

ADAPTIVE SPORTS: ASSESSING THE INAUGURAL YEAR OF THE ECAC AND
ADAPTIVE SPORT NCAA CHAMPIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

Ethan Lievense: Adaptive Sports: Assessing the inaugural year of the ECAC and Adaptive Sport
NCAA Championships
(Under the direction of Barbara Osborne)

As pieces of legislation continue to circulate concerning discrimination based on disability and the requirements and opportunities schools are obligated to provide, organizations have begun looking for ways to abide by the legislation, most importantly Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In response, the Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference became the first collegiate athletic conference to offer NCAA-sanctioned events and varsity-level competition in adaptive sports. Recommendations and observations from ten participants were used to create a framework for a more polished adaptive initiative. The suggestions and observations of the inaugural year of competition are driving factors that will best represent a similar student-athlete experience to that of an able-bodied student-athlete. By advising ECAC officials, coaches, and administrators, this study aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program and how ECAC institutions can best advance this initiative going forward.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

More than fifty million people in the United States (1 out of 6 people) have documented disabilities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Individuals with disabilities are also almost three times as likely (29% vs. 10%) to be sedentary as individuals without disabilities (Patricia, 1994). In fact, 56% of people with disabilities do not engage in any physical activity, and only 23% of people with disabilities are active for at least thirty minutes three or more times per week (Patricia, 1994). This may be related to a lack of physical activity and athletic opportunities for individual with disabilities as compared to individuals without disabilities (United States Census Bureau, 2012; Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).

The American Association of Adaptive Sports Programs (AAASP) boasts membership of more than 2450 schools and 195 school districts. This organization has held over 1700 interscholastic competitions with 5600 participants and a total of \$1.2 million dollars' worth of funding via grants and equipment to schools. Teams are formed on a district-wide level and are comprised of students from elementary, middle and high schools within that district (American Association of Adaptive Sports Programs, 1996). AAASP, being one of the leaders in the adaptive sport movement, only serves a small fraction of people with disabilities. Some schools and states are recognizing the need to provide appropriate and equal opportunities in extracurricular athletics for students with physical disabilities, and are including adaptive sports as part of the school district's extracurricular athletic offerings.

Historically, athletes with medical impairments and disabilities had minimal legal recourse to assert rights to participate in competitive sports. No such rights were recognized at common law, and Constitutional claims against exclusion met limited success. In *City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Center* (1985), the Supreme Court held that individuals with disabilities were not a “quasi suspect class” (p.473). As a result, public schools and institutions could justify excluding disabled athletes from participation if their reasons were rationally related to a legitimate objective, such as to guard the health and safety of athletes. On a due process level, there is no fundamental or constitutional right to participate in competitive sports (Weston, 2005).

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 provide qualified disabled individuals with legal protection against discrimination on the basis of disability by requiring covered entities to provide reasonable accommodations and/or by modifying criteria for persons with disabilities (Weston, 2005).

Title IX of the Education Act Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination in schools. As this legislation is intended to provide equal opportunities, it is useful as a model for expanding opportunity for students with disabilities. Prior to the passage of Title IX, few schools offered interscholastic or intercollegiate athletic teams for girls. Since the passage of Title IX, female participation in athletics has expanded over 904% at the high school level (294,015 to 3,021,807) and over 456% at the college level (29,977 to 166,728) (Irick, 2015). The benefits that women receive from having opportunities to participate in sports can also be said for people with disabilities. Physical activity improves academic success, builds self-esteem, and prevents health problems (Hancock, 2011). It reduces the risk of developing heart disease, helps control weight, builds lean muscle, reduces fat, and prevents osteoporosis. Additionally, sport is where

people can develop skills like teamwork, goal setting, the pursuit of excellence in performance, and other achievement-oriented behaviors necessary for success in life (Lakowski, 2009).

Currently, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFSHSA) do not officially sanction any intercollegiate or interscholastic program, event or competition for individuals with disabilities (Lakowski, 2009). With statutes providing legal impetus and a regulatory framework to emulate, there has been a movement to make adaptive sport programs more attainable and available at the interscholastic and intercollegiate level.

The Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) has become the first collegiate athletic conference to offer NCAA-sanctioned events and varsity-level competition in adaptive sports (Springer, 2015). During the 2016-2017 school year, the ECAC expects athletes with disabilities to vie for championships in swimming, track and field, and wheelchair basketball. In the near future, the conference plans to add championships in sled hockey, goalball, sitting volleyball, rowing, and tennis (Springer, 2015). The inaugural year of having NCAA adaptive sport championships in the ECAC is expected to be somewhat of a “trial and error” year for the conference (Springer, 2015). While the benefits and needs of adaptive sport programs have been well documented, feedback on actual championships is not.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the competitive infrastructure of the ECAC adaptive sport program and build a “best practices” framework based on the inaugural year of its NCAA sanctioned events and varsity level competition.

Research Questions

Q1: From the inaugural year of NCAA sanctioned events and varsity level competition in

adaptive sports in the ECAC:

- a) What worked?
- b) What didn't work as well?
- c) What recommendations can be made for other schools and conferences?

Q2: At the participating ECAC schools:

- a) How were adaptive athletes made aware of the adaptive sport opportunities?
- b) How were the adaptive sports chosen?
- c) What percentage of the eligible population participated?

Q3: What are the calculated costs involved in adding the adaptive sports?

Definition of Terms

Adaptive Sports: Sports played by persons with a disability, including physical and intellectual disabilities.

Disability: a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities (Goldstein & Naglieri, 2016).

ECAC: Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference

National Governing Body (NGB): a sports organization that has a regulatory or sanctioning function. Sports governing bodies come in various forms, and have a variety of regulatory functions. Examples of this can include disciplinary action for rule infractions and deciding on rule changes in the sport that they govern.

NCAA: National Collegiate Association of Athletics. A non-profit association that regulates sports and championships at over 1,200 colleges and universities in the US.

Paralympic: a series of international contests for athletes with disabilities that are associated with and held following the summer and winter Olympic Games —called also *Paralympic Games*.

Reverse Integration: Having able-bodied participants play adaptive sports (wheelchair basketball, goal ball) (*Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 2016).

Student-athlete: An individual who participated on any varsity athletic team for a minimum of one academic year while enrolled at a four-year college or university (*NCAA Manual*, 2016).

Assumptions:

1. Study participants will complete all interviews and have a clear understanding of each question.
2. All responders will provide honest and accurate answers.
3. The data used in this study will be recorded in an accurate and timely manner.

Limitations:

1. The study population is limited to sports offered for those with physical disabilities.
2. Not all subjects will have the same adaptations.
3. Subjects may be biased to help grow the opportunity for adaptive athletes.

Delimitations:

1. This study will involve Division I, II, and III universities in the Eastern College Athletic Conference.
2. This study will involve NCAA affiliated administrators as well as student-athletes who are adaptive athletes.

Significance of the research

One out of every six people in the United States has a disability. Via empirical evidence, it has been supported that adaptive sport programs noted reductions over previous years in secondary health complications resulting from sedentary habits. Benefits identified by parents and supported via data include:

- The opportunity to play sports the kids would otherwise never have;
- The ability to work hard, participate in a group, set goals, & excel in sports;
- Active engagement and friendship with other students, mentors, & coaches;
- Increased physical and social competence and perceptions of oneself as an athlete;
- Positive perceptions of quality of life and independence (Lakowski, 2011).

One of the main challenges adolescents with disabilities face in terms of sport is finding an opportunity to participate. It is estimated that 4 to 4.7 million students under the age of 18 have disabilities (Wenger, Kaye, & LaPlante, 1996). The U.S. Department of Education estimates that nearly 95% of all children with disabilities who attend mainstream public schools do not have access to physical education and sport (Staff, 1994). The opportunity to explore the boundaries of one's physical abilities is important because it builds a foundation on which physical and social growth occurs (Blinde & McClung, 1997).

Significance of Study

The significance of this study will be the lessons learned from a pioneering conference event. The goal of this study is to help schools provide opportunities for adaptive athletes. Results of the study will provide feedback from Division I, II, and III institutions and they will benefit all college athletic conferences. Reasonable accommodation (which has been sparsely defined alongside interscholastic and intercollegiate sports), can finally have a standard set for adaptive sport programs. With multiple schools hosting competitions, a collaborative effort can

be made to come up with the best definition of reasonable accommodation possible. In the past, interscholastic and intercollegiate athletes have sued their respective schools to gain more access to varsity level athletics, so minimizing these instances alone is highly significant. The findings will allow schools to better understand the ins and outs of providing adaptive athletic opportunities.

This study will also promote inclusion and accommodation by the ECAC and NCAA, while developing excitement from youth/interscholastic prospects who could someday funnel in to the Paralympic sector. This could supply a phenomenal product that would grow the sports globally.

Finally, there will be potential to draw significant relationships between adaptive college athletics and job placement, self-identity, grade point average, and quality of life.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This chapter begins with some background on adaptive athletics, including research conducted in the area. Next, the legislation which supports adaptive sport opportunities at an interscholastic and intercollegiate level is presented, including the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Americans with Disabilities Act, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and case law. Additionally, the *Dear Colleague Letter* (2016) addressing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act has garnered the attention of all affected entities by providing a broad overview of Section 504 and school districts' obligations to provide educational services to students with disabilities. Finally, examples of state legislation and organizations providing adaptive athletics programs are included.

Adaptive Athletics

In 1960, the first ever Paralympic games was held in Rome, Italy. The Paralympic movement enables Paralympic athletes to achieve sporting excellence and inspire and excite the world. At the peak for adaptive athletes, the Paralympic vision is to develop all athletes from initiation to elite level. The external result is the contribution to a better world for all people with a disability. All people would include the thousands of adaptive athletes competing in high school athletics, and the tens of thousands of disabled persons who are not privy or who don't have the opportunity to participate in adaptive athletics, because it is not an option for them at the grade school level. The NCAA system has garnered national growth for Olympic sports,

whereas Paralympic sports currently are not represented. There are currently 122 Disabled Sport and Recreational Programs in the United States (McNiven, 2015).

An adaptive athlete is a person with a physical or mental disability who plays a sport (Lundberg, Bennet, Smith, 2011). Many adaptive sports are based on the existing able-bodied models, which have been modified to meet the needs of the disabled persons, but not all disabled sports are adaptive. Several sports have been uniquely created for persons with a disability and have no equivalent in non-disabled sports (Duncan, 2013). The push for inclusion and opportunity has also taken credence in Olympic sports, as civil rights legislation requires disabled athletes have the opportunity to compete in able-bodied athletics if they possess the skill and no result/rule changing alterations have to be made (Lavaque-Manty, 2015). There have been select instances in the NCAA where disabled athletes have been given the opportunity to compete at the college level. In 2011, Dalton Herendeen began his first year at the University of Indianapolis, a Division II school represented in the GLIAC (Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference). Three days after Herendeen was born, his left leg below his knee was amputated due to blood clotting complications. After seeing success throughout high school, The University of Indianapolis made him a part of their varsity swim team. Herendeen excelled in the water, setting numerous pool records and eventually becoming a two-time Paralympian (Stubbs, 2016). Herendeen was afforded this opportunity without accommodation.

Toure Butler played football for the University of Washington from 1996-1999. Ever since Butler was a child, he had difficulty understanding material he read, no matter how many times he read it, and struggled through school. One of his six older brothers took Butler under his wing, and somehow, he got by (Dimmick, 1996). Butler did not meet the NCAA's initial-

eligibility standards, but under Title III of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), Butler was deemed eligible to play (Dimmick, 1996).

Benefits of Adaptive Athletics

Adaptive athletics have evolved over the years. As adaptive athletics gained traction, organizations formed to support competition at the interscholastic level. The Minnesota Adaptive Athletics Association (MAAA), founded in 1969, provided youth with disabilities the same sport opportunity as other students. The association provided support, scheduling, and playoff ratings for the sports of soccer, floor hockey, and softball. In 1992, the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) accepted a proposal from MAAA to become the first high school activity association in the nation to sponsor adaptive athletic programs (Access Press Staff, 2015). The first state championships under the MSHSL began in 1994. The association created divisions for cognitive and physical disabilities, and most recently in 2016, a third division for athletes on the autism spectrum. Athletes with disabilities can also compete in track and field events. Minnesota is the first state where adaptive student-athletes can be on a sports team and earn varsity letters (Stein & Paciorek, 1993).

For many individuals with cerebral palsy and other disabilities, inequities in various areas of life have resulted in poor health, limited community participation, and a reduced quality of life. Research shows that participation in extracurricular activities and athletics significantly improves academic performance, behavior, and attendance. Participation in athletics can be used as an indicator of future success on standardized test scores, while student-athletes are more likely to become leaders as well (Williams, 2014). Most students with disabilities are not afforded these opportunities. Sports are a great way for adaptive students to better their chances at a successful future and develop their educational experience. Likely psychological gains

include an improvement of mood-state, with a reduction of anxiety and depression, an increase of self-esteem and feelings of greater self-efficacy. Sociological gains include new experiences, new friendships, and a countering of stigmatization. Perceived health is improved, and in a more long-term perspective there is a reduced risk of many chronic diseases. Finally, there is a greater likelihood of employment, with less absenteeism and enhanced productivity (Shephard, 1991).

There is a significant relationship between quality of life and athletic identity. Concerning quality of life, the activity limitations that people with disabilities often experience result in ‘more days of pain, depression, anxiety, and sleeplessness as well as fewer days of vitality when compared to individuals without activity limitations’ (Drum, 2013, p8). Determining quality of life (e.g., affect, peer relations) of youth athletes with physical disabilities may have significant implications on identity formation and motivation for continued involvement in sport and physical activity and on health and well-being. Thirty-one percent of children and adolescents 4 to 11 years of age with disabilities were reported to be sad, unhappy, or depressed compared with 17 percent of children without disabilities (Miller & Kaitz, 2015). Participation in physical activity and sport has been found to positively influence health-related quality of life, serve as an effective setting in promoting psychosocial qualities (e.g., self-esteem), and provide opportunities for children, who are often socially isolated, to be with peers and to develop close friendships (Miller & Kaitz, 2015).

Athletic identity is the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role and looks to others for acknowledgement of that role (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). It is a type of self-schema or how an individual perceives him or herself. Exploration of the existence and salience of an athletic identity should indicate the degree to which athletes with disabilities identify with the athletic role, develop a self-concept based on their athletic identity, and provide

evidence that they are true athletes. Strong athletic identity can establish salient self-identities through the development of skills, confidence, and social interactions during sport. Strong athletic identity is also related to better health. Athletic identity can be shaped and molded as early as during youth athletics (Martin, Mushett & Smith, 1995).

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Similar to the discrimination women experienced before Title IX came in to effect in 1972, individuals have suffered from discrimination on the basis of disability until the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehab Act). The Rehab Act prohibits discrimination based on disability in programs run by federal agencies, programs that receive federal financial assistance, in federal employment, and in the employment practices of federal contractors. Under the Rehab Act, an institution is required to provide a qualified student with a disability an opportunity to benefit from the institution's athletics program equal to that of students without disabilities. Generally, to make a claim an institution has denied an athlete equal opportunity under the Rehab Act, an athlete with a disability must establish that: (a) He/She has a disability; (b) He/She is otherwise qualified to participate in the athletics program, activity, or benefit in question; (c) He/She was excluded from the athletics program, activity, or benefit solely on the basis of the disability; and (d) This denial was discriminatory because He/She could not be accommodated with reasonable accommodations (Section 504).

For purposes of the Rehab Act, a person with a disability is one who (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities or major bodily functions; (2) has a record of such impairment; or (3) is regarded as having such an impairment. (Rehabilitation Act, 1973). The Rehab Act regulations require schools to address the following conditions: (1) the opportunities for students with disabilities have historically been limited; (2)

there is sufficient interest and ability to sustain a viable team; (3) there is a reasonable expectation for competition for that team; and (4) the students with disabilities, even with reasonable accommodations, do not possess sufficient skill to be selected for a single integrated team or compete actively on such a team if selected. The creation of these regulations would supplement, not replace, the existing regulations that require students with disabilities to always have the opportunity to try out for the mainstream team (34 C.F.R. § 104.37(c)(2))

McFadden v. The Howard County Public School System (2007) and *McFadden v. Grasmick* (2007) provide examples which have shed light on this grey area of adaptive athletics. Tatyana McFadden was a wheelchair racer at Columbia Atholton High School in Maryland. As a result of spina bifida, Tatyana was paralyzed early on in her life, but still wanted to compete against able-bodied peers at track meets. Tatyana had been racing in separate events where able-bodied runners were not competing. Tatyana wasn't interested in having her race count towards the team score; she simply wanted to have the same experience as her able-bodied teammates. A temporary injunction was granted in favor of Tatyana, as she was able to race at the same time as her able-bodied runners for the rest of the year. The *McFadden v. The Howard County Public School System* was an example of how a case-by-case basis approach would look.

Similar to the McFadden case, Mallerie Badgett was also contending to be on her high school's track and field team. Badgett had cerebral palsy, and also used a wheelchair to compete in track and field. Badgett chose to sue the AHSAA (Alabama High School Athletic Association) after they chose to accommodate her by creating a separate state wheel chair division that Badgett could compete in, instead of allowing her to race alongside her peers. Then Badgett argued that the AHSAA refused to include her in the mixed heat races or count her points towards her team's total; and that this was a violation of the Rehab Act and the ADA. The court

eventually came to be in favor of the AHSAA, holding that “to the extent Defendants were obligated to modify the track and field program, they have met that obligation by establishing a separate wheelchair division for track and field.”

While the regulations do permit the creation of separate teams, the court failed to recognize that the regulations also specify that schools must still provide students with disabilities the opportunity to try out for the mainstream team even when separate teams exist. The court claimed that allowing Badgett to contend alongside able-bodied competitors would be a safety hazard. The Martin case, which described above, provides reason that individualized assessments are required under the ADA. Badgett pleaded that because she held junior national records for her sport and was a gifted athlete, the AHSAA should have contended that she should’ve been able to compete in mixed heats. Popular verbiage that has been used to help decide between individual cases has been if a request “changed an essential aspect of the game/contest.”

The core element under this framework is whether the impairment affects a major life activity. Major life activities include performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, working, and caring for oneself plus school-related activities such as learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, and communicating (ADA Amendments Act of 2008). Major life activities also include major bodily functions including functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine and reproductive functions (42 U.S. Code § 12102). The coverage is quite broad, but does not include impairments of a temporary nature, so an impairment that is expected to impact a student for six months or less would not be

considered a disability under §504 of the Rehab Act. For the student athlete, participation in sports is not a major life activity as defined by the Rehab Act. Therefore, in order for a student athlete to qualify as having a disability, the disabling condition must affect areas of his or her life beyond sports.

In addition to demonstrating the existence of a disability to establish a case of discrimination under the Rehab Act, an athlete also must demonstrate that he or she is otherwise qualified to participate in the interscholastic athletics program. With regard to educational programs, the term “qualified” means that the student is capable of fulfilling the essential functions and requirements of the program, with or without the provision of “reasonable modifications” (The Rehabilitation Act of 1973). For the student-athlete, this means that he or she must prove that he or she is qualified to participate in interscholastic athletics programs before taking into consideration whether his or her disability is a factor in participating. Thus, with or without reasonable accommodations, student-athletes with disabilities must meet the essential eligibility requirements for participation in school interscholastic athletics. Next, an athlete must demonstrate that he or she is excluded from participation in an institution’s athletic programs based on his or her disability. A coach ultimately determines the roster for the team, and thus legitimate non-discriminatory factors, such as insufficient skill level, skill development, bad team chemistry or other performance-based criteria, could explain grounds for a denial. However, where the exclusion is made solely based on disability, it could be grounds for a discrimination claim under the Rehab Act (NCAA Inclusion Manual, 2010).

Rehabilitation Act Regulations

The U.S. Department of Education issued regulations that address interscholastic and intercollegiate sports as a required area of focus. It states: The Rehab Act. Section 504 states:

(a) Promulgation of rules and regulations

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in § 705 (20) of this title, shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Service. The head of each such agency shall promulgate such regulations as may be necessary to carry out the amendments to this section made by the Rehabilitation, Comprehensive Services, and Development Disabilities Act of 1978. Copies of any proposed regulations shall be submitted to appropriate authorizing committees of the Congress, and such regulation may take effect no earlier than the thirtieth day after the date of which such regulation is so submitted to such committees.

(b) "Program or activity" defined

For the purposes of this section, the term "program or activity" means all of the operations of

(1)(A) a department, agency, special purpose district, or other instrumentality of a State or of a local government; or

(B) the entity of such State or local government that distributes such assistance and each such department or agency (and each other State or local government entity) to which the assistance is extended, in the case of assistance to a State or local government;

(2)(A) a college, university, or other postsecondary institution, or a public system of higher education; or

(B) a local educational agency (as defined in § 8801 of Title 20), system of vocational education, or other school system;

(C) (3)(A) An entire corporation, partnership, or other private organization, or an entire sole proprietorship --

(i) if assistance is extended to such corporation, partnership, private organization, or sole proprietorship as a whole; or

(ii) which is principally engaged in the business of providing education, health care, housing, social services, or parks and recreation; or

(B) the entire plant or other comparable, geographically separate facility to which Federal financial assistance is extended, in the case of any other corporation, partnership, private organization, or sole proprietorship; or

(4) any other entity, which is established by two or more of the entities, described in paragraph (1), (2) or (3); any part of which is extended Federal financial assistance.

An institution that receives federal funding and offers physical education courses or that operates or sponsors interscholastic, club, or intramural athletics must provide qualified handicapped students an equal opportunity for participation. The Department of Education, although mandating regulations for interscholastic and intercollegiate sport, did not bring forth further guidance as to what constitutes equal opportunity. Students and school administrators tend to come in to conflict on this matter.

A recipient may offer to handicapped students' physical education and athletic activities that are separate or different from those offered to non-handicapped students only if separation or differentiation is consistent with the requirements of § 104.3441 and only if no qualified

handicapped student is denied the opportunity to compete for teams or to participate in courses that are not separate or different (Title 34 US Department of Education).

Finally, a student-athlete must demonstrate that his or her exclusion from the institution athletic program was discriminatory. Generally, exclusion is discriminatory when the student athlete could have participated in the interscholastic athletics program with reasonable accommodations. Defining a reasonable accommodation in the context of athletics has been the subject of much discussion and debate. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) within the U.S. Department of Education is responsible for protecting students' civil rights and is committed to working with schools, students, families, communities, athletic organizations, and advocacy organizations to ensure that students with disabilities are provided an equal opportunity to participate in extracurricular athletics. The OCR prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, handicap, age, or membership in patriotic youth organizations, and instructs educational institutions that receive federal funding how to comply with civil rights laws. A Dear Colleague Letter (DCL) issued by the OCR in January, 2013 reminded institutions that students with disabilities are not being afforded an equal opportunity to participate in extracurricular athletics in public schools (on all levels) and that §504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires equal opportunity in participation, including extracurricular activities. The DCL went on to explain if an adaptive athlete is qualified enough to make their varsity level athletic team for instance, but enhancements need to be made for competition to be feasible, changes must be made so long as this does not fundamentally alter the program. A reasonable accommodation might be to alter a rule allowing an adaptive swimmer to only touch the end of the pool with one hand – this would allow the adaptive athlete to compete without fundamentally altering the nature of swimming competition. In addition to direct

participation modifications that §504 makes mandatory, public institutions must also provide aids and services to qualifying adaptive athletes and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) eligible students. For example, an adaptive athlete who has diabetes will be provided with someone who can help with glucose testing and insulin administration (Hornsby & Chetlin, 2005).

The Dear Colleague Letter

The goal of the Dear Colleague Letter was to ensure equal opportunity for participation (Lakowski, 2011, p.97). The Dear Colleague Letter clarifies that in order to include students with disabilities to the fullest extent possibly in mainstream interscholastic athletics programs, institutions must provide reasonable accommodations upon the request of a student with a disability. This may include the modification of existing policies, practices, or rules. An accommodation is considered reasonable under the law if it is necessary for the student to be able to participate and the modification or waiver of the policy, practice, or rule would not fundamentally alter the nature of the sport or activity (Active Policy Solutions, Know Your Rights: Disability In Sport, n.d.). A modification of a competition rule would be fundamental and therefore not reasonable if:

- The modification changes the essential nature of the sport or activity or
- Gives the person with a disability a competitive advantage over non-disabled competitors.

In making determinations of requested accommodations, the athletic program must conduct an individualized assessment of a student with a disability to determine whether the requested modification given the student's individual circumstances would be a fundamental alteration (Section 3, DCL, 2016). An individualized assessment means that the institution will

evaluate a student with a disability based on the specific nature of their disability and the specific accommodations they need to participate in sport program. Additionally, to provide for equal opportunities, the interscholastic athletics program must conduct individualized assessments of a student with a disability to determine how they can modify existing policies, practices or rules in order to include a student with a disability in the athletic programming. A debate that has been the talking point in the interscholastic adaptive athletic world has focused on two center points.

1. Should each accommodation be considered on an individual, case-by-case basis, or can the local school system establish rules for participation that accommodate the novice as well as the elite athlete?
2. Can the accommodations in some instances, for example wheelchair track, require scoring?

In addition to the provision of equal access to services in mainstream programs, the Dear Colleague Letter further clarifies that institutions should expand opportunities for students with disabilities such as adding separate events within existing sports or creating adaptive programs for students with disabilities who cannot participate in the mainstream athletic programs even with reasonable accommodations (Davis, 2013). These expanded opportunities must be offered and supported using non-discriminatory criteria for distribution of resources as the institution's mainstream athletic programs (Wolanin & Steele, 2004).

Table 1.
Factors Identified by the Government Accountability Office Regarding Extracurricular Opportunities for Students With Disabilities

Factor 1	Schools do provide students with and without disabilities similar opportunities to attend physical education classes but face challenges in integrating students with disabilities in general physical education.
Factor 2	Students with disabilities participate in extracurricular athletics at consistently lower rates than students without disabilities.
Factor 3	Officials from school districts and state athletic associations said they lacked information and training that would help them provide athletic opportunities for students with disabilities.
Factor 4	Officials also requested guidance from the U.S. Department of Education on school responsibilities under law.
Factor 5	The U.S. Department of Education currently provides little support and guidance on physical education and extracurricular athletics to schools for students with disabilities.

(The Historical and Legal Background Leading to the Office of Civil Rights “Dear Colleague Letter, 2013).

Table 2.
Congress's Response to the GAO Report

Congressional Response	Areas to Address
1 & 2	Accessibility (built environment) and equipment (safe and effective use of sport equipment)
3	Personnel preparation (training of highly qualified adapted physical education teachers and coaches)
4 & 5	Teaching style (adapting individualized teaching techniques) and management of behavior (coaches need strong behavior management skills)
6 & 7	Program options (alternative and appropriate sport opportunities) and curriculum (adapted, accessible curricula to meet individual needs of students with disabilities)
8	Assessment, progress, achievement, and grading (assessment strategies meeting the needs of youth with disabilities)

(The Historical and Legal Background Leading to the Office of Civil Rights “Dear Colleague Letter, 2013).

Table 1 and Table 2 were created by The Government Accountability Office and it was then up to Congress to decipher the wants and needs of corresponding school districts. The Dear Colleague letter is the most recent development on the OCR front, as it is working on clarifying schools’ obligations under the Rehab Act. The Dear Colleague Letter specifically delves into §504 of the Rehab Act to provide athletic opportunities for students with disabilities. Section 504 does not say what schools must include for students with disabilities, but how and when they

must provide athletic programs. A roadmap is encouraged for schools to create adaptive programs for students with disabilities.

The Dear Colleague Letter was an attempt to clean up some open-ended verbiage, and develop greater awareness of the issue, while reminding interested persons of the legal and educational responsibilities that institutions have to prevent and appropriately respond to disability harassment. This regulatory framework translates to the disability context and should be implemented to ensure that sports opportunities for students with disabilities expand in the same manner as they have for women under Title IX (Lakowski, 2011, p. 97).

The Dear Colleague Letter further highlights that an educational institution may not operate its program or activity on the “basis of generalizations, assumptions, prejudices, or stereotypes about disability generally, or specific disabilities in particular” (Section II, DCL, 2016). Institutions cannot rely on generalizations of what students with disabilities are capable of to determine their participation in sports. Coaches must use the same criteria for determining playing time of students with disabilities as for students without disabilities.

Additionally, the Dear Colleague Letter requires institutions create grievance procedures to provide due process and the quick resolution of student’s complaints under the Rehab Act.

Furthermore, students who cannot participate in an institution’s or district’s existing extracurricular athletics program even with reasonable modifications are required to have an equal opportunity to receive the benefits of extracurricular activities. This may require adding adaptive sports to intramural and varsity participation opportunities. When the number of students with disabilities at an individual school is insufficient to field a team, school districts may develop district or region-wide teams, mix male and female students for co-ed adaptive

sport, and offer allied or unified sports teams (Galanter, 2013). An allied sports program means a program that is specifically designed to combine groups of students with and without disabilities together in physical activity (Code of Maryland). A Unified sports program would allow able-bodied competitors to compete with adaptive athletes using the rules and regulations that govern the adaptive sport.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

The American Disabilities Act (1990) is another civil rights law that protects the rights of adaptive athletes. The ADA prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. Five titles within the ADA constitute the application of the law to different areas of public life: Employment, Public Service, Public Accommodation, Telecommunications, and Miscellaneous.

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits disability discrimination in all public schools. If an institution receives federal financial assistance, it must ensure that children and youth with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in all programs or activities. Under Title II, a person with a disability may not be refused participation in a service program or activity simply because the person has a disability. Programs and services must be provided in an integrated setting, unless separate or different measures are necessary to ensure equal opportunity (Section 202). A person with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a “major life activity” or has a record of such and impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment, is qualified as an individual with a disability (42 U.S. Code § 12102). If the organization receives federal financial assistance, it must ensure that children and youth with

disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in the program or activity of the school, including extracurricular activities.

Title III (Public Accommodation)

Title III prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in the activities of places of public accommodations (Colker, 2000). This title prohibits private places of public accommodation from discriminating against individuals with disabilities. This includes both public and private schools alike. It also requires places of public accommodations, such as sports stadia and arenas, to remove barriers in existing buildings where it is easy to do so without much difficulty or expense. Businesses are expected to make "reasonable modifications" to their usual ways of doing things when serving people with disabilities, including taking steps necessary to communicate effectively with customers with vision, hearing, and speech disabilities (U.S. Department of Justice: ADA Update, 2011). Section III is regulated and enforced by the U.S. Department of Justice. In providing goods and services, a place of public accommodation may not use eligibility requirements that exclude or segregate individuals with disabilities, unless requirements are necessary. Existing facilities must have easily accomplishable means of entering and exiting; enhancements like installing ramps, widening doorways, making curb cuts at sidewalks and entrances are all examples of what is expected for satisfactory compliance (United States Access Board Ch. 4, n.d.).

An example of the effects of the ADA involved Casey Martin, a professional golfer (*PGA Tour, Inc. v. Martin*, 2001). Casey Martin had a serious condition called Klippel-Trenauney syndrome, which makes walking long distances extremely painful. This case addressed the following issues: 1) whether his condition is a disability within the ADA; 2) whether the Professional Golf Association tour is subject to Title III of the ADA; 3) whether walking is an

essential requirement of PGA level golf competition; and 4) whether the accommodation he requests is reasonable (golf cart for transportation). First and foremost, there was not a dispute about whether his condition was a disability or not. Martin's disability was determined to be "substantially altering to major life activities" (*PGA Tour, Inc. v. Martin*, 2001, p.5). As for issue number two, the Supreme Court holds that a professional sport is a place of public accommodation and that respondent is a customer of competition when he practices his profession. If a spectator with a disability were denied access to attend the event because of the disability, certainly that should be protected (Rothstein, 1998). There is no reason that other aspects of such an entertainment event should not be covered as well. Whether walking is considered a requirement of PGA level golf turned out to be the toughest aspect of this case for the judges to decide. The court decided walking is not an essential function of golf, and that using a golf cart is reasonable. Casey Martin won the case and continued to set the stage for athletes that would come to follow his example.

The ADA has had many powerful implications on adaptive athletics in public and private settings. The ADA and the Rehab Act work in tandem to allow liberation for adaptive athletes, but schools and places of public accommodation have been slow to comply with the legislation. Over thirty-five years after the passage of the Rehab Act, high school athletic associations in less than ten states and fewer than fifteen colleges and universities offer adaptive interscholastic or intercollegiate sports programs for students with disabilities (Lakowski, 2009, p.312).

Since 1993, new construction projects and places of public accommodation must be accessible to individuals with disabilities to the extent that it is not structurally impracticable (Sec.36.401). The Americans with Disabilities Act provides comprehensive civil rights protections for individuals with disabilities (Section 504, ADA).

In addition to physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities are also covered under all of the legislation that has been mentioned above. In order to compete in interscholastic and intercollegiate competition, student-athletes must show that they meet the eligibility criteria that their school or athletic governance organization establishes. Minimum requirements are set academically, while specific requirements are also set out to protect the health and safety of the student-athlete (NCAA FAQ). An example of this would be the age requirement to play interscholastic sports (this age varies by state). Academic requirements can also prevent student-athletes from participating in their sport. Although governance organizations make these rules under the idea that they are neutral and all inclusive, conflicts arise when the same criteria is applied to students with disabilities who may have been held back in school or were unable to take certain core academic courses due to their learning disabilities (Euban, 2002). Prior to *Martin*, the courts were divided on the issue of whether or not a waiver of an age eligibility rule for a student with a learning disability would fundamentally alter the nature of interscholastic competition. On one hand, courts upheld the rules because it was essential to maintain a competitive balance and promote the health and safety of the student athletes. In *Tatum v. The NCAA and St. Louis University* (1998) the court determined whether the substantive provisions of Title III apply to an athletic association that imposes eligibility criteria on public and private schools, and sponsors athletic events at public and private coliseums and stadiums around the country. Tatum, who was in high school at the time, took the American College Test (ACT) in the spring of his senior year. Based on a diagnosis of generalized anxiety disorder with a specific phobia related to testing, Tatum was permitted to take the ACT in a nonstandard format. Tatum argued that the NCAA's failure to recognize the scores from a nonstandard format violated Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. § 12101). When considering whether to

grant preliminary injunctive relief, the Court considered “the threat of irreparable harm to the movant; the state of balance between this harm and the injury that granting the injunction will inflict on other parties litigant; the probability that movant will succeed on the merits; and the public interest” (*Tatum*, 1998, p.2). The Court decided not to grant the injunction citing the lack of certainty surrounding plaintiff’s irreparable harm coupled with the lack of a substantial likelihood of success on the merits.

Government programs allow students with a disability an opportunity to benefit from the institution’s athletic program equal to that of the students without disabilities. To claim discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act, an athlete must demonstrate that they are qualified to participate in the athletic program. If the athlete cannot fulfill the task to the same degree as an able-bodied athlete, then there is no call for discrimination. Reasonable accommodation is what some employers can get hung up on and is what programs like the ADA and the Rehab Act can help with. Because of the multiple variations that come in to play when handling discrimination claims for adaptive athletes, only so much precedent can be set in terms of setting a general rule for all future cases. There have been both interscholastic and intercollegiate cases in the past, which have shed light on what the ADA and Rehab Act protect for the student-athlete.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a four-part piece of legislation that ensures students with a disability are provided with “Free Appropriate Public Education” (FAPE) tailored to their individual needs. Schools are required to provide FAPE in the “least

restrictive environment” (Section 504, IDEA). Section 602(3) of the IDEA defines having a disability as someone having one of the following:

- Developmental delay (only for children under the age of 9)
- Intellectual disability (formerly known as mental retardation)
- Hearing impairments including deafness
- Speech or language impairments
- Visual impairments including blindness
- Emotional disturbance
- Orthopedic impairments
- Autism
- Traumatic brain injury
- Other health impairments
- Specific learning disabilities

In *Matthews v. National Collegiate Athletic Association* (2001), Anthony Matthews played football for Washington State University during the 1999 season. During that season, Matthews sued the NCAA after it declared him academically ineligible to play football. During the '98 season, the NCAA granted Matthews a limited waiver due to his learning disability. His minimum credit hour requirement was reduced, and the 75/25 rule, which stipulates that student-athletes cannot earn more than 25% of their credits for a school year during the summer, was waived. During the 1999 season, Matthews sought an additional waiver of the 75/25 rule, which the NCAA denied, arguing that his failure to meet the rule for a second consecutive year was due to his “lack of effort, not to his learning disability” (Lakowski, 2009, p.302). The NCAA would contend granting Matthews the waiver would “fundamentally alter the NCAA’s purpose of

promoting academics and athleticism” (Walker, 2005, p.615). Matthews claimed the NCAA had discriminated against him because of his disability, in violation of Title III of the ADA. Applying the individualized inquiry that *Martin* requires, the court held granting Matthews the waiver of the 75/25 rule would not fundamentally alter the NCAA’s purpose and policies (*Matthews*, 179 F. Supp. 2d at 1227).

First, the court noted that the 75/25 rule was not an essential aspect of the game of football or the NCAA athletic program. Second, the court found that granting a waiver to Matthews did not provide him with a competitive advantage, but “would merely provide a modification that would permit Plaintiff access to competitive college football at WSU while he pursues his degree in an academic program tailored to his learning disability” (Matthews, 2001, p.34). As a result, the court concluded that Matthew’s request for a waiver was reasonable because it would not fundamentally alter the NCAA or WSU athletic program.

In *Cruz v. Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association* (2001), Luiz Cruz, a high school student with a learning disability (mental retardation), sued the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) after it enforced its age limit rule, which barred him from participating in sports once he turned nineteen. Cruz requested that he still be allowed to participate in high school sports because his advanced age for his grade was due to a learning disability. The PIAA justified the denial of the waiver on the grounds that the Age Rule was an essential eligibility requirement for interscholastic competition because its purpose was to prevent athletes from having a competitive advantage, posing a safety risk to other students, or displacing athletes who meet the regular age requirements from teams (Lakowski, 2009). Accordingly, the PIAA argued that waiving such an essential requirement would fundamentally alter the nature of interscholastic competition as prohibited by *Martin*. In response, Cruz argued

that the Age Rule was only an essential eligibility requirement when an individualized assessment demonstrates that a waiver would, in fact, present a safety risk, displace other athletes or present a competitive advantage. He contended that, pursuant to *Martin*, the PIAA should conduct an individualized assessment to determine whether any of their concerns might exist in Cruz's specific case. Cruz further argued that an assessment of this kind would show that his waiver would not fundamentally alter the program as: (1) he did not present a safety risk because he was five-foot three-inches tall and weighed 130 pounds, "which is by no means greater than the average height and weight of other, even younger, participants," (2) his participation did not give him a competitive advantage because he was "not a star player in any of his interscholastic sports," and (3) he was not displacing other athletes because there was a "no cut" policy in football and track and field (Lakowski, 2009, p.301). The court concluded that allowing him to participate in football and track would not fundamentally alter the nature of PIAA interscholastic competition. In doing so, the court rejected the PIAA's arguments that undergoing such an individualized assessment would be unduly burdensome and held that such a process was precisely what *Martin* required. The courts appropriately applied *Martin* in context of interscholastic sport. Something that may be individualized based on varying court settings, was this in-particular court's understanding of the importance of athletic participation for students with disabilities (Lakowski, 2009).

State Legislation

In May of 2007, Maryland enacted the Fitness and Athletics Equity for Students with Disabilities Act, which included individuals with disabilities to be taken in to consideration regarding physical education and athletic programs. Schools must provide students with

disabilities with equal opportunities to participate in physical education and athletic programs (Adaptive Physical Education, 2015). The act also mandates schools to develop policies and procedures to “promote and protect” the inclusion of students with disabilities (NASBE [Code 7-4B-02](#), 2008). Reporting to the Maryland State Department of Education is provided annually for compliance. The state of Maryland puts on the Adaptive Sports festival annually, and the Kennedy Krieger’s Physically Challenged Sports Program provides over 18 therapeutic sports and recreational programs for children with varying degrees of physical abilities in the greater Baltimore area (State School Health Policy Database, n.d.).

USOC Partnership

The Gateway to Gold (G2G) initiative of the USOC is a talent identification program that will introduce people with Paralympic-eligible impairments to Paralympic sport and lead them to the athlete pipeline for the U.S. Paralympic team. The four core elements of the strategy are as follows:

- Awareness & Communication – Make Paralympics a household word
- Grassroots Programs – Increase and enhance opportunities for Paralympic-eligible individuals to participate, develop, and compete in Paralympic sports.
- Athlete identification – Provide services to NGBs/HPMOs and tools to partner organizations (NCAA) and impaired individuals to facilitate participation.
- High Performance Programs – Support the athlete development requirements of each Paralympic sport.

The G2G strategy is a means to achieve sustained competitive excellence for student-athletes with Paralympic sport eligible disabilities competing for their respective college and university teams and for U.S. Paralympics.

The impact of complying with legislation

Implications of the assumed additions of opportunities for adaptive athletics will be vast. The changes below will cover not only the benefits of these added opportunities, but also the assumed results from the implementation. Certified Master Athletic Administrator Michael Williams briefed the significance of adding adaptive athletic opportunities.

- Budget -- Boards of education and superintendents will be forced to increase spending to accommodate athletes with disabilities (preferred) and/or cut existing programs (discouraged). A 10-percent increase in spending can be expected if no existing programs are cut.
- Defining a Student with Disability -- When considering the educational services for which a student with disabilities qualifies, IEP committees have prescribed guidelines. When considering whether a student has a physical or mental disability entitling him/her to accommodations in athletics, there is no clear, uniform definition -- how will the LLS require a student with a disability to prove how substantially limited his/her life is by a physical or mental disability?
- Equal Opportunity -- More students with disabilities will have an equal chance to participate in education-based programs. If expanded budgets are affordable, cuts of existing programs will not reduce opportunities for students without disabilities.
- Numbers -- More students will participate in interscholastic athletics so long as existing programs are not cut to accommodate budgets.
- Connections -- More students will be connected to their schools and communities, extending the "ownership" of schools to more students and families. Increasing connections can only help decrease the sense of alienation that is becoming more

prevalent among students. Disconnected/alienated students are more likely to be disruptive, even violent

- Cultural Diversity -- The erosion of stereotypes, biases and prejudices will continue, promoting safety, cooperation and acceptance within our increasingly diverse population.
- Rules -- Changes will occur as greater accommodations are made to include, as fully as is possible, our students with disabilities. Scoring will continue to be an issue. If not scored, then the student's participation has intrinsically less value than that of students without disabilities. If scored, schools without students with disabilities in those sports/events will be at a competitive disadvantage and less likely to win the contest/event. Educationally sound compromises must be reached.
- Scheduling -- Games and practices must be scheduled in already booked facilities. Time and space will be an administrative issue.
- Officials -- Already stretched officials' associations may experience greater shortages. Training of officials will undergo changes. More students with disabilities will go on to be officials.
- Coaches -- Certification and training of coaches will undergo changes. More students with disabilities will go on to be coaches.
- Safety and Risk Management -- Additional safeguards to protect students from the risk of injury will need to be developed and implemented, often on a case-by-case basis.
- Accessibility of Facilities -- Students will need to be able to access fields, tracks and all other facilities, which may require intensive accessibility studies by LEA staff (Williams, 2014).

Although the information provided above may seem vague, when it comes to facility upgrades and athletic team implementation, it is imperative to have all affected groups represented.

In conclusion, it is under the guarantee of federal statutes (ADA, IDEA and § 504) that local public school systems will be required to develop and implement an interscholastic athletic program for students with disabilities. The inclusion of students with disabilities into athletics will generally take three forms:

1. The student is able to participate in athletics without any accommodations.
2. The student is able to participate against or alongside athletes in individual events (not team sports) with allowable accommodations or modifications.
3. The school system will develop an alternative athletic program because the student is unable to participate in individual or team sports because the necessary accommodations or accommodations:
 - Fundamentally alter the sport
 - Significantly increase the safety risk to the student or other athletes
 - Disadvantage other athletes
 - Provide the student with an advantage.

The Department of Education and the ADA

The Paralympic movement, and therefore the interscholastic and intercollegiate movement to propel adaptive athletics, has been slow to gain any traction. Administrators at the collegiate level are still new to the idea of supporting and/or going grassroots to promote opportunities for disabled athletes. Perhaps the lack of awareness or knowledge of needs to comply with the multiple aforementioned legislations have “helped” to stray administrators away from instituting

these opportunities. There are institutions that do provide these opportunities at one level or another, and there are institutions that have no varsity level programs, let alone intramural opportunities. By administering interviews with universities who do have ample opportunities for students with disabilities, and by administering interviews with universities who don't have ample opportunities for students with disabilities, we will be able to find the gaps in thinking, and mark out a clear path for those universities without opportunities. Not only will there be an ample roadmap provided, but recent legislation, which has fallen by the wayside to more pertinent NCAA news, will give universities lawful reasons to create opportunities. This study will help gauge what factors come in to play when deciding on whether to fund NCAA affiliated, adaptive athletic programs, as well as find out where the gaps in thinking are amongst NCAA administrators.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This is a pragmatic, exploratory study. Exploratory research is appropriate for a problem that has not been studied more clearly, establishes priorities, and develops operational definitions. The study is grounded by a legal and regulatory framework, but the focus is pragmatic: lessons learned from the implementation of an inaugural adaptive athletics event sponsored at the collegiate level.

Personal interviews were conducted to generate information on the ECAC adapted program. Although this study seeks practical information rather than motivated by a need to develop a theory, the technique utilized was based on theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is defined as “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his/her data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his/her theory as it emerges” (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009).

Theoretical sampling is unlike conventional sampling, because the researcher begins the analysis while collecting the data. The concepts that are generated are determined by collecting data that leads to analysis. These questions lead to more data collection allowing the researcher to learn more about these concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2012).

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. Email invitations were sent out to ten participants that the researcher felt would best represent the study's needs. These

interviews all took place over the phone. The researcher received recommendations from the first set of participants on whom else to contact for the study, via email and/or phone. The process continued until the researcher felt that a sufficient number of participants had been interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured with six questions guiding the conversation based on the study's research question. Ten participants in total were interviewed. The information learned from these interviews helped the researcher assess the inaugural year of adaptive athletic NCAA sanctioned sport in the ECAC.

Each interview began with an introduction of what the study was trying to accomplish, and why the researcher was carrying out the study. The primary questions asked were the stated research questions, with additional questions added as the topics were introduced by the various participants:

1. From the inaugural year of NCAA sanctioned events and varsity level competition in adaptive sports in the ECAC...
 - a. What worked?
 - b. What didn't work?
 - c. What recommendations can be made?

Follow up questions:

- Is team scoring a possibility for next year?
 - What are you doing at the conference level to advance this initiative?
2. At the Participating ECAC schools:
 - a. How were adaptive athletes made aware of the adaptive sport opportunities?
 - b. How were the adaptive sports chosen?
 - c. What % of the adaptive population participated?

Follow Up Questions:

- What does the future of recruiting look like for adaptive athletes?
 - What is the significance of the relationship with the USOC?
3. What are the calculated costs involved in adding the adaptive sports?

Data Analysis

Additional questions were asked based upon the participant's answers above. Each participant, depending on his or her job title, had a different expertise that was valuable to the study. Each interview varied in length, depending on the participants' knowledge and perception of the inaugural year of adaptive athletic competition. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for future data analysis.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The purpose of this study is to examine the competitive infrastructure of the ECAC adaptive sport program and build a “best practices” framework based on the inaugural year of its NCAA sanctioned events and varsity level competition. The study was comprised of ten individuals and used qualitative research based semi-structured interviews to delve in to the adaptive athletics initiative promoted by the Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC). The findings from the ten interviews will be presented in this chapter, beginning simply with what did and didn’t work during the inaugural year of adaptive competition, while moving towards questions surrounding the landscape of the adaptive athletics initiative at the coach, administrator, and official level.

Participant background information

Ten individuals were chosen by the researcher for their knowledge, role, and/or involvement in the ECAC adaptive athletics movement. Based on the unstructured style of the interviews, the researcher used the information gathered to strategically choose whom to interview next. Fifteen subjects were contacted to participate in the study, with ten out of the fifteen agreeing to participate, making for a response rate of 66.6%. A pre-determined set of questions was prepared for the interviews, with the flexibility to ask other questions if new information was provided to the researcher. The participants in this study were all associated with the ECAC at some level. Participants held one of the three following occupations: coach, administrator, or conference official. Out of the ten participants, three were ECAC officials,

three were ECAC affiliated school administrators, and four were ECAC affiliated collegiate swim and/or dive coaches.

Research Question 1

From the inaugural year of NCAA sanctioned events and varsity level competition in adaptive sports in the ECAC...

a) What worked? b) What didn't work? c) What recommendations can be made?

The ECAC open swim and diving championships were held on March 3-5. The swimming meet is the only event that has/will take place during the confines of my study; therefore, all statements made about the championships held during the athletic calendar year solely involve the ECAC swim championships. In order to better understand the successes and trials/tribulations of the mixed adaptive events at the competitions, the participants were asked the following questions: (1) How did the adaptive student-athletes feel about the experience? (2) What are the differences between this year's competition and last year's competition, focusing on the adaptive athlete addition? What will be different next year compared to this year? Because of the varying expertise of the subjects, some subjects were able to give longer, more thorough answers than others were. The participant's responses were organized in to two categories, "Positives aspects of the adaptive events and competition" and "Negative aspects of the adaptive events and competition."

Table 1

Positive aspects of the adaptive events and competition"

Reasons	%	<i>n</i>
Student-Athlete Experience	100.0%	10
Increased exposure/education	90.0%	9
Partnership with Paralympics & NCAA	50%	5
Inexpensive for institutions	50%	5

1. Student-athlete experience

Since this was the first competition of its kind where adaptive athletes were able to compete in the conference championship, all subjects agreed that actually giving the opportunity to the student-athletes to have a platform to compete in was very important. Although only 5 athletes competed in the mixed open events at the championships, all of the participants stated that the competition would only increase next year and that the fact that the necessary steps were made to have this opportunity happen in the first place was crucial. Below are quotes from participants that touch on the student-athlete experience as a benefit of the championship.

“The impact is years from now. Normally, student-athletes are effected positively by their time competing. Giving these student-athletes a platform to pursue their dreams where they aren’t limited holds incredible long term significance” -RS2

“Normally, you would have to go to a separate event to cater to the needs of your adaptive athletes. These athletes can now compete and compete for an intercollegiate championship.” -RS3

“This event is all about the student-athletes. There are so many benefits from being able to compete at this level, and this is a great start to providing those opportunities.” -RS8

“This is so much more than a chance to compete for these adaptive athletes. This is a chance to gain so many skills that able-bodied college athlete’s gain every year. Now the adaptive athletes can have an identity outside of their disability.” -RS9

“For athletes, it means the opportunity to play for their school. They identify themselves as athletes. That is part of who they are. Now, they get to make that part of their college experience, instead of it being separate from their college experience. They can be part of

a varsity sports program, and that's the same message high school athletes who don't have disabilities get about their future.” – RS10

2. Increased Exposure

Nine of the ten participants cited the exposure the championship gave the adaptive athletic initiative that the ECAC is backing. There was a range of responses relating to the exposure of meet. Five out of the nine participants felt like the exposure would be beneficial to reaching other adaptive athletes who were either interscholastic athletes or on campus athletes who did not know about the opportunity. Four out of the nine participants felt that the exposure was important to reach administrators and coaches to show how important this initiative is, so that there could be more of a backing from their respective athletic departments and head coaches. Below are quotes from participants that touch on the reach in which the exposure of the meet touched.

“I think this competition will at the least show administrators of the opportunities that are available. These programs are supported by the Paralympics and by the NCAA. They can help facilitate participation by youth and young adults.” –RS6

“We want to get on the athlete's schedules; get on their radar. That is our goal for the future. We're working with New England sports adaptive to implement the beginning stages of awareness. Our priority is to get more athletes...to be able to recruit the best adaptive athletes.” –RS5

“You increase exposure by adding support. Get support from people in the ECAC who this is affecting. Educate fans on the point system. Make sure the meet info is clear. Education at the college level is key.” –RS3

“A lot of these athletes are on the Paralympic team already. These are very talented athletes. Having a Paralympic athlete on your college swimming team would receive positive publicity and be great for exposure.” –RS2

“The championships are a great way to get the word out. This is an emerging area. We want to attract attention from the athletes competing. If you're not enlightened on the subject of adaptive athletics, then it is a distraction. Education is key. We need to make sure people understand the benefits of providing these opportunities so they can buy in.” –RS1

“We want to produce the highest level of adaptive athletes. We want adaptive athletes to say, “I want to be the next Grace Norman, I want to be the best Allysa Seely (both medalists in the Paralympic Triathlon in Rio). This is such a necessary step to strengthening our adaptive athletic system from youth to Paralympic.” –RS10

“Our communications team at our university writes as many stories as possible on our adaptive athletes on the team. These are published on our athletic website and in our alumni magazine. It’s a great way to reach alumni and current students who currently aren’t familiar with Paralympic competition, but who are interested in supporting the initiative.” –RS7

3. Partnership with Paralympics & NCAA

Five of ten participants cited a partnership with the Paralympics and the NCAA as major benefits from the implementation of the adaptive athletic championships. Each of the five participants noted that the relationship with the USOC in particular was key, because of their mission statement directly relating to that of the adaptive athletes. A conference official for the ECAC stated that the USOC is really driving home this initiative, and they are an incredibly important piece to the puzzle. Below are quotes from participants that touched on the impact the partnership with the Paralympics & NCAA made on the Adaptive Athletic Championships.

“Our relationship with the USOC is integral. They are the ones really driving this movement. They help get the word out, that it is an emerging area, and in doing so they attract attention and give the adaptive athletes exposure.” –RS1

“There are 79 NCAA institutions that have student-athletes that competed in the Paralympics in Rio. The growing numbers of adaptive athletes at NCAA institutions has called for a higher engagement in Para sport opportunities.” –RS10

“We are proud of our role at the forefront of providing opportunities for student-athletes to compete in Para sports. We hope this event helps generate additional attention and support for these participants and this field.” –RS8

“This could be a great filter system for our Paralympic teams. This could really lead to growing the Paralympic program and starting kids out younger and giving them a competitive field to work with at the national level on a more consistent basis.” –RS9

“I currently have athletes on my team who compete in the Paralympics. They’ll go to the Paralympics, tell their teammates of the support system we have here, and then those high school athletes will want to come to compete at our schools. The relationship is really great.” –RS2

4. Inexpensive

Five of the ten participants mentioned a stigma that many people unfamiliar with adaptive athletic competition may feel it is expensive to implement, and that costs for equipment, officials, travel, etc. would raise significantly with the increased opportunities. A coach of a DIII ECAC institution noted that besides a specialized uniform for the adaptive athlete, there were not any adaptations to the budget. Two of the five participants noted that it depended on the classification of the physical disability. Some athletes may need buses with wheelchair access, while others mentioned limited pool time as an indirect expense. The following quotes are from participants that noted the inexpensiveness of the added adaptive opportunities as a positive of the implementation of the 2017 intercollegiate para swimming championships.

“Most adaptive athletes aren’t going to need extra equipment. We had to buy a custom swimsuit for one of our athletes, but other than that there aren’t many added costs that would be different from that of an able-bodied athlete.” –RS2

“In terms of added costs during meet day, we don’t need special officials, and the equipment is all the same. The officials do need to be briefed on the appropriate accommodation for the athlete, but that is something that is brought to the attention of the officials plenty of time before competition begins.” -RS4

“We spent extra money on a special warmup uniform and on suits, but that is it. Our athlete is a dwarf, so not much changes in terms of accommodation via extra money. –RS7

5. Accommodation

Three of the participants cited the success of accommodating athletes at all levels of competition. The three participants shared the view that the venue, as well as the personnel who were involved in the competition, were prepared for the challenges that may have been presented. They believe that with completely updated and reasonable accessibility via the ADA, any foreseeable problems beforehand were omitted. Whether it was the accommodation of competition schedule, or the enhanced communication with officials, meet directors who were unfamiliar with the accommodation needed for the adaptive athletes, all three participants agreed as a whole that the competition was successful. Below are quotes from participants who viewed the efforts of the host venue (Navy), and the coordination of the championships to be a positive aspect of the ECAC Championship.

“The events in which the adaptive athletes were competing in only took fifteen to twenty minutes. The events took place during when a time period that is usually blocked off for a break time in between events, so it worked out really well. I think the crowd really enjoyed the events, and the kids got a great reception.” – RS5

“Facilities that were updated or constructed within the past 25 years have reasonable accessibility due to ADA mandates. Sometimes there is temporary set up that has to take place at these events, but all pools have plenty of space for set up and accessibility.” – RS6

“No adaptations were needed at the venue. Officials needed to be told beforehand of the accommodation needed for each individual athlete, like having to start in the water beforehand for example, or having an accommodation to the rule like a one hand touch instead of two. As long as everything is communicated in advance, there is no issue whatsoever.” – RS4

Negative aspects of the adaptive events and competition

For the purpose of this study, “Negative aspects of the adaptive events and competition” refers to the setbacks and concerns with the 2017 intercollegiate para

swimming championships. See the table below for a complete summary of the findings where n= the number of participants that discussed the specific concern in their interview.

Table 2

Negative aspects of the adaptive events and competition ”

Reasons	%	<i>n</i>
Minimal # of athletes competing	100.0%	10
Athletes not computed in team score	70.0%	7
Team sports behind schedule	40%	4
Practice Issues/Distracton	40%	4
Seen as off shoot	30%	3

1. Minimal # of athletes competing

All ten participants cited the lack of athletes competing in the championship to be a concern. All shared the view that although five adaptive athletes were given the opportunity to compete at the intercollegiate para swimming championships, those five athletes were far from ideal. Participants primarily noted the inaugural year having an effect on the lack of participation. Below are quotes from participants that illustrate the concern of having minimal athletes competing in the 2017 intercollegiate para swimming championships.

“It’s great that there is an individual aspect to the competition and that there are enough people to compete. There were only five. I would love more competitors.” –RS9

“Last year, it wasn’t just restricted to collegiate athletes. This year it is, and we didn’t see the jump in numbers that we thought we would.” –RS8

“We need more participation in these events. It would bring a really neat dynamic for inclusion. The success of this meet could really help college coaches take initiative.” –RS3

“On one side, yes, exposure of the event via advertising, marketing, and education will help publicize the event and attract athletes. On the other side, you’d like to see a natural increase in athletes simply by word of mouth and by simply knowing of the opportunity. Not all athletes who were eligible to compete competed.” –RS10

“The mixed open events took place during a break in the action. Because there was only the 100m freestyle and 100m backstroke, they could throw the events simply where it would not affect the other swimmers schedule. With only 5 athletes total competing, it almost felt like a sideshow.” –RS4

“In the future, I’d love to see more adaptive athletes competing in the events, with all four strokes being represented. I think adding a prelim stage and a final stage would be great, but it all depends on the numbers.” -RS3

“I think the participation was lower this year because the guidelines for how the adaptive event would be contested were not set until days before the meet. Coaches and athletes need time to budget and plan for meets. I am hopeful we can get this done much sooner for next year.” –RS2

2. Athletes not factored in team score

Seven out of the ten participants cited the fact that the mixed open events did not count towards the overall team score as a negative aspect of the meet. A concern mentioned from a DIII coach in the ECAC was that the placing for the events were scored by measuring how far away an athlete was from their respective American record, so even if you swam the fastest, you may not have come in first. All seven of the ten participants noted that having multiple athletes in the same para classification would help organize the meet and give appreciation and exposure to more athletes. Two of the seven participants stated that they thought the para competitors would never be involved in team scoring. Below are quotes from participants on the concerns of not having the athletes’ performances factored in to the team scores.

“The plan for this year was to have the events be calculated in the team scores. That would’ve been great, but it lost steam, and there would have to be more participants.

There were not enough participants for each disability classification. Ideally, you’d have each classification have its own race.” –RS9

“I don’t foresee these events effecting the team scoring. Scoring is done by calculating how far away you are from the American record.” –RS4

“Getting more and more participants is the key. I think this is a great start. Education of the movement is necessary. In terms of these events effecting team score, I don’t think that is necessary. The punishment of not having enough adaptive athletes hurting the schools chance to succeed at a championship will only hurt the movement.” –RS3

“Currently the scoring is how far away the competitor is from the American record. For the situation we had this year, that works, but if we truly want to give adaptive athletes the same opportunities as able bodied athletes, then we need to find a way for them to actually feel like a part of the team at these championships.” -RS8

3. Team sports behind schedule

Four out of the ten participants cited the lack of a plan for the team sports initiative. The ECAC’s vision was to have team sports implemented in the near future, yet no word has broken on the subject. One conference official stated that they are solely focused on swimming and track & field because of the publicity at the Olympic level. Below are quotes from participants who identified the lack of a plan for team sports to be a concern for the adaptive athletic initiative of the ECAC.

“We’re just focusing on swimming and track and field at the moment. Those two sports have the most publicity at the Olympic level. There is not a concrete plan in place yet for team sports” –RS5

“We need to make certain that money used for student-athletes with disabilities is in addition to what we have right now for other sports — not taking away money or resources.” –RS3

“Costs of team sports could cause institutions to stay away. Ideally, these teams would come from already developed club sports or rec sports on a campus. We need people who are bought in to the adaptive movement in order for this to work. There needs to be a link to the athletic department’s mission.” –RS1

“Ideally, we would want these programs to be implemented through the already created club teams or rec teams. The costs of team sports could cause people to stay away. We need people who are bought in, but for now we’re focused on swimming and track & field.” –RS10

4. Practice Issues/Distractions

Four out of the ten participants cited practice issues and distractions as reason for concern with the current model. One administrator of a member ECAC school stated how new para teams could affect the budget of schools who are already losing money on the sports they are already sponsoring. Another ECAC swimming coach stated that the adaptive athletes would take away from practice time to the already established team, and cited the already strict time demands the coach has with the athletes as a stressor to his team. Below are quotes from participants who noted practice issues and indirect distractions the adaptive athletic initiative brings to teams.

“I think the initiative is great, but it can be costly to coaches. It is like having to coach another team. These swimmers are totally separate from able-bodied swimmers. Most swimming pools on college campuses are six lanes wide, and if you have an athlete who is assumedly swimming much slower than your able-bodied swimmers, that makes practice difficult. Lanes are very valuable. When you’re only allowed to have 20 hours of practice a week, it is important for practice to be as efficient as possible.” –RS4

“The most important thing that an institution can do is be open to the topic. This needs to be close to the mission of the school. The typical coach is precarious when it comes to adding adaptive athletes, because it is a new idea. A coach’s focus is to build a winning team with a budget, so that comes at a price. This just becomes another item to worry about, and it can definitely become a distraction for a coach.” –RS1

“The hindrance is getting in the way of able body athletes because the para athlete is too slow. There is limited lane space. Where do you put the para athletes? These athletes could be at risk to get hurt.” –RS3

“At a swimming meet, everything is timed intentionally. Swimmers need certain time to cool down, certain time to warm up, and all that. These para events ran in to break time. If we were to have more athletes competing, we could rethink how to run a meet, but with the two races randomly placed in the schedule, it was a bit of a distraction from everything else going on.” –RS4

“The last thing you want to do is jeopardize or manipulate the meet. There are NCAA mandated breaks. You want to move along as quickly as possible.” –RS8

5. Seen as an off shoot

Three participants cited the lack of continuity between the intercollegiate para swimming championships and the ECAC open swim and dive championships as a concern for the adaptive athletics initiative as a whole. One of the participants claimed that they could not see this as an NCAA sponsored sport, and that it was too far off from the able-bodied swimmers. Below are quotes from participants that saw the adaptive athletic initiative as a separate entity from the already in place ECAC open swim and dive championships.

“I do think that by having a high amount of participants competing in the ECAC championships that it could hurt the meet structure as a whole. Maybe if there are enough adaptive athletes interested in participating, they could have their own championships. There are a lot of ideas to explore.” –RS9

“The system worked well at this year’s Championship, but I solely see this as an off shoot of the able bodied championships. These events would run in to break time, which would affect the scheduling of the entire meet.” –RS4

“I just don’t see it in the NCAA. Maybe it could be an offshoot of the program. They are just totally separate from the able-body swimmers. I just don’t see adaptive sport coming in to the meet itself. I don’t want to jeopardize or manipulate the meet or the NCAA mandated breaks.” –RS4

Research Question 2

At the participating ECAC Schools:

- a) How were adaptive athletes made aware of the adaptive sport opportunities?*
- b) How were the adaptive sports chosen?*
- c) What percentage of the adaptive population participated?*

In order to understand the initiatives of the participating ECAC schools regarding adaptive athletics, it was necessary to get a sense of what ECAC officials were looking to implement in

the coming years, and what the goals of the conference was regarding adaptive athletics. The participants were asked the following questions: (1) What kind of recruiting efforts have been made to attract adaptive athletes? On campus/interscholastic? (2) Is there a plan in place at your institution to implement team sports for adaptive athletes? (3) What is the best way to support these programs?

What kind of recruiting efforts have been made to attract adaptive athletes?

All ten participants addressed the question regarding recruiting efforts in their own way; depending mostly on if they were a coach, administrator, or conference official. All participants who were willing to answer the questions acknowledged that recruiting on campus was essential. Nine out of the ten participants acknowledged that there was a specific recruiting initiative that was taking place on or off campus. One participant has recruited adaptive athletes at the Paralympic level, while others mentioned recruiting as somewhat of a hands-off initiative to find adaptive athletes to compete. The following quotes provide a glimpse in to what kind of recruiting efforts were made to attract adaptive athletes, and how the adaptive athletes were made aware of the opportunities.

“I think I’ve had some success attracting adaptive athletes because of my work with the USOC. The student-athletes on my team who have competed in the Paralympics at a young age know of my expertise and comfortability in the area, so I think that is a recruiting tool in and of itself. The student-athletes that are already on the team talk with other Paralympic athletes and let them know of the situation at our school.” –RS2

“Our best recruiting tool is the meet itself. We need to seek ways to support these folks and their endeavors. This meet provides the best exposure for the adaptive athletes. The idea is for this meet to attract attention and show its value, so that other adaptive athletes can get excited about the opportunity, and compete for an ECAC school to take part in our championships.” -RS1

“The main focus is to get athletes who are already involved...athletes that are already on campus. It’s very important to educate participants who are already at college. The hope is that

the success of the championships will attract high school and youth adaptive athletes and they'll be attracted to the opportunity that will be provided.” –RS5

“I recruited a dwarf to be on our team. Although this is not the reason why we recruited the athlete, things like positive publicity and national exposure are indirect benefits. This athlete is on the Paralympic National Team, and that is a big deal.” –RS7

“What needs to be understood is that this is not a fight...not a social movement. We want to support programs that will give these opportunities to the student-athletes. It's all about the student-athletes. It is important to facilitate participation by youth and young adults.” –RS6

“Often times these athletes aren't fast enough to compete in most meets, so to have this intercollegiate para swimming championship is a great recruiting tool. These kids want normalcy. They define themselves as an athlete just as much as an able-bodied athlete does.” –RS8

“I am involved in para swimming a lot. I work camps, travel meets, and continue to help grow the sport as much as I can. We have open sign up in our cafeteria for all of fall. We are open to all athletes who want to come and compete for our team.” –RS7

Is there a plan in place at your institution to implement team sports for adaptive athletes?

All ten participants, including the conference officials, exclaimed that there was no set plan to when team sports would be implemented. In 2016, the ECAC did state that the goal was by the year 2020 to have over 1,000 adaptive athletes competing in ECAC sports, including team sports like sled hockey, wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball, rowing, tennis, and goal ball. After talking with officials at the ECAC, the focus is currently on swimming and track & field championships, while there is no immediate plan for team sport implementation. Each presumed sport that will eventually be NCAA affiliated is currently represented at the Paralympic level. None of the three administrators, nor the four coaches that I interviewed had any set plan at their institution to implement any of the proposed team sports mentioned above. Although there were no set plans at any institution I interviewed, one participant offered their take on implementing team sports below.

“Adaptive team sports under the NCAA umbrella are far away. Club teams could be a good starting point, and it would be most helpful for an existing conference to adopt the teams with physical proximity for club teams to be developed.” –RS6

Percentage of Participation

Out of the ten participants in my study, none of them were able to give a firm number of the percentage of adaptive athletes that participated in the intercollegiate para championships of the ECAC. Participants had a difficult time answering what percentage of the institution’s adaptive population was participating in these athletics opportunities. Some schools in the ECAC had a handful of adaptive athletes competing, some schools had one, and some schools didn’t have any. Of the four coaches I interviewed, all of them had at least one adaptive athlete on their team. The para section of the ECAC open swimming and diving championships was finalized only days before the meet occurred because guidelines as to how the adaptive events would be run were not confirmed to all athletes and coaches effected. One coach who participated in my study has numerous adaptive athletes on his team, but only one competed because only two events were held for adaptive athletes at the meet. A similar question was asked about the MIAA, or Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association. Back in 2015, a Massachusetts nonprofit focused on increasing sports participation for children and young adults with impairments, looked in to how many candidates there were in the state of Massachusetts for adaptive athletic competition. Out of the reported 230,664 student-athletes that competed in the 33 sports offered during the 2014-15 academic year, an estimated roughly 1,000 such candidates had impairments that would qualify them for adaptive competition. Coaches and athletic directors were “encouraged to consult with school nurses, guidance counselors, principals, and teachers to identify and recruit eligible student-athletes (Springer, 2015). Although no data from this study can directly answer the research question, a similar ratio can be surmised from the

MIAA study above. As the NCAA continues to sanction events and varsity level competition for the aforementioned adaptive team sports that are still on tap, coaches and administrators would be more incentivized to truly find out how many potential adaptive athletes there are on campus; providing a more concrete number to answer the research question which was originally meant to be answered.

Research Question 3

What are the calculated costs involved in adding the adaptive sports?

In order to understand what the calculated cost components of adding adaptive sports looks like, the participants were asked the following question: (1) Does an adaptive athlete cost more than an able-bodied athlete in terms of equipment, gear, travel, and such?

Adaptive athlete cost vs. able-bodied cost?

All participants recognized that added costs come with having an adaptive athlete competing at a championship swimming event, but agreed that it depends on the certain classification of the adaptive athlete. All participants answered this question yes, but because of their varied experience in terms of coaching an adaptive athlete, or being at an event that allowed adaptive athletes to swim, answers were diverse. Although adaptive team sports have not been added at any ECAC schools yet, three out of the ten participants gave their thoughts on the added costs that these new sports would require. Below are quotes from participants that illustrate the added costs that adaptive athletes accrue, if any.

“As a coach, sometimes you need to go to certain meets that allow your adaptive athletes to participate. Sometimes that can mean significant trips that normally wouldn’t be factored in to the budget.” –RS3

“Equipment is going to cost some money for certain adaptive athletes. A wheelchair lift for a bus, extra pool time for the athlete, racing wheelchairs for wheelchair basketball, etc.” –RS6

“I think cost could cause people to stay away. Many may view it as a distraction, and it’s hard to put a dollar amount on it. If people are not enlightened on the opportunity it is providing the athletes, then it will become a distraction.” –RS1

“Depending on what a school’s current facility situation is, in some cases a new facility may have to be constructed. You’d have to look more in to the wear and tear something like wheelchair basketball can cause a gym floor. The obvious answers are equipment, travel costs, and scholarships. Whatever costs you accrue for adding a new able bodied team, the same would apply for an adaptive team.” –RS10

“If we’re talking strictly the difference between the costs of an able-bodied athlete and a disabled athlete, then it would really just be what accommodation costs are. I’m not certain what that would look like or how much more money that would cost, but I can’t imagine it being too much.” –RS9

Suggestions for best practices

After the ten participants answered all of the prescribed questions during the interviews, themes were developed concerning the best practices for competition with adaptive athletes as well as the direction of ECAC team sports.

Best practices for competition would include providing the same opportunities you do to able-bodied athletes, to adaptive athletes. This includes event variation, ability to affect the team score, and a well-organized, structured plan which is set up far in advance. The competition would include a plethora of ECAC schools, as the Para Intercollegiate Championships would eventually be a multi-day event with prelims and finals.

With exposure and partnerships being at the forefront of growth strategies for adaptive competition, best practices for that avenue include on campus marketing efforts, as well as advanced partnerships with the USOC and interscholastic clubs. Finding the niche markets where adaptive athletics can grow and gain traction is a way for the ECAC to help educate students and families about the available opportunities and competition for adaptive athletes.

Best practices for team sport implementation would include using the momentum of the

swimming and track & field platforms by supplanting those who have been exposed to the ECAC initiative already. Administrators, coaches, and officials alike will have already been exposed and educated on the benefits and inner workings of adaptive sports, so excitement will be garnered and will help support the additional sports. Additional research will help to identify prospective athletes on campus and in high schools. Administrators and conference officials will need to come up with a regionalized model in regards to competition schedule, championships, and facility needs.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

Analyzing the inaugural year of competition of the ECAC adaptive sport programs

The purpose of this study was to examine the competitive infrastructure of the ECAC adaptive sport program and build a best practices framework based on the inaugural year of NCAA sanctioned competition. This chapter discusses the adaptive sport initiative of the ECAC, focusing heavily on the intercollegiate para swimming championships. The most important themes cited throughout the study are discussed, limitations via the data set are identified, and suggestions for future research are provided. The discussion focuses on the idea of providing a great student-athlete experience, as well as a feasible model for future adaptive athletics competition.

Analysis of infrastructure

Based on the results of the interviews with ECAC officials, administrators, and coaches, the most important findings were those based on the adaptive competition at the intercollegiate para swimming championships, as well as the pronounced additions of adaptive team sports. The following suggestions are aligned with the most common responses to the research questions, and will discuss the implications of the results in chapter 4.

Student-Athlete Experience

Before this year, there was no pathway to competing in NCAA sanctioned sports for adaptive athletes. Affording this opportunity to potential adaptive athletes can do more than field a team. It was reported that all ten participants in the study found the student-athlete experience to be an important aspect of the competition. Participants valued the experience, as well as the significance of getting these students involved in athletics. Adaptive members of society tend to be more sedentary than able-bodied members (Patricia, 1994). The opportunity to compete at the

collegiate level will not only affect those able to compete in the ECAC's intercollegiate championship, but it will also affect the lives of those youth and interscholastic adaptive athletes aspiring to become collegiate athletes. With this opportunity being afforded to student-athletes at the intercollegiate level, a rise of youth and interscholastic athletic activity can be assumed, similar to the spike in activity and competition that Title IX gave to the expansion of high school athletics. Physical activity is said to improve academic success, build self-esteem, and prevent health problems (Hancock, 2011). The recent Dear Colleague Letter brings to fruition these concerns as to why it is so imperative for adaptive athletic opportunities to exist. This study is looking to increase the number of schools which can provide adaptive athletes the opportunity to compete at the intercollegiate level, so that more than five adaptive swimmers can participate in next year's championship. Expanding opportunities for adaptive athletes presents them with a greater opportunity for success (Henderson, 2011). In order to comply with the notion of providing a comparable student-athlete experience to that of an able-bodied athlete, the initiative must evolve to actively seek out prospective adaptive student-athletes, uniformly. It is imperative for ECAC competition to grow so that the competition can be further exposed to a larger amount of people, including potential future participants.

Recruiting/Exposure

Lack of recruiting was an important finding in this study. As reiterated by some of the coaches interviewed, because adaptive events do not influence the team score of the ECAC championship does not entice them to recruit adaptive-athletes. The athletes have no effect on team success, therefore not fulfilling a true purpose concerning one of the largest goals of a coach/team. As noted by a coach in the study, adaptive athletes are seen as a burden to able-bodied athletes when it comes to lane space at practice and warranting attention from coaches.

The solution to this problem would be adding value to the adaptive athlete's roster spot by making the mixed events at the ECAC championships scored. That way, coaches would be inclined to recruit adaptive athletes that could help their team win a title. The more events that are available for adaptive athletes to compete in, the more of a demand for adaptive athletes there will be. Increasing the value of an adaptive athlete's roster position will incentivize coaches to recruit these athletes more frequent.

Recruiting is critically important if adaptive athletics is to grow. Similar to the initiative that the MIAA took in 2015, recruiting could start with an on-campus initiative. This study found very little knowledge about the number of qualified prospects on campus. Finding out how many qualified prospective adaptive athletes are already on campus is a way to spike participation in the ECAC as a whole and give interested students on campus an opportunity to benefit from all of the positives that being a student-athlete entails. If the best prospective adaptive athletes aren't currently on campus and therefore available for competition, a natural progression could be assumed, with each team wanting to then recruit the best adaptive swimmer, track athlete, or wheel chair basketball athlete in the area. Since a study has not been done via the ECAC or any of the ECAC affiliated schools in the study, administrators and coaches alike are unaware of how many eligible adaptive athletes are already on campus. The ECAC should carry out a study to compile how many eligible adaptive athletes are on campus. By focusing strictly on the quantity of adaptive athletes participating, a competitive imbalance amongst ECAC schools will force schools competing for championships to recruit the highest quality of adaptive athletes that are available.

Citing a study done via the NCAA department of Inclusion, 127 athletes were surveyed and asked how and where their Paralympic careers began (NCAA Inclusion Forum, 2016).

Ninety-five percent (95%) answered by citing family/local programs, while 5% cited web/TV/social media. The focal point of the study was where these athletes said their Paralympic careers began. Eighty-eight (88%) said their initial participation was with a public service center/local programs, while only 12% of careers began in college/high school (NCAA Inclusion Forum, 2016). As expressed by some participants in the study, the exposure of the event itself may be one of the best recruiting tools for youth and interscholastic athletes who are interested in being a college athlete. The ECAC should promote the adaptive portion of the championship by making it a spotlight event. The ECAC should promote their own initiative of providing NCAA-sanctioned adaptive athletic opportunities with the Paralympic partnership that drives and backs the initiative. The combination of the two will produce a diverse audience, which will reach a broader group of interested individuals. By reaching a diverse audience, the ECAC's initiative will be exposed to people who are interested in the Paralympics as well as providing adaptive athletic experiences at the collegiate level. The growth of the intercollegiate para-championships paired with the exposure that the high number of participants will provide will yield an increased interest in the opportunities that the ECAC are offering prospective adaptive athletes. According to the subjects that participated in the study, exposure of the adaptive initiative was ranked second behind student-athlete experience in terms of the most positive things that came from the event. Exposure is the best way to get the word out on an emerging area, while attracting attention from people who were unaware of the initiative previously. The importance of the exposure of this event is to supplement the recruiting efforts of coaches and ECAC officials. In terms of off campus recruiting, the meet itself, as mentioned above, is a great way to recruit. The ECAC could supplement the event with something similar to a national visit day for prospective adaptive athletes. All eligible athletes could visit the site of

the ECAC championships and get to talk with coaches, see how the event functions, and get a better idea of what the best fit for them would be. This would be the start of the external recruiting process, as relationships could be made with coaches, and naturally, word of mouth via the athletes would educate those unaware of the ECAC's initiative. Seven out of the ten participants stated that the exposure the meet received was a positive to the event, which means that ECAC officials should focus heavily on promoting the meet early and often for next year, so that a maximum amount of people will take part in the meet.

Organization of Event/Team Dynamic

During the confines of the study, the only event that took place involving adaptive competition was the swimming and diving championship. Not solely, but partly because of the late forming dynamics of the meet structure, only five adaptive athletes competed, making the transition seamless for those who were putting on the event. Focusing solely on the swimming championships, the growth of the para section is inevitable, not only because of the exposure of this year's championship, but also because of the late start that teams and athletes got this year.

Three out of the ten participants in the study cited a potential issue with the implementation of a larger intercollegiate para championship, and how it would affect the event as a whole. The possibility that the assumed exponential growth of adaptive events could completely alter the logistics of a championship as a whole is very real. According to an administrator who has worked alongside the USOC, the intercollegiate para championships would be best held as an offshoot of the already withstanding ECAC open swim and dive meet. A view that would support this theory is the fact that the Olympics and the Paralympics are held at completely different times. The Paralympics' motto of "within, not beside" relates directly to this issue.

Reasons for concern included mandated break time in between events, limited amount of lane space available, and the effect it would have on coaches. As of now, there is a mandated break in between the morning and afternoon sessions of swimming. This break is strategically placed so that swimmers can rest, refuel, and warmup/cool down for their next event. With the implementation of the adaptive section of the championship, pool space is limited, so some athletes cannot properly warm up and cool down, while adaptive athletes competing while able-bodied athletes are on break, making it feel like a completely separate event. This problem can be addressed by adding time to the beginning and end of the meet so events will not be rushed through, and adaptive athletes will compete during the normal competition hours. It is true that coaches will have more athletes to coach during the meet. Although this is a fair concern, the source of the concern came from having to coach athletes whom are not a factor in the result of the team championship. If adaptive athlete's results were to be counted in the total team score, this issue would be nonexistent.

The final concern is the lack of lane space for additional athletes during the ECAC Championships. Swimmers normally will warm-up in a pool, swim their race in the pool, and then cool down in a pool. The additional athletes would obviously make the warm-up/cool down pools more crowded during parts of the event. The solution goes along with the solution listed above. By stretching out the meet to allow for all student-athletes to compete within the confines of the morning and afternoon session, all athletes will then have an equal amount of time to warm up and cool down in the pool, as the natural flow of the swimming meet will not be compromised by the proposed scheduling change.

A reorganization of the meet would allow for a more fluid flow of events to occur without going through the problem of running in to an event break time. This would assumedly account

for the reclassification of the Paralympic swimming events, as well as addition of prelims and semis (if applicable). Two out of the ten participants cited the need for each para classification to have its own race. Reasons for this included clarity for “uneducated” fans of the meet and adding value to each individual disability. Para classifications would allow each individual classification to compete in their own event, and therefore compete against fair competition. These opportunities are permitting a large enough number of eligible adaptive athletes in each classification. Because of the close relationship with the USOC, it is important to promote the same organization of the meet as they would in the Paralympics. The meet will have to develop and adapt as more participants become interested, but it is important that each classification be represented uniquely, not only for the athlete, but for the education of the audience. As commented by a participant in this study, this year’s para intercollegiate championship felt like a sideshow. Having different classifications compete against each other was part of the reason why, as the winner of the race happened to be the person who finished last, because that athlete was the closest to their classification’s American record. The supply of adaptive athletes will demand the number of events for the competition. It is important to provide multiple events for each classification, but it is also important to fill the event with a full pool of competitors. The best way to educate the fans is to promote fluidity between the Paralympics and the ECAC adaptive athletic initiative.

USOC Relationship

Five out of the ten participants cited how important the ECAC’s relationship with the USOC is. Reasons the participants cited as why the partnership is so important, is because of the guidance the USOC can provide in terms of hosting events, as well as the USOC’s interest in the success of potential Paralympic athletes. The relationship with the USOC can also help entice

prospective Paralympic athletes to consider ECAC schools because of the opportunities they have to be a student-athlete and follow their athletic endeavors while receiving an education. The Gateway to Gold initiative will help to enhance the ECAC championships in the future. By continuing to increase and enhance opportunities for Paralympic-eligible individuals, the talent pool will continue to grow for the ECAC as well as the Paralympics. The partnership can also reaffirm the steadiness of the initiative. Having the United States Olympic Committee as an interested partner is a great benefit to have, as they value developing the most talented athletes in the U.S. The USOC wants to make Paralympics a household word through intercollegiate varsity sport competition, while increasing and enhancing opportunities for Para-eligible individuals to participate and compete in adaptive sport at an intercollegiate level. The G2G provides the tools for colleges and universities to facilitate identification, recruitment and participation of Paralympic-eligible student-athletes to compete for a college/university of their choice. The USOC has provided a road map of key principals to create positive experiences through para sport and maximize potential & long-term health of the athletes. Intercollegiate and interscholastic programs can use these principles to help develop their athletes. Leaders on campuses have been given the goal of adopting an inclusive sport policy for varsity athletics, club sports, and intramurals on their campuses, while also adopting an inclusive sport initiative set of best practices on their campus.

Limitations

Those who participated in the study had reservations with the initiative to go along with their excitement. Schools participating in adding para team sports must allocate money from the current athletic department budget to account for direct costs like travel, equipment, personnel salary, and potential scholarships. Indirect costs would include shared practice space with

already existing sports and Title IX implications. In 2014, only 24 athletic departments were said to have made money, so adding a sport could be tough feasibly on schools that are fighting to appropriately fund their Olympic sports. Most sports will be able to compete in pre-existing facilities as sports like sitting volleyball, rowing, and tennis are all adaptive variations of the able-bodied sports. Equipment needs would be most onerous on the wheelchair basketball program, as special racing wheelchairs are necessary for competition. A one-time fee can be assumed for the racing wheel chairs, while personnel salary and potential scholarships will have to be funded annually. Athletic departments should look to their alumni database to find patrons who are passionate about the Paralympic movement and adaptive athletic opportunities. Athletic departments already endow scholarships, so this will not be a large change.

The process of adding adaptive team sports could also be delayed because of the focus on swimming, track, and wheelchair basketball currently. A competitive model and framework are likely to be developed before the ECAC decides to move forward with the expansion of adaptive team sports. As previously mentioned, the intercollegiate swimming para championship only had five competitors. For the team sports, teams will need more than five competitors on each team, posing the question of how feasible it will be to find enough athletes to fulfill a bona fide championship. The ECAC can use the momentum that swimming, track and field, and wheelchair basketball bring, and hopefully look to compile a database of adaptive athletes that are interested in these sports and survey their interest on the available team sports as well. By starting with swimming and track and field, a fan base can continue to grow, so that once the ECAC is ready to begin implementing team sports, athletic departments will feel more comfortable backing the initiative because of the seen success. Because many of these sports are solely visible at the Paralympic level or at Paralympic affiliated clubs, many youth and

interscholastic eligible athletes have not been introduced to these sports before, so it will be very hard to recruit athletes for the team sports if they have no experience or records of their competition. A solution to this would have to rely heavily on recruiting the best athletes from high schools and introducing the sports to them when they get on campus. Ideally, high schools and youth programs will continue to add new adaptive sport opportunities so that recruiting will be made much simpler for ECAC coaches, but until then, coaches will have to look to recruit the best athletes and those high school kids who are looking to compete at the collegiate level. Schools will have to rely on already established clubs and rec sports to operate as a grassroots initiative if they want to fast track the initiative. This conundrum begs the question of how many already established teams are on college campuses, which would require further research to determine how many established programs are available at ECAC institutions, and how many eligible athletes are at each institution if there is not already an established team, or a team, which lacks the sufficient amount of members. A competition model would have to be developed, as the ECAC would act as the true conference of these team sports, unlike the “conference of conferences” that they act as for all existing sports. A competition schedule would have to be developed, as well as logistics including championships, regionalized competition, and qualified competition settings with proper personnel.

Future Research

Current ECAC member students should be surveyed on if they are eligible to participate in Paralympic sport. This survey could include questions asking if they have competed in adaptive sport at any level before college, and if they would be interested in being a collegiate athlete if they were given the opportunity. This type of student interest survey can be modeled after the student participation surveys schools use for Title IX, or they could even include para

questions on that survey. This would further my research by giving coaches and athletic departments a solid number of how many prospective, eligible athletes are on campus, so the initiative can grow at a more exponential rate. As seen at the intercollegiate para swimming championships, a lack of eligible student-athletes was a major concern of the event. Taking advantage of eligible athletes on campus is a great way to grow the initiative as well as attract eligible athletes still in high school. The students could also be surveyed to find out if they already knew about the ECAC adaptive athlete initiative. This portion of the study could be a survey given out to able-bodied students as well, to see how much exposure the current efforts are creating. In addition, because of the timing of the study, another case study could be constructed that would look at the track and field championships, as well as wheelchair basketball championships. This would be incredibly important because it would show if the meet itself truly does receive a good amount of exposure, or if many people on campus and/or prospective adaptive athletes at the intercollegiate or youth athletes have heard of the initiative. On the survey, there could be open-ended questions that ask what the ECAC could do to continue to promote this initiative, and if the athlete or other random participant is interested in hearing more about the initiative, and if they are eligible/know of eligible participants.

Another beneficial study would be identifying groups that are currently providing opportunities to adaptive athletes, so that there could be a more universal understanding of how partnerships are made between these groups with colleges, high schools, and the USOC. Being able to take advantage of these relationships would surely vault the growth of adaptive athletics in interscholastic, intercollegiate, and Olympic settings. The ECAC could absolutely benefit from learning of all the groups throughout the US, so they can learn of prospective athletes.

A survey of schools sponsoring programs in the ECAC, delving in to their strategies with recruiting, costs, facilities, etc., would be extremely valuable. With many college athletic budgets currently being used on Olympic sports, which do not have much return on investment, it would be very important to learn how much money needs to be allocated towards adaptive programs, so to be as transparent as possible for schools looking to add adaptive sports. Along with this study, surveying the strengths and weaknesses in integrated competition (like in swimming) and separate competition (wheelchair basketball) would be valuable as well. The event that was most prevalently studied, swimming, is currently integrated, but if the adaptive events grow to a point where a high amount of events are being competed in, a separate (but equal) competition model could be a possibility. The idea of separate competition could take lessons learned from Title IX and look to relate and mimic the strategies that initiative used to gain traction and rapidly move towards equal opportunity for women. The comparison and case study of Title IX as a comparison to the ECAC initiative would be a way for advocates at the conference and institution level to fight for a separate (but equal) opportunity for adaptive athletes.

Conclusion

As the Rehab Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 have paved the way for adaptive athletes, institutions and conferences alike have slowly provided opportunities for competition similar to that of able-bodied athletes. What started with the Minnesota Adaptive Athletics Association in 1969, has now led to the ECAC offering the first NCAA sanctioned para events for collegiate athletes. This current initiative was prompted by the recent Dear Colleague Letter, which reminded institutions that students with disabilities are not being afforded an equal opportunity to participate in extracurricular athletics in public schools on all

levels. That, paired with section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which requires for equal opportunity in participation, has catapulted this initiative and has helped to foster the growing partnership with the United States Olympic Committee. The ECAC has planned to institute adaptive athletics in multiple sports as track & field, swimming, and wheelchair basketball will have had para competitions this year, while team sports like sitting volleyball and goal ball will hope to make their way in to competition within the next few years. Officials and coaches alike are focusing solely on the swimming, track & field, and wheelchair basketball competitions this year, as these sports have the highest amount of exposure and for track and swimming, can be conjoined with the able-bodied teams.

There were things to celebrate about the event as well as things to consider for revising next year. As illustrated in Chapter 4, the student-athlete experience was a large positive. As told by all of the participants in the study, the student-athlete experience was the greatest takeaway from the event, as well as the positive exposure that the meet received and the enhanced relationship with the USOC. The positive feedback regarding the student-athlete experience can be related to the significance of improvement in quality of life and athletic identity that the adaptive athletes gain their athletic experiences in relation with their education. What the ECAC will look to improve in future years will be the lack of adaptive athletes competing, as well as the question of whether or not their performances will be counted in to the team score. The lack of structure within the confines of the organization of the meet didn't allow more than five athletes to participate in the event, but coaches and administrators alike agreed that next year would improve drastically because they have a championship under their belt.

Adaptive athletes will continue to be made aware of the opportunities that the ECAC is providing. The initiative that the ECAC is carrying out, paired with the backing of the Dear Colleague Letter, which is sure to carry out the requirements of the Section 504 of the ADA to

its fullest, will promulgate an infusion of adaptive athletes. The inaugural year of competition at the ECAC provided an overview of what the road ahead looks like if the officials, administrators, and coaches alike are going to continue to grow the adaptive platform and provide more opportunities.

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