

## ***BEYOND DOLLARS AND CENTS: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF THE MOVE TO DIVISION I ON STUDENT-ATHLETES***

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Each university has established its academic philosophy guided by its mission statement. Similarly, within each university's athletic department is also a mission statement. The scope of this philosophy varies from school to school and division to division. Schools in the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Division III do not offer athletic scholarships to its athletes and simply do not place much emphasis on this facet of the university. On the other end of the spectrum is Division I. Division I schools offer many scholarships to its athletes and sometimes rely on their athletic departments for a significant source of revenue. Division II schools lie somewhere in the middle, offering some scholarships but generally not relying on revenue from their athletic events.

When a school considers a move from one division to another, the effects are felt throughout the university. The most common situation involves a school moving up from Division II to Division I. In this situation, the balance between increased expenses and increased earnings potential becomes the critical issue. Current and future students are often asked to pay more money to make their school's facilities on par with Division I standards through increased tuition and student fees. Further, most schools expect to see a significant deficit during their first few years as a Division I school due to an immediate rise in the number of scholarships, an increase in the number of sports (including coaches and equipment), and any necessary facility changes. This rapid increase in expenses can seriously impact the budgets of other departments throughout the university. The hope is that in the long run, these changes will lead to an increase in revenue for the athletic department from ticket sales, sponsorship sales, media rights fees, and alumni donations, an increase in public exposure for the university as well as its athletic department, and an increase in student enrollment (Orszag & Orszag, 2005).

However, lost amidst all of these changes is the effect that this move has on the athletes at the university at the time of the transition. These athletes are often asked to compete against superior competition, risk injury against more physically-imposing athletes, spend more time traveling than they otherwise would have, and have increased expectations in terms of practice and athletic performance. The players who will generally see the most significant changes are the football players. Not only are they subject to the aforementioned changes, they are also subject to increased pressure to perform. The effects on these athletes have yet to be examined; however, the impact on these athletes cannot be overlooked. This study focused on one athlete's experience playing college football for a university during a transition period from Division II to Division I.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

From an extensive review of literature, most of the existing research that discusses a university moving from one division to another focuses on the financial aspects of this decision. In Tomasini's (2005) investigation on economic differences associated with reclassification to NCAA Division I-AA (DI-AA), the author reported that member universities which reclassified from 1993 to 1999 failed to achieve significant differences in terms of

donations to the university, attendance at football games, incoming freshmen applications, and undergraduate enrollment in the first three years following the reclassification. In a more recent analysis of moving from Division II to Division I, Orszag and Orszag (2005) examined 20 schools that reclassified between 1994 and 2002 and found that the selected institutions experienced an average decrease of \$1.2 million in net revenue with institutional support and an average decrease of more than \$3 million when institutional support was excluded. Their report further revealed that schools that switched divisions did not experience a significant increase in enrollment or alumni donations.

In addition to the impact on university finances, there are other consequences for many different groups in switching from Division II to Division I such as the impact on the general student population, faculty and staffing issues, facility issues, as well as a variety of other details associated with such a transition. In a review of SUNY Buffalo's ascension to Division I-A (DI-A), Lords (1999) disputed the impression that a move to Division I-A would help attract more applicants, better faculty members, and more donations from alumni. In particular, Lords argued that the shift to Division I-A made it more difficult for students to get tickets to games, impeded major hiring and expansion plans, and even made the university unable to control its alumni. In Wong's (2002) more recent review on Buffalo's move to Division I, the author further confronted the necessity of Buffalo's \$4 million stadium renovation. As Wong commented in his article: "Thousands of empty seats. Eleven losses and no wins. Big-time college football wasn't supposed to be like this" (p. A55).

Despite the fact that the issue of division transition can be approached from the various perspectives above, these are exactly the types of data and research that this study is looking to avoid. In all of this, one group tends to get overlooked: the current student-athletes who were recruited to play Division II sports who are now playing in Division I. The impact on their experience cannot be ignored. Unfortunately, there is currently a dearth of literature that addresses the plight of these individuals.

## METHODOLOGY

### TYPE OF STUDY

Although gathering quantitative data on the overall performance (academic and athletic) and expectations (academic and athletic) on student-athletes would be a valuable complement to this research, this particular study used a biographical case study approach of one particular former student-athlete at the University (Creswell, 1998). This individual's perspective on the situation was invaluable as a 4-year varsity player and currently as a coach.

His ability to address some of the unique aspects of the move to Division I made doing a biographical study much more appealing. Assessing the overall mood and expectations of the team are hard to quantify in any other type of research. Further, gaining access to an adequate number of responses from student-athletes who competed during a transitional period at a school is a complicated task.

Although there are several types of biographical case studies, this research is considered a life history (Creswell, 1998). This research was not concerned with the entire life of the participant; instead, it was focused on his life during his time as an intercollegiate athlete and as a young assistant coach. Creswell stated that this approach "reports on an individual's life and how it reflects cultural themes of the society, personal themes, institutional themes, and social histories" (p. 49). The primary goal of this research was to identify these themes. The society being examined was the smaller society of an intercollegiate football team. What was the general mood of the team? How did the team dynamics change when the program moved to Division I? The personal themes were also important. How was this athlete along with his teammates impacted by the move to Division I? Finally, the institution changed during this time as well. What were the athlete's perceptions of the institutional themes during the drastic transition? Open-ended, biographical questions were the key to unlocking some of these answers.

## THEORY

This study was viewed using an interpretivist epistemology. Crotty (1998) stated that this is a theoretical perspective in which "social reality is regarded as the product of processes by which social actors together negotiate the meanings for actions and situations" (p. 11). He also stated, "The interpretivist approach looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (1998, p. 67). This research sought to do exactly that by examining the culture of a football team and trying to determine how the participant interpreted the changes that surround him.

The interview questions were developed with this approach in mind. The questions were designed to find not only what the changes were for the athletes but also the participant's interpretation of why and how these changes affected his teammates, coaches, other athletes, the athletic department, and the university. This approach was symbolic of why the study was done as qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research. We were not simply trying to find out what the changes were (something you might find using a quantitative approach that identifies common statistical measures of intercollegiate athletes, such as graduation rates, GPA, and number of hours spent with the team). Instead, this study sought out some of the intangible effects on the student-athlete, such as pride, success, enjoyment, injury, and frustration. These emotions and experiences were best examined using a qualitative design featuring in-depth interviews and examining the participant's interpretations of his social life-world.

## PARTICIPANTS

There was one participant for this biographical case study. He was a four-year varsity football player who was in the unique position of playing before and after the University changed its division status. Further enhancing his value as a participant in this particular study was his status as an assistant coach for the university's football team. He will be referred to as "Jim" throughout this study; however, a non-descript pseudonym is being used.

## SETTING

In an effort to enhance his memory and perhaps enable him to recount pertinent stories, the interview was held at the university's athletic facilities. This setting made him feel more comfortable and he spoke quite openly and freely about his experiences. He was also very visual in his responses, frequently pointing at various parts of the campus and athletic facilities. We did believe that this setting helped him to recall his experiences more vividly, which was a tremendous advantage to the interview.

## METHOD

Seidman (1998) stated that "interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of the behavior" (p. 4). Interviews can range from highly-structured to informal. Merriam (1998) claimed that most often "interviewing in qualitative investigations is more open-ended and less structured" (p. 74). The interview in this study was conducted using an interview guide (see Appendix); however, using a semi-structured interview format allowed us to respond to the "situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). Amis (2005) stated, "The utility of this type of interview is that there is a structure that ensures that certain themes will be covered and helps to develop questions as new themes emerge in the course of the interview" (p. 108). In addition to the interview being semi-structured, the interview questions were open-ended in nature in order to gather the facts of the situation in addition to the opinions, emotions, and experiences of this athlete (Yin, 2003).

This semi-structured interview lasted just over one hundred minutes. The interview length allowed the participant ample time to answer questions regarding the various aspects of a student-athlete's life. His answers were immediately transcribed and field notes were included throughout the course of the transcription process.

## ANALYSIS

Merriam (1998) stated that "the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection" (p. 163). The observations that were recorded during the transcription process represent this. These field notes represented our first effort to make sense of the statements that were made by the participant.

The data were examined using two methods of analysis. First, we used a narrative approach (Merriam, 1998). The interview transcript was essentially a story of this student-athlete's life over the course of his four years *as a player* (his first year as a red-shirt freshman was not included in the analysis because he was not playing or traveling with the team). It was critical to tell that story and find out what the story meant. However, to gain a better understanding of exactly what the story meant, we thought it was best to attempt to pull out several themes or categories that emerged from the story. Therefore, we also used a thematic approach to analyze this data (Merriam). These themes gave a better sense of exactly how he felt about his experience. What were the dominant themes of his time as a student-athlete? Did he identify more with the "student" side of the term "student-athlete" or did he become engulfed in his role as an athlete? Is the program about winning and success or about participation and creating a positive experience? As such, it was critical to identify exactly which themes emerged from the participant's experience.

The data was coded using open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the first step (open coding), data are "broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences" (Strauss & Corbin). These individual parts were then grouped into categories. In the second step (axial coding), these categories were then compared and contrasted to try to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena (Strauss & Corbin). By first deconstructing our data, we were able to then rebuild the information into our identified themes or categories.

## INTERNAL VALIDITY

Internal validity addresses the issue of whether or not the findings in a research study match the reality of the situation (Merriam, 1998). Merriam poses the question: "Are investigators observing or measuring what they think they are measuring" (p. 201)? There are two primary ways that this study with address internal validity.

First, we gave the participant every opportunity to speak to any different facet of his intercollegiate athletic experience. Further, the questions were framed so that he addressed many of the pertinent aspects of a student-athlete's life, both academically and athletically. The questions raised in this study were unique in that they do not address many ambiguous terms or events. There should be little question about what the participant's responses address.

The second method of addressing internal validity was through peer examination. Seeking the feedback of peers is a useful way to ensure the internal validity of a study. The data, interpretations, and findings were shared between the authors in order to enhance the validity.

## EXTERNAL VALIDITY

According to Merriam (1998), external validity is "the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (p. 207). This concept is also referred to as generalizability or transferability. External validity

will be difficult to determine in this study. Experiences are subjective and one person's interpretation of an event or situation may be vastly different from the next. While the participant may not be able to speak to the individual experiences and opinions of other members of the football team, our hope was that he could speak to the general "feel" of the group in addition to his own personal experiences and opinions.

It is important to reiterate that generalization is not the primary objective of this study, nor are we seeking to draw any particular conclusions about the situation in general. This study sought to find specifically how the changes at this University impacted the lives of this individual and his teammates and coaches so that universities that make this transition in the future do not neglect these student-athletes. By raising awareness of the experiences of these athletes, our hope was to remind universities that the mission of their athletic department should revolve around creating a positive academic and athletic experience for its student-athletes and not solely around revenue generation.

## FINDINGS

### NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Our participant, Jim, is an imposing figure standing a little over six feet tall and weighing what appears to be at least 230 pounds. He looked like a football player: big, strong, and athletic. Jim was also confident, almost cocky, in the way that he carried himself. He is a younger guy, only two years out of college so before the researchers, we were worried that he might not have much to say in the interview. As soon as the researchers saw him, we did not worry anymore as they knew he would have a lot to say.

Jim's story as a college athlete is a story of growth. He was always big but wasn't always an athlete. Entering college, Jim did not picture himself as a Division I caliber football player. He had actually decided to attend a Division III school because that's where he "really wanted to go to school." Football was merely an afterthought. However, a spontaneous visit to the university led to the spontaneous decision to play for a championship caliber Division II school. Although the university was a good fit academically, Jim admitted that he "mainly came for football." Each year, Jim was faced with difference challenges as a football player (injury, lack of playing time, winning, losing, etc...) but by the end of his tenure as an athlete, he proudly admits that he was a DI-AA player on an NFL (National Football League) Scout Watch List. Further, once he graduated, he changed roles and became an assistant coach for the university's football team.

### YEAR ONE

Judging by his body language and frequent laughter, Jim's experience during his first year was not indicative of the typical year of a DI-AA football player. However, at this point, Jim was *not* a DI-AA football player as the University had yet to make the switch from Division II. He did not do well in school and was overwhelmed by the spectacle of college football he stated, "It was novel: the traveling, going to stadiums. It was really exciting." For the first time, he traveled with the team (usually by bus) and "wasn't hyper-responsible" so he performed poorly academically. This did not seem to be an issue as the academic expectations were quite low. Jim said, "[T]here's really not that much talk about 'get A's.' It's 'get a degree.' That's the expectation. I guess, stay eligible and get a degree."

Despite the apparent lack of academic expectations, there were lofty expectations for football-related activities. He spent as many as six hours on a regular day on these activities during his first year as a player (he did red-shirt during the previous year, which means that he was a member of the team but did not play and therefore did not use a year of eligibility). The pressure to perform, especially as one of the younger and less experienced players, was overwhelming for Jim at times but he described the experience as "really fun."

Despite the high level of commitment by the players, the football program at the university remained unsophisticated. This lack of sophistication had a significant impact on Jim's first year. He described long bus rides, outdated equipment, and a lack of manpower on the coaching staff. This led to a lack of organization, particularly during the off-season when players were urged to complete their workouts without supervision from the coaching staff. However, the way Jim spoke of these off-season workouts left little doubt that most athletes completed them. It was just a matter of where and with whom.

## YEAR TWO

When asked about his experience during his first year, Jim's first adjective was "fun." When asked about his second year, the first words out of his mouth were: "We had a really good team." The focus had changed from his individual experiences to the overall team experience. This was not surprising considering he spent the first part of the year recovering from injury which prevented him from excelling individually. Again, he took advantage of the opportunity to let us know that he was a premier player on the team despite the injury saying, "I was actually alternating starts with (another player). He was an All-American his senior year." After that, his focus shifted quickly back to the team and its success. During this final year as a Division II school, the team lost in the semi-finals of Division II and lost only one other game all year. Jim explained how the team success affected his experience saying, "Everything was really smooth. When you're winning, everything is really smooth, I think."

Jim also took a positive approach to his personal experience. The experience was an enjoyable one despite the injury. He described less pressure since he was not playing as much and had a year of experience under his belt. Plus, he pointed out that "you don't get graded that hard when you're winning by 20." It seemed as though part of him wanted to be the star and the one with all the pressure on him. However, there was another part of him that was content to simply be associated with something successful without much personal recognition.

## YEAR THREE

The struggle for balance between personal success and team success took another turn during Jim's third year. This was the first year that the University's football program was DI-AA as opposed to Division II. Convinced that the team would have won the National Championship had it remained in Division II, Jim describes a new type of motivation. No longer a contender for a championship because of their status as a DI-AA school, the team's focus shifted to merely winning a few games against these tougher opponents. There was some uncertainty going into that year about how the team would fare against tougher competition. Jim stated, "we're gonna play these I-AA teams every week and it's a big deal if we beat one of these teams." Despite playing tougher opponents, the team was still successful, achieving a 9-2 record and a ranking of #16 among DI-AA schools, both tremendous accomplishments for a team in its first year of DI-AA. That year's team had tremendous talent and "sent a lot of guys to the pros."

Personally, Jim's junior year was his best. He was healthy and in the best shape of his life. He stated:

Out of high school, I never thought I was that good of a player. Like, I didn't expect to go to like a good DII or a DI... so then it's like DII, this is cool. But then going to DI-AA, I was like 'are these guys gonna be a lot better than me?' And then that year, since I improved so much, I was like I'm as good or better than these guys.

It was during this year that Jim found himself on an NFL Scout Watch List.



Still under the same coaching staff, off-season and academic expectations did not change significantly during this third year; however, there were policy differences between Division II and DI-AA that affected a number of players. Specifically, Division II allows athletes to finish their degree in five years while DI-AA insists that you maintain a pace to finish in four. Subsequently, some players became academically ineligible during the transition period. Jim was fortunate to avoid this predicament.

#### YEAR FOUR

Regarding the fourth year, Jim stated that it was "basically a huge disappointment." Once an up-and-coming DI-AA program, the University saw its football team go 2-9. The smoothness that was described during the winning years, was now replaced by a very bumpy road. There was a transition new coaching staff, as well as an adjustment to becoming a losing program. Jim suggested that while many players were committed to the team, there were players who would rather not try and lose instead of trying and losing. This caused bitterness and conflict amongst the players. Expectations appeared to be high for the university's football team after an incredible first year in DI-AA. A tougher schedule was partially responsible for the lack of success but Jim has other theories saying, "I don't want to say that guys weren't trying or something but it was terrible though. I think in general, we're getting to the point where we have a lot of Division II talent playing DI-AA. Those guys are just bigger, stronger, and faster than our guys." This seemed to be a painful memory for Jim as his answers became shorter and his tone less confident and enthusiastic. The stunned expression on his face along with the brevity of his responses indicated to us that Jim was not quite sure what happened between year three and year four that changed everything.

#### THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Throughout the course of the interview, certain themes became apparent. Some were more prominent than others. In this following section, the strongest themes will appear first. The themes have been titled Winning, Funding and Accountability, Coaching Changes, and Pride.

#### WINNING

The interview was structured so that the participant isolated his experiences from year to year. Several questions were asked to probe deeper into the experience of that particular year. For example, to begin a discussion on a particular year, the participant was asked to describe his overall experience during that year. After that, he was asked to address other facets of his experience during that year such as academic performance, team expectations, and off-season requirements. A copy of the interview guide is available in Appendix.

With the exception of his first year, Jim began the discussion of each year by discussing team success. Beginning to discuss his second year, Jim stated: "Second year, we had a really good team." About the third year, Jim said, "We had a better team. I'm convinced that if we had stayed in DII, we would've won the National Championship because we were so much better than the year before." Finally, Jim stated that his fourth year was "basically a huge disappointment because we went 2 and 9."

It seemed as though the transition had little to do with an expectation of success. Even though the team played against tougher competition, Jim still evaluated each year based on team success and wins and losses. However, especially during that fourth year, the losses were attributed to playing against tougher competition. This seemed to be one of the detrimental effects of the university's transition. Once a proud and successful Division II program had quickly become one of the weaker DI-AA schools. The university's struggles continued in the years following Jim's graduation and into his years as a coach. Players once competing for a National Championship were now struggling to win any games. Not only is the team struggling, but Jim claimed:

[T]here's some (players) that are passed by the quality of football that's played. I don't know if they're enjoying themselves or not. I wish I could tell them to go play at a DII and have a great time being a good player as opposed to being passed by at IAA.

Though failure is certainly a part of any intercollegiate athlete's career, success is also an important experience for young student-athletes. Jim's discussion of his third year dwelled on the fact that he felt the team would have won a championship. He stated his desire for success, by stating, "It would've been nice to have that season actually get a championship. I've never had that." The University's decision to move to DI-AA cost this student-athlete (and likely many others) an opportunity to achieve high levels of success both personally and collectively.

### FUNDING & ACCOUNTABILITY

As the University transitioned to DI-AA, they were required to make certain changes to their program. Among them were an increase in the number of scholarships and an increase in the capacity of their facilities. While players on the team saw some of the benefits of increased support for the program, they did not benefit from the increase in the number and amount of the scholarships. With some bitterness, Jim explained:

I came in on a \$2,000 scholarship to start. So if you start for 4 years, they'll bump you up if you're doing well and if they can to where my senior year, I got \$5,000 which is helpful, it's good but by my senior year we brought in 2 recruiting classes who are Division IAA guys so they guys who are getting full rides who were terrible and on the practice squad. Some of them, I understand, some of them are projections. It wouldn't have bothered me if I saw that we were bringing in true Division I talent, guys that are going to be better athletes than me. But I think we brought in guys that were of equivalent talent and they're getting a full ride as where I've been giving my life to the program for 5 years and I'm getting \$5,000... Like I'm better than the guy at Montana State who's getting a full ride but because I'm here this transitional place, I'm getting kind of screwed.

Although Jim claimed that he had no bad feelings for any individuals, jealousy is a dangerous ingredient among teammates.

However, Jim saw many benefits associated with DI-AA schools that athletes at the university had not seen before. After the transition, the Athletic Department started to provide "a better support system for the athletes." The team was now flying to games as opposed to making eighteen hour bus rides. The program hired a full-time strength and conditioning coach and the players were given better equipment and apparel. Jim eloquently explained the difference when stating, "When you're in Division II, you have to support yourself and then do your football as opposed to having the football support you back."

However, there is a level of accountability associated with this increased level of support. Jim noticed this first from the player perspective and then, once he became an assistant coach, he noticed the increased pressure on behalf of the coaching staff. He stated:

I don't know if it's the change in personnel around here but it's just more professional... More money, more accountability for people's actions from top to bottom: players, the AD (Athletic Director), that type of thing...I think it's just back to the balance of the higher it gets the more professional it gets which means you have more support but it also means it's more cutthroat.

Players are now expected to perform at a high level or risk being cut and losing their scholarship. In Division II, there are higher roster limitations so even if you are not one of the best players, you can still be a part of the team and reap the benefits of the intercollegiate athletic experience. A Division II player "can slide by by saying



'hey I just don't have the money.'" On the other hand, Jim claimed, "In Division I, you really have to take it as your job...I mean, this money comes in and people invest and you have to be successful."

### COACHING CHANGE

One of the unanticipated aspects of this study was the fact that in their second year as a DI-AA school, the university also changed football coaches. Although he did not mention it initially as one of his primary recollections of his fourth year, Jim referred to the coaching change on more than one occasion as "more of a transition than just the move (to DI-AA)." He also suggested that in hindsight, the reason for the team's success in the first year as a Division I-AA school was due to the players' loyalty to the coaching staff despite the fact that there was a possibility that they would not be as competitive as a DI-AA school. The "loyalty to old coaches" carried over into Jim's fourth year as several key players from his third year moved to along with the coach that left, which was certainly a possible cause for the team's poor performance during that year. The previous coach became the head coach at a DI-A school and Jim felt that many of his teammates thought: "I don't want to play for nothing. Here's my chance to go play I-A." As a result, they transferred with the coach.

Jim seemed uncomfortable talking about the coaching staff that came in during his fourth year likely because he is now a member of this coaching staff. When he talked about the effects of the coaching change, he talked exclusively about the previous coach. Jim appeared to have a strong sense of loyalty to both coaching staffs because one recruited him to play and the other recruited him to coach.

### PRIDE

Pride is prevalent in Jim's responses on more than one level. First of all, he was obviously proud of the team's success as was discussed in the first theme: winning. Secondly, Jim is proud of his personal accomplishments. Although he always mentioned team success first, he was not bashful about mentioning his personal accomplishments. He discussed being scouted by the NFL and boasted confidently that he was better than many DI-AA players. He even admitted: "I think there's some (players) that take pride in that 'yeah, I'm at a I-AA school.'"

Interestingly, Jim did not mention any personal details about his fourth season. His responses regarding his fourth year were quite brief and he did not provide any information about how well he played or even if he played at all. The researchers believe this to be a result of him not wanting to be associated strongly with a losing team rather than a result of a lack of personal success, which is consistent with the notion of cutting off reflected failure introduced by Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, and Sloan (1976) and Richardson and Cialdini (1981). He did not play much during his second year due to injury and lack of playing time; however, he still managed to brag about the times that he did play ("I was actually alternating starts with... an All-American."). He was so proud of the team's success during his second and third year that he wanted his career to be associated with those years only, an understandable desire.

Jim wore his heart on his sleeve when he discussed his career at the university. His stories clearly showed his loyalty to the program and his continued interest in its success. However, the tone of his voice, along with his nonverbal expressions, was striking. Specifically, the tone and volume of his voice along with his facial expressions and body language changed drastically between year one and year two from casual and light-hearted to intense and proud. The mood changed again between year three and year four, when his answers became shorter and quieter reflecting the team's lack of success during that year. During years two and three, he was leaning forward and telling long stories of success. During years one and four, he was leaning back, seeming almost disinterested. His chin and his eyes also instantly indicated whether or not the year in question was a good one or a bad one. He proudly held his chin high and looked out across the facilities while recalling his most successful years. Conversely, he looked down and seemed to be trying to make sense of the disaster which was his fourth and final season as a player.

## REFLECTIONS

### 40-60-80 RULE

One of the really sad side-effects of the move to DI-AA is a result of Division I's 40-60-80 rule. Jim described why this was an issue during the transition:

It's an after-effect, is the 40-60-80 rule where by your sophomore year you have to complete 40% of your requirements for your major. So when you're division II, everybody red-shirts. Everybody in the system knows that so you come in, you're a football player, and, ok, you're on the 5-year plan. You can red-shirt, we'll space it out, that sort of thing. But if you're on the 5-year plan in Division I, you're academically ineligible.

Coaches, advisors, administrators, parents, and athletes were simply not thorough enough about the impact that this rule would have on the athletes. Jim described situations where teammates were doing well in school but were academically ineligible because they were on the 5-year plan common to Division II. The university likely knew about a possible change in division status prior to Jim's third year and should have been more helpful in advising students on the requirements for eligibility. The NCAA also has a responsibility to educate transitioning schools about the differences in academic requirements for the different divisions.

### FOOTBALL AS A JOB

Jim mentioned on more than one occasion that the transition to DI-AA made football a "job" for the student-athletes since they were now better funded. The use of the term "job" for an intercollegiate athlete is an alarming one and should immediately remind players, coaches, and administrators that these people are students first and athletes second. If anything, these student-athletes should feel as though school is their job. This pressure to perform on the field of play is a lot to put on the shoulders of a teenager. In reality, if this is the perception at this lower-echelon DI-AA university, it could be even worse for athletes at highly-competitive institutions. This scenario once again begs the question originally asked by Representative Bill Thomas to NCAA President Myles Brand: "How does playing major college football or men's basketball in a highly commercialized, profit-seeking, entertainment environment further the educational purpose of your member institutions" (Thomas, 2006, p. 2)? It seems as though this particular member institution has failed to enhance the educational value of this particular student-athlete.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

The transition to DI-AA indeed affected Jim during his playing career. The university's football team was unique in that it did see significant success early on in Division I-AA. However, the struggles that Jim faced in his fourth year continue to plague the University's football program years later with only seven wins in three years since its successful first year as a DI-AA program. While Jim and many others at the university think that the transition will ultimately help the school overall, the early effects on the student-athletes, in this case the football players, appear to be quite negative despite the additional funding for the program. Players are devoting more time to their football activities instead of their academic responsibilities and consequently, even though there are more full scholarships to give to student-athletes, many are not able to take full advantage of the educational opportunities provided to them.

Also, as is the case at the university, players have to grow accustomed to failure. Many of these athletes were football standouts in high school and, as Jim pointed out, many of them are now simply "passed by the quality of football that's played." As a result, neither the individual nor the team is seeing much success. The negative tone of Jim's responses regarding his fourth year might reflect the entire experience of some of these athletes

that are faced with failure after failure on the football field, even after spending hours upon hours in preparation. As was mentioned earlier, experiencing both success and failure is a critical component of life as a student-athlete. It is discouraging to see athletes devote so much of their life to one thing without seeing significant success which, for college football, is often measured in wins and losses.

### FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was conducted several years after the university's transition. The researchers were fortunate to find Jim who was in the middle of the transition as a student-athlete *and* remained on as a coach. His perspective was valuable; however, a more developed case study in which a researcher follows a team during the course of a transition and interviews athletes and coaches during the experience may shed more light on this topic. Using a case study of this nature would help to address in more detail the psychological effects of the transition on the athletes such as pride and confidence as well as other positive or negative effects such as academic performance, time spent on football-related activities, and injuries. Research that examines the effects of winning and losing on college athletes may also be an appropriate follow-up to this study or a more expansive case study.

Another intriguing aspect to this research was Jim's discussion of the coaching change. A future study could examine the phenomenon of loyalty to coaches. How is it established? Does winning impact loyalty? What does impact loyalty, positively or negatively? We found Jim's perspectives on the effects of the coaching change to be fascinating and hope that someday this phenomenon will be studied in more detail.

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**Appendix****Interview Guide**

1. Did you play football in HS? What was your experience like there?
2. Did you come to (the University) to play football?
  - a. What were your expectations when you started?
3. Describe your participation in intercollegiate football at (the University).
  - a. Years?
  - b. Position(s)?
4. Describe your experience as a freshman.
  - a. During this year, what was the status of the team in terms of Division I or II?
  - b. Hours/day?
  - c. Hours/week?
  - d. Off-season expectations?
  - e. Academic expectations?
  - f. Team expectations?
  - g. Summarize this season...
5. Describe your experience as a sophomore.
  - a. During this year, what was the status of the team in terms of Division I or II?
  - b. Hours/day?
  - c. Hours/week?
  - d. Off-season expectations?
  - e. Academic expectations?
  - f. Team expectations?
  - g. Summarize this season...

**Interview Guide (cont.)**

6. Describe your experience as a junior.
  - a. During this year, what was the status of the team in terms of Division I or II?
  - b. Hours/day?
  - c. Hours/week?
  - d. Off-season expectations?
  - e. Academic expectations?
  - f. Team expectations?
  - g. Summarize this season...
7. Describe your experience as a senior.
  - a. During this year, what was the status of the team in terms of Division I or II?
  - b. Hours/day?
  - c. Hours/week?
  - d. Off-season expectations?
  - e. Academic expectations?
  - f. Team expectations?
  - g. Summarize this season...
8. What were the primary differences each year?
9. What do you see as the primary differences overall between your freshman year and your senior year?
  - a. What do you think was the cause of these differences?
10. How did the transition from Division II to Division I impact your intercollegiate athletic experience?
11. What was your overall experience at (the University) like?
12. Now that you are a coach, how has your perspective of (the University's) switch changed?
13. Are your motivations as a coach in any way affected by (the University's) status as a DI school? If so, how?
14. Is there anything else you'd like to add?