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Native Americans and Athletic Scholarships

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Abstract

This research examines the potential effects of collegiate athletic scholarships on Native American athlete's lives and the lives of the people in their communities. The main focus of this study is to investigate whether it is more likely that Native American students on athletic scholarships will graduate from college and how it affects their reservation communities. Furthermore, it seeks to discover if Native communities look more favorably on their students pursuing higher education when achieved through athletic talent and why this might be the case. This research is important because there is a cycle of alcoholism, drug abuse, poverty, and poor family dynamics, prevalent among Native American reservations. If athletic scholarships can produce a ripple effect that leads to restoring these communities, it is crucial that school administrators, coaches, educators, and parents prioritize the accessibility and awareness of these scholarships. This research could have a large effect on Native American communities by spreading awareness of the opportunity and change collegiate athletic scholarships can bring to Native Americans.

Keywords: Native American, athletic scholarships, communities, restoration, change

Native Americans and Athletic Scholarships

When Vice World of Sports interviewer Selema Masekela visited the Pine Ridge Reservation and asked four high schoolers from Red Cloud Indian School's men's basketball team what basketball meant to kids living on the reservation, they responded instantaneously with "hope" (Rezball, n.d.). Literature and media sources provide clear evidence that sports provide a beneficial and meaningful component to the lives of Native American people. Unfortunately, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment, suicide, and poor family dynamics are problems that are prevalent on Native American reservations all over the United States with many of the problems due to the tragic history they have suffered. Very low graduation rates for both college and high school students are very common on these reservations. Statistics show that the percentage of Native Americans receiving collegiate athletic scholarships is much lower than the percentages of other ethnicities based on their representations in the U.S. population (NCAA, 2018; American Fact, n.d.). It is possible that there is a correlation between the low graduation rates and the other problems on the reservation, and that higher percentages of Native Americans receiving athletic scholarships would lead to significant progression in the quality of life on reservations.

The problem is that Native American reservation communities are suffering greatly and have not been improving. The graduation rates for Native Americans are lower than any other ethnicity within the United States. In a 2005 study out of the twelve states with the greatest population of Native American and Alaska Natives, only three had graduation rates of 50% or higher. As a result, unemployment and poverty run

rampant on reservations leading to drug and alcohol abuse, crime, and mental illnesses. Native American men are 4% less likely to be employed or in the job search process than males of other ethnicities within the U.S. (Faircloth & Tippeconnic III, 2010). In addition, the kinds of jobs earned often have much lower wages putting approximately 55% of Native Americans below the national level of poverty (Grandbois, 2005). The problem even more specific to this study is that American colleges and universities are missing out on aiding this situation by failing to recruit Native American athletes to attend their school and play for their teams.

Before going any further in this thesis, it is extremely important to note that the struggles talked about in this thesis are not of Native peoples own doing but due to the traumatic experiences they survived. Researchers believe that what Native American communities are experiencing now is a direct result of historical and intergenerational trauma (McLeigh, 2010). Historical trauma “is conceptualized as a collective complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who share a specific group identity or affiliation—ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation” (Evans-Campbell, 2008, p. 320). Historical trauma, was first coined to describe the “emotional and psychological injury” Jews who survived the Holocaust endured (McLeigh, 2010, p. 178). For the Native American, it comes from: oppressive tactics enacted by colonists, forced residential education, and aggressive assimilation. During colonization, many wars between the settlers and the Native Americans ensued, countless treaties were broken, and in events such as the Trail of Tears, Native Americans were forcibly removed from their homes and lands with many of them dying along the way (McLeigh, 2010).

Scholars believe that boarding schools have had effects that continue to be passed down from generation to generation. These effects are a product of the separation of families, the sexual and physical abuse present in boarding schools, the absence of nurturing and caring parents, the purposeful undermining of indigenous identity, and the cultural knowledge and traditions that were lost while at these schools, including even the loss of language. Youth who grew up in boarding schools never learned the correct way to parent but instead emulated the harsh treatment they received from boarding school staff (McLeigh, 2010). In general, people affected by historical trauma may suffer with PTSD, guilt, anxiety, and depression (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Furthermore, the Swinomish Tribal Mental Health Project of 1991 explains that until there is recovery, a community will continue to pass down the effects of a loss from the time it occurred (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Although there are Native Americans and non-Natives alike working to finally replace what was taken away, more people are needed to step up and more action needs to be taken.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is to explore the different components that affect Native American life, such as cultural mindsets among the community, hardships on the reservation, and the potential value of collegiate athletic scholarships on the quality of life for Native Americans. As fellow Americans, schools, administrators, athletic directors, and teachers should be knowledgeable of the ways in which they can help improve the quality of life that has been broken on reservations. Tribal leaders, school administrators, athletic directors, and coaches working in reservation schools should also

be aware of the progress athletic scholarships can bring in the lives of their students and communities. With this knowledge and awareness, they can then provide the necessary training to help their students earn them.

Significance of the Study

This research will potentially bring to light a discrepancy within the sport world. The sport industry today is brimming with the desire to provide equal opportunity for those of different genders and different ethnicities. If Native American athletic talent is being overlooked by college coaches and athletic directors, both Native Americans and these athletic programs might be missing out. It is of utmost importance that every community in our society be given the opportunity to succeed. Athletic scholarships provide a potential means to promote higher education and diminish the effects of joblessness, depression, and substance abuse that are rampant in Native American communities.

Statistics of Native Americans in NCAA Sports

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Fact Finder, the total population in the United States in 2017 was 321,004,407 people. Of these, 5,497,131 were Native Americans, including Native Americans of more than one race. This means that approximately 1.7% of the population in 2017 were Native American, while 75.7% were Caucasian, 13.9% Black or African American, 17.6% Latino, and 6.3% Asian (American Fact, n.d.). Richard Lapchick's 2018 College Sport Racial and Gender Report Card, shows that in the 2017-2018 season, the total percentage of men in NCAA Division I, II, and III sports included 65.9% Caucasian, 18.0% Black or African American, 6.0%

Latino, 1.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.4% Native American, 3.9% Two or More Races, and 3.9% Non-Resident Aliens. The female demographic for the same season by race was: 70.9% Caucasian, 9.4% Black or African American, 5.5% Latina, 2.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.4% Native American, 4.1% Two or More Races, and 4.1% Non-Resident Aliens (Lapchick, 2018).

The total population percentage of Native Americans in the U.S. versus the total population percentage of Native Americans in NCAA sports when compared to the same statistic among other races reveals that Native Americans are the least proportionately represented race in the NCAA. Because the NCAA seeks to uphold “foundations of a diverse and inclusive culture across dimensions of diversity,” there is a question of what percentage of college sports Native Americans should comprise (NCAA, 2010). The total population of Native Americans in the U.S. at 1.7% compared with the percentage of Native Americans in male Divisions I, II, and III sports at .4% means that their representation is only 23.5% of their total U.S. population, while Caucasian representation is 87.1%, Latino representation is 34.1%, Asian representation is 30.2 % of their total U.S. population, and Black and African American males actually have greater representation in NCAA sports at 129% than they have in the entire U.S. population. For women in Division I, II, and III, the percentage is also 23.5%, while for Caucasian it is 93.7%, Black or African American it is 67.6%, Latinas, 31.3%, and Asians, 41.3% (Lapchick, 2018).

History on Native Americans in Sport

Towards the end of the 19th century, Native Americans were forced to attend boarding schools founded by white Americans in order to become “civilized” and abandon Indian ways (Bloom, 2005). Soon educators at these institutions realized that they could use sports as a way to assimilate Native Americans and also as a way to fundraise money for their schools. Another reason that sports became essential in boarding schools was due to the belief that Native Americans carried inferior traits that made them easily susceptible to sicknesses. In one year, many students at Carlisle were severely ill with tuberculosis and other illnesses leading to six students dying. The physician at Carlisle, suggested that exercise would help students “overcom[e] any hereditary weaknesses” (Bloom, 2005, p. 7). Two institutions that were crucial in making the playing of sports a norm at boarding schools are Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania and Haskell Institute in Kansas. Sadly, students who attended these schools were subjected to much oppression aimed at causing them to become “imitation white men” (Bloom, 2005). Thankfully, many students found ways to retain their culture and a great way in which they did this was through sports (Bloom, 2005).

Because there was no age limit for students, many students were over the age of 18, and therefore had the ability to compete against college teams. By 1896, the football team at Carlisle started playing a full college schedule. Just a few years later, the football program was accused of paying players, and giving them the freedom to drink, miss curfew, and skip classes, which resulted in the dismissal of their coach. Carlisle hired a

new coach but he was soon found guilty of embezzlement of the program's funds and fired (Bloom, 2005).

After this, the school decided to stop focusing on producing elite sports teams leading to Haskell Institute becoming the new powerhouse in athletics at boarding schools. Native Americans all over praised the football program at Haskell so much that in 1925 they raised between \$180,000 and \$250,000 to build a 10,500-seat football stadium for the team (Bloom, 2005). Unfortunately for the team, the age limit at Indian schools was lowered and the football team, which was ranked 4th in 1927, was no longer able to compete with colleges. This led them to discontinue all games against college teams by 1939, only twelve years after the stadium opened in 1926. In the 1930s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) led Indian schools to no longer employ athletics for the sake of notoriety and intense competition, but move to intramural sports allowing more students to play (Bloom, 2005). Then, as football waned, boxing started to become an important sport at boarding schools. It thrived for about 17 years until the BIA banned it from its schools in 1948 due to the danger of the competition and of the fanatical crowds watching the matches (Bloom, 2005).

Sports have been a part of Native American culture for hundreds of years. A long-standing belief among Native Americans is the importance of maintaining the "Sacred Circle." This circle is made up of four parts and provides the precedent for Native American communities to take care of themselves physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. All these four are tied together and equally important, and of course, to meet the physical part of this Sacred Circle, they play different athletic games (King,

2005). Forms of many of the modern games that exist today can be found in the games Native Americans have been playing for hundreds of years, such as lacrosse, javelin, racquetball, football, soccer, and hockey to name a few. When the football stadium at Haskell Institute was finished, people from over 70 different tribes came for a homecoming celebration. This is representative of how important sports were in Native American communities even before the arrival of Europeans to America. Sport was one of the only things that brought tribes together (Bloom, 2005). Often, missionaries would introduce new sports or different versions of already played games as a means to lead Native Americans to conversion. Eventually, sports not only were a way for different tribes to spend their free time and were no longer used for becoming the “warrior” of their tribes, but they gave Native Americans a place to combat whites in a nonthreatening arena, earn their education through sports, and become a part of their now Americanized country (Schroeder, 1995). Native Americans contributed largely to sports in the first half of the 1900s but began to fade from the scene and are now hardly visible in the sport world (King, 2005). Because of the intimate history Native Americans have with sports, sports are still an important part of their culture and can, therefore, be used to bring transformation to the quality of life on reservations.

Issues Facing Native Americans in Sports

Currently, there are several issues facing Native Americans within the sport world. To start, a topic that has been very popular over the last few years is the misuse of Native American culture through the names and mascots of different collegiate and professional sports teams. The way these teams are referencing and using images of

Native Americans can be seen as insensitive and degrading. While it would be looked down upon to use similar images of African Americans, Asians, or Jewish Americans among mascots, many sport organizations still use names that are considered racially inconsiderate and images that are stereotypical and inappropriate (King, 2005). On the upside, in 2005, the NCAA called for the ending of racially inspired team names and mascots which led to over 200 colleges and schools in America to retire offensive Native American names and likenesses from their teams (Change the Mascot, 2016).

Furthermore, the media has done a poor job when talking about Native American athletes. Though the media has been diligent in praising the American Indian heritage of people in the sport world such as Notah Begay III, Kelvin Sampson, and Naomi Lang, they often talk about the social issues facing these athletes and coaches more than their actual performance in their sport (King, 2005). For example, in an ESPN Outside the Lines segment, commentator Tom Farrey asks about Notah Begay III, who is famous for his extreme talent and victories in the golf world, “[w]hat cosmic set of circumstances could have conspired to lift Begay above the despair, alcoholism, and lack of education that have claimed other Native American youth” and make him an “alien to his own people” (King, 2005, p. 215). In addition, the media has simply not covered Native Americans nearly enough and when they do, there have been mistakes that provide false knowledge and misconceptions about them. For example, in the 2002 winter Olympics, the NBC sports announcer, Ted Hammond, stated that karuk dancer Naomi Lang was the first Native American to appear in the Olympics since Jim Thorpe, yet he was completely

disregarding such athletes as Billy Mills and Ben Nighthorse Campbell both in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics (Jacobs, 2016; King, 2004).

Native Americans still experience much racism in athletics from such sources as radio announcers, referees, opposing fans and teams, and their own leagues. In February of 2017, a radio announcer for a station in Montana, named Paul Mushaben, wrote a blog post calling for the segregation of Native American teams and non-Native teams in Montana High School Association basketball tournaments. He attempted to support his suggestion with statements saying that fans of Native teams were “unruly and disrespectful of the facility” in which they were playing and also stated that it was unsafe for opposing fans and teams (Cook, 2017, para. 4). The Montana High School Association responded explaining that no complaints had been made by recent tournament hosts concerning Native American fans and that no other evidence was found supporting Mushaben’s claims. At a basketball game several days after his comments, basketball teams from Box Elder, Heart Butte, Power, and Belt, schools from both on and off the reservation, locked arms to demonstrate their devotion and respect for one another. Strangely, Mushaben was not fired or given reduced time on the air, but simply censored as he continues his radio shows (Cook, 2017). Several months later, just a few days before a homecoming football game between Sturgis Brown High School and Pine Ridge School, a school on the Pine Ridge Reservation of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, students from Sturgis posted pictures online of a car bash with racist comments such as “go back to the rez” spray painted on the car (Mitchell, 2017, para. 2). The school board preceded

to cancel the homecoming game, homecoming parade, and the homecoming dance that weekend in order to address the situation with their students (Mitchell, 2017).

A couple more incidents that happened within the last three years include a referee and a lacrosse league. In 2016, Flagstaff High School girls' basketball team in Arizona, prepared their hair in traditional Navajo buns for their basketball game against Greenway High School. The hair buns consisted only of yarn and nothing that would be considered dangerous to wear in a game, but the referee ordered the whole team to remove the yarn from their hair before playing the game. Though the state commissioner of officials, Gary Welchel, apologized and explained that the referee was simply trying to keep the game safe and made a call that he "should have passed on," it is unfortunate that the referee did not first ask what the hair buns were made of before ordering the girls to take them out (Associated Press, 2016). The buns were a celebration of traditional Navajo culture and the team felt that their culture was being looked down upon (Associated Press, 2016).

Then, in the beginning of April of this year, 2018, the only three teams belonging to the Dakota Premier Lacrosse League (DPLL) that are majority Native teams, were suddenly expelled from the league. The teams believe they were expelled from the league because the coach of one of the teams, the 7 Flames, had a meeting with the league's administrator, Corey Mitchell, to talk with him about the racism the Native teams were experiencing within the league. It was during that meeting that Mitchell told the coach that he was expelling the three teams. Their expulsion was just one week away from the upcoming season's registration date. Mitchell then wrote a letter to the CEO of U.S.

Lacrosse to explain his actions by giving points in which the three teams had broken the rules. Out of the reasons he gave, some of them were rules that every single team in the league had broken and some named misdemeanors that the Native teams could prove they had not committed (Waltman, 2018). After U.S. Lacrosse investigated the allegations of racism towards Natives in its organization, it made a list of ways in which it will improve its relationship with Native Americans and become a more culturally aware organization. Though some changes are being made, the three teams that were expelled have not been reinstated and Corey Mitchell continues as Dakota Premier Lacrosse League's administrator (Anti-Native, 2018).

Organizations Working with Native Americans and Sport

Despite the issues that Native Americans are still facing within sport today, there are organizations that are working hard to lift up Native American athletes. The North American Indigenous Games were founded in 1990 with the vision to improve the lives of Indigenous peoples through sports. The Games are composed of competitions for youth ages fourteen to nineteen. They are hosted every three years and switch locations between the United States and Canada (History, n.d.). The focus of these Games is not only to give youth the opportunity to be on a team and to train them in good character, but also to help them earn college scholarships through their sport. Coaches work to encourage their players to pursue higher education, teach them how to play at the next level, and even call college coaches in regard to their players who have exceptional talent (Wohlers, n.d.).

Another organization, called the Native American Basketball Invitational (NABI) Foundation, has similar goals to help point Native American high school youth towards higher education and to provide opportunities for them to earn scholarships. The foundation was founded in 2002, and in 2007, became the first all-Native basketball tournament accredited by the NCAA (NABI Foundation, n.d.). The NABI Foundation hosts week-long programs where Native American high school students, in addition to the tournament games, will be a part of a basketball clinic, an all-day mandatory college and career fair, and different educational components during the week. Through its College Scholarship Fund, NABI is working to see more and more Native Americans in college. Since the fund's conception in 2003, it has given over \$250,000 in scholarships to Native American athletes who participated in the tournament (NABI Foundation, n.d.).

The Nike N7 Fund was started in 2000 through the dream of Sam McCracken who grew up on the Fort Peck Assiniboine/Sioux Reservation in Montana (About N7, n.d.). The Fund started a line of Nike products designed using different tribal patterns. With the money earned from the line, Nike grants money to different Native American communities and organizations promoting the lifelong well-being of Native peoples (About N7, n.d.). Though there are many different recipients of grants from the N7 Fund, two that are notable and serve K-12th graders are the Indian Health Council and InterTribal Sports. The Indian Health Council started a program called F.I.T.S. (Fitness in Tribal Schools) at the All Tribes American Indian Tribal School in California that provides youth with an option of different athletic activities to participate in and teaches them healthy eating and exercise patterns. Intertribal Sports provides athletic training and

competition for youth from 22 different tribes in California. In addition to training the youth in physical skills, the organization aims to unite youth from different tribes and open up an avenue for the sharing and learning of each other's cultures (N7 Fund Grant, n.d.).

Lastly, a new development that will play a crucial role in getting more Native Americans into athletics in higher education comes from a partnership between Sacred Hoops Basketball Association and the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). They have formulated a plan to launch the first ever AAU All-Native National Championships basketball tournament. Director of Sacred Hoops Allan Bertram stated that "the hope is [that] this high-level tournament will provide further opportunities for athletes who wish to continue their post-secondary education" (Sacred Hoops, n.d.).

In 2017, the NCAA developed their own Inclusion and Human Resources department in order to strive more effectively towards diversity and inclusion within the Association. Also in 2007, the NCAA's Board of Director's gave their stamp of approval on creating a new Board of Governors Committee to Promote Cultural Diversity and Equity that has the task to "to review, endorse and make recommendations regarding diversity and inclusion matters that impact the Association" (Lapchick, 2018, p. 37). Though these seem like great steps in the right direction, the NCAA has had the Minority Opportunities and Interests Committee (MOIC) since 1991 which has the duty of evaluating the desires of ethnic minorities in the NCAA, NCAA minority programs, and any policy that would affect minority athletes and staff within the Association (Lapchick, 2018). Though the new department and committee make the quest for more Native

Americans in the NCAA seem hopeful, it is discouraging that the MOIC has been in place for almost 30 years now and no large change in the disparity between Native American student-athletes and the NCAA has seemed to take place.

Native American Athletes Using Sport to Help Their Communities

In addition to organizations, there are a number of Native American high school and college athletes who have used or are currently using their position in athletics to improve the quality of life for their people. SuAnne Big Crow was a Lakota native living on the Pine Ridge Reservation. In Big Crow's Freshman year of high school, she led her basketball team to earn fourth place in the South Dakota state tournament. She averaged thirty points per game throughout her career and was awarded all-American honorable mention by USA Today. She used her success in athletics and in academics to spread the message of alcohol's harmful effects for the lives of youth. Sadly, she died in a car crash when she was only 17 years old (King, 2004). Big Crow dreamed to have a place called Happy Town where kids could come to have fun in a safe environment. When she died, her mom worked hard to make her dream come true by calling up the Boys and Girls Club. Soon after, the first ever Boys and Girls Club to exist on a reservation was opened on the Pine Ridge Reservation and named after SuAnne Big Crow (Giago, 2015).

Today, three brothers are striving to make a huge difference in the lives of Native Americans through lacrosse. Lyle, Jeremy, and Miles Thompson are talented lacrosse athletes from the Iroquois Nation. They were recruited by Syracuse, a school that won 10 NCAA national championships in the sport. Despite the grand resume of Syracuse, they decided to go to Albany instead. They knew that all Native American athletes in the

region who were being recruited by Syracuse chose Syracuse over other schools which was causing other colleges and universities to stop pursuing Native athletes. Their decision to go to a different, less prominent school quickly led to more Native lacrosse players earning athletic scholarships from other schools, such as, Zed Williams to the University of Virginia, Zach Miller to the University of Denver, and Frank Brown to Hobart and William Smith Colleges (Schonbrun, 2014).

A less well-known athlete named Preston Wynne and a former athlete named Nanabah Allison-Brewer are also working to help their Native communities. Preston Wynne is the first Native American to earn the NAIA Division I national championship MVP award. Now his dream is to play basketball professionally and use his platform to “change the dynamic of the reservation and help people get into college” (Fenwick, n.d.). His hopes are that if Native athletes see that he was able to make it professionally, they will see that they can succeed in sports and other areas of life as well (Fenwick, n.d.).

Nanabah Allison-Brewer became the first Native American to become the head coach of a NCAA Division I volleyball team after being one of just a handful of Native Americans who have played in Division I sports. She now serves as the Athletic Director at Haskell Indian Nations University. Because of her faith in the ability of sports to aid in education for Native Americans she has been developing programs for the Native American Volleyball Academy since 2006 (Nana Allison, n.d.). Her vision is to “foster and create that pipeline into higher education [for Native Americans], into college play, and hopefully to our national team” (Reaching New, n.d.). These Native American individuals used their success in sports to make a difference in their communities but

their reach is limited. More stories like these need to be told and more athletes need the opportunity to become successful in their sport and use their platform to improve the lives of their people. The shortage of Native Americans in college and professional sports is still way too strong.

Background

The lack of Native Americans represented in college sports has become such a problem that in the 2016-2017 season, only 129 Native American men and women played NCAA lacrosse out of the 26,369 total student-athletes who played which means approximately .5% of lacrosse players were Native American (NCAA, 2018). Again, these numbers demonstrate that only a very small of the population of student-athletes playing NCAA lacrosse in the 2017-2018 season were Native American which is too large of a difference from their representation as a people group in the United States at 1.7%. As mentioned earlier, this is not only in the sport of lacrosse but the percentage of .4 is the average representation of Native Americans across all NCAA sports among all three divisions (Lapchick, 2018). This shows how greatly Native Americans have been pushed to the sidelines of sport in America when considering the fact that lacrosse originated with Native Americans (King, 2005). Tribal high schools, school administrators, and coaches can use this information to encourage their students to pursue college sports while colleges and universities can use it to improve upon their recruitment strategies and add more diversity and equal opportunity within their programs.

Social Background

An increase in Native Americans receiving scholarships to play college sports could cause an increase in the Native American graduation rate for several reasons. A survey done by Cibik and Chambers reveals that during college “56.8% of the 155 American Indian respondents indicated a need to go home often compared to 31.6% of Blacks, 24.4% of Hispanics, and 16.7% of Anglos” (Benjamin, Chambers, and Reiterman, 1993, p. 31). In another study, Native American students commonly answered that on-campus social support and their desires to give back to their reservation communities helped them in persisting through college, while lack of family and academic support were huge factors to overcome in order to reach graduation (Juntunen, Barraclough, Broneck, Seibel, Winrow, and Morin, 2001). Thirdly, in a study done by Guillory and Wolverton, several main factors affecting persistence were discovered: support from family, the desire to give back to their communities, on-campus social support, financial support, and level of K-12 academic preparation (2008). Their findings are important to this study because many of these factors are provided to student-athletes through coaches, teammates, academic programs, and athletic scholarships.

The theory of Family Education Model (FEM) developed by HeavyRunner and DeCelles states that Native Americans will be able to persevere throughout college and attain higher graduation rates if immersed into a setting that provides a family away from home (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). Colleges and universities must find a way to create an “extended family structure” for these students on their campuses (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008, p. 61). Sport teams are a great way to do this.

Having an atmosphere of family is important to Native Americans because they grow up in a culture where the community is elevated above the individual (James, 2015). Research shows that Native Americans who become a part of a social group on campus have higher chances of graduating (Okagaki et al., 2009). In a national study of student-athletes regarding their experiences as college students, Division IA athletics were described as providing student-athletes with the opportunity to get involved with a greater variety of student groups than non-athletes (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Furthermore, research done on international student-athletes showed that these athletes created deep relationships with the people on their team which enabled them to adjust to college life in America as opposed to international students that were not on a team (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). A similar idea can be applied to Native Americans who are citizens not only of the U.S. but also of their tribal nations because these nations are considered sovereign states. In a way, these reservations are like different countries (Okagaki et al., 2009). In essence, being on a team is like being with family which helps give Native American student-athletes the ability to persist throughout college much more easily.

As discussed earlier with the stories of SuAnne Big Crow, the Thompson brothers, Preston Wynne, and Nanabah Allison-Brewer, another factor that helps Native Americans persist through college are their plans to use education to give back to their communities in the future. Because bringing positive change to their communities through what they have learned in college is the goal motivating many Native American

students to graduate, it would follow that the increase of Native American graduation rates would lead to improved quality of life on reservations.

On the negative side, discouragement from family members and lack of educational preparation were factors making it harder for Native Americans to complete college. Many students reported that when they returned to the reservation after entering college, they experienced rejection from their community. They found it harder to fit in and even experienced hard feelings from family and friends (Juntunen et al., 2001). Because of the high cultural value that Native Americans place on sports, it is very possible that sports are one of the few things that will earn the encouragement students need from family. If family members become more open to their students going to college, these students will have a much higher chance of graduating.

Secondly, Juntunen et. al also revealed that poor educational training from preschool through 12th grade on the reservation created a barrier for these students when they got to college (Juntunen et, al, 2001). College sports is a great way to combat this barrier because many athletic programs assure that their student-athletes are receiving strong academic support (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). The NCAA also launched its Life Skills Program in 1994, which focuses on developing student-athletes in several areas including academic excellence and career development (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000; Life Skills, 2015). With a greater level of academic support for student-athletes than non-athletes, these Native American students will receive the help they need to cover for any discrepancies that occurred throughout their grade school education thus leading to higher graduation rates.

Several foundational theories have led to this paper's theory of investigation that an increase in Native American students receiving collegiate athletic scholarships results in increased quality of life for these individuals and for entire reservation communities. First of all, there are many problems on reservations that have produced the poor quality of life that exists on them. Furthermore, lack of education, and lack of stable work and income on reservations are combined with a very high percentage of suicides and mental health which led the U.S. Commission of Rights to announce that Native Americans are in a public health crisis (Grandbois, 2005).

With more Native Americans graduating from college, there could be a great shift in these patterns. Unfortunately, many of these students have parents who discourage them from going to college. Parents fear that if their children leave the reservation, they will never come back. It is true that a good amount of Native American students who succeed in college choose not to return to the reservation, but a study on transcultural theory done by Huffman (2011) shows that for many Native American students, the motivation behind completing higher education comes from the hopes to return to their reservation and help their home community (Huffman, 2011). Transcultural theory states that for a person of a certain culture to succeed in another culture, they must be able to maintain their cultural identity. I hypothesize that many more Native American parents and communities are more willing for their children to go to college when the opportunity comes through an athletic scholarship the student has earned because sports provides these students with a way to hold onto their Native identities more clearly.

Because Native culture places a high value on the collective body over an individual, another way that Native American students can still hold onto their cultural ways, is through having a family-like group to spend time with while at school (James, 2015). The Family Education Model is a social framework designed by HeavyRunner and DeCelles to promote retention of Native American students. This study was based on student retention at five different college campuses. The model states that colleges and universities can increase Native American student retention by creating an “extended family structure” on their campuses. This reduces isolation and loneliness for these students and makes them feel as though they are at home (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). This kind of family can be found in college athletics, where student-athletes are supported by teammates, coaches, trainers, tutors, and fans who are all rooting for their success.

Very similar to the concept of transcultural theory, Native American students, and minority students in general, persist throughout college, by possessing bicultural efficacy. Bicultural efficacy is the ability or belief that one can be of a different ethnicity or culture and still uphold their ethnic values while being immersed and involved in another culture (Okagaki et al., 2009). If a Native American student contains bicultural efficacy, they do not feel that they will go against their own culture by participating in another. Instead, they feel confident that they can continue in their cultural ways while still being a part of the conventional American campus culture (LaFromboise et al., 1993). College athletics can also provide this for Native American athletes because they can continue in practicing their cultural values through the sport they play.

As mentioned earlier, college persistence factors for Native Americans include such things as academic programs and on-campus social support (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). In a national study done on the college experiences as students for student-athletes, students were asked whether they felt strong academic support from coaches, faculty, and the rest of the student body. Eighty-five percent of student-athletes reported that their coaches had a positive influence on their academics and 90% stated positively of their professors. Eighty percent of student-athletes reported that they received social and emotional support from their teammates, 74% from their roommates, and 66% from other friends. In addition, this study showed that student-athletes are involved in as much or more educational activity and programs as the non-athlete student body (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Their study showed that sports also provide the mentoring that minority students need to increase retention rates (Stromei, 2000).

Different research studies can be pulled together to speculate that Native American student-athletes will have much higher graduation rates than non-athlete Native American students. The literature shows that for Native Americans to persist in college they need both bicultural efficacy and transcultural abilities. These are two qualities that are hard to adopt in college campus life but that this research hypothesizes are much more easily accomplished when playing on a sports team. Previous studies also show that important factors necessary for Native American students to succeed are found in sports (citation).

Conclusion

Though this paper only covers the beginning of the involvement of sports with Native Americans in high school and college, it goes over important history involving sports and Native peoples, shows issues met by Native Americans in sport today, talks about organizations aiming to use sports for the good of reservation communities all over the U.S., and highlights certain Native athletes who have been important in moving their people forward through sports. As shown at the beginning, Native American representation in sport is nowhere near where it should be when compared with their population in the U.S. and the populations of other races in sports. The NAIG, NABI, Nike N7 Fund, and Sacred Hoops Basketball Association which are working to improve the presence of Native Americans in high school and collegiate sports and use sports to improve the lives of Native Americans have been founded in the last thirty years; three of these within the last twenty years. With these organizations and many Native athletes working to help their communities through sports and help more of their people earn athletic scholarships to college, it is very possible that the number of Native American athletes in high school, collegiate, and even professional sports will begin to increase.

There are many issues on Native American reservations, and it is possible that a majority of them can be traced back to very low graduation rates among the communities. College sports have the potential to bring about positive change on reservations because of the different opportunities and enhancements that sport programs would bring to the lives of these Native American students. Unfortunately, the amount of Native Americans receiving athletic scholarships is very small. The hope for this study is that tribal schools

and the different colleges and universities throughout the country will see the positive change collegiate athletic scholarships can bring about for these communities and will let the information bring about adjustments to the way they run their programs.

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