BRIDGING THE GAP: THE PERCEPTIONS OF ATHLETIC DIRECTORS AND COACHES REGARDING NONREVENUE PROGRAM DISCONTINUATION DECISIONS

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Research Problem

The purpose of the research was to examine the perceptions that athletic directors and coaches have regarding the reasons for program eliminations at the intercollegiate level. With the discontinuation of men’s wrestling programs becoming a common occurrence at the NCAA Division I level, it is essential that coaches understand the reasons why athletic directors eliminate programs so they can enhance their business operations in future years. Further, it is also essential that athletic directors understand coaches’ perceptions so that they can improve their working relationships within their athletic departments. This article is intended to serve as a guide to athletic directors and wrestling coaches looking to enhance program sustainability within college athletic departments.

Issues

During the past 30 years, men’s wrestling and other nonrevenue sport teams have been discontinued at an alarming rate within NCAA athletic departments. With a growing emphasis on profit maximization at the Division I level, it is essential that college wrestling programs identify strategies to enhance their program sustainability. In order to achieve this objective, college wrestling coaches must understand the reasons why athletic directors eliminate nonrevenue sport programs. With an understanding of the program elimination criteria, coaches have the opportunity to engage in campaigns to improve their programs from a broad operational standpoint. Ultimately, this provides an opportunity for a “Win/Win” situation for both athletic directors and college wrestling coaches.

Summary

The results of the study illustrated the primary reasons why athletic directors eliminate nonrevenue sport teams. From a broad standpoint, the data demonstrated that athletic directors felt that budget shortages, financial strain of the program, gender equity implications, success on the mat, and regional sport popularity were the primary
reasons for eliminating wrestling programs. In contrast, the study also added value by investigating the reasons why coaches believed wrestling programs were eliminated. Overall, the coaches indicated that they felt that gender equity, regional sport popularity, donor support, athletes actions off the mat, and athletes academic performance were the primary reasons for program eliminations. Thus, the results illustrated that athletic directors and coaches had varying perceptions for the reasons why nonrevenue programs such as men's wrestling are eliminated.

Analysis

With an understanding of athletic director's program elimination criteria, coaches have the opportunity to implement business strategies to enhance their sustainability in coinciding athletic departments. For example, when coaches understand that regional sport popularity has an influence on their programs survival, they can engage in grassroots marketing efforts to improve consumer interest in their surrounding areas. Similarly, within this framework, they can implement innovative fundraising campaigns to increase the revenues realized by their program. Further, from an administrative standpoint, the results also allow athletic directors to understand the perceptions held by coaches regarding program eliminations. Thus, with these perceptions in mind, athletic directors are afforded with the opportunity to better communicate their organizational objectives with concerned coaches.

Discussions/Implications

The study provides a unique opportunity to understand the underlying reasons why men's wrestling programs are eliminated in NCAA athletic departments. With a clear reason why nonrevenue programs are discontinued, the National Coaches Wrestling Association (NWCA) and coaches can now implement grassroots strategies to enhance the sustainability of programs all across the United States. For example, the group can focus on developmental programs to encourage coaches to act like responsible CEO's within their respective programs. Further, the NWCA can engage in marketing-based research to enhance the promotional strategies implemented at the local, regional, and national levels. Ultimately, it is the understanding of athletic director's perceptions that affords the NWCA and college wrestling coaches an opportunity to effectively improve their operations in future generations.