

MINI-REVIEW ARTICLE

SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT ON COLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

Heath Wesley Hooper¹
Shorter University, Rome.

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ABSTRACT

The increase of social media communication and usage by student-athletes has created risks for not only the student-athletes, but coaches, athletic departments and universities. By student-athletes increasingly consuming the use of social media, suggests a need to analyze National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I athletic department social media policies to determine how policies are developed in regulating student-athlete communication. Student-athletes are utilizing social media as both positive message and athletics and the need to develop a generic social media policy for all NCAA institutions to undertake as part of the policies and procedures through negative actions that has cause repercussions for some colleges and student-athletes. It is important to understand the social media landscape of collegiate.

Keywords: NCAA, Student-athletes, Social media, Social media restrictions, Social media policy.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become the mode of communication between people and the sports world contributing to various social media platforms providing instantaneous communication to occur at the touch of a button. Social networking platforms have provided new ways for people to establish and maintain relationships through online interaction (Waters & Ackerman, 2011). NCAA Division I student-athletes are during the social media controversy on how to reduce the negative usage of social media by implementing social media policies (Browning & Sanderson, 2012). Previous research on social media has provided many benefits and constructs in terms of usage by student-athletes, professional athletes, marketing companies and colleges in disseminating information to the public (Sanderson, Snyder, Hull & Gramlich, 2015; Sanderson, Browning, & Schmittle, 2015; Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Van Namen, 2012; Sanderson, 2011). There is an underlying issue on how exactly student-athletes and NCAA colleges and universities are controlling the usage of social media. Sanderson et al. (2015) elaborates that future research studies need to answer the following: How are athletic administrators justifying the implementation of social media policies? What are the content restrictions issued to

¹ Correspondence to: Heath Wesley Hooper, Dean of the Ledbetter College of Business and an Associate Professor of Sport Management, Shorter University, 26 Westover Dr. SW Rome, GA 30165, Tel: 706-292-3906; E-mail: hhooper@shorter.edu

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student-athletes on social media use? Why are colleges and universities not training student-athletes on the proper way to use social media? What are the specific policies in place for student-athlete usage of social media at colleges and universities? All of these questions have been touched on in various forms of research; however, understanding the rationale of implementing a social media policy or not is still yet to be answered.

DISCUSSION

Social media has a major influence within the communicative landscape of intercollegiate athletics and its student-athletes (Sanderson & Browning 2013; Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Sanderson, 2011) illustrated by the evolution of sport communication practices at NCAA institutions (Clavio & Walsh, 2014; Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012). The growth of social media within collegiate athletics is seen daily through college athletic department social media postings, Head Coach mentions and followers through Twitter, and most importantly through the student-athlete's fingertips (Sanderson et al., 2015). Athletic department compliance directors have had an increase in social media knowledge given the formation of social media policies currently being presented in student-athlete handbooks throughout NCAA Division I, II, and III institutions (Sanderson & Browning, 2013; Snyder, 2014). Research concerning social media policies and legislation in intercollegiate athletics is minimal as social media guidelines are still underrepresented in athletic departments (Sanderson et al., 2015). Social media policies do exist at both public and private colleges and universities while some of these schools have differing methods of monitoring social media, executing policies, or allowing the student-athletes the freedom of using social media platforms (Browning & Sanderson, 2012). This portion of the literature review will focus on previous research of social media policies and the needs for implementing social networking guidelines.

The increase of technology and instant communication on social media platforms is creating public relations issues for college athletic programs and student-athletes (Sanderson, 2011). Permanent online interaction permeates information that is truly never erased placing colleges and universities at risk (Namen, 2012). Student-athletes are separate from the entire college enrollment and are not entitled to the full protection of free speech as an average college student is (Namen, 2012). When a prospective student-athlete signs a national letter of intent and an athletic scholarship, those rights are waived to the college's athletic program he/she is a part of (Namen, 2012). This scholarship enforces student-athletes to abide by the rules of the coach, team, athletic department and most importantly the institution. Establishing vivid standards for student-athletes enables the coach, athletic department and university to effectively and actively monitor use of social media. There are three primary approaches to evaluate the unique circumstances placed on student athletes: a) student-athletes waive their constitutional rights by contract when accepting a scholarship, each student-athlete must uphold certain policies and standards; b) institutions may expect student-athletes to participate and meet standards of community participation, role model for younger generation, and representatives of the institution; and c) student-athletes have less privacy expectations than the general student population because they place their selves in the public eye competing on a university athletic team. The following are further examples of colleges having to sanction athletes because of misuse of social media: Two athletes at University of

Colorado received citations for harassment by campus police based on racial messages posted on profiles; Louisiana State University (LSU) terminated swimmers after posting negative comments about their coaches; Northwestern University women's soccer team members received team sanctions for photos released on social media from a hazing event that took place off-campus (Namen, 2012).

The NCAA has not implemented a policy on the use of social media by student-athletes, but instead encouraged and allowed institutions to implement their own appropriate standards for student-athletes (Namen, 2012). The NCAA restricts student-athletes use of social media through the recruitment of potential student-athletes, but the primary purpose of this restriction is to limit the contacts between coaches and prospective student-athletes. USA Today researched social networking policies for 27 schools in six major conferences. Five of the schools including Auburn, Iowa State, Ohio State, Miami, and North Carolina already have monitoring in place; while other institutions are warning athletes of the dangers of social media through policies, meetings, coaches' discussions and tutorial training (Namen, 2012). A few examples of these institutions and their social media policy in place are: Ohio State requires their athletes to have a public social media page and to add coaches and administrators as "friends" or "followers" to adequately monitor; Missouri track and field coach prefers to have team captains monitor their teammates pages; and Head Coach of Kentucky football tells his players to pretend they are interviewing when tweeting and imagine each post beginning with "Dear General Manager" (Namen, 2012).

A research study was conducted by Jimmy Sanderson on how many NCAA Division I institutions' handbooks include social media policies for its student-athletes (Sanderson, 2011). Online Research found 249 handbooks out of the total 343 DI institutions in the country and out of those 249 handbooks, 90 were found that did not include a social media policy making the final sample size 159 student-athlete handbooks containing social media policies (Sanderson, 2011). Research was conducted on each social media policy to reveal what the most content prohibitions used for student-athletes to be aware of when using social media (Sanderson, 2011). The following sections were revealed within each of the colleges' policies: personal contact information (73), inappropriate pictures (68), inappropriate comments (47), offensive language (35), team information and activities (21), and criticism of school/team (24) (Sanderson, 2011). Analysis revealed the following personnel would be used as monitoring sources: team and school personnel (80), graduate school and internship programs (38), potential employers (60), law enforcement (21), online predators (60), and media personnel (30) (Sanderson, 2011). Sixteen of the policies required student athletes to "friend" or "follow" requests to coaches, athletic personnel when they joined a social media site (Sanderson, 2011). College athletic social media policies consist of many restrictions regarding personal use. These policies are strictly guidelines and enforcers to consequences that will occur from the negative use of social media; primary responsibility relies on the student-athlete. A more recent study on social media policies within NCAA Division I, II, and III universities was conducted by Sanderson, Snyder, Hull, and Gramlich (2015). This study explored whether social media policies were present within student-athlete handbooks of each university. At the NCAA Division I level, focus was established on only "Power Five" conference athletic departments (Sanderson et al., 2015). The schools that did include a social media policy, accessible through the athletic department's website, were used for the study making the total sample of all three divisions, 244 social media policies. This study contributes to social media understanding within the policies being present on athletic websites as well as coding

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the policies in terms of wordage on the restrictions; however, the implications of the study seeks the need of utilizing surveys or interviews with athletic administration on the need of social media policies.

CONCLUSION

The review of the relevant literature provides an overview of scholarly research surrounding student-athletes use of social media and an athletic department's implementation of a social media policy. Throughout, the reader is provided with an understanding of social media as it is used by student-athletes, the impact of social media uses and the implementation of social media policies by NCAA Division I athletic departments. Social media use by student-athletes has been a highly discussed topic as researched previously by Browning & Sanderson (2012); Browning (2012); Carroll (2012); DiVeronica (2014), who have called for further research of the following issues including: the development of social media policies by athletic administration, privacy management practices of student-athletes, and how social media banning affects free speech of student-athletes.

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