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What Drives and Motivates the Division III Female Basketball “Benchwarmer” to Compete Every Day?

Kelly S. Witte
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Whitewater, WI

Teri J. Hepler
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, La Crosse, WI

Tiffany Morton
University of Montevallo, Montevallo, AL

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to give coaches insight into the motivation, and self-determination of players who have different roles on the team to ultimately assist with recruiting, retention, coaching preferences, and/or leadership adjustments. The purpose of this project was to examine what motivates and drives NCAA Division III female basketball athletes to compete and continue to work hard every day without the incentive of scholarships. Specifically, we compared the motivation (both intrinsic and extrinsic) and self-determination of players in different roles: starters, substitutes, and “benchwarmers.” Female intercollegiate basketball players ($N = 53$) from 8 public universities participated in the study. At the end of the season, participants completed a survey addressing their motivation and self-determination in basketball. Motivation and self-determination were measured by modified versions of the Self-Regulation Questionnaire- Exercise and the Self-Determination Scale, respectively. Moreover, based on the self-reported average playing time, participants were categorized as starters (20 or more minutes), subs (6-20 minutes), or benchwarmers (0-5 minutes). The three playing status groups were then compared on various aspects of motivation and self-determination. In terms of motivation, benchwarmers tended to score higher than starters and subs on items most related to intrinsic motivation (e.g., intrinsic motivation, identified regulation). However a one-way MANOVA indicated no significant differences in motivation based on playing status, $F(8, 94) = 1.13, p = .35$. The means of the benchwarmers, subs, and starters were quite similar on the self-determination subscales of perceived choice and self-awareness. Likewise, the results of a one-way MANOVA revealed no significant differences between benchwarmers, subs, and starters in perceived choice or self-awareness, $F(4, 98) = 0.58, p = .68$. While no significant statistical differences were discovered, bench warmers did tend to score higher on intrinsic motivation than did their counterparts who averaged more playing time. This trend should not be overlooked simply because there were no statistically significant differences, which may be due to a small sample size. Understanding what motivates all athletes regardless of playing status is an important step to improving performance, satisfaction, and retention of Division III athletes. For instance, knowing what drives the benchwarmer is important for coaches because these players are responsible for challenging the starters in practice and preparing them for the other team. Likewise, benchwarmers also act as an important source of support during competition. Moreover, coaches should seek opportunities to enhance the intrinsic motivation of subs and

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starters, as participating in Division III lacks some of the major external rewards such as scholarships and other incentives that come with playing at Division I or II.



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Authors' note

Dr. Kelly Witte is an Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater where she is the Coordinator of the Athletic Coaching Education Minor in the Department of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Coaching. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses, advises the minors, and oversees the Coaching Field Study requirement.

Dr. Teri J. Hepler is an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. She received her PhD in Kinesiology, with an emphasis in sport and exercise psychology, from Michigan State University in 2008. Her research focuses on improving the performance and satisfaction of coaches and athletes.

Tiffany Morton, MS, is an assistant women's basketball coach at the University of Montevallo. She received a Master's of Science in Education and Professional Development with an emphasis in Physical Education and Coaching from the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater. Prior to Montevallo she served as the graduate assistant coach for UW-W women's basketball.

