

2016

AAU Basketball - Participants' Perceptions of Their AAU Experience

Hakeem R. Willis

Eastern Illinois University

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Recommended Citation

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AAU Basketball – Participants' Perceptions of their AAU Experience

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BY

Hakeem R. Willis

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Masters Of Science in Kinesiology and Sports Studies

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2016

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AAU Basketball – Participants’ Perceptions of their AAU Experience

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Science in the
Graduate School of Eastern Illinois University

By

Hakeem Rashad Willis

Graduate Program in Kinesiology and Sports Studies - Sports Administration

Eastern Illinois University

2016

Thesis Committee

Dr. Amber Shipherd

Dr. Brian Pritschet

Dr. Jill Owen

Abstract

In the United States, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) has become the focal point for college recruiters in searching for top talent amongst middle and high school basketball athletes. Financially, AAU basketball can be expensive, making it difficult for families to allow their children to compete. However, players feel that AAU participation is worth the investment because of the benefits, which includes collegiate exposure. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of former AAU basketball players' experience. The research question used to guide this study was: what are former AAU basketball players' perceptions of academic requirements, time/money, basketball skills/development, and the opportunity to play college basketball? The participants in this study were men and women ages 18-35 years old. Participant's eligibility was determined based on their participation as an athlete in AAU basketball. Using the survey software Qualtrics, participants were provided a link via email, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and through wireless phone text messaging. The findings of this study of twenty-four former AAU basketball players provided insight into players' perceptions of academic requirements, time/money, basketball skills/development, and the opportunity to play college basketball. The former AAU basketball players in this study believed that although AAU basketball does not require any academic standards at this time, academic requirements such as a minimal grade point average should be required for participation. The former players felt that if academic requirements were enforced in AAU basketball, participation would not decrease. They also felt that AAU is expensive, but worth the investment because of the number of games that AAU provides. They also believed that AAU basketball does not improve knowledge about basketball or

how to be a better teammate. They did feel that AAU participation does give an athlete the best chance to receive a college scholarship and that athletes only play AAU for collegiate exposure. Despite the expenses to participate versus the amount of games played in AAU basketball, it was concluded that the AAU only provides athletes exposure to collegiate scholarships however, academic requirements should be, but are not required to participate in AAU basketball.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my committee members, Dr. Amber Shipherd and Dr. Brian Pritschet. Thank you for joining me on my journey and instilling confidence in me along the way. Because of your passion and experience in research, I now have a better respect and outlook on life as a researcher. I value both of you for taking the time to show me the way, while being patient and understanding throughout the process. Your kindness and professional attitude has made me a better writer and a better scholar.

I would like to thank the KSS department and department chairperson, and Mrs. Carol Dhom for their wonderful guidance and support during this journey. They were always there to listen and help me achieve my full potential. I know I would not be where I am without their caring support and love.

I would also like to thank Dr. Jill Owen for helping me complete a goal that I did not think was possible. Dr. Owens convincingly conveyed a spirit of hope and resilience to never give up and to continue to work hard. Without her generous guidance, loving support and sacrifice, this thesis would not have been possible.

In addition, I would like to thank my mentors, Mr. Russell Brodie and Mrs. Tara Baldrige, for their words of wisdom and support. To my fiancée, Brittany, thank you for sticking by my side and motivating me to keep fighting when times were hard and frustrating. Lastly, to my family, thank you for your love, sacrifice, and support. Because of all of you, I strive for success by being the best I can be every day.

Thank you all for being a part of my journey!

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In the United States, basketball is a high profile sport. For many youth, it is easily accessible and relatively inexpensive, and therefore popular recreationally (Smith, 2010). Due to these factors, basketball has seen many “rags to riches” tales of professional NBA players emerging from early ages – some who entered the NBA straight right from high school (Katz, 2013). For those youth devoted to the pursuit of a college or professional career in the sport, play outside of high school has become a consistent thread in the athletic player profile. Consequently, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), a governing body tasked with ensuring equity in youth sports, has become the focal point for college recruiters in searching for top talent amongst middle and high school basketball athletes in the United States (Wood, 2010).

There are both advantages and disadvantages to the prevalence of the AAU system as a recruitment generator. Financially, AAU basketball can be expensive, making it difficult for families to allow their children to compete. Families investing in AAU basketball can expect to pay \$400 to \$4,000 per summer just to play; not including transportation, food, gas, or admission for family members (Green, 2013). While this can be a problem for many, players feel that participation in AAU is worth the investment because of the opportunity that AAU provides to gain recruitment attention from NCAA Division I programs (Korman, 2015). Youth players looking for an advantage feel compelled to view participation in AAU basketball as more of a talent search rather than a fun experience of playing basketball with friends (“What Effects Do AAU,” 2014).

Age requirements and competition levels within the organization have also raised questions about the mission of the AAU. The AAU suggests that its purpose is to provide an

opportunity to increase the participation of all youth in sports. However, participation in school-related sports has declined because the AAU basketball system allows athletes to play basketball all year around without scholastic pre-requisites to participate (“What Effects Do AAU,” 2014). In fact, participation in year-round programs with AAU basketball leagues almost demand a decision be made that eliminates participation in other sports (Cimbollek, 2014). Most AAU basketball programs stress commitment to the AAU basketball team, practice and travel as prerequisite for involvement – all of which leave little room for youth participants to pursue other activities (“Recruiting 101,” 2016). Notable professional and collegiate coaches and players have gone on record to express their disinterest in AAU basketball (Phillips, 2015). According to Davis (2011), Mike Krzyzewski, legendary college coach and future hall of famer, commented that AAU basketball is only known for the ability to play games, not learn fundamentals. Also, the message that playing AAU basketball gives an athlete a better chance to land a scholarship to a top school is misrepresented and takes away the responsibility for that athlete to maintain his or her school status as a student-athlete (Green, 2013). Finally, it appears as though AAU basketball can be a feasible option for some up and coming college prospects, yet no academic standard has been set. This is potentially problematic for AAU athletes who want to pursue collegiate athletics, and whose participation in AAU is not dependent on particular academic standards that will be an essential component of collegiate eligibility.

This study examined player perceptions on issues revolving around participation in AAU basketball. Exposure for a collegiate scholarship is highly important to AAU basketball participants; however, are players who receive those scholarships aware of the academic responsibilities at the collegiate level? While collegiate recruitment continues to be a leading factor for participation, how are other factors such as academics and AAU expenses valued

amongst its former participants? A further look into investigating these concerns is important because it allows researchers to better understand former AAU players' perceptions of academic requirements, time/money, basketball skill/development, and the opportunity to play college basketball as it relates to their AAU experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of former basketball players' experiences participating in the AAU program. Survey questions were designed to determine participants' perception of: a) the reasons that motivated players to participate, b) the importance of academic standards within AAU basketball, and c) whether participating in AAU basketball prepares an athlete for college basketball.

As such, the questions that guided this study were the following:

1. What are former AAU basketball players' perceptions of:
 - a. Academic requirements.
 - b. Time/money.
 - c. Basketball skill/development.
 - d. Opportunity to play in college.

Delimitations

This study included former AAU basketball participants, between the ages of 18-35 years. Participants were chosen based on their prior playing experience within AAU basketball. For this study, participants were both men and women with minimal experience (as few as one-month of playing) as a participant in AAU basketball. A survey was used to determine the opinions or feelings of the participants' experiences within the AAU based on social, ethical, and educational issues.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This literature review addresses different components of AAU basketball. The first section includes literature pertaining to the history of AAU. The second section includes literature regarding the implications within AAU basketball, such as participation, time/money, the opportunity to play college basketball, academic requirements, winning vs. player development, and recruitment.

The History of the Amateur Athletic Union

As one of the largest non-profit sports organizations in the United States, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) has become the most viable option for certifying youth as amateurs in various sports. Established in 1888 by William Buckingham Curtis, called “The Founding Father”, the purpose of AAU was to instill uniformity and standards in amateur sports. In the beginning of its establishment, AAU served as the national governing body of athletics, represented the United States in the international sport federation, and assisted with the Olympic movement to prepare athletes to participate in the Olympic Games (AAU Sports, 2015). In the early 1970s, athletics (also known as track and field) was one of the inaugural sports AAU offered. Prominent athletes such as Jesse Owens, Jackie Joyner-Kersey, Florence Griffin-Joyner, and Carl Lewis are all products of AAU. Each of these individuals competed and contributed to their sport as AAU athletes (AAU Sports, 2015).

Another inaugural sport that continues to remain the top sport in AAU is basketball. In 1897, the first Men’s AAU National Championship was held and won by the 23rd Street YMCA out of New York City (Wood, 2010). Following in the men’s footsteps in 1926, the first

Women's AAU National Championship was held and won by the Athletic and Country Club from Pasadena.

Due to the success of the AAU, the first girls and boys' national championships were organized in 1972. Three moments in AAU history stand out as the evolution of AAU basketball (Wood, 2010). The first moment came when AAU basketball grew from six age group championships in the late 1970s to include thirteen age group championships in 1989. Next, the passage of the Amateur Sports Act by President Jimmy Carter in 1978, significantly altered the focus of the AAU. The act formed a governing body for each Olympic sport and removed the AAU from those responsibilities. Due to this act, the AAU shifted its organization's focus from developing elite athletes to youth programming. The third moment came when the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) restructured its recruiting calendar adding significant value to AAU basketball over traditional high school basketball (Wood, 2010).

Today, 126 years later, AAU offers different types of memberships to all participants of all ages for all 32 administered sports. Over the years, the AAU has achieved record-breaking milestones in its organization. The first milestone came between the years 2012 to 2014, when the AAU decided to move forward under the leadership of its first two African-American Presidents/CEOs, Louis Stout (his tenure lasted only months after his unfortunate death) and Henry Forrest, and its first African-American woman named as National Chair. Another milestone came when the AAU Junior Olympics track and field recorded the largest number of participants for any youth track meet in the world with 14,000 participants in 2011 and 12,000 participants in 2012. Finally, 50% of AAU's 1.1 million memberships are due to the high relevance of AAU basketball. Numbers like these give reason as to why AAU continues to remain at the top for youth sports across the country (AAU Sports, 2015).

The Founding Father of AAU: William Buckingham Curtis

William Buckingham Curtis was born in 1837 in Salisbury, Vermont. Some believed that William Curtis would live a short life because of a disease many thought was inherited due to the damage by his poor health (Wettan & Willis, 2012). The lack of support from his strict religious parents did not stop his participation or interest in athletics. Throughout his life, Curtis actively competed in sports for mere fun and love, but he also felt there were other intentions for playing. He stated, “Boys and men practice all sorts of games primarily for the intricate pleasure of the sport, but secondarily, and mainly, that they may arrange competitions, measure themselves against others, and prove their superiority over their fellows” (Wettan & Willis, 2012, p.30). From the time his athletic career started in 1854 to the time it ended in 1880, Curtis actively competed, setting records and standards in every sport he played, and leaving everything on the line. Although there were a handful of people involved in the establishment of amateur athletics in America, it is only William Curtis who stands as the “Founding Father” due to his consistent commitment, passion, and love for amateur athletics, which has become a dominating force for decades. His decision to remove all professionalism within amateur athletics was monumental in the growth of the organization. Curtis believed that removing himself and other athletes from partaking in any prized or wagered events would only move the organization to a higher level in the near future. Before his tragic death in 1900, William Curtis dedicated his life to the separation of amateur athletics from professionalism. He did this so that governing bodies could be formed to protect and organize amateur athletics for the betterment of future amateur athletic endeavors (Wettan & Willis, 2012).

The Impact of the 1978 Amateur Sports Act

Years before the enactment of the Amateur Sports Act, sports in the United States struggled to maintain establishment against other world competitors (Nafziger, 1983). Minor sports like bobsled took a significant decline in surviving against international opponents in competition. Athletes within the sport lacked institutional and financial support, making it harder for their sport to succeed (Wakefield, 2007). As frustrations grew amongst the sport of bobsled toward the AAU, so did the feud between the AAU and NCAA over who would have sole control over those organizations appointed by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to govern individual sports in the United States. As the feud between the AAU and NCAA continued for decades, the problems that Olympic-style sports in America encountered called for immediate action (Nafziger, 1983).

Influenced by the lack of success from the American teams in the Olympic Games, the United States Congress authorized a President's Commission on amateur sports in 1975. The Commission was used to observe amateur sports in the U.S. to determine how federal subsidies can be beneficial, how to develop all Olympic sports, and to identify the factors impacting the United States selection of teams (Wakefield, 2007). While efforts by the AAU to release control over the International Olympic Committee in which they held, the President's Commission had other plans in mind. Two years later in 1978, the United States Congress passed the law signed by President Jimmy Carter called the Amateur Sports Act which governed amateur sports in the United States and required individual sports to form their own national governing bodies (Nafziger, 1983). After its revision in 1998, the Amateur Sports Act still exists in the United States. The enactment of the Amateur Sports Act shifted the AAU focus from the elite athletes to youth programming (Wakefield, 2007).

Implications within AAU Basketball

Participation

Aforementioned, basketball has one of the largest memberships in the AAU. Since its establishment in 1888, the AAU has been consistent in following its mission statement, which is “to offer amateurs and volunteers opportunities to develop to their highest level through a national and local network of sporting events” (Pogge, 2010, p.5). However, the purpose of the AAU established by “Founding Father” William B. Curtis was to remove all professional ties within amateur sports. Due to the lack of enforcement on professionalism and its influences, sport participation in today’s AAU basketball has taken precedence over that of high school basketball (Pogge, 2010).

The opportunity to play in college. Participation in AAU basketball presents a unique opportunity for young athletes to play against bigger, stronger, and faster competition across the country (Sorensen, 2015). The AAU summer circuit has become critical for high school athletes aspiring to play Division I college basketball (Alexander, 2014). For participants in AAU basketball, gaining exposure in hopes of becoming a professional basketball player seems to be the only attraction when addressing sports participation (Korman, 2015). The ability for these young athletes, teams, and coaches to hold sponsorships and be influenced by money takes away the intention of what participation in sports can provide especially at the high school level.

Time/money. According to Sullivan (2015), parent spending in youth sports has grown up to 10.5% of the parents’ gross income. In AAU basketball, parents can expect to pay between \$400 and \$4,000 a year, not including travel or other expenses (Green, 2013). Athletes can expect to devote most of their time to playing full court games rather than spending time

developing their skills, spending summers with family, and/or spending time being a kid. Huber (2015) believes that youth basketball players spend too much time on meaningless weekend tournaments because athletes don't value the significance of wins and losses when they know they have another game to play the next hour. There are several factors that can influence an athlete's decision to participate in AAU basketball. The opportunity to play in college continues to be one of the top choices as time/money continues to be more of a concern for parents.

Academic Requirements

According to Wolf (1983), parents and coaches refused to support efforts to reform high school academic eligibility in 1983. In 1985, the Texas state legislation passed a "No Pass No Play" rule that stated an athlete could not play or participate in any activities if a failing grade was achieved (Burnett, 2000). Although these rules were put in place many years ago, the same rules are still being enforced in today's athletics where student athletes must maintain a C grade point average (GPA) to be eligible to participate in high school competition (Bukowski, 2008). The inability of AAU basketball to enforce some academic requirements not only hurts the athlete by not preparing them for the college transition, but it also implies that an athlete's talent is the only source that can get them into college. For example, an athlete who may be struggling with academic eligibility in high school is still allowed to compete in AAU basketball.

The transition from high school to college can be academically demanding for an athlete (Nathanson & Kimmel, 2016). According to the new academic requirements imposed by the NCAA, college-bound student athletes first enrolling at an NCAA Division I school on or after August 1, 2016 must meet new academic rules to practice, compete and receive athletic scholarships during their first year (ncaa.org, 2015). In order for an athlete to qualify for a scholarship, a college bound athlete must have 16 high school level core courses, a minimum

core course GPA of 2.3, and SAT/ACT scores matching NCAA guidelines (ncaa.org, 2015). While the NCAA moves forward with improving scholastic achievement for student athletes, AAU basketball must take a realistic approach towards helping athletes achieve academic performance instead of only exposing them to college recruits. For example, imposing similar educational requirements would only encourage and increase athletes' efforts towards academics in high school, which would prepare them for the demands at the collegiate level.

Winning vs. Player Development

The value of winning placed on sports today in the United States is in fact increasingly higher than those who participate in sports in other countries (Coakley, 2007). However, winning is also dependent upon the level in which competitive sports is played. For example, athletes between five and 13 years of age should not be expected, nor should they be required from coaches, to have winning as their main priority while playing competitive sports (Johnson et al., 2011). According to research by Meisterjahn and Dieffenbach (2008), youth listed enjoyment and having fun as the primary motivation for playing sports. This shows that not everything is based on the results of a game. Some athletes who participated in AAU before college had a hard time transitioning their games to the next level because of the lack of fundamentals being taught at the AAU level (Clark, 2009). Due to the AAU game schedule, AAU coaches do not have enough time or resources to hold quality practices. Five-time NBA Champion and future Hall of Famer Kobe Bryant recently shared his opinion on why he would take a European player over an athlete from the AAU basketball system. He believes European players are more skillful and that AAU players come from a system of greed and bad coaching where players aren't properly taught the fundamentals of the game (Phillips, 2015).

Player development at all ages is critical when helping an athlete build their future and career; however, winning still holds priority. While winning games can help influence players' attitudes and perceptions of their coach, it is still the coaches' responsibility to win games by developing players into winners (Coakley, 2007). Coaches are teachers who in some cases are seen as parental figures, and like parenting and teaching, coaching takes skill and knowledge to help young athletes become better both on and off the court (Simon, 2013). According to Gatz et al., (2002), development in youth sports should focus less on winning and more on skills such as physical fitness, self-esteem and self-confidence, moral values, and education. These skills can not only increase the athletes' abilities to succeed outside of sports, it can also create opportunities for athletes to be recruited by a top college recruiter.

Recruitment

Recruitment in all sports is an opportunity for teams to gain a competitive advantage over their opponents by acquiring the best available talent (Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 2011). For decades, the relationship between AAU basketball and college recruiters has resulted into numerous NCAA recruiting violations against college basketball programs (Prisbell, 2013). Many believe that AAU basketball has become a minor league system that funnels money to athletically gifted, but economically disadvantaged players and their families (Hughes, 2012). For example, during the 2012-2013 college basketball season, former Kansas University star Ben McLemore was under the spotlight when his AAU coach took money from potential sports agents in hopes his former player would sign with them. This case shows how AAU coaches can take advantage of players by committing illegal actions for their personal gain. The coach was on record for taking two payments of \$5,000 and all-expense paid trips to California to meet with agents and financial advisors who wanted to represent Ben McLemore after he declared for the

NBA draft (Branch, 2011). These actions could have destroyed McLemore's dream before it ever started. This is one example of how college recruiting in the NCAA needs to be revised and reviewed in support of athletes who follow the rules.

According to David (1999), history has shown that sports can bring out the best and worst in an individual, which often leads to the question of: how far is too far? In 2012, a new NCAA rule took effect which allows NCAA Division I coaches the opportunity to communicate with potential recruits at the end of their sophomore year of high school (Hughes, 2012). In other instances, there have been college recruiters going after athletes while still in middle school (Popper, 2014). Recently, NBA superstar LeBron James spoke out against recruiters who have been sending his son, LeBron James Jr, college offers at the age of ten. LeBron expressed frustrations by responding through the media on how his son is just a kid and that there should be a violation against recruiting ten year olds (Medcalf, 2015). This is a prime example of why it is necessary for the AAU and college recruiters to create a solution to stop the exploitation of children.

Overall, research in this study provided insight as to how the AAU has evolved over the years. Research also discussed several implications which affects players' AAU basketball experience. Examining former AAU basketball players' perceptions of academic requirements, time/money, basketball skills/development, and the opportunity to play college basketball can give perspective into what former players thought during their participation in AAU basketball. The information gathered from former AAU basketball players not only is useful to the AAU but also benefits future participants. The opinions and perceptions of former players improves the quality of experience a player receives to ensure that their dreams and goals are achieved when participating in the AAU.

CHAPTER III

Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of former basketball players' experiences participating in the AAU program. Survey questions were designed to determine participants' perception of: a) the reasons that motivated players to participate, b) the importance of academic standards within AAU basketball and c) if participating in AAU basketball prepares an athlete for college.

As such, the questions that guided this study were the following:

1. What are former AAU basketball players' perceptions of:
 - a. Academic requirements.
 - b. Time/money.
 - c. Basketball skill/development.
 - d. Opportunity to play in college.

Participants

Twenty-four former male and female AAU basketball players between 18 and 35 years of age served as participants in this study. Participants' eligibility was determined based on their previous experience participating in AAU basketball. Due to AAU basketball tournaments being played mostly on weekends throughout the summer, participants only needed to have a minimum of one month experience as an AAU basketball participant. Research on high school basketball players is typically conducted on players who have a minimum of three to four months (28 regular season games) of experience with the team (Giannotto, 2015). AAU basketball players on average play 15-25 games a month (Alexander, 2014); therefore, to be eligible to participate in this study, participants needed at least one month of playing experience in AAU. Convenience

sampling was used to recruit participants in this study by word of mouth, and personal and mutual acquaintances.

Data Collection

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Eastern Illinois University. Participation was voluntary. Using the survey software Qualtrics, participants were provided a link via email, social media (i.e. Facebook and Twitter), or through text messaging. Clicking the link led participants to a page with information about the study that required participants to indicate their consent to participate (see Appendix A).

Data were collected electronically via Qualtrics. Eight statements were presented for participants to respond to using a Likert type response, with 1 representing SA=strongly agree, 2 representing A=agree, 3 representing N=neutral, 4 representing D=disagree, and 5 representing SD= strongly disagree (Appendix B). These statements were designed to elicit the strength of participants' opinions on their experiences in AAU. Four closed-ended questions were also provided for participants to respond yes, no, or maybe. Both the Likert type statements and closed-ended questions were created to allow participants to focus on specific issues within AAU basketball.

Data Analysis

Quantitative methods were used in this study to assess survey results. Statistical analysis were conducted once surveys were submitted using the survey software Qualtrics. Means and Standard deviations of Likert Scale responses for each question and percentages of those responding yes, no or maybe were computed.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of former basketball players' experiences participating in the AAU program. Survey questions were designed to determine participants' perception of: a) the reasons that motivated players to participate, b) the importance of academic standards within AAU basketball and c) whether participating in AAU basketball prepares an athlete for college basketball.

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 - b. Time/money.
 - c. Basketball skill/development.
 - d. Opportunity to play in college.

A total of 30 participants responded to this study. Of these 30, two respondents did not complete the survey past the fourth question and four of the respondents did not complete the survey at all. Of the 24 participants who completed the entire survey satisfactorily, 11 were males and 13 were females.

The ethnic breakdown of participants is shown in Table 1, summaries of the Likert type responses and statements can be found in Tables 2 and 3, and summaries of closed-ended statements can be found in Table 4.

Table 1. *Ethnicity of Participants by Gender*

Gender	Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
Male	White/Caucasian	1	4%
Female	White/Caucasian	8	33%
Male	African American/Black	10	42%
Female	African American/Black	5	21%

Table 2. *Summary of the Likert type responses (Mean and Standard Deviation) (n=24)*

#	Statements	Mean*	Standard Deviation
1	AAU gives the best chance to land a scholarship	1.83	0.76
2	In order to play AAU an athlete must have good grades	3.13	1.26
3	AAU teaches more knowledge about the game of basketball	3.21	1.14
4	AAU teaches an athlete to be a better teammate	3.13	1.24
5	AAU should limit # of games	2.83	1.05
6	AAU should require GPA	1.79	0.78
7	An athlete that plays AAU plays college basketball	2.04	0.81
8	An athlete only plays AAU for exposure	2.67	1.17

*Based on the total number of responses for each statement a mean and standard deviation was calculated to collect average level of responses.

Table 3.1 *Summary of the Likert response statements numbers 1-4. (n =24) responses*

#	Statements	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Total % of Agreement
1	AAU gives the best chance to land a scholarship	SA	9	37%	Agree 79% Neutral 21% Disagree 0
		A	10	42%	
		N	5	21%	
		DA	0	0	
		SD	0	0	
2	In order to play AAU an athlete must have good grades	SA	2	8%	Agree 37% Neutral 21% Disagree 42%
		A	7	29%	
		N	5	21%	
		DA	6	25%	
		SD	4	17%	
3	AAU teaches athletes knowledge about basketball	SA	3	13%	Agree 21% Neutral 33% Disagree 46%
		A	2	8%	
		N	8	33%	
		DA	9	38%	
		SD	2	8%	
4	AAU teaches an athlete to be a better teammate	SA	3	13%	Agree 30% Neutral 29% Disagree 42%
		A	4	17%	
		N	7	29%	
		DA	7	29%	
		SD	3	13%	

Table 3.1 *Summary of the Likert response statements numbers 5-8. (n=24)*

#	Statements	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Total % of Agreement
5	AAU should limit the number of games played	SA	2	8%	Agree 41% Neutral 29% Disagree 29%
		A	8	33%	
		N	7	29%	
		DA	6	25%	
		SD	1	4%	
6	AAU should require GPA (Grade Point Average) to participate	SA	9	38%	Agree 88% Neutral 8% Disagree 4%
		A	12	50%	
		N	2	8%	
		DA	1	4%	
		SD	0	0	
7	An athlete who plays AAU has the chance to play in college	SA	6	25%	Agree 75% Neutral 21% Disagree 4%
		A	12	50%	
		N	5	21%	
		DA	1	4%	
		SD	0	0	
8	An athlete only plays AAU for collegiate exposure	SA	4	17%	Agree 50% Neutral 21% Disagree 29%
		A	8	33%	
		N	5	21%	
		DA	6	25%	
		SD	1	4%	

Table 4 Summary of the closed-ended questions numbered 1-4 (n= 24)

Questions	Answer Choice	Response of Frequency	Percentage
1. What are the reasons you decided to play AAU Basketball?	To gain exposure for a college basketball scholarship	16	70%
	To play basketball with friends	9	39%
	To learn more about the game of basketball	11	48%
2. Would you play AAU basketball if you were required to maintain certain academic standards (i.e. grade point average)?	Yes	22	96%
	Maybe	1	4%
	No	0	0
3. Do you think AAU play too many games?	Yes	4	18%
	No	18	82%
4. Do you think AAU charges too much money to play games?	Yes	18	78%
	No	5	22%

Note. Percentages in question 1 do not have a sum of 100% as participants were allowed to choose more than one option they identified with.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of former basketball players' experiences participating in the AAU program.. No previous studies were found examining former AAU players' perceptions of academic requirements, time/money, basketball skills/development, and the opportunity to play basketball college basketball.

In the current study when addressing academic requirements within AAU basketball, participants reported that an athletes' grades do not determine participation in AAU but that an athletes' GPA should be required for participation. In the statement: in order to participate in AAU basketball an athlete must have good grades 37% of participants agreed, 21% reported neutral, and 42% disagreed with the statement. In the statement should AAU basketball require GPA for participation, 88% of participants agreed, 8% reorted neutral and 4% disagreed with the statement. Research conducted by Bukowski (2008), compared academic athletic eligibility among interscholastic high schools across the United States. The results showed that the minimum individual grade point average to participate in athletics ranged from no minimum GPA to a 2.5. The minimum GPA requirement to participate in some high schools across the country were the same as the GPA requirement within AAU basketball.

Participants also reported that had academic requirements been enforced, they would have continued participation in AAU basketball. When asked would you participate in AAU if academic standards were enforced, 96% of participants reported yes and 4% said no they wouldn't. Yiannakis and Melnick (2001) found that students who were more involved in high school competitive sports had higher grades, higher self-concept, higher educational aspirations,

and fewer discipline problems. It can be suggested that if academic requirements in AAU basketball were enforced, then AAU participation would decrease at a minimum of 4%.

Regarding player development, participants reported that the AAU does not teach knowledge about the game or teach an athlete how to become a better teammate. In the statement: AAU teaches athletes' knowledge about the game, 45% of participants disagreed, 33% reported neutral, and 20% agreed with the statement. Coakley (2007) suggested that the value placed on winning in youth sports was too high and that player development should be more of the focus for athletes because what use is a scholarship if the athlete is unable to translate their skills to the college level. In youth sports, player development is key to building a better player and teammate. The importance of basic fundamentals being instilled into the player at a young age increases the chance for those skills to translate to highest level of competition. According to Huber (2015), youth basketball players in the United States spend too many weekends playing in meaningless basketball tournaments instead of using some of that time to work on their basketball skills and identify their individual weaknesses. The desire to workout individually or in a group gets overlooked because of the excessive amount games played when participating in AAU basketball.

Challenges in sport occur when those involved are caught between the will to win and the overall task of staying in the realm of acceptable values and virtues (Kvalnes & Hemmestad, 2010). In response to the statement: AAU teaches an athlete to be a better teammate, 41% of participants disagreed, 29% reported neutral, and 28% agreed. According to Arthur-Banning, Paisley, and Wells (2007), player development, friendship building and sportsmanship have all been replaced due to the attraction to professional sports, college scholarships, and the emphasis that has been placed on competition and winning. The organizational structure of the AAU gives

coaches full control over individual teams operations and procedures (AAU Sports, 2015). It is the coach who decides who plays in games, what fundamentals or skills are being taught, and how the team is ran throughout the AAU season.

In response to perceptions on recruitment, participants reported that the AAU does give an athlete the best chance to receive a college scholarship and that athlete's only play AAU for collegiate exposure. Participants also reported that an athlete who plays AAU has a better chance to play in college. Seventy-nine percent of participants agreed to the statement: AAU gives the best chance to land a scholarship. Twenty-one percent of participants were neutral on this statement and 0% disagreed. The second statement: An athlete only plays AAU for collegiate exposure, 49% of participants agreed, 20% were neutral, and 29% disagreed with the statement. In response to the third statement: an athlete who plays AAU has the chance to play in college, 75% of participants agreed, 20% remained neutral, and 4% disagreed. Overall the number of games played in AAU generates more exposure for recruitment than high school basketball. Due to the high volume of games played at the AAU level there are more scouting opportunities for coaches and/or recruiters to come and observe athletes. Edwards (2015) suggests that AAU is where recruiting happens because at an AAU tournament there would be 30 to 50 collegiate coaches whereas a high school basketball game may only have one or two.

Gaining exposure for an athletic scholarship can be financially beneficial for the athletes and their families, however Wojtys (2013), believes that the athlete who participates in more than one sport has a better chance at obtaining a scholarship because of the exposure from the various sports being played. The skills an athlete develops from participating in more than one sport increases their ability to perform in difficult and challenging environments. For example, an

athlete who plays both soccer and basketball may acquire a more advanced skill set such as better decision-making than an athlete who only plays soccer (Baker, 2003).

Conclusion

The findings of this study of twenty-four former AAU basketball players provide insight into players' perceptions of academic requirements, time/money, basketball skills/development, and the opportunity to play college basketball. Based on the results of the current study, the following conclusions were made:

- Participation would not decrease due to the enforcement of academic requirements; however, academic standards should be, but are not required to participate in AAU basketball.
- Although AAU basketball is expensive, the number of games played makes the investment worth the risk because of the opportunity to play in college.
- AAU basketball does not teach athletes' knowledge about basketball or how to be a better teammate.
- AAU basketball only provides athletes the exposure to a college scholarship.

Limitations

While this is the first study of its kind that the researcher is aware of to survey former AAU basketball participants, the challenges associated with data collection did create limitations. It is difficult to know if there would be a greater response rate if the study included current AAU basketball players. Former and current coaches should have also been included in this study to achieve more recent results. Participants in this study were limited to former AAU basketball players because current AAU players are minors, and obtaining parental consent is difficult when collecting data via an Internet based survey. Another limitation was the use of an

electronic data collection method. We do not know, for example, how many emails or invitations were blocked or trapped due to spam filters or how many requests were successfully delivered but deleted or ignored by recipients. In addition, open-ended and interview style questions should have been included in this study to get a better understanding of participants' feelings and perceptions of their AAU experience.

Suggestions for Future Research

Further research in this field should include a larger sample size of both genders with AAU basketball experience. The most beneficial group to include in the sample would be high school minors between the ages of 13-17. Since there were a few negative opinions in regards to their AAU experience, future studies should investigate whether the AAU playing or coaching experience really matches with the philosophy of the AAU, and if academic requirements should be enforced at the AAU level. In addition, investigating different techniques for improving the AAU to establish a core philosophy by enforcing mandates will create a more consistent experience for AAU participants.

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Appendix A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Dear Athlete/Coach,

You are invited to participate in this research study involving AAU basketball. This study involves the filling out of a questionnaire via electronic link provided by researcher, Hakeem Willis from the Kinesiology and Sport Studies Department at EIU.

The survey will be in the form of questions (based on your experiences) sent to you on-line via email with a link. At all times your identity and the information you provide will be protected and safely locked in our office. The information you provide will not be directly attached to your name; instead, each of you that participate will be given a number to keep track of your responses. As such, your name will never appear with the data, i.e., a future published paper would state that “respondent #7 noted that her experience was...”

A positive benefit of participation is that students will be entitled to examine the results of our research once the study is concluded. As such, those participating might have a better understanding of the implications AAU basketball portrays to young high school and/or coaches. This could possibly help the team and its coaches enact strategies for educating and instructing players in advance of the season that take into consideration noted and analyzed strategies for success. Furthermore, participants will have the opportunity to share their attitudes and opinions regarding how they perceive the importance of their sport and team within the framework of their own personal experiences or current team program vision. If this research discovers that positive change is needed, then the researchers are committed to helping bring the results of this research to the attention of the university’s athletic administration.

Although this study presents minimal risk, by completing the questionnaire assessment and interview, students may potentially experience negative emotions due to the possibility of a question, bringing up any negative memories associated with their sport or previous sport experience. Therefore, if participants are in need of psychological help due to participating in this study, they will be provided information about the counseling center at EIU. The EIU counseling center is located in the Human Services Building and is open Monday through Friday from 8:00am-4:30pm. Participants may also contact the counseling center at 217-581-3413.

Consent: “Having read the procedures described above, grants my participation in this study, as evidenced by continuing to the next page.”

Appendix B

Survey Statements

The following scenarios involve dilemmas with AAU basketball athletes. Carefully read the scenario and respond in one of five ways: **SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, and SA = Strongly Agree**. There is no right or wrong answer. Fill in the appropriate response.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Playing AAU basketball gives an athlete the best chance to land a NCAA basketball scholarship.	1	2	3	4	5
2. In order to play AAU basketball an athlete must have good grades in school.	1	2	3	4	5
3. AAU basketball teaches an athlete more knowledge and fundamentals of the game than high school basketball.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Playing AAU basketball teaches an athlete to be a better teammate.	1	2	3	4	5
5. AAU basketball should limit the number of games that are allowed to be played in a day.	1	2	3	4	5

6. AAU basketball should require athletes to maintain a certain grade point average in order to play.	1	2	3	4	5
7. An athlete that plays AAU basketball is more likely to play college basketball.	1	2	3	4	5
8. An athlete only plays AAU basketball for exposure more than team play.	1	2	3	4	5
