

A New Collegiate Model: Intra-Collegiate Athletics at BYU Idaho

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Aaron Kelly, a highly respected college sport consultant, is charged with the task of presenting a new model of intercollegiate athletic administration to a panel of leaders in the field. Coincidence and research led him to a successful National Junior College Athletic Association athletic program that was discontinued in pursuit of a new model of competitive intra-collegiate athletics when the institution transitioned to a four-year university. Given the purpose of athletics within the academe to facilitate an educational experience difficult to replicate through any other opportunity, (Brand, 2006; NCAA 2010; Rader, 1999) this program sheds light on a new way to view this tradition we have come to know as college sport. The purpose of this case is to highlight the tremendous potential for innovation that exists within the intercollegiate athletic model. While financial challenges make it difficult for many institutions to sponsor broad-based intercollegiate athletics programs, this model presents a design that can reduce expenditures and provide additional participation opportunities for education through athletics. As Kelly prepares for his presentation, he questions whether this model is ideal and how the landscape of intercollegiate athletics might be affected if implemented on a national scale.

In the wake of rampant deficit spending, disgraceful scandals, and vocal calls for reform, the building inertia for a college sport renaissance seemed palpable. It was this sense of urgency that spawned the Summit on Intercollegiate Athletic Reform. Several weeks ago, Aaron Kelly, a highly respected sport administration consultant and former Division I East Coast Conference commissioner, received a phone call from the president of the Summit with an invitation to present a proposed solution to some of the financial issues that university athletics programs were facing. The Summit organizer emphasized it was time for a new model of intercollegiate athletics to be presented and charged Kelly with the task of developing a model that could decrease the financial burden of struggling universities without decreasing the number of participation opportunities. Kelly was honored and hesitantly accepted the task not knowing whether this was a feat that could be accomplished. After grappling with the charge for several months and finding little direction through a variety of research methods, a conversation he overheard at his favorite local pizza joint led him to his first breakthrough – and possibly a direction for his presentation.

While anxiously waiting for his fully loaded stuffed-crust pizza, he overheard a conversation at an adjacent table between two missionaries and a young couple. The couple asked the young men what they planned to do when they finished their service as missionaries. Both missionaries emphatically stated they hoped to go to BYU Idaho in order to be involved in competitive sports. One mentioned he hoped to coach basketball at the university because his playing days were over due to a high school injury, and the other said he wanted to play competitive football and baseball. The couple asked some follow-up questions about how they intended to do this, and the missionaries explained that several years ago church leaders had directed the successful National Junior College Athletic Association athletic

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program at Ricks College to be discontinued in pursuit of a new model of competitive intra-collegiate athletics when the institution transitioned to a four-year university. The missionaries went on to recount experiences of leadership and athletic skill development that they had heard about from friends who were alums of the university. These athletic opportunities, they mentioned, were the driving force behind their hopes to attend the university. As Kelly finished his third slice, he thought about the enthusiasm he had sensed from the missionaries and made the decision to box up the remaining slices of his pizza so he could get to a computer to learn more about this intriguing university and its athletic program.

Several weeks later, after researching and visiting the campus of BYU Idaho, Kelly believed the philosophy and organization of this athletics program met or exceeded all of the specifications he was hoping to fulfill in the proposed new vision the Summit leaders desired. Kelly hoped the BYU Idaho competitive athletics model would inspire Summit participants to recognize the tremendous potential there is for innovation within college sport, and that this recognition would spur a rich discussion leading to additional organizational models. As enthusiastic as he was, he also held a fair amount of worry about how the model would be received by those in attendance (including a selection of athletics directors in addition to the presidents of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and numerous conference commissioners and university presidents). As the presentation drew near, Kelly debated whether this model was truly the best answer to the issues currently faced in the industry of intercollegiate athletics.

BYU Idaho

For most of its history BYU Idaho was known as Ricks College. Initially established in 1888 as the Bannock Stake Academy by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the school was renamed in honor of founder Thomas E. Ricks in 1923 (BYU Idaho, 2006; Crowder, 1997). Except for a brief period between 1948-1956 when it operated as a four-year institution, Ricks College primarily functioned as a two-year junior college. By 2000, Ricks College had over 7,500 students, making it the largest private junior college in the country (Encyclopedia of Mormonism, 1992).

In June of 2000, Gordon B. Hinckley, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, announced that Ricks College would become a four-year institution. Among the changes mentioned was the discontinuation of the varsity intercollegiate athletics program and institution of a competitive intra-collegiate athletics program. The athletics announcement took the campus by surprise given the historical success of the athletic program (BYU Idaho 2011b). As a member of the Scenic West Athletic Conference in the National Junior College Athletic Association, Ricks boasted one of the top five junior-college athletic programs in the country. The football program was especially strong, winning several Western States Football League championships and routinely sending players to Division I powerhouses. Between 1980 and 2000, nearly 25 Ricks College alumni had played in the National Football League or the Canadian Football League (Jacobson, 2005).

Located in Rexburg, Idaho, Ricks College officially became known as Brigham Young University Idaho on August 10th, 2001 (BYU Idaho, 2006) and continues to offer several Associate degree programs in addition to Bachelor degree programs. Since the transition from Ricks College to BYU Idaho, the school has experienced tremendous growth doubling enrollment from the Ricks College era. During the fall semester of 2011 there were 13,368 full-time students enrolled at the institution (BYU Idaho Newsroom, 2011). Despite this growth, the campus is considered geographically, ethnically, and religiously homogeneous, with 90% of the students being Caucasian and 99% members of The Church of Latter Day Saints (BYU Idaho Institutional Research, 2011).

Although numerous changes have taken place subsequent to the transition from Ricks College to Brigham Young University Idaho, university and church leaders have made an effort to continue the “Spirit of Ricks” - a campus emphasis of service, hard work, friendliness, and compassion. In this spirit, much of BYU Idaho student life revolves around organized student activities which consist of dances, outdoor excursions, concerts, fitness programs and service projects (BYU Idaho, 2010). These university initiatives along with the sports events, recreational sports and competitive sports tracts of the sport division are housed within the Student Activities Program.

The Student Activities Program

Introduced in the transition from two-year Ricks College to four-year BYU Idaho, the student activities program provides engagement opportunities for everyone on campus regardless of their skill level, or degree of commitment. A variety of activities are offered throughout the year in an effort to provide students with opportunities to be involved, gain leadership skills, and serve others while enriching the university experience for themselves and those around them (Student Activities Program, 2011). The activities program is guided by five foundational principles that contribute to a complete education enabling students to learn and grow through ‘taking action’ in the pursuit of developing “the best, most interesting and capable versions of themselves” (Activities Guiding Principles, 2011):

Principle #1: A wide range of activities will meet the diverse interests and abilities of students.

Principle #2: Students are the participants rather than the spectators.

Principle #3: Participants have the opportunity to act rather than be acted upon.

Principle #4: Students choose their level of participation.

Principle #5: Participants will develop personal and spiritual qualities that prepare them for life.

Elder Henry B. Eyring, the Church’s commissioner of education, said the activities program is intended to build leaders and is “leadership training of the broadest and most exciting kind” (qtd. in Gardner, 2001). The goal is for participants in the program to be “leaders who know how to teach and how to learn... [who] will become legendary for their capacity to build the people around them and add value wherever they serve” (Eyring, 2001). Students can choose to participate or become involved in leading the program through being a coach, manager, coordinator, director, or area director. Area directors and directors are scholarship positions, with coordinators, managers, and coaches as volunteer opportunities. The Student Area directors oversee the seven program divisions including outdoor, service, talent, wellness, social, life skills and sports.

The sports division uses a three track system to provide options for students to lead and participate in sports events, recreational sports, and/or competitive sports. Annual sports events include golf scrambles, 3-on-3 basketball tournaments, and themed races. Recreational sports, similar to most university’s intramural programs, include a variety of options with the average participation requirements of one game per week and a tournament if eligible. The competitive sports track emulates collegiate varsity sport participation with the inclusion of try-outs, regular practices, trained coaches, and a full season and post-season of competition all of which takes place on campus between other university competitive sport teams.

The Competitive Sports Program

The Competitive Sports Program “provides opportunities for individuals to develop personal honor in a disciplined team environment” (BYU Idaho Competitive Sports Program, 2011, ¶ 6). When a student chooses to participate in the BYU Idaho Competitive Sport Program, he or she is held to a high standard of commitment that includes many of the features of traditional intercollegiate varsity athletic programs including regular team practices led by trained coaches, team uniforms, and post-season play.

Participants in the competitive program must go through a try-out process. In order to play competitive football, for instance, students must attend a registration meeting and three days of tryout sessions. Following this, a public draft is held that eligible student-athletes must attend in business attire. If drafted onto one of the teams, athletes then attend a team combine to begin the season. Once committed to a competitive team, students are required to attend all practices and competitive events. The competitive baseball league, for instance, states “if you miss practice unexcused you will have to sit out for the games that weekend. If you quit playing during the semester you will be ineligible to play competitive sports the following semester” (“League Description”, 2011, ¶ 1). The tryouts and drafts held each semester as opposed to traditional intercollegiate athletics team recruiting are implemented in order to maintain a level

of competitive parity within the leagues, and this parity has been instrumental in providing an optimal experience for spectators and participants as there are many close finishes and exciting playoffs (J. Garner, personal communication, November 4, 2011).

Along with competing in the campus-wide leagues, students also maintain the athletic fields and serve as coaches and/or athletic administrative staff. The organizational structure of the competitive sports area within the activities program is very similar to a traditional intercollegiate athletic department; however the complex structure is overseen by only four full time university employees. These advisors oversee several different sports per semester and serve in a primarily administrative function. Advisors have a light touch at different levels throughout the organization, however day-to-day activities are largely student run (J. Garner, personal communication, November 16, 2011). In order to split up the workload, simulate the real world, and provide tremendous opportunities for leadership, each semester a student is selected to serve as the area director and two students are selected to serve as directors of programs and operations, respectively. Coordinators are then chosen to oversee each sport and finally coaches are selected for each team (J. Garner, personal communication, November 16, 2011). In 2010, there were 386 students who served in leadership capacities within the Competitive Sports Program. An additional 277 were employed in games management or officiating positions, and many more volunteered in other capacities to help the program run (J. Garner, personal communication, November 10, 2011). Because of the significant time commitment required of participants in the Competitive Sports Program, students are limited to participation in one sport per semester, and most sports have the option to simultaneously be an administrator or coach and participant.

Outcomes of the Transition from Intercollegiate Athletics to Competitive Intra-Collegiate Athletics

The new model of competitive intra-collegiate athletics that has been implemented at BYU Idaho has brought a number of effects to the university and community. The most notable impacts on the university from an administrative standpoint have been the tremendous cost savings the new program has facilitated, and the ability to accommodate all students who hold the interest and ability to participate in competitive intercollegiate athletics. From a student standpoint, perhaps the most notable impact of the transition has been the addition of impactful leadership opportunities that participants consistently describe as highly educational, worthwhile and valuable experiences that are instrumental in enhancing personal growth (see Table 1). Other direct impacts of the Competitive Athletics Program have been noted in student recruiting and donor philanthropy. Supporters of the intra-collegiate program cite the administrative, sportsmanship, and leadership skills that students are able to develop as the primary benefits of the model with the cost-savings as an added bonus (Jacobson, 2005).

The decision to replace intercollegiate athletics with a competitive intra-collegiate athletic program was largely driven by economics. Though David A. Bednar, who served as the university's president during the transition, declined to disclose financial figures for Ricks College varsity athletics, he did state publically that the intra-collegiate activities program would operate at a fraction of a traditional intercollegiate budget as travel often demands a large percentage of the funds (J. Garner, personal communication, November 16, 2011; Jacobson 2005). Evidence of this forecast has come to fruition.

Staffing cost savings related to the administrative and coaching salaries have decreased significantly as the Competitive Sports Program operates with just a fraction of the staff members that were employed by the Ricks College athletic department. Comparing operational budgets of sports offered under the Ricks College athletic department with the same sports offered through the Competitive Sports Program, sport-by-sport operational budgets operate at between 3-13% of what was spent under the traditional intercollegiate athletics model. This figure accounts for the average decreases in sport-by-sport expenditures related to travel; (representing approximately 34% of the operational budgets); scholarships (representing approximately 58% of the operational budgets), and "other" expenditures including equipment costs, office supplies, equipment repairs, cell phone costs, etc. (representing approximately 8% of the operational budgets). In aggregate, these sports operate in the Competitive Sports Program for less than 8% of the Ricks College system operational budgets while serving 920% more students (J. Garner, personal communication, June 9, 2012).

Table 1 Student Leader Experiences (Fall 2010, Winter 2011, Spring 2011)

	Mean	SD
Transferable Skills Developed*	6.30	1.15
<i>I learned leadership principles that I can apply to other settings.</i>		
Experience was Educational*	6.29	1.16
<i>My experience in Activities helped me learn practical leadership skills.</i>		
Experience Facilitated Personal Growth & Development*	6.27	1.15
<i>I have personally grown and developed from this leadership experience.</i>		
Experience was Worthwhile*	6.22	1.25
<i>My leadership experience in the Activities Program was worthwhile...</i>		
Felt trusted in role*	6.09	1.25
<i>I felt trusted in my role running a program or event.</i>		
Felt Empowered*	5.96	1.31
<i>I was able to act, have my ideas heard, and make a difference.</i>		
Felt Influential*	5.82	1.37
<i>I felt like I was in a position where I could "grow" people under my supervision.</i>		
Experience was Critical to BYU Experience	5.10	1.51
<i>How critical was the leadership role to your overall BYU experience?</i>		

Note. The scale ranged from Strongly Disagree or Not Critical (1) to Strongly Agree or Extremely Critical (7)

* $p < .001$ ($\mu \geq 5$)

$n = 267$

Participation in the competitive intra-collegiate athletic program has increased participation opportunities dramatically. Under the old intercollegiate model in 2000, 264 athletes played nine varsity sports. Ten years later, under the new model, 2,433 athletes participated in competitive intra-collegiate athletics with 212 unique teams in 19 sports (see Table 2). Because of the minimal financial investment required to field and operate the teams, a broad-based program is possible. As of 2010, nineteen different sports were fielded, many with male and female leagues and between three and thirty-four teams per league, with football capped at eight teams (see Table 3) (J. Garner, personal communication, November 16, 2011; Competitive Sport Program, 2011). The addition of sports has come based on the interests and abilities of students, and that level of interest and ability continues to rise as the program gets more visibility. This program provides many individuals the opportunity to compete after high school that they wouldn't otherwise be able to do. These participation and leadership opportunities fit with one of the guiding principles of the Activities Program that students should be participants rather than spectators (J. Garner, personal communication, November 4, 2011).

Chris Moore, the Director of Philanthropies at BYU Idaho, recalled the initial hit in giving that was taken when it was announced the athletic program would be discontinued. "People were upset," he recollected (personal communication, June 12, 2012). One donor in particular who had been a long-time supporter of the renowned athletics program was so upset that he asked for a significant ~\$30,000-40,000 gift back. While there was an initial dip in giving after the athletics program was discontinued, there has been an overall increase in giving for the institution since the transition. It is difficult to pinpoint the source of this increase, however, because the entire institution has changed. Before, if someone wanted to give to athletics, they could make a direct donation, but now those funds would be directed toward the general scholarship fund.

Discussing some of the direct benefits of the Competitive Athletics Program as seen in the philanthropies office, Moore mentioned the "amazing graduates" from the first 3-5 years of BYU Idaho who already major donors and some

Table 2 Competitive Athletic Participation Opportunities in Ricks College Athletics (2000) and BYU Idaho Competitive Sports Program (2010)

	Ricks College Athletics		BYU Idaho Competitive Sports	
	Men's	Women's	Men's	Women's
Baseball	x		x	
Basketball	x	x	x	x
Cross Country	x	x	x	x
Football	x		x	
Golf			x	x
Ice Hockey			x	
Lacrosse			x	x
Soccer			x	x
Fast Pitch Softball		x		x
Swimming			x	x
Tennis			x	x
Track & Field	x	x	x	x
Ultimate Frisbee			x	x
Volleyball		x	x	x
Wrestling	x		x	
Spirit/Dance	x	x	x	x
Total # of Athletes	264		2883*	

*Represents total participation opportunities from teams in fall (n = 918), winter (n = 710), and spring (n = 1255). During this time frame there were a total of 2433 unique participants

Table 3 Teams in the 2010 BYU Idaho Competitive Sports Program

	Fall			Winter			Spring			Total
	M	W	C	M	W	C	M	W	C	
Baseball	6						6			12
Basketball (Varsity)				12	6		10	6		34
Basketball (JV)				12	6		10			28
Cheer Squad			1			1			1	3
Color Guard		1								1
Cross Country	5	5								10
Dance Team		1			1			1		3
Football	6									6
Golf									4	4
Ice Hockey				6						6
Lacrosse							4	3		7
Soccer	6	6					6	6		24
Softball		4						4		8
Swimming			3						3	6
Tennis							6			6
Track & Field									3	3
Ultimate Frisbee	5	4					5	4		18
Volleyball	4	12					4	10		30
Wrestling				3						3
Total Teams	32	33	4	33	13	1	51	34	11	212

Note. M = men's teams, W = women's teams, C = combined teams

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of the school's best alumni. Moore believes their experiences with leadership in the Activities Program were integral in tying them to the university. Because of the number of opportunities present in this program, Moore expects the benefits in terms of giving to continue to increase as the program matures (personal communication, June 12, 2012). Related to how much the Competitive Sports Program is present in donor visit conversations, "the Activities Program is a great story, and we love to talk about the wonderful things happening there...but because there isn't a whole lot of money needed to run the program, it's not the best pitch to donors. (T. Moore, personal communication, June 12, 2012). The Activities Program generally comes up in discussions as a wonderful leadership program, but the majority of funding conversations center on the educational initiatives that are in need of funding (personal communication, June 12, 2012).

Tyler Williams, the Director of Admissions at BYU Idaho, commented on his observations related to direct impacts of the Competitive Athletics Program and its "resoundingly positive impact on quality student recruitment" (personal communication, June 8, 2012). As he and other members of the admissions office have travelled to meet with prospective students, they have noted a tremendous amount of enthusiasm when they describe the Competitive Athletics Program. "When students learn there are still opportunities to participate in sport at a high level beyond intramurals – that they get coaching time, practice time, and structure – they are excited about that" (T. Williams, personal communication, June 8, 2012). Williams also mentioned the influx of transfer students who are athletes that have noted the Competitive Athletics Program as an element of their transfer decision. These students have expressed a desire to get to do what they love to do – play their sport – while being able to focus on academics. These transfer athletes have noted the stress, intensity, and travel schedule they were required to maintain as collegiate athletes and chose the BYU Idaho model as one that would fit their individual educational needs more fully.

There are other students and parents who are disappointed to find out that the school doesn't have a football or basketball program that they can root for...but these voices have been the minority. "Most believe it is more exciting to participate than to watch others participate. That is the kind of student that is attracted to our school" (T. Williams, personal communication, June 8, 2012). The recruiting office has also received its fair share of occasional parents that offer negative feedback related to the program who reflect on their nostalgia from the old glory days of the athletic department. Generally, Williams noted, once these students or parents get to campus and gets a feel for the Activities Program, their pre-conceived notions of what campus might be missing without the varsity athletic program melt away. "Upon observation, it is evident the Activities Program provides a laboratory for learning. Students are able to put into practice what they are taught and can develop new leadership skills - it's a very effective model" (personal communication, June 8, 2012).

While the opportunities for experience are great within the model, there are challenges. The primary challenge in this model is the customary turnover of student-leadership which creates a continual staffing concern. This turnover can at times lead to inefficiency. Additionally, because the students are fulfilling all the roles from umpire and referee to athlete, coach, and administrator, there have been isolated instances where a student has a conflict of interest that hurts the integrity of the system (J. Garner, personal communication, November 4, 2011).

The role of the community has also taken a different form - there are generally not a lot of fans in the stands. A large crowd for a championship typically consists of 800-1000 people while average games only draw a few hundred spectators. Where at one point there was a fair amount of community involvement as fans followed their nationally ranked teams, the new model which involves a shuffle of teams each semester is not as fan friendly (J. Garner, personal communication, November 4, 2011). This leaves somewhat of a void in opportunities to unite the students and create school spirit and strong community relationships through athletics. The reality of the intra-collegiate athletic model is that the institution will never be better than .500, and while the level of play is good across the leagues due to the competitive parity, it is not equal in quality to that of intercollegiate sports.

Conclusion

In 2010, only 22 athletics programs in the NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision—the wealthiest intercollegiate athletic division—reported positive net generated revenue without allocated institutional support - up from 14 schools in 2009 (NCAA, 2011). Most athletic programs through all levels of intercollegiate athletics rely heavily on institutional support to supplement the salary, scholarship, travel, and other administrative and infrastructural financial demands inherent in

athletic operation (NCAA, 2006), and despite this support there is systemic deficit spending (Dadigan, 2010; Knight Commission 2010; NCAA 2011). The competitive nature of athletics and the lure of commercial enticements at some levels have also led to patterns of abuse in athletic administration that in many ways threaten the sanctity of college sport (Dadigan, 2010; Splitt, 2009; Upton, 2011). These compounding issues have led many intercollegiate athletic stakeholders to question the current model (Branch, 2011; Byers, 1995; Sack, 2009; Splitt, 2009).

The BYU Idaho intra-collegiate athletic model offers an illustration of an administrative structure that dramatically increases participation opportunities while decreasing expenditures. While the model is quite a divergence from traditional varsity athletics, it fulfills an educational mission “providing opportunities for individuals to develop personal honor in a disciplined team environment” (BYU Idaho Competitive Sport Program, 2011). Given the purpose of athletics within the academe - to facilitate a holistic education difficult to replicate through any other educational opportunity (Brand, 2006; NCAA 2010; Rader, 1999) - this program sheds light on a new way to think about this tradition we have come to know as college sport.

As Aaron Kelly reviewed his notes for the Summit presentation, he reflected upon his first visit to BYU Idaho and his meeting with the Director of the Activities Program, Justin Garner. When the announcement came to the students, staff, and community that Ricks College would discontinue its intercollegiate athletics program and begin a new model of competitive intra-collegiate athletics, Garner was coaching and serving as an assistant athletic director of a very successful National Junior College Athletic Association program. “We didn’t know what the new model would look like, or what it meant to the university,” he recalled, “but we believed in our leader and so we rolled up our sleeves and went to work. Looking back,” he reflected, “I don’t think any of us would have believed how great the new model would become. The quality is remarkable – it’s a different quality, but it meets our mission and it is a great program” (J. Garner, personal communication, November 4, 2011). It is this great program that Aaron Kelly hoped the Summit attendees would embrace.

In just a few days, Kelly would be sharing the BYU Idaho intra-collegiate athletics model to a panel of leaders in the industry. While confident in his research and excited about the recommendations he would propose, he was troubled by the reality that this model might be too different, and that it might not be an ideal fit for many institutions – particularly those with “big time” athletics programs. As he contemplated the potential reaction of those that would soon enter the Summit venue, he questioned whether this was the best model to present, and how the landscape of intercollegiate athletics would be affected if this model were instituted on a national scale.

Case Questions

1. If an institution is hoping to decrease costs and increase participation opportunities in their intercollegiate athletics program, what are some important considerations in evaluating competitive intra-collegiate athletics as a potential model?
2. What are the benefits and/or drawbacks of the competitive intra-collegiate athletics model?
3. What factors should an administrator consider in maximizing the educational potential of athletics within their institution?
4. What factors should an administrator consider in maximizing the commercial potential of athletics within their institution?
5. What impact would the competitive intra-collegiate athletics model have on the institution’s brand and/or admissions?
6. What would be the implications of implementing this model at your institution?
7. How might the dropping of intercollegiate athletics affect an institution’s local economy? What factors in this case minimized the negative effects dropping intercollegiate athletics might have on the local economy?
8. What factor would the *public* or *private* status of an institution play in the administration’s ability to drop intercollegiate athletics in favor of an intra-collegiate athletic model?
9. What impact might there be on achieving racial diversity or gender equity in an intra-collegiate model compared to the intercollegiate model?

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