

PRO OR BUST: CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF DIVISION I AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE
BASKETBALL PLAYERS

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ABSTRACT

Pro or Bust: Career Aspirations of Division I and Community College Basketball Players

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The purpose of this study was to determine the difference, if any, between Division I and community college basketball players career aspirations. Interviews were held with eleven athletes from the Cal Poly Men's Basketball team, and ten athletes from the Cuesta College Men's Basketball team. The interviews were used to determine the impact of different variables on the athletes career aspirations, and to explore themes in the data. To look for themes, both axial and open coding was used. Division I athletes were more likely to aspire to be professional basketball players than the athletes at the community college level. However, community college athletes aspired toward higher education levels overall. Many of the variables such as low parental involvement and low socioeconomic status that typically have a negative impact on career aspirations did not seem to affect these athletes long term academic and professional aspirations. Being involved in athletics may shield or reduce the negative effects of the variables on the athletes; however, further study is needed. These findings can help coaches, athletic departments, and individuals working with youth.

Keywords: Career Aspirations, College Athletes, Men's Basketball, Division I, Community College

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ask many young athletes what they want to be when they grow up and you will probably hear the same answer: professional athlete. The glamour of the big stage, the millions of dollars in contracts and endorsements, the national and sometimes global popularity are all big draws for athletes. As these young athletes grow and the realization of how difficult it is to attain professional sports status becomes more apparent, goals tend to shift and change.

One of the most popular sports both in the United States and internationally, is basketball. The National Basketball Association has some of the highest paid athletes on the globe, as well as some of the most endorsed. LeBron James, Kobe Bryant, and Michael Jordan are household names in most countries. The fame, fortune, and level of competition is inviting for many young athletes; however, it is not so easy to obtain. Roughly one percent of high school basketball players make it to the college level, including two- and four-year colleges, and 1.1% of those college players make it to the NBA (NCAA, 2016). Another 12.2% make it to other professional leagues around the world (NCAA). The odds of making it to the professional level are very low.

After high school, some basketball players continue playing in college. Division I and Division II in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) offer athletic scholarships, as do Division I and Division II at the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) level. The goal for most high school athletes is to obtain an athletic scholarship at the highest level possible. For those athletes that don't make it to the four-year level right out of high school, the community college route is the next best thing. Community colleges have their own athletic associations across the United States. Players attend community college for two years to either

improve their academic standing or improve on their skills and garner more recruitment from four-year universities. The short-term goals for young athletes are to obtain a scholarship at the four-year level and have their education paid for. However, student athletes also have long term goals that they strive for after college.

1.1 Rationale

As people age, career aspirations change and develop as individuals learn more about themselves and the society around them. Goals and aspirations developed during teenage years can have a large impact on job attainment as adults. Adolescents with ambitious occupational aspirations are more likely to enter a professional career once they reach adulthood (Schoon & Polek, 2011). As a large part of children and adolescents lives are spent studying in school, their success in this realm may impact their career choices. Young people who do well in school will also have higher and more prestigious career aspirations than those who don't. Those on the lower end of the academic achievement scale tend to limit their ambitions and not aim as high in their careers (Schoon & Polek).

Education is also influenced by individual career aspirations people form as youths. High aspirations are linked to continued participation in higher education. Full-time education is an important determinant of social status attainment (Schoon & Polek, 2011). As professional level jobs tend to require more education, aspirations for those jobs will also increase the chances of these individuals continuing their education at the collegiate level.

Athletics throws another variable into the equation for students in the pursuit of education. Sports programs can help develop a young person's character and provide direction in

life. The pursuit of a sports career is generally congruent with education as collegiate level athletics require minimum grade point averages to gain acceptance into the school and athletic programs. Sports also allows for different avenues in the professional work realm. Athletes have a chance, albeit slim, to compete professionally in their respective sport and earn a living differently than typical workers. This provides a different perspective on the word “career” for athletes than non-athlete students in high school and college.

This study focuses on the men’s basketball teams at California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly), and Cuesta College. Cal Poly is a four-year university in San Luis Obispo, California, that competes at the Division I level in the Big West Conference. While Cuesta College is a two-year community college that competes at the California Community College Athletic Association (CCCAA) level, in the Western State Conference North division.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if the career aspirations of community college athletes are different than the aspirations of Division I athletes.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the career aspirations of Division I college basketball players?
2. What are the career aspirations of community college basketball players?
3. Does ethnicity impact career aspirations of Division I and community college basketball players?
4. Does socioeconomic status impact career aspirations of Division I and community college basketball players?

1.4 Delimitations

This study was conducted within the Cal Poly and Cuesta College men's basketball programs in San Luis Obispo, California. Players were asked to participate in an in-person interview, or Skype interview if in-person was not possible. The sample size included 10 athletes from Cuesta College and 11 from Cal Poly. Coaches from both programs were asked for permission before their players were interviewed.

1.5 Summary

Although career aspirations have been studied in adolescents and young adults, not as much attention has been paid to athletes and how sports impact these decisions. Of the studies conducted, Division I athletes have been the main focus. This study seeks to establish a starting point in investigating the difference between Division I athletics and community college athletics in terms of the career aspirations of student-athletes. The information in this study can be used for recruiting purposes by college athletics teams as well as contributing to the overall literature of career aspirations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the current literature on career aspirations, as well as the theoretical framework that addresses how race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and parental involvement have an impact on career aspirations. The literature review will be broken into four sections. The first section will discuss the impacts of race and ethnicity on career aspirations, specifically looking at how white and African-American athletes view their careers. The second section will cover socioeconomic status during youth development and how it impacts career goals. The third section will broach parental involvement and how parents' aspirations and goals influence their children. The fourth section will discuss Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), as a theoretical framework for the study. The final two sections will provide some insight into graduate level education for athletes as well as motivation for enrollment at the community college level.

The study of career aspirations is broad and has been studied across grammar school, high school, college, and even post college men and women. Throughout the literature are similar themes connecting it all together. Career aspirations tend to be affected by differences in gender, race, and socioeconomic status (SES; Galliot, 2015; Howard et al., 2011; Khallad, 2000). Parental involvement with their children also influences career aspirations (Otto, 2000). SCCT is used to measure the effects of the previously mentioned variables along with others like age and self-efficacy (Ali & Saunders, 2008; Lent, Paixao, Silva, Leitao, 2010). These different effects will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

2.1 Race and Ethnicity

Race and ethnicity are one of the first characteristics we as human beings notice about one another. Different cultures have different values and focuses on education, career, and life in general. Athletics involves people from many different ethnicities. However, not all sports share the same demographics. The NBA is made up of approximately 77% African-Americans, the NFL about 65%, while only 15% of MLB players are African-American (Beamon & Bell 2002). African-Americans aspire towards professional athletics careers at a much higher rate than their white counterparts. Studies have shown that African-American male athletes believe that sports will provide more economic success than any other career (Beamon & Bell). This ideal has been perpetuated by mass media who often celebrates African-American men who have gained financial success through their athletic ability, while often ignoring those who have done the same through academia or other professional careers (Beamon & Bell). This can lead to an unhealthy obsession with sports and a lack of understanding of the other avenues in which African-American's can succeed. Beamon and Bell said that, "The combined impact of these images has placed the African-American male on a 'fantasy island.' The implication being that there is a pervasive and unrealistic belief in the chances of playing for a professional team" (p. 179).

While sports participation can positively influence African-American student athletes regarding their school engagement and academic self-confidence, for long term success, the right structures both academically and at home must be in place (Singer & May, 2011). Without these important structures, an obsessive pursuit of a professional sports career may derail any potential talent from other career options (Beamon & Bell, 2002). Hall contends that part of the problem is

that media images of sports and entertainment are “a continuation of the historical presentation of African-American males as clowns, buffoon, and gladiators” (as cited in Beamon & Bell, p. 179). While all academics do not offer such harsh comparisons, the consensus is that sports can at times be too much of a focal point for African-American youth.

In a single-subject study, Singer and May followed the career trajectory of an African-American male high school basketball player named Cerico from Georgia. Although Cerico had goals of playing collegiate and professional basketball, his understanding of the steps needed to reach that goal was nonexistent. Unless accompanied with athletics, Cerico was not interested in attending college and continuing his education. Without the proper educational structures in place too much emphasis can be placed on the sport and not enough on academics as well. This can lead to a lack of understanding of career choices and the actual possibilities of making it to the professional level (Beamon & Bell, 2002; Singer & May). This lack of understanding can hinder African-American career decisions and lead an individual towards bad career choices without a backup plan. It is a prime example of the adage, “putting all your eggs in one basket.”

The overall view of African-Americans in the United States is that athletics is one of the best ways for them to become successful financially and socially (Beamon & Bell, 2002). This stereotype not only hurts other’s perceptions of African-Americans, but also negatively affects African-American self-esteem in other professional fields (Brown & Segrist, 2015). When Division I football players were asked about their career aspirations, African-Americans held views to become professional athletes at a much higher rate (84%) compared to 41% of white teammates (Beamon & Bell). African-American athletes seem to believe that their economic success is most likely to come from professional sports, while white athletes believe they can be successful in other avenues outside of athletics (Beamon & Bell). However, it seems that white

athletes also believe athletics is the best avenue for African-American athletes, showing that the view of African-Americans in the academic world is not held as highly as their white counterparts (Beamon & Bell). This may show a societal stereotype of African-Americans and their ability to become successful outside of the realm of sports (Brown & Segrist). This can manifest itself in what Brown and Segrist call “internalized racism,” which can lead the marginalized group to accept the negative stereotypes and beliefs about themselves (Brown & Segrist). The socialization process for African-American and white athletes is different as their cultures are markedly different. Since there is such a disparity in each group’s personal views of success, it is believed that their socialization processes with family, friends, and culture play a large role in these views as well. While white parents push their children towards education for careers outside of athletics, African-American parents may be pushing their children towards academic achievement for sports eligibility, rather than for careers in academia (Beamon & Bell).

2.2 Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status can have a large impact on career aspirations. Lower income areas tend to be lower resourced and have less access to employment opportunity. Some poverty-stricken areas do not offer much in regards to social and economic mobility. According to Singer and May (2011), many low-income neighborhoods see sport as their “meal-ticket” to upper social mobility. Most of the literature points to socioeconomic status having the largest impact on career aspirations (Howard et al., 2011). Those who grow up in families and neighborhoods that are defined by low socioeconomic status are likely to mimic what they see and follow a similar path. This is not to say that individuals cannot climb out of poverty through education or

other means, however the impact of lower income as a whole is negative on career aspirations (Howard et al.).

Not all of the literature on socioeconomic status is in agreement. When controlling for ethnicity with regards to socioeconomic status Howard et. al (2011) found that Asian/Pacific Islander and Native Americans were the only groups to show a positive correlation between economic standing and career aspirations. Youths in both ethnic groups who are not from low income families aspire to occupations that are more prestigious, require more education, and have higher salaries than those of their lower income peers (Fouad et al., 2008; Howard et al.). Also, among low income youth, Native Americans report lower aspirations than other ethnicities from low income families. This can be due to a multitude of factors such as, pressure to stay on the reservation, inadequate funds for education, limited range of available career possibilities, and pressure to conform to perceived social norms (Thompson, 2013). Living and social conditions on many Native American reservations may play a part in these aspirations as well (Thompson). While Asian/Pacific Islander youth who are not from low income families report higher aspirations than other ethnic youth (Howard et al.).

Career aspirations are not only impacted by socioeconomic status in the U.S. In Australia, students with low socioeconomic status selected “money” rather than “interest” as a reason for career preference (Galliot, 2015). This may be one of the biggest indicators of how socioeconomic status effects career aspirations. Unfortunately, decisions that are highly based on prestige and income may lead students to make career decisions that are not aligned with their interests (Fouad et al., 2008). Students from higher income families have more opportunity to take their time and discover what they truly want out of life because of financial backing from their families. Lower income students may be more interested in careers that make a lot of

money and are willing to sacrifice their interest to get themselves and their family to a better economic standing quickly (Galliott).

2.3 Parental Involvement

Parental involvement in a child's development is paramount. While social skills, boundaries, and learning are all affected by a parent's involvement, so are career aspirations (Dietrich & Salmelo-Aro, 2013; Otto, 2000). Children with parents who are very involved in their lives are more likely to have similar views when it comes to what types of careers they want, and how much they value their parent's advice (Otto). Also, more parental involvement shows a higher endorsement of their children's career goals (Salmelo-Aro). Otto found that high school students in North Carolina held strong value in their parent's beliefs. Eighty-one percent of the students agreed with their parent's beliefs about what they should do with their lives. Subsequently, when asked about what occupation they should enter 46% said mostly similar, while 36% said very similar to their parents (Otto).

Many young adults follow paths that their parents have set for them. Those whose parents went to college are more likely to attend themselves. Parents who are involved in their children's academics are more likely to have a positive impact upon their kids academic and developmental outcomes as well (Jung & Zhang, 2016). However, it is important to note that too much involvement and control from parents can yield negative results. Studies on immigrant children showed that excessive control and monitoring of children by parents was detrimental to their educational aspirations (Jung & Zhang). Career planning is often discussed between parents and their children, and many times children are likely to look for advice on how to prepare for a career from their parents (Otto, 2000). African-American youth say their views of career and life

aspirations are similar to their parents at a lesser rate than white youth (Otto). Boys and girls both feel that their mothers are the person they can talk to about career aspirations more often, rather than their fathers (Otto). These findings indicate that parents do have a large impact on youth career decisions and aspirations.

2.4 Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social Cognitive Career Theory or SCCT is a theoretical framework about the mechanisms of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and choice goals and how these interact and are impacted by variables like gender, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Cunningham, Doherty & Gregg, 2007). According to the SCCT theory,

personal factors like gender, race and ethnicity and environmental factors within family, community, media and educational systems work interdependently to impact student learning experiences. Learning experiences affect career self-efficacy and outcome expectations which result in the formation of vocational interests, occupational goals, choice actions, and performance attainments.

Environments impact career persistence and may differ in the degree of support or obstruction provided. In sum, the environment serves to, determine who gets to do what and where, for how long, and with what sorts of rewards. (Michel, Hays, & Runyan, 2015, p. 309).

It would be incorrect to label one variable as the single most important in career decision making. Each variable holds a role in the formation of aspirations and how they develop over adolescence.

In a study by Lent, Paixao, Silva, and Leitao (2010), 600 Portuguese high school students were examined. Participants answered questions that measured occupational self-efficacy, outcome expectations, interests, social supports and barriers, and choice considerations across the six Holland RIASEC types (Lent, et al.). A strong correlation between self-efficacy and outcome expectations predicting interests was found. Self-efficacy measures one's belief in their abilities to perform, while outcome expectations is an individual's thoughts on whether a behavior will provide positive or negative results (Cunningham et al., 2007) Also, interests seem to mediate the relations of self-efficacy and outcome expectations to choice consideration (Lent et al.). Self-efficacy, in many ways, is the foundation for career aspirations. Without first having personal belief it is impossible to aspire to be something.

SCCT has strong predictive value by considering multiple variables that effect career aspirations. Multiple factors of SCCT were studied by researchers on high school students in rural Appalachia (Ali & Saunders, 2008). Measures which assessed their vocational/educational, self-efficacy beliefs, career decision outcome expectations, socioeconomic status, age, and their perceptions of family support were studied. It was found that 52% of variance associated with career aspirations was accounted for by these variables (Ali & Saunders). The large majority of the variance came from vocational/educational self-efficacy beliefs, social economic status, as well as career decision outcome expectations (Ali & Saunders).

Self-efficacy plays an important role in Social Cognitive Career Theory. The higher one's efficacy, the more likely they are to aspire for higher end careers. Outcome expectations and choice goals also help provide insight into why career aspirations form differently for each individual (Cunningham, et al, 2007). Socioeconomic status, along with gender, race and ethnicity, and parental involvement all can create barriers that impact these mechanisms. Higher

socioeconomic status, for example, along with high self-efficacy, is more likely to create higher career aspirations than for someone with low economic standing and low self-efficacy (Ali & Saunders, 2008).

Although some youth and young adults may have already developed their career plans and aspirations, this is not the case for all. Students at the high school and even collegiate level do not always have their career plans thought out (Robbins, Wallis, & Dunston, 2003). Without some of the previous structures, like parental involvement and high socioeconomic standing, long term planning can be avoided or not thought of at all. Cultural background may also play a role as some cultures place family circumstances as more important in future planning, rather than individual achievement (Robbins et al.).

2.5 Career Aspirations for Student-Athletes

Although athletes do fall under the same umbrella as students, in attending school and getting an education, playing sports also provides them with a different career path not available to the non-athlete student. As mentioned previously, African-American collegiate athletes have disproportionately aspired towards professions in athletics (Beamon & Bell, 2002). However, this idea does not simply permeate one race and ethnicity. While white college athletes seem to see themselves at the professional level at a lesser rate than African-American athletes, they still aspire towards pro sports at a rate much higher than the amount who make it to that level (Beamon & Bell, 2002). Although professional sports may seem like the main objective for many, the choice to continue playing college sports is not as simple as one might think. While many athlete's educations are paid for, the decision to get the education may be more complex than it seems. There are athletes who use college sports as a stepping stone to the professional

level. This can be seen in the ‘one-and-done’ basketball players who attend college for a year only to leave and play in the NBA soon thereafter. Others choose to pursue their degree and even graduate school in lieu of chasing the professional sports dream.

Haslerig & Navarro (2016) studied division I football players about their graduate degree choices. Athletes were chosen in their final year of eligibility and could either finish early and pursue a graduate degree or continue to take undergraduate classes. Fourteen athletes were interviewed, and 12 of the 14 chose to pursue graduate degrees. The two that decided not to pursue a degree cited lack of personal passion and interest in finishing the degree as reasons not to further their education (Haslerig & Navarro). Even though the graduate degree would have been paid for by their athletic scholarship, not all of the athletes chose to take advantage of it. The participants who chose to pursue graduate degrees did so after thoughtful consideration of their career aspirations and passions, and all of them said they planned on finishing their degrees (Haslerig & Navarro). Athletes who choose to attend graduate school do not simply choose this path because the education is free. The decision is based on their desire for higher education, and not simply for athletics alone (Haslerig & Navarro).

2.6 Community College Students

Community college students take a different path than those at the four-year level and choose these schools for a myriad of reasons. Cheaper schooling, low requirements for acceptance, and close proximity to home are just a few reasons people start their college experience at the community college level. Although a large portion of community college students aspire towards obtaining a bachelor’s degree or higher, many fall short and never reach their goals (Nielsen, 2015). Plans after community college range from associate degrees to

doctorate degrees, but the choices are markedly different when separated by race and ethnicity. White students planned to obtain associate's and bachelor's degrees at a higher rate than nonwhite students (Laanan, 2000). White students and students of color equally aspired towards master's degrees. While nonwhite students desired to complete doctorate degrees at a higher percentage than white students (Laanan). Something to take note of is that as the degree level increases, aspirations flip flop for both groups. Lower level degrees like associates and bachelors were desired more by white students. While master's degrees were sought after at the same rate between both groups, and doctorates were the goal of more students of color.

On average community college students do not finish their bachelor's degrees as quickly as those who attend universities out of high school, however this does not mean they have given up (Nielsen, 2015). Previous research had stated that these students had "cooled off" in their desire for a degree and career (Nielsen). More recent research has shown that many of these students "hold steady" in their career aspirations (Nielsen). Although their route may take them longer than the average college student, it does not mean their aspirations have diminished. More common at the community college level are students who work full time jobs and take smaller class loads. The ability to "hold steady" with their career aspirations has been attributed to a desire to get out of minimum wage work, climb the social ladder, draw boundaries between themselves and other disadvantaged people, and manage difficult relationships with significant others (Nielsen).

Community colleges help students hold steady to their career goals by having an open access structure, or the ability to get accepted with very low requirements. Community colleges offer multiple chances for students to work towards post-secondary degrees and credentials. With high career aspirations, community college seems to foster and continue those goals at the

same level that university education does (Laanan, 2000; Nielsen, 2015). Community college is often viewed in a negative light, and its students are often seen as second tier compared to those at the university level. However, Nielsen shows that individuals at community college are also motivated and have serious plans and goals to become professional working members of our society.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

How individuals decide on their specific career aspirations can be complex and difficult to pinpoint. There are a multitude of factors that come into play which all help shape people's goals and aspirations for the short and long term. Although some research has been done on the aspirations of college athletes, these studies have generally focused on those at the high major Division I level who already have scholarships. Exploration on the differences in goals that may come from playing at a lower collegiate level is lacking. The following chapter presents the methods used to conduct the current study. The following sections are included in this chapter: Study locale, description of subjects, description of instruments, and data coding and analysis.

3.1 Study Locale

The study was conducted at both California Polytechnic State University and Cuesta Community College. The schools are both located in San Luis Obispo, California.

3.2 Description of Subjects

Research subjects included men's basketball players from Cal Poly and Cuesta College. Cal Poly plays at the NCAA Division I level in the Big West Conference, which spans up and down the state of California. Cuesta College plays at the community college level or CCCAA, in the Western State North Conference which entails schools from San Luis Obispo down to Moorpark, California. The population of this study was Division I and community college basketball players in the United States. Collegiate teams are comprised of young adults ranging from 18-23 years of age. All athletes interviewed were male. Ten athletes from Cuesta were

interviewed while eleven from Cal Poly were chosen. All eleven athletes at Cal Poly were on full athletic scholarships. As both teams have players from the United States as well as internationally, an attempt was made to recruit the same amount of U.S. and international athletes to keep the ratio as even as possible. Interviews were conducted on each respective campus, or at athletes' living quarters. If athletes were unable to meet in either place, a Skype interview was used instead.

3.3 Description of Instruments

The study was conducted using semi-structured interviews. Interviews comprised of 10 questions. The full interview being used in this study can be found in Appendix A. The pilot test was conducted with four subjects, comprising of four interviews total. After the test, the researcher discussed with the subjects how easy or difficult it was to understand the interview questions as well as what the information was being used for. This allowed the researcher to gain an idea of how long each interview would take.

3.4 Data Coding and Analysis

All interviews were conducted through either in person interviews, or video interview. Live interviews and Skype interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to written format. Once the interviews had been transcribed, the data was analyzed using open coding and axial coding. Data was read and open coded by summarizing the responses given to the interview questions. Within those responses axial coding was used to find relationships and connections between the open codes. Microsoft Excel was used to code the data. Attention was paid to certain groupings like race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and parental involvement.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the career aspirations of Division I and community college basketball players. The sample size included twenty-one athletes, ten from Cuesta College and eleven from Cal Poly. Participants were age 18-22 years old, and all participants were male. All participants were full-time athletes of the collegiate institution they attended. After interviewing players from both teams, analysis was made of their answers using both open coding and axial coding techniques. While answers varied from player to player, some themes developed between the community college and Division I athletes. The themes were divided into the following: Place of living and AAU program, parental involvement, choice of school, athletic and educational aspirations, and definition of success.

4.1 Place of Living and AAU program

The Division I athletes at Cal Poly grew up in mostly urban and suburban areas with larger populations, as can be seen from the response by Cal Poly player A: “I grew up in the greater Seattle area, in Washington.” Most of the players from Cal Poly grew up in or right outside larger cities like Los Angeles, Seattle, and Dallas. On the other hand, most of the community college athletes at Cuesta College described their homes as rural areas with smaller populations. The second highest response for Cuesta players was urban living. The size of the cities where the Cal Poly players lived may have a correlation with the size of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) programs they played for. While some high school athletes travel long distances for AAU practices and games, it is easier for good players to get recognized and attend practices for AAU teams if they live nearby. When looking at responses for the type of AAU

programs they participated in, Cal Poly players split evenly between large national and medium regional-sized clubs. Large national clubs refer to programs who travel all across the U.S. for high profile AAU tournaments. Medium regional clubs are those who may travel to nearby states, but do not travel across the U.S. to play in tournaments. Most of the Cal Poly athletes played on both at some point during their career, usually starting with smaller clubs and working their way up. Cuesta athletes had the same amount of responses for large national, medium regional, and European clubs. However, they had less in quantity than Cal Poly responses for large national/medium regional, meaning that more of the Cal Poly players played on multiple sizes of club teams growing up. Cuesta College has a roster primarily made up of foreign or international athletes. Their foreign origins contributed to the lack of large national AAU participation in the U.S. Many of these athletes played in the club system in Europe, or if they came to the states during high school, participated in lower levels of AAU.

4.2 Parental Involvement

One of the main areas of disparity between the two groups of athletes was comparing their parental involvement growing up. The theme for Cal Poly players was nurturing and high involvement when asked about their home life growing up and how much their parents were involved in their lives. This nurturing environment helped these athletes have a higher chance of making it to the Division I level as can be seen from the following quote from Cal Poly player C: “Support-wise, they’ve been there since day one, -financially, mentally, any possible way they could be there for me they were.”

Cuesta players, on the other hand, gave moderate involvement as the highest response with high involvement and nurturing second and third. While it was the lowest response of the

group, Cuesta players had answers of abandonment when describing their parental involvement, an area that Cal Poly players had zero responses of the same nature. Cuesta player B talked about growing up without really knowing his father “I just grew up with my mom, I didn’t really know my dad till I was 15 or 16 years old.”

4.3 Choice of School

Another differentiating theme emerged when examining why the athletes chose to attend each school. Cal Poly players said the location and coaching staff were the main reasons why they chose the school, as can be seen by Cal Poly player D: “Then living in California and getting to live in SLO I think those were the biggest for me.” Cuesta players main two responses were athletics and school reputation. This could be related to the fact that all junior college athletes are looking for a good program to get them to the scholarship level. This can be seen by Cuesta player F’s response: “Pretty much because I saw videos about Cuesta. It was my first school in America. They reached out to me and I talked with them. They shared some very good reasons for me to go there and so I decided it was a good opportunity for me to play basketball and study there. Basically that was why I went there, because of studies and basketball.”

4.4 Athletic and Educational Aspirations

Answers about athletic goals and aspirations were starkly different. All Cal Poly athletes said their athletic goals were to play professionally. Some players even had aspirations of playing at the NBA level, as can be seen by Cal Poly player E’s answer: “I just wanted to make it to the NBA because that’s the highest stage in the world. That’s the level that I want to play at and that’s just where my dreams have been since a young kid.” Cuesta athletes were split right

down the middle, half said their goals were to play collegiately and half said professionally. Both groups had all of their athletes say they wanted to achieve at least a bachelor's degree as their academic goals. Cal Poly player H said: "First I want to get my degree in sport management and then I want to get my masters in either business or sport management and hopefully take it as far as it can go." However, more of the community college athletes said they also wanted to pursue a master's degree. Only one student, Cuesta player G, said he wanted to pursue a Ph.D. "I probably want to continue and get a masters if I can find the means to pay for it, and I mean later in life a Doctorate would be cool and all. But, I'd like to get into the workforce after I'm done at Cal Poly." Cuesta player G had already been accepted into Cal Poly, and decided to give up playing collegiate basketball in order to focus on his academics the following year. This decision was made during the recruiting period after his college season had ended.

4.5 Definition of Success

Cal Poly players also differed from Cuesta athletes on their opinions of what success means. They responded with "happiness" and "helping others" as definitions of a successful career. When asked about his definition of success Cal Poly player B said: "Something that you're happy doing, something you love doing. I feel like if you're crying in a Porsche then your life's not that great." The Cuesta team, on the other hand, responded with "financial success" and "helping others." This could be seen with Cuesta player D's response: "Having a house, a stable family, having somewhere to live, paying everything without problems. I think that's a successful career for me."

All Cuesta players except two responded with middle class as their SES growing up. One player responded with rich, and another responded with poor and near the poverty level. Cal Poly

players mostly responded with middle class as well; however, there were more responses of rich, upper class, and lower class than Cuesta players. This is opposite of what the literature has shown about the negative impacts of lower SES. In this case, more Cal Poly athletes described themselves as being poor or in the lower class growing up compared to Cuesta, yet their definition of success is more concerned with happiness than financial success.

Each group shared in the idea of helping others as part of being successful, which can be seen here in this response from Cal Poly player I: “I would say being able to take care of your family financially and leave some leftovers for generations to come.” Cuesta players had similar responses as can be seen here “You know you’re just in a stable situation in which you don’t have to worry about anything and you can help others along the way. I would consider that a successful career.” One area where both groups showed similar results was in their self-confidence to reach their goals. The overwhelming majority of both teams stated that they were very confident in their abilities to be successful in their careers. This could be attributed to the necessary self-confidence needed to participate in a collegiate sport, or it could stem from other sources like the love and support of their parents.

4.6 Demographics of Study Participants

Three of the Cal Poly athletes described themselves as African-American, with one of the three being bi-racial. The eight other athletes described themselves as Caucasian, with one being part Native American. Four of the Cuesta athletes described themselves as both African-American and bi-racial. Six of the Cuesta athletes described themselves as Caucasian. Two of the six also described themselves as bi-racial, one identified ethnically as being from the Middle East, and one as part Chinese.

The majority of both Cal Poly and Cuesta players said they grew up in middle class homes. However, two Cal Poly athletes described themselves as growing up rich, and one described himself as poor. Cuesta had one athlete describe himself as rich and one athlete describe himself as poor.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if the career aspirations of collegiate basketball players is different at the Division I and community college level. The intent was to see how different variables impact the career and academic goals of collegiate athletes. This chapter includes the following: a summary of the study, discussion of significant findings, limitations of the research, conclusions based on research questions, and recommendations for the field and future research.

5.1 Summary

The current study provides insight about the impact that playing basketball at the Division I level has on long term career aspirations. Athletes from Cuesta College and Cal Poly completed a ten question open ended interview either in person or through Skype. After obtaining all interviews, the researcher used open and axial coding to develop themes within the data.

Through this analysis, there was a positive relationship between basketball players at the Division I level, and their career aspirations of playing professionally. This differed from athletes at the community college level, who were just as likely to pick careers not involving athletics as they were to try and play professionally. Cuesta College athletes also showed more of a desire to continue their education, as more students wanted to obtain master's and doctorate degrees compared to the Cal Poly students. Within this sample size these findings suggest that the level a student athlete reaches has an impact on their long-term career goals. Also, higher level athletics

may impact post graduate educational goals, especially if the student desires to play professionally after the completion of an undergraduate degree.

5.2 Discussion and Practical Implications

The results of this study indicate a few different trends. The first being that within this sample, male basketball players at the Division I level have a much higher propensity to make their career goals focused on reaching the professional level compared to their peers at the community college level. This conclusion can be seen by the responses to question number six, which asked about individual athletic aspirations, where all eleven Cal Poly athletes said they wanted to play professionally, and only half of Cuesta athletes gave the same response. Another trend in the data was the amount of confidence every single athlete at both Cuesta and Cal Poly showed in their ability to achieve their goals. The high amount of confidence that these athletes have in themselves is a key factor in why they have reached the collegiate level in the first place. Individual confidence levels also play a part in why so many of the Division I athletes believe they will make it pro, even though the overall data shows otherwise.

Basketball players at the Division I level have more career aspirations of playing professional sports compared to players who are at the community college level. This trend concurred and strengthened some of the research done by Beamon & Bell (2002). One area that differed from Beamon and Bell's study was that both white and African-American athletes at the Division I level all had the same desires of playing professional basketball. Eight of the athletes at Cal Poly identified as Caucasian, and all of them desired to play professional basketball. Three athletes identified as African-American, and all three also aspired to professional basketball. For Cuesta, three of the four athletes who identified as African-American aspired towards

professional basketball, and three out of the six athletes who identified as Caucasian also aspired to professional basketball. Beamon and Bell's research showed white athletes having a lower propensity for aspiring to play professional sports compared to African-American athletes. However, the data in this study did not come to the same conclusion at the Division I level. Academically, both the Division I and community college athletes had similar desires in completing their bachelor's degree. These findings are concurrent with Nielsen (2015) who said that while community college students sometimes take longer to reach their goals, they still aspire at the same level as those already at a four-year school. However, the community college athletes showed more desire towards completing a master's degree or Ph.D.

Socioeconomic level seemed to have very minimal or no impact on educational or career aspirations for either group. While both groups mostly answered with middle-class as their economic level growing up, their view of success differed between the two groups. Galliot's (2015) study said that lower economic individuals tend to choose "money" rather than "interest" when looking at success and choosing a career. Yet, when asked about their definition of success, most Cal Poly athletes equated it with happiness, and Cuesta athletes with financial success. This difference in definition could be impacted by the fact that all athletes interviewed at Cal Poly are already on full athletic scholarship, while athletes at Cuesta are still paying for school and housing.

Overall there is less involvement from Cuesta parents compared to the parents of the Cal Poly athletes, but there does not seem to be a correlation between this variable and the athletes educational aspirations. In fact, Cuesta athletes aspired for higher levels of education than their Cal Poly counterparts. This could be because most parents were at least moderately involved with their lives, and that may have been sufficient enough to support their educational

aspirations. This research also contributes to and strengthens Nielsen's (2015) findings that community college students hold steady with their goals even though they have to take a different route than at the four-year level.

Career aspirations are forged by a complex and multi-faceted variable system that individuals experience throughout their young lives. While often people want to point towards one reason why an individual has chosen a career, this study and many others have shown that there are a multitude of reasons and factors why individuals choose to pursue specific careers. Specific variables in one's life may help push an individual towards one goal or another, but when variables mix together they often change the career aspiration outcome. For example, lower parental involvement is linked to lower career and educational aspirations, however both of the Cuesta athletes who had answered with "abandonment" still wanted to pursue at least a bachelor's degree (Dietrich & Salmelo-Aro, 2013). Other factors in these two young athletes lives have helped protect them from the negative effects that parental abandonment would normally have on an individual. Research on career aspirations has been done at the high school, college, and post graduate level. However, very limited research has been done on the student-athlete and how athletics may impact career aspirations.

This study can help college coaches and athletic departments better understand their athletes career goals. In turn, athletes can be better taken care of if they work with a coaching staff and athletic department who helps them achieve their career goals after they are done playing basketball. Providing quality services to help student athletes on and off the field is paramount to a successful program, and a healthy culture. Also, people and agencies who work with at risk youth can use this study to see the benefit of athletics as a shield against many negative variables for long term goals.

5.3 Limitations

There were several limitations that may have impacted the findings from this study. The sample size gives information on the two teams at Cuesta College and Cal Poly, but does not necessarily display the career aspirations of all community college or Division I athletes. It should be noted that this study was intended to be a starting point for research on community college and Division I basketball players career aspirations.

In addition, a large portion of Cuesta College's basketball team was born outside of the U.S. and had already moved thousands of miles to pursue their education and collegiate basketball career. This could cause an increase in their drive to do well in school and achieve their goals compared to the average U.S. student who attends their local community college. Furthermore, athletes born outside of the U.S. do not necessarily reflect the ethnicity and background of most community colleges in California.

5.4 Future Research

Future research should include interviewing multiple teams from different regions of the U.S. to help promote diversity of the data and create a better overall picture of what both Division I and community college basketball players aspire to be. At this point, most of the research on career aspirations does not include anything about athletics. In addition, future research could explore the "fall back plan" for basketball players who aspire to be professionals. Finding out if players have a secondary plan in case they don't make it in professional sports can help identify if their self-confidence is damaging to their long-term success. Researchers could also look at female community college and Division I basketball players and see if their career

aspirations are similar to males. Further research should also include whether students are first generation college students, what the parents levels of education is, and what the parents careers are.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Let's start at the top. I want to know more about you and where you grew up. If you are willing to share, can you tell me about where you grew up?
2. Did you play on club/AAU teams growing up? If so, tell me about them
3. If you are willing to share, can you tell me about your racial and ethnic background?
4. If you are willing to share, can you tell me about your parental involvement in your life?
5. If you are willing to share, can you tell me about your economic situation growing up?
6. What were your athletic aspirations growing up?
7. Why did you choose the school you are currently attending?
8. What are your educational aspirations?
9. How would you describe a successful career?
10. As a follow-up to the previous question, tell me how you feel about your ability to succeed in life, your ability to reach that successful career that you just described?