeant type of thing. I didn't like that. His personality to me didn't match [what it had previously seemed to be] once I got there and I didn't like that.

Keith played in a state where his older brother was a starter on the basketball team at a large college. In basketball, starters tend to play the bulk of the minutes in a game substituted for periodically by the reserve players. This is a contrast to a sport such as hockey where a team has four lines of players and utilizes each line to some degree. In basketball, there may be players on a team who dress for a game but do not play. Keith felt as though the coaches had thought they would be getting a duplicate of his brother

and that things changed when that was found to not be the case. He outlined how he felt they lost their patience with him: “It turned from starting drills to subbing in at the very end of practices. Not even games. They were getting my name wrong. Not to say that I cared but I obviously noticed.”

Tom’s preconceived notion was that he would be entering a highly structured environment that the coaches had their footprint on. He opened our conversation on this topic by saying

I’d say with the coaching of our team, I thought it was going to be more hands-on. Coach kind of let us do our own thing. Practice on our own time. It wasn’t really structured. We were left to do kind of our complete own thing.

Kendra and Tom shared similar experiences of feeling a need to forge a relationship with a new head coach. There were feelings of uneasiness and the need to prove oneself. These can be seen as normal feelings with any set of coaches and athletes except that in these two instances, the impact was magnified by a new coach being present.

Gabe had to work twice as hard to build rapport with his coaches as he was a two-sport athlete. He reported having a great relationship with his soccer coach. This may have been facilitated by the fact that the soccer coach was a fellow Canadian. On the baseball side of things, his head coach was an “old-school” coach who valued the need for “buying your time” as a young player and leaned towards giving the bulk of the playing time to older players. The concept of “buying your time” can work if you have a veteran team with good role models amongst the veteran athletes that can provide

learning opportunities for young players. Nevertheless, this framework can prove to be very difficult when there is a talented group of younger players who become disgruntled due to being buried on the depth chart behind older and less-talented players. Gabe found comfort in his assistant coaches, describing his relationship with the assistants when he noted: “They really helped me out and bought into me.” Similarly, Jim gravitated to the assistant coaches on his team. He pointed out that he felt the head coach was too nice. He also developed a large amount of respect for one assistant coach. In explaining his relationship with that assistant coach, he said, “He understood soccer a lot better than the actual head coach. And it ended up afterwards when the head coach, he actually quit and then the assistant took over.” Rosie detailed her experiences of a very positive relationship with the head coach who recruited her prior to his dismissal. She felt as if the coach was highly invested in her as a person, and she had a tremendous rapport with him.

5.3.2 Relationships with Teammates

A collegiate sport career can last as long as four or five years. Four years is the anticipated norm; however, a career can reach to five years if a player has a redshirt year. Over the course of those four to five years, many people meet teammates who become more than people they shared a jersey with. Teammates can become close friends and almost an extension of family, similar to brothers and sisters. These are also people that can be leaned on and learned from in times of transition.

The notion of coming together as a group with teammates was clearly shared by participants in my study. Tom was part of a golf team comprised of people from all over

the world. This made for a distinctive social experience and one that he viewed as being very cohesive:

I thought that was going to be a bit tougher, a bit more different because we had kids from Europe, kids from South America, a kid from New Zealand, a couple of kids [from] out of state. I thought it was going to be really strange and different for all these cultures and backgrounds to be cohesive but it was not.

Troy spoke about embracing his teammates and using them as motivation to continue when things look bleak. He summarized this by saying,

You're there for the person next to you at times. You're in the trenches with your teammates. You learn to push past things using other people, not just being individualistic the entire time you're there. You learn the concept of team and family, friends.

Gabe's journey through collegiate athletics as a two-sport athlete made it difficult for him to develop close relationships with teammates in either sport. He was a soccer player in soccer season and a baseball player during baseball season. These sports did not overlap which made for two distinct athletic groups that he had to find a way to function within. He felt disconnected on both sides.

5.4 Academics

Most of the participants felt that there was a good balance between academics and athletics at their institution. The emphasis that the coaching staff places upon the

importance of academics will permeate the rest of their program as some athletes respond well to challenges.

Gabe indicated that the coaches at his institution put an emphasis on being a student first, as they understood that you could not flunk classes and get to show up on the playing field the next day. Jessica spoke about the high academic standards her coaches had in place:

The good things I liked about my coach were if you didn't do your six hours of study hall, if you didn't pass a class, if you didn't do anything you were supposed to do student-wise, you actually ended up getting suspended off the team for extra time.

Similarly, Kendra summarized the student-athlete equation at her institution as "an equilibrium, a happy medium." In speaking to Troy, it was impressive to note the flexibility his coach gave players to keep things balanced both in the classroom and on the field. Troy said,

If there was a conflict of class schedule he would give us a different practice time. He actually, when you look back at it and put yourself in his shoes, went above and beyond the call because he opened up different practice slots for different people and had to make himself available at all times for us.

Keith's coaches made it abundantly clear that academics were of the utmost importance with the goal of transferring from a junior college to a four-year school. They emphasized that the goal should be to progress to a Division I school, and to do that,

there was a GPA to be maintained. Tom admitted to struggling academically. He passed one class his first semester, making him ineligible to compete athletically the second semester. He said that he did not like his classes and found them too general. He also pointed to an influx of first-generation college students at his institution. A particular quotation from his interview that stuck out was, "It didn't make me feel smart." He went on to say that he felt like he was redoing grade eleven and twelve. He was open about the frustration he felt academically and summarized it when he said, "I had a terrible GPA but I felt smarter than the teachers." Overall, he had a hard time staying motivated academically. This illustrated a gap in understanding on Tom's behalf. Additional research on academic programming and expectation may have alleviated this problem. In summary, there appeared to be value placed on education by the coaches. Whether this value was placed on simply being eligible to compete or not is unknown. Overall, the coaches had a firm grasp on the fact that they needed their athletes to perform in the classroom in order to be able to get them on the field. The coaches promoted academic achievement and provided what they were able to in the way of necessary resources to be successful in the classroom. One of the areas that we did not venture into was the pursuit of graduate or professional programs. It appeared that the participants were focused on the attainment of a diploma or undergraduate degree and had not let their thought venture too far into the future.

5.5 Challenges Experienced

There are significant challenges that will inevitably appear during the life transitions that result from a young person uprooting his or her life, acclimating

themselves to a new place, committing to being a student-athlete as part of a team, and fitting into the new relationships that develop through these experiences. The research participants were candid in speaking about these topics and others that emerged when reflecting upon the course of their experience in the American collegiate sport system. These will be broken into non-athletic and athletic challenges. In reviewing the data, most of the challenges faced came from non-athletic factors. Over time, different barriers for each athlete emerged. These barriers included integrating and acclimating to a new culture, and managing the enhanced workload and demands of staying focused and balancing academics and finances.

Whether you are an athlete or non-athlete, acclimating to a new place presents its own issues. Given the scope of the current research, the focus here is the student-athlete experience. Doing so in another country in a city or town much different from the one you grew up in only enhances the challenge. Dave, Jim, Tom and Kendra all spoke about the varying forms of culture shock that they faced. Both Tom and Jim referenced the type of food locally available as posing a challenge. Tom was used to home-cooked meals, fruit and vegetables. Instead, he was presented with meal options that were loaded with carbohydrates. Jim had vivid memories of his first experiences at his new school: “It was a really big culture shock when I got there. My first time getting into the place we went to a rodeo. I had no idea what was going on.” Elaborating on the issues that come with adjusting to a new culture, Kendra referenced her reluctance to travel off-campus, citing the challenges of being intimidated by the area she lived in and not having a vehicle to

get around. According to Dave, “Integrating myself to teammates and to people and being an outsider, that was, that took a lot longer than I thought.”

Another concern was being able to adapt to new demands while prioritizing things that were important. As student-athletes, the physical demands expected of oneself increase dramatically. In addition, there was an intricate balance to be found between athletics, academics and social life.

Dave talked about seeing teammates hurt themselves as they had it etched in their heads that they had no choice but to meet the demands placed on them by their coaches. He described some of these experiences when he said, “I’ve seen guys pass out from heat stroke because they won’t stop running. I’ve seen guys blow out their knees in the gym because they won’t stop squatting⁶ or whatever.” He admitted to becoming dependent on ibuprofen, “taking 10-12 pills a day.” These increased demands taken on as a student-athlete were summarized well by Troy when he spoke of the challenges he faced. The greatest of these challenges, he said,

was being completely self-aware. Having to take care of myself.

Having to make commitments and stand by my commitments. Being an adult. There are times when you get to be a student and you get to be a kid but you have to make commitments. You have to be at practice sometimes twice a day. And you have to get to class afterwards and you’re accountable for what your actions are. Being completely accountable for the fact that I had to be at everything, still maintaining a

⁶ “Squatting”: performing a squat exercise with weights.

good GPA and take care of myself while doing my own laundry, making sure I wasn't eating out of a vending machine every day. Some well-cooked meals, that sort of stuff.

This speaks to the overall lifestyle changes that take place between the period of youth to becoming a collegiate athlete. For Gabe, these lifestyle changes were magnified by being a two-sport athlete. He recounted the challenges he faced when he said:

I think lifestyle. You know, it is...on one hand, you can look at it as I had no life because it was soccer season and then baseball season. I never had an off-season all year long. And you can sit there and say I had no life, but then I sit there now and I look at it and I think it was my life. And I was ok with that.

Jim described how easy it was to become distracted, especially in the dorms. With schedules that are demanding both on and off the field, it's important that student-athletes maintain their focus to the best of their abilities. In Jim's opinion, it was very easy to get distracted. He noted, "There's so many distractions. You can hear something down the hall. There could be a party down the hall, party next door. You can party every single day." Without question, the biggest off-the-field challenge that Tom faced was the academic component of being a student-athlete. He paints a picture of having lost interest in his classes, becoming lazy and ultimately being deemed ineligible to compete during his second semester of his first year. There are a minimum number of classes that you must pass to maintain your athletic eligibility at the collegiate level. You are classified as

ineligible if you fail to meet this requirement. Tom spoke about his academic experiences openly:

I just stopped going to class at one point. I didn't like my classes. They were too general for me. I thought I was going into college to you know, narrow my focus. I was in a Business program. I thought I was going to be taking Business classes but there were two classes (laughs) that I took that I tell everybody about when I talk about that school. It was U.S. History and Appreciation of Music.

Canadian families have to fully consider the costs of international education and account for the variation in the exchange rate. Given that most student-athletes are not on full scholarships, they are obliged to pay expenses not covered by their scholarship funding with the financial resources of their Canadian family. There are also other costs that must be factored in, including flights to and from school, transportation while at school, spending money, clothing and incidentals. Keith spoke about the financial struggles he faced by virtue of not having a clear picture of the financial situation,

I had to work three jobs and I had to practice maybe once, twice a week. This is something that they never told me would be a difficulty.

If I had known, I would have said ok, we need to figure out a financial situation because my parents have multiple children. They can't afford to put all of their financial stability into one child.

Keith had quite a mountain to climb in balancing academics, athletics and part time work to be able to fund the experience. The participants spoke about missing home

and how difficult it was to move away from home. Jessica talked about her apprehension as she was getting ready to move away from home. This was magnified when she arrived on-campus,

Honestly, for me it was more the anxiety of not being home and I had already not wanted to go. So, I had a really poor experience through the National training program here. Before I even left to go to the States, I was already kind of getting anxious about the fact that I kind of wasn't enjoying playing anymore.

Jessica continued to experience anxiety as her first semester progressed. She spoke about a specific game that she played in as a substitute during her first year. During this game, she was watching the clock hoping for the game to end. Feelings of anxiousness overcame her. She was in a mindset where she doubted her ability and desire to play. Her mind had morphed from high-performance to survival mode. For Kendra, the cumulative experience of being away from home made her realize how much she missed home. She explained, "Being there and that experience, I just felt like I wanted to be closer to home. Yeah, there was more for me here (in Canada)."

There were challenges on the field as well. The most obvious of these was the increased level of competition. This was a challenge that the athletes embraced as they sought to elevate their level of play. As Dave said,

Athletically, you know, you go from bigger fish in a smaller pond to a smaller fish in a bigger pond. You play with players that are better than

you and it pushes you. That was a challenge but that was a challenge I loved and that's the whole reason I went down there.

Along with this increased level of competition was the pressure to perform at the highest of standards at all times. This started in practice sessions where there was an internal competition between teammates to compete with each other to earn playing time in games. This can bring out the best in players if a coaching staff fosters this atmosphere in a positive way. It can bring result in feelings of resentment and anger if handled improperly and pushed too far.

Athletic facilities were occasionally a challenge that had to be overcome. Tom's golf program had a unique facility set-up. As opposed to having a home course, golfers in his program utilized multiple courses. He explained the arrangements that his junior college had with various golf courses as posing a challenge to being able to practice and continue to get better at his sport.

This was probably one of the parts that I didn't expect. We played and practiced out of four different courses. One course we weren't allowed to use the driving range. At another we were only allowed three people hitting on the driving range at once and we were only allowed out on Monday's and Friday's. The one that we weren't allowed to use the range at we were only allowed to play on Tuesday's. And then the other two courses we had full use of until apparently, we ran over budget so I think we were paying this course to let us play.

5.6 Moments of Doubt

Certain doubts started to mount for the participants during their time in the U.S. collegiate sport system. Some of the challenges they faced were not exclusive or unique to the student-athletes. Nevertheless, these challenges were magnified by the life transitions they were going through which brought about feelings of doubt. For some, there were doubts right from the start while for others, these only resonated once they returned home.

Kendra had doubts right from the start of her U.S. collegiate career. Despite having been to her school on a visit, she indicated that things were vastly different when she arrived. She spoke to this when she said, “The whole atmosphere. Just being in a different country, being away from home. It all just hit me at once (laugh)”. Jessica was very forward about her doubts, stating, “I don’t think I believed in myself as much as other people believed in me.” She cited the absence of family as a major source of doubt, “I needed a parent almost. I’m eighteen years old, like, you’re throwing me to this world. I needed someone that trusted me that brought me here to kind of guide me, right? I don’t know.”

For Gabe and Keith, doubts were raised by their financial circumstances. At his end-of-year meeting, Keith’s coaches notified him that they would be reducing his scholarship from full to partial. At that point, he remembered thinking

What’s the point of coming back here next year? I redshirted that year, so I was a redshirt. I technically didn’t spend any years of eligibility. I

would have two after that. What's actually the point of me coming back if they're taking away my scholarship as a redshirt?

In Gabe's case, he suffered an injury that was going to limit his ability to compete and ultimately led to a reduction in his scholarship. He spoke of his experience:

And then when I got hurt, that's when it became clear that I didn't think I was going to be able to come back because I didn't think I'd be able to afford it. That's pretty much what it revolved around was money.

In contrast to the other participants, Jim only started doubting himself once he returned home after his second year at his junior college. Prior to leaving for home, he had signed an NLI with a NAIA school and was set to move forward in his athletic career. Upon returning home, he realized that everything had changed in his home life. He said

Then I got home and I don't know, everything felt different. I didn't know anything that was going on at home. I didn't know half the people. I hadn't been home in two years. Was not even home for Christmas or anything. I do not think I had thoughts until I came back. I kind of do want to go back but I wasn't going to go back.

It is not uncommon for Canadian student-athletes to only visit home once or twice a year. This is likely to be the complete opposite of a student that is not an athlete and may have the ability to return home as they wish. Tying into Kendra and Jessica's feelings of missing home, it appeared that Jim shared the same feelings but only realized it when he returned home.

5.7 If the Student-Athlete Could go Back and do Things Differently

Perspective affords people the opportunity to view the same scenario through different lenses as time passes. As time goes by, we may begin to look at things in a different light. There was considerable, in-depth discussion about what, if anything, the participants would have done differently had they been given the opportunity to go back in time to the point where they decided to leave their American schools.

Dave, Kendra and Jessica all indicated that they would have stayed at least one more year. They shared feelings of having possibly given up too quickly. As Jessica put it, “I feel like, sometimes I thought to myself maybe I gave up a little too quick. Maybe it could have been the anxiety. Maybe it could have been something I could have gotten past.” Each of them looked back on the situation they were in and wondered whether living it one year longer might have changed the outcome.

Some of the junior college participants spoke about not focusing on themselves enough. As previously noted, the junior college system works in two-year cycles with athletes intending to transfer to continue their academic and athletic pursuits at a four-year school. The competition to move on is fierce and Keith and Jim felt they could have done a better job of being more self-centered and taking care of their own needs first. It can be difficult to put oneself first as most young athletes are taught that the team comes first. In the junior college system, there is a fine line between team and personal success given the desired outcome of transferring to a larger school. Jim further explained this as follows: “Stay focused and be more selfish. More selfish on the soccer point-of-view. I realized that my second year. I did a lot better my second year because I was more

selfish. I knew JUCO was every man for themselves.” Keith gravitated towards the word “aggressive” instead of selfish but shared the same line of reasoning as Jim. He said,

I passed [the ball to teammates] a lot because I thought getting my guys involved was the right way to play basketball and ultimately would have made me a better player. It would have come back. But no, it’s JUCO. Everybody is trying to get, it’s like a dogfight. If I give you a piece of my...if, I’m a dog and I give you a piece of my chicken everybody else is going to eat the rest that I have. I wish I was a little bit more aggressive. A little more selfish in a good way.

Troy had a different perspective when looking back on his career in the U.S. collegiate sports system:

A lot of people ask if I didn’t get hurt would it change things for me. Honestly, I would like to think that my injury caused me to better myself as a person. It caused me to learn how to become more of a coach and a support system for my teammates. It taught me to work harder because in normal circumstances for those who get caught up in feeling sorry for themselves, end up being shipped off because they’re wasting a roster spot. In essence, I had to work harder to keep mine and it taught me valuable life skills on how to work through problems and not stay down on myself. I don’t know if I would have changed that.

He kept an open mind about the circumstances he faced and made the best of it. His comment shows that during this time, he experienced personal growth and within himself was able to get to a place where he made the most of his situation.

Chapter 6: Leaving the United States and Moving Back to Canada

At some point, each of the participants in this study ended their actual or planned career in the U.S. collegiate sports system prior to graduating with a diploma or degree. Rosie never made it fully into the system despite having a verbal commitment including a scholarship. The eight other participants spent varying lengths of time in the U.S. before returning home to continue their education in Canada. Gabe, Jessica, Kendra, Keith and Tom spent one year or less at their schools whereas Jim spent two years at junior college while Troy spent three years at school. Dave returned to Canada without a degree despite spending four years in the U.S.

There were a number of reasons that led them to come home early. Gabe and Troy returned due to injury. Kendra, Jessica and Jim all missed home enough that they did not want to stay any longer. Keith could no longer afford to stay in the U.S. Tom was the only student who left because he was not interested in his academic program. Finally, Dave made a relatively personal decision to return grounded in feeling that he was compromising himself and personal standards that he had set for himself to appease his head coach.

6.1 Becoming a Canadian Student-Athlete

Each of the participants also decided to look into the Canadian post-secondary system and find out whether or not they felt it might be a fit for them. Each participant spoke about the factors that led them to decide to go to a Canadian school which included: a familiarity with the school where they registered, their desire to be a “normal” student, and their assessment of the quality of education they would receive in Canada.

Familiarity was the strongest influencer for all the participants. After spending time away from home in a different country in a different education system, being familiar with what they were getting themselves into eased the transition back into the Canadian system.

Dave and Troy had prior relationships with coaches at their respective Canadian schools and these relationships made for an easier transition into the life of a Canadian student-athlete. Troy spoke about the support that came from knowing his coach,

There were people in place at the school that gave me a lot of good information and offered me a chance to keep playing baseball as well as gave me a good support system to you know...I wasn't trying to make the change on my own.

Both Jim and Gabe were recruited by Canadian institutions out of high school and circled back to those institutions when they returned to Canada. Jim explained his desire to attend his Canadian school:

Soccer was the main push because the school is really good at soccer. I knew a few people that went there. I knew a few people before I went there and I knew a few people that went there before that were top-notch players.

Rosie's situation different. She had an offer to attend an American institution in grade 10 but the coach that recruited her was terminated in January of her senior year. This resulted in her having to make a quick decision about her post-secondary education. She had a family member who previously attended the Canadian institution that she

eventually enrolled in. That relative put her in touch with the right people and they were able to expedite the application process for Rosie.

After committing many years to a sport, there can be a desire to be “normal.” This was the case for both Keith and Jessica and the reason why they enrolled at a Canadian school. Jessica outlined her mindset:

I said I’m going to go to school to be a normal student, not an athlete. I was not going to play sports. That didn’t work out. It didn’t even last. So I just said I wasn’t going to play sports. I just want to go to school and see what it’s like. Go to class, go to parties, like I didn’t get to do any of that in high school because every weekend I had Provincials or Nationals or Club. My schedule was always packed. I wanted to see what it was like to not have the extra responsibilities on my plate.

Keith admitted to not having any expectations for himself when he entered the Canadian education system. His intention was to go to school and play basketball for fun. Nevertheless, neither athlete could stay away from their sports. Jessica met someone at school who found out about her past as a NCAA soccer player. This person convinced Jessica that the sporting culture at her school was different and offered to put her in contact with the coaches. The coaches were unfamiliar with her and asked for a resume. The coaches were impressed with the resume and she joined the team and eventually became a captain. Keith had a similar experience “I ended up playing basketball, fell right back in love with it and we actually won a championship. That just steered me...that just brought me right back. The game naturally pulled me right back in.”

Tom and Dave wanted to be sure that they were registering in an academic program that was a fit for them. Dave was close to graduating from his U.S. school when he returned. Despite this, he indicated that he didn't like the program he was in: "I boil it down to the right fit and the right time." Likewise, Tom was looking for something different. After losing interest in general education classes, he wanted to focus on a specific area of interest in Canada. He went on to explain:

I think I was looking for the exact opposite from what I was currently at when I did enroll. It was the very general and I wanted to get really narrowed in. I thought I wanted to do something in the golf industry.

He found a fit for himself in Canada at an institution that had a golf management program.

6.2 If Only I had Known

One of the topics discussed was the importance of the information that the participants wished they had prior to signing with their U.S. schools. This advice included going the junior college route in the U.S. in order to receive increased playing time as well as some of the realities that were subsequently learned during their time in the U.S. Each of the participants indicated that they had a much better understanding of themselves after their experience in the U.S. Whether good or bad, their experiences taught them life lessons and were instrumental in shaping their current identities. In Dave's case, he understood that he compromised his personal values to conform to the wishes of a leader. In a very reflective moment, he stated "Because of the experience I

had, I changed how I viewed myself because I thought it would help me get ahead with the person that had power over me.”

Looking back, Jessica wished she had been asked what she actually wanted from her experience. She reflected on why she chased a scholarship as well as the anxiety and hesitation she felt in moving away from home. She went on to say,

So, I wish that someone maybe sat down and asked what’s your goal?

What’s the whole point of getting this? And I think, maybe like anything else, I would’ve liked real people that went to school in the States to sit down and talk to us about it.

Troy spoke about the personal growth he experienced and the desire for someone to tell him that the experience he was going to undertake was about much more than baseball.

In retrospect, if someone would have told me (pause) going to school in the States had nothing to do with, not nothing to do, but wasn’t entirely revolved around being an athlete but it’s a big stepping stone to growing as a person. It would have helped me understand what I was preparing for more than anything. You learn a lot of valuable life skills.

Gabe expressed a desire for someone to have shared with him the merits of going to a junior college prior to a four-year school. He admits to discounting junior college scholarship offers out of high school. After educating himself and learning about the two-year system, he wished someone had given him the advice to consider JUCO’s. Rosie and Tom indicated that they wished someone had told them to consider Canadian options more seriously out of high school. Rosie shared her perspective when she said,

I wish I could go back in time and tell myself that like, you can get a scholarship still. But make it to a school in Canada and be thankful for the education that Canada has and is willing to give students.

After experiencing collegiate sport on both sides of the border, Tom had this to share:

I just don't think I was mature enough at the time to handle that kind of set-up. That may have been the biggest flaw. I'd say the one word of advice I wish I had received was that Canadian schools can still compete with U.S. schools.

6.3 Paying it Forward

Each interview concluded with a discussion about what advice the interviewee had to offer Canadian student-athletes given their own personal experiences. This provided an opportunity for the speaker to come full circle by reflecting upon their experience and pinpointing one thing that they could offer the community of young Canadian athletes.

Most of the participants shared a common message – do your research. They emphasized the importance of getting as much information as possible about the school and sports program being considered. Dave mentioned trying to get in touch with former players to gain a sense of what their experiences had been like. Jim spoke of the value of visiting schools to really get a sense of what they are like. Although Jessica did visit, she recommended renting a vehicle to better explore the surrounding community as a whole rather than just focusing on the campus. Overall, there was a shared sentiment that

athletes and families should exhaust every informational resource possible prior to making a decision.

Keith raised a tough question that he felt every Canadian student-athlete should ask themselves: namely, “Am I good enough?” Along this line of thinking, Troy spoke to the importance of being comfortable in your decisions and not overshooting your estimate of where you belong. He elaborated:

The best choice I ever made was to choose a comfortable feel over...because I also understood that if you're as good as you think you are at what you do you could play in Alaska. If after two years I think I'm better than what this school has to offer me, there are steps to find a bigger school and go from there if you're that good. I would say start smaller, be safe. Start smaller, work your way up. There is always room to go up. The backwards step is always a lot harder of a fall.

Gabe outlined three pillars to finding a fit in the U.S.: financial, academic and athletic. He provided some insight into each of these and tied them together:

It has to be a financial situation that's not going to put your family in extreme debt. It has to be an athletic situation that's going to benefit you as an athlete. And it has to be an academic situation that's going to benefit you now and down the road. If you can't check off all three of those things, you need to evaluate why you're doing this.

There was an emphasis placed on doing things for the right reasons and weighing the current opportunity with future goals and the realities of the workforce after college.

Rosie talked about making sure that your decision is based on more than simply sport. She referenced people she knew who played at the NCAA Division I level for four years and then came back to Canada only to have to sort out their lives. Jessica openly shared her opinion in saying, “You can go to the States and get your degree, but are you going to be able to come back and get a real job?” Kendra shared a similar stance:

I would say if your program is offered here and sport at the same school, I’d say probably best that you stay here. It is just not...like I said, it’s not really worth it anymore. Especially with the U.S. dollar. You need to be careful of if your [academic] program transfers to Canada.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The field of study that looks at the motivations that inspire student-athletes to earn an athletic scholarship is extensive (Ali, 2014; Bale, 1991; Boucher, 2017; Medic, 2003). When you look at the opposite side of the spectrum, research conducted on Canadian student-athletes who attain an American athletic scholarship but return home prior to completing their degree, published findings are comparatively sparse. Indeed, relatively little has been written about this specific subset of the student-athlete demographic namely Canadian student-athletes who return prior to completing a degree. The purpose of this study was to examine the factors at work when Canadian student-athletes return home from the U.S. without completing their degree. Overall, this experience is a sensitive narrative to discuss. This is understandable, given the time, effort and commitment that went into reaching the goal of becoming a U.S. college athlete. Part of the composite narrative that emerged also focused upon the logistics of entering the unknown. Transitioning to become a post-secondary learner, whether an athlete or not, is full of its own challenges. But there were a number of other more specific challenges experienced by the student-athletes who participated in this study. The least of these was how little they were able to learn beforehand about what might go wrong in taking up an apparently prestigious opportunity to “go South” as a student-athlete.

7.1 Unpopular Narrative to Discuss

The personal narratives of those who return home without a degree are not widely shared, let alone made available to the general public. Understandably, student-athletes are hesitant to discuss personal experiences which might be viewed by some as having

fallen short of what was expected. The personal investment that goes into earning a scholarship can be enormous in terms of time, commitment and financial resources. Upon earning a scholarship, the student-athlete and his or her family likely feel a sense of accomplishment. Much has been written about the quest for the American athletic scholarship by Canadian student-athletes (Bale, 1991; Dyck, 2010; Gilgunn, 2010). Much less has been written about why things don't go as planned. Miller (2013) initially wished to examine this subset of Canadian student-athlete in his study. He pivoted away from interviewing this type of participant due to the difficulty he had in securing participants. In the end, he moved his study from the experiences and narratives of black Canadian basketball student-athletes who hadn't completed their degree to those who had. Ali (2014) provides some further context into the lives of Canadian athletes who did not complete their degree and returned home before exhausting their eligibility with some who did. Nonetheless, there remains a substantial gap in this topic which presents opportunities for future research. The challenge will be for researchers to continue to seek access to participants who might be prepared to speak about their experiences. Overall, it is a highly significant topic that includes information which needs to be made available to Canadian student-athletes, their parents, and youth sport coaches.

7.2 Entering the Unknown

On the surface, it appears that young athletes were being groomed from an early stage of their involvement in youth sports for an opportunity to become scholarship recipients. As I moved through this research and examined the layers of the scholarship-attainment process, it became clear that there were instances where the participants and

members of their respective support groups were naïve about the realities that they might encounter in the U.S. They knew very little about collegiate athletics in the U.S. and what they were getting themselves into.

For some, the athletic scholarship is a reward for reaching the next step in the journey. It is as if the journey has pre-determined benchmarks that are to be met in order to be deemed successful (Falls, 2009). Jessica remarked that, “A lot of us wanted to play for Team Canada. And I think again, you were expected to get a scholarship because how are you going to play on Team Canada if you’re not coming from some Div I school?” In some cases, the student-athletes overlooked what moving away from home to another country to pursue a collegiate sport entailed. This life-changing experience that might be expected to shape the meaning and purpose of the rest of a person’s life was being taken for granted. The winning of an athletic scholarship was of utmost importance. All the other things that would go into making the experience of being a student-athlete worthwhile were seldom considered.

Part of the willingness to take on the unknown may come from the prestige placed on becoming an athletic scholarship recipient. Rosie references her coach telling her from a young age that she too would be a scholarship recipient. She said, “That was his goal for us. He wanted each and every one of us to go to school in the States.” After hearing this over and over, it would be natural to begin to believe that obtaining a scholarship was what you were set out to do, whether you actually felt this way or not. As framed by Gilgunn (2010, p.58), “American college sport can be the pinnacle of an amateur athletic career.” Coaches and support networks (including parents, siblings, friends, and fellow

athletes) can have a tremendous amount of influence on potential scholarship recipients. In looking back, it doesn't appear that the student-athletes were often, if ever, asked what they wanted from their amateur sports careers. In general, it was assumed that they wanted to become collegiate athletes and thus were directed to do the things that collegiate athletes should do in order to get noticed and to obtain an athletic scholarship.

7.3 Not Going on a Campus Visit Increased the Unknown

If a small investment gave you the comfort of knowing what the next four to five years of your life could look like, would you make it a priority? Aside from the financial aspect, taking a campus visit is a trip that can be coordinated rather easily by a student-athlete. Despite this, only a handful of the participants went on such a visit. Regardless, it appears that a campus visit should be a best practice to follow. For some, this may have been due to not having the trip financed as an official school-sponsored visit and not having the financial resources to fund the visit on their own. Yet for others, this could have been a complete oversight or even related to not wanting to tarnish their sense of what the reality of an athletic scholarship was supposed to be. Overall, the data suggests that financing an unofficial visit, if at all possible, would be in the long-term best interest of any prospective Canadian student-athlete who is considering signing with a U.S. school. Being afforded an inside look at the community and culture on their respective campuses may have been an eye-opener for the participants involved in my study that did not go on a visit.

By going on a visit, the student-athlete would simply be following suit with many of their non-athletic peers who attend campus tours. Hubbard (1999) outlines how the

parents of a female African-American student took their daughter on multiple campus visits to find the best school for her. In committing to a visit, whether official or unofficial, the athlete gains a better understanding of the campus and a sense of what they may be getting themselves into. Overall, it gives them the opportunity to set foot on-campus and get a feel of whether it is or is not a fit for them. Given what is at stake, this seems a prudent action to take. Making a mistake in deciding where to go to school may cost the student-athlete money, academic standing and wasted athletic eligibility. Given the rarity of the full-ride scholarship, making a mistake of this magnitude can cost a family a considerable sum of money. According to Gilgunn, “it would be less expensive for families if their children stayed in Canada to attend university even without any financial assistance from scholarships” (Gilgunn, 2010, p. 60).

7.4 The Player-Coach Relationship

Amateur athletes progress through their respective sport system under the tutelage and guidance of a variety of coaches. Within youth sports, the majority of these coaches are volunteers. At the very early age groups, many of the coaches are parent volunteers. These parents provide a meaningful adult figure for young people to look up to. Paid coaches may enter the picture as the young person progresses through their amateur career and enters the club system. As opposed to volunteer coaches, paid coaches will have additional expectations placed on them. These can include the amount of time they are expected to be involved with their athletes, creating training programs both on and off the field, as well as beginning to prepare the amateur athlete for a potential venture into the world of collegiate sports. These coaches are paid in the form of registration fees by

families to clubs. The expectations of the coaches are partially informed by the clubs themselves while also being influenced by the families paying the fees. Overall, the emphasis at the club level is often somewhat less on winning and more about individual player development. This can make for a fundamental conflict in expectations that is slow to evolve with student-athletes who go on to intercollegiate athletics. That your coaches' livelihoods are based primarily on wins and losses may only surface for the first time in college.

The collegiate sports industry is driven by the concept of winning. Greenberg summarized this well when he said "coaching is a tenuous position in a very fragile world" (Greenberg, 1992, p. 103). The job security of a coach can be directly attributed to their record of performance. Holmes (2011) dove into this by examining the dismissals of college football head coaches from 1983 to 2006. If the performance of their team begins to suffer, the mentality of a collegiate coach can begin to change. Tied to this are the expectations a coach, in turn, has of his or her players. In consequence, a student-athlete's worth may drop in the eyes of a coach based on the most recent performance. What might begin as a coach deflecting responsibility for their own performance issues can become a genuine problem from the standpoint of the student-athlete. This was what seemed to have happened in Dave's case. His relationship with his coach changed dramatically over the time he spent at his U.S. school. The coach went from being warm and welcoming to stern and demanding. Dave felt his own self-worth was becoming tied to what his coach thought of him, making for a very difficult situation for him to navigate. Keith also spoke of a complicated relationship with his head coach. Keith's

arrival on-campus was met with optimism from his coach and high hopes for what he could bring to his basketball program. For Keith, the realities of being a student-athlete hit hard. The time commitments and financial strain were real and unanticipated. Despite these inescapable realities, the expectations of his coach did not change. The player-coach relationship eroded through this process. Keith recalls going from getting starting reps to more limited action to nearly no action in practice.

Given the competing priorities coaches are faced with (Greenberg, 1992) and the fact that their livelihoods are on the line, a student-athlete is not only under the microscope but also expected to fit in to their coach's system and learn to conduct themselves within it. The student-athlete's options are limited should things not work out as expected. The most severe consequence would be that the student-athlete has their athletic scholarship removed by the head coach. Alternately, the student-athlete might decide to transfer institutions. The practice of transferring comes with many hoops to jump through both academically and athletically. This process may cost an athlete a substantial period of limited eligibility to compete and also have a significant impact on their academic program as not all courses will transfer from one institution to the next.

At some point after a student-athlete arrives on a college campus, the reality begins to set in that all members of a team, including the athletes and coaches, are replaceable. No one person is bigger than the system or protected from its demands. This realization sets in at different times for different student-athletes. I've witnessed this reality set in at various points in the Fall semester when the team dorm begins to thin out

as teammates decide to withdraw from school to return home. This can also become more readily apparent when a coach is terminated part-way through a semester.

It may be that the player-coach relationship is just the most readily visible element of a larger athletic system that's hard to understand. This relationship is just one part of the business of collegiate sports that we are asking eighteen and nineteen-year-old athletes to figure out while living inside of the system and to navigate when they are immersed within it.

7.5 Demands

The level of competition prevalent at the collegiate level is unmatched for the young people that enter this athletic world, specifically for Canadian student-athletes. Should a Canadian have the opportunity to “go South”, chances are they are amongst the top handful of athletic performers in their club program. The talent level that awaits them upon their arrival on campus in the U.S. is unlikely to be like anything they have witnessed previously. Couple this with the “minimal expectations” that the participants in this study noted they had about what to expect and therein lies a complete misunderstanding of what they would be getting themselves into.

From the first practice onward, competition is fierce to be able to get on the field and represent your institution. A substantial amount of time and effort must go into maintaining your “status” on a team. This goes well beyond attending regularly scheduled practices and team events. Student-athletes are expected to participate in comprehensive weightlifting programs and put in extra work before and after scheduled practices. “Living in the weight room” becomes a badge of honor. All of these

expectations come to bear before the academic component of being a student-athlete is even taken into consideration. Classes, studying and study hall are all common elements in the life of a collegiate athlete. Further, there is going to be some aspect of a social life that every college student craves. The number of demands placed on a student-athlete can be staggering. Boucher (2017) outlined how international swimmers are confronted by these demands and attempt to adapt. Overall, whether student-athletes learn to cope with these competing priorities can be the deciding factor in whether or not they have a successful collegiate career.

For Tom, the message became clear – only the strong survive. He and his teammates would compete in practice rounds on the golf course to determine which members of the team would get to represent his college in intercollegiate play. Dave referenced being pushed by the increased level of competition and embracing the new challenge. The off-the-field demands can also start to mount. As Jim said, “There are so many distractions.” Depending on the type of school that an athlete goes to, their celebrity can grow within their institution. It may feel as if they need to be all things to all people. Learning to be a student, a high-performance athlete, and to balance their newly found celebrity and image is quite an undertaking. The dual demands of school and sports can lead to increased stress levels (Pritchard, 2005). Pritchard identifies stressors that are prevalent in the first-year student-athlete experience and compared them to the experience of non-athletes. The stressors included relationships, academics, finances, physical and mental health, body satisfaction and social. Pritchard reported that overall, student-athletes indicated higher stress levels than non-athletes in dealing with conflicts

with a boyfriend's or girlfriend's family, having a lot of responsibilities, not getting enough time for sleep and having heavy extracurricular demands. Conversely, non-athletes reported higher stress levels in areas such as financial burdens, making important decisions about their education, social isolation, being ignored and being dissatisfied with their physical appearance.

7.6 Opportunities for Canadian Institutions

Canadian institutions can begin to position themselves as a viable alternative to “going South” by being open, honest and transparent with student-athletes. Given the stories of tainted narratives from across the border, there is likely an opportunity to be had by being up front about what individuals should expect throughout the student-athlete experience. The way Canadian schools identify with their brand is important. By putting forth the effort to provide a good athletic product that is sufficiently resourced while emphasizing the overlying importance of academics, Canadian institutions can capitalize on a niche that exists in the market. Capitalizing on this would mean truly embracing the term “student-athlete” and highlighting the importance of both academics and athletics in the post-secondary life cycle. This could be an attractive contrast to some American institutions that sell the athletic experience while downplaying academics, using class time as a mechanism to maintain athletic eligibility.

Overall, six of the nine participants indicated that they had considered and applied to Canadian post-secondary institutions before making the decision to go to the U.S. The reasons for applying to Canadian schools were varied. It was a back-up plan for some, while others valued what a Canadian education could do for them. Overall, the

participants were persuaded by the “athlete-student” mindset as opposed to that of the “student-athlete”. The opportunity to see what sport could be a vehicle for in their futures drove the athletes toward the U.S. route.

Three of the participants indicated that they would have liked to have given themselves another year in the U.S. before returning home. This ties back to the fact that these young people were entering the unknown and didn’t have a good sense of what demands that were going to be challenged with.

Upon leaving the U.S. intercollegiate sport system, the participants appeared to have the same view of the Canadian system in being a back-up with an educational appeal. With each student-athlete having experienced the U.S. model, it appeared that despite viewing the Canadian system in the same light, they believed that they were now a better fit for this system. It was believed that the Canadian system provided familiarity and an opportunity for them to be “normal.”

Canadian institutions can take a holistic approach at targeting student-athletes by marketing their athletic programs as a key cog in the post-secondary experience and a mechanism for future success in post-secondary and beyond. There is an active and engaged audience that is listening on the other end.

7.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the seldom researched scenario that unfolds when a Canadian student-athlete attains a U.S. athletic scholarship but returns home to Canada prior to exhausting their athletic eligibility and completing their diploma or degree. The framework of this study was grounded in reviewing each participant as

their own individual case. Due to the sensitivities that may be present in recounting these experiences, it is understandable that this is an unpopular narrative to discuss. The findings suggest the student-athletes found themselves entering the unknown. At times, it appeared that they had a romanticized understanding of what the experience would be like. The unknown was further magnified by not going through the step of taking a campus visit. Best practice would be to go on a visit-- whether official or unofficial-- despite the fact that it may not always tell the whole truth.

One of the prominent features of this study is that the player-coach relationship is multi-layered and can be very difficult to understand. Coaches are a part of the business of college sports. This is a business that the participants did not appear to have a fulsome understanding of. There were increasing demands of the student-athletes on and off the field which led to anxiety and additional stress.

This study explored the individual narratives involved in the specificities of American athletic scholarships pursued and obtained by young Canadians. It was apparent that there was not one single roadmap to success or to disappointment. The new athletic and educational world that the student-athletes entered was far more complicated and less transparent than they had anticipated or been made to believe. Despite their disappointments and challenges, none of the student-athletes hung up their gear or their studies for good.

Despite the road blocks they encountered, none of the participants allowed the failures and challenges they faced to derail their futures. The student-athletes utilized their experiences to define new end goals. Traits that define the athletic mind set in

training and discipline skills afforded them the opportunity to pivot and redefine their plans. This resilience in the face of adversity is exemplified by the simple fact that no one really quit on themselves.

References

- National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (n.d) *About Us*. Retrieved from <https://www.naia.org/about/about-us>.
- Ali, A. E. (2014). *The fulfillment of Canadian student-athletes in the NCAA*. Electronic Theses and Dissertations. [Master's thesis, University of Windsor]. 5073. <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/5073>
- Bale, J. (1991). *The brawn drain: Foreign student-athletes in American universities*. University of Illinois Press.
- Barnes, D. (2008, January 15). NCAA decision may force CIS to rethink its policies. *Star-Phoenix*, p. 4.
- Beaudoin, C., Callary B. & Trudeau, F. (2015). Coaches' adoption and implementation of sport. *Canada's long-term athlete development model*. 5(3) 1-16.
DOI: 10.1177/2158244015595269
- Blair, E. (2015). A reflexive exploration of two qualitative data coding techniques. *Journal of Methods and Measurement in the Social Sciences*, 6 (1), 14-29.
- Boucher, M. (2017). *Thrown to the wolves: The obstacles and barriers of international student athletes prior to and during enrollment in American universities* [Masters thesis, Loyola University Chicago]. Loyola eCommons.
- Brown, G. (2012). Executive committee paves way for Simon Fraser to be NCAA's first international member. *NCAA News*, 3.
- Canadian Sport for Life (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.sportforlife.ca>

CB Players (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.cbplayers.com/team/Canada>

Cléménçon, J. (2014). *"I wouldn't change it": An exploration of the lived experiences of international student-athletes in Canadian interuniversity sport*. [Master's thesis, University of Windsor]. Electronic Theses and Dissertations. 5147.
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/5147>

College Board (2018, Oct 25). Trends in higher education reports Find Published Tuition and Fees in Grant Aid for Students Continue to Grow at Moderate Rates.
Retrieved from <http://www.collegeboard.org/>

Connell, C. (2007). International Educator. *Washington* 16 (5), 58-61.

Coudriet, C. (2019). The top 50 schools for international students 2019: Foreign enrollment is slowing, but it's not all trump. *Forbes.Com*, 1. Retrieved from
<http://search.ebscohost.com.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=bth&AN=134655757&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

Davis, T. M., & Institute of International Education, N. Y. N. (2000). *Open doors: Report on international educational exchange*. Retrieved from
<http://search.ebscohost.com.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=eric&AN=ED448658&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

National Junior College Athletic Association. (n.d). *Divisional structure*. Retrieved from
https://www.njcaa.org/member_colleges/Divisional_Structure

- Dyck, N. (2006). Athletic scholarships and the politics of child rearing in Canada. *Anthropological Notebooks*, 12(2), 65-78.
- Dyck, N. (2010). Going south: Canadians' engagement with American athletic scholarships. *Anthropology in Action*, 17(1), 41-54.
- Elliott, J. (2005). *Using narrative in social research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4. doi:10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11
- Falls, D. (2009). *Canadian student-athletes on the move: Narratives of transition through time and space*. (Master's Thesis). University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. Retrieved from <https://circle.ubc.ca/handle/2429/24172>
- Garcia, A (2018, March 7). *NCAA surpasses \$1 billion in revenue for first time*. CNN Business. Retrieved from <https://money.cnn.com/2018/03/07/news/companies/ncaa-revenue-billion/index.html>.
- Gilgun, M. (2010). 'Obviously it's worth it': The value of being a Canadian student athlete in the USA. *Anthropology in Action*, 17(1), 55-65.
- Greenberg, M. J. (1992). Representation of college coaches in contract negotiations. *Marq. Sports LJ*, 3, 101.
- Gryzman, A., & Lodi-Smith, J. (2018). Methods for conducting and publishing narrative research with undergraduates. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 2771.

- Holmes, P. (2011). Win or go home: Why college football coaches get fired. *Journal of Sports Economics*, 12(2), 157-178.
- Hubbard, L. (1999). College aspirations among low-income African American high school students: Gendered strategies for success. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 30(3), 363-383.
- James, C. E. (2003). Schooling, basketball and US scholarship aspirations of Canadian student athletes. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 6(2), 123-144.
- Jayanthi, N., Pinkham, C., Dugas, L., Patrick, B., & LaBella, C. (2013). Sports specialization in young athletes: Evidence-based recommendations. *Sports Health*, 5(3), 251-257.
- Long, M. (2014). SEC to distribute record \$309.6 million in revenue to members in 2013-14. *NCAA News*, 28. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=s3h&AN=96289459&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Malina, R. M. (2010). Early sport specialization: Roots, effectiveness, risks. *Current Sports Medicine Reports*, 9(6), 364–371. <https://doi-org.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/10.1249/JSR.0b013e3181fe3166>
- Mazzarol, T., & Soutar, G. N. (2002). “Push-pull” factors influencing international student destination choice. *International Journal of Educational Management*. 16 (2), 82-90.

Medic, N. (2003). *The effects of athletic scholarships on motivation in sport* [Masters thesis, Brock University]. Brock University Repository.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10464/2343>

Miller, D. (2013). *The post-game: Retrospectives of the experiences of Canadian Black student-athletes on US athletic scholarships* [Master's thesis, York University].

York Space Institutional Repository. <http://hdl.handle.net/10315/31946>

NCAA Recruiting Facts: College sports create a pathway to opportunity for student-athletes. (2018, March). National Collegiate Athletic Association. Retrieved from <https://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/Recruiting%20Fact%20Sheet%20WEB.pdf>.

NCAA Research (2019, April 3). *NCAA estimated probability of competing in professional athletics.* Retrieved from

https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/research/pro_beyond/2019RES_ProbabilityBeyondHSFiguresMethod.pdf

National Collegiate Athletic Association (n.d.) *NCAA international student-athletes.*

Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/future/international-student-athletes>

NCAA Research (2019, Oct). *Trends in the participation of international student-athletes in NCAA Divisions I and II.* Retrieved from

<http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/international-student-athlete-participation>

- Pennington, B. (2008). The scholarship divide. *New York Times*.
- Pritchard, M. (2005). Comparing sources of stress in college student athletes and non-athletes. *Athletic Insight: The Online Journal of Sports Psychology*, 5(1), 1-8.
- Rezania, D., & Gurney, R. (2014). Building successful student-athlete coach relationships: examining coaching practices and commitment to the coach. *SpringerPlus*, 3(1), 383.
- Simon Fraser University Athletics (n.d). Retrieved from <https://www.athletics.sfu.ca>
- Small, M. L. (2008). Lost in translation: How not to make qualitative research more scientific. *National Science Foundation Workshop on Qualitative Methods*.
- Small, M. L. (2009). How many cases do I need?' On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research. *Ethnography*, 10(1), 5-38.
- Statistics Canada (2018, Sept 5). *Tuition fees for degree programs, 2018/2019*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca> .
- Tongco, M. D. C. (2007). Purposive sampling as a tool for informant selection. *Ethnobotany Research and applications*, 5, 147-158.
- Tsitsos, W., & Nixon, H. L. (2012). The star wars arms race in college athletics: Coaches' pay and athletic program status. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 36(1), 68-88.
- University of British Columbia Athletics (n.d). Retrieved from <http://www.gothunderbirds.ca>

University of Victoria Varsity Athletics (n.d.). Retrieved from

<https://govikesgo.com/index.aspx>

Wells, S. (2012). Athletic aspirations: NCAA scholarships and Canadian athletes. In J.

Joseph, S. Darnell, & Y. Nakamura (Eds), *Race and sport in Canada: Intersecting inequalities* (265-290). Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.

Williams, M., & Moser, T. (2019). The art of coding and thematic exploration in

qualitative research. *International Management Review*, 15(1), 45–55. Retrieved

from <http://search.ebscohost.com.qe2a->

[proxy.mun.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=bth&AN=13584](http://search.ebscohost.com.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=bth&AN=13584)

[7332&site=ehost-live&scope=site](http://search.ebscohost.com.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=bth&AN=135847332&site=ehost-live&scope=site)

Won, S. (2017, October 18). Canadian universities have a game plan for wooing top

athletes. *Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from

[https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/canadian-university-](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/canadian-university-report/canadian-universities-have-a-game-plan-for-wooing-top-athletes/article36634827/)

[report/canadian-universities-have-a-game-plan-for-wooing-top-](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/canadian-university-report/canadian-universities-have-a-game-plan-for-wooing-top-athletes/article36634827/)

[athletes/article36634827/](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/canadian-university-report/canadian-universities-have-a-game-plan-for-wooing-top-athletes/article36634827/)

World University Ranking (2019, Sept 11). Best universities in Canada 2020. Retrieved

from <https://www.timeshighereducation.com>

Appendix A: The Interview Questions Guide

The following questions were part of the semi-structured interview guide:

1. What sport did you play which led to you attending a U.S. institution?
2. Which demographic region of the United States was your institution located in?
3. At what age did you start playing your sport?
4. Throughout your formal amateur playing days, say 16U-18U, did you play on a club team?
5. Looking back, do you feel there was pressure on you from your club program to pursue U.S. scholarship options? Explain.
6. Was there a point in time that really made you feel that you were talented enough to pursue a scholarship?
7. Did you consider Canadian sport/schooling options as well? Explain.
8. Ultimately, what were the factors that led you to deciding on attending your U.S. school?
9. If you think back to your initial impressions of your school and collegiate sport program, did your first impression match your preconceived notions of what the experience would be like? If not, what was different?
10. How long did you spend at your school?
11. What was your relationship like with your coaching staff? Were they the same or different when you were in their program as opposed to the recruiting process?
12. What were the biggest challenges you faced as a student-athlete at your institution?
13. Do you feel as if you were given the proper resources to succeed as a student-athlete at your institution?
14. Thinking about the student-athlete equation, do you feel as if there was more importance placed on being a student or athlete or do you feel as it was a balanced equation?
15. Was there a moment when you had a feeling that you may not continue your studies at your institution?
16. In retrospect, is there one piece of information or advice you wish you had known or been told prior to moving away from home to pursue the life of a student-athlete?
17. Looking back, is there anything you would change about your experience in the U.S.?
18. What led you to the decision to enroll at a Canadian post-secondary institution?
19. At the Canadian institution you attended, think about the student-athlete equation. Do you feel as if there was more importance placed on being a student or athlete or do you feel as it was a balanced equation?
20. If you could give Canadian athletes and parents that are currently considering U.S. schooling options one piece of advice, what would that be?