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Apr 4th, 12:00 PM - 12:50 PM

## Differences Between Upper- and Under-Classmen in Intercollegiate Athletics

Benjamin Boezinger  
*University of Northern Iowa*

Jessie Woodyard  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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### Recommended Citation

Boezinger, Benjamin and Woodyard, Jessie, "Differences Between Upper- and Under-Classmen in Intercollegiate Athletics" (2023). *INSPIRE Student Research and Engagement Conference*. 50.

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# Differences Between Upper- and Under-Classmen in Intercollegiate Athletics

Ben Boezinger & Windee M. Weiss, Ph.D.

Department of Kinesiology

University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA



## Introduction

The sport commitment model (SCM) has been used as a theoretical framework to examine commitment. Understanding the extent and reasoning to which athletes continue participation will help further understanding of effective coaching techniques, as well as ways to provide unique, customized strategies for team or individual athlete's needs.

Sport commitment (e.g., Scanlan et. al 1993) represents the desire and resolve to continue an activity when facing adversity or hardship. The strongest predictor of sport commitment is enjoyment and enthusiasm (Weiss & Aloe, 2018). Additionally, the perceived benefits of participation, investments put into sport (i.e., time or energy), and social support from important others also predict greater commitment. Attractive alternatives delineate other ways that an individual can spend their time, thus higher attractive alternatives has been related to lower commitment.

For the purpose of this study, additional constructs were included in this study: authentic and hubristic pride, and athletic identity. Authentic pride is acceptance of work ethic; enjoying the fruits of labor related to participation in sport or activity. In contrast, hubristic pride is arrogance, and an exaggeration of accomplishment as a mechanism for deflecting feelings of inadequacy (Tracy & Robinson 2014). Athletic identity is how an athlete or individual experiences themselves within the sport or activity (Brewer et al., 1993). The aspect of identity relates to perception of roles within a team, as well as the level of competence in performance for an activity or sport.

Prior research has explored commitment from both developmental and competitive level perspectives. Consistently, the strongest predictors of commitment vary depending on the developmental age of the athlete (e.g., Weiss & Weiss, 2007). Additionally, higher competitive level athletes report different perceptions of the predictors of commitment as compared to lower level athletes (e.g., Weiss & Aloe, 2018; Weiss & Weiss, 2007). Therefore, understanding how variables of the SCM affect underclassmen and upperclassmen collegiate athletes, respectively, was explored.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study was to explore differences between upperclassmen and underclassmen regarding the predictors of enthusiastic and constrained commitment.

## Method

### PARTICIPANTS:

- Male ( $n = 86$ ) and Female ( $n = 99$ ) intercollegiate athletes from 12 different sports participated
- Participants were underclassmen ( $n = 118$ ) and upperclassmen ( $n = 61$ )
- Age ranged from 18-23 years old ( $M = 19.95$ )
- Redshirt freshmen, freshmen, and sophomore were categorized as underclassmen; Upperclassmen included: junior, senior, 5th year senior, 6th+ year
- Approximately 80% of the participants were Caucasian, 9.7% were African American, 3.2% were Hispanic-Latino, 1.6% were Biracial, 1.1% were Asian American and 0.5% were Pacific Islander or Native American.

### MEASURES:

**Sport Commitment Constructs:** Scanlan et al.'s (2016) Sport Commitment Questionnaire- 2 was used to assess sport commitment model constructs: enthusiastic and constrained commitment, sport enjoyment, valuable opportunities, personal investments, other priorities, desire to excel, social support, and social constraints.

**Athletic Identity:** The Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Brewer et al., 1993) was used to assess the degree to which athletes identify with the athlete role. Participants completed 10 items, using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 "Strongly disagree" to 5 "Strongly agree."

**Pride:** The authentic and hubristic pride scale, developed by Tracy and Robins (2007) was used to determine the emotional experience of pride. Athletes were asked to respond to the following stem: "Read each item and then indicate the extent to which you feel this way toward sport." A 5-point Likert response format was used with answers ranging from 1 "Not at all" to 5 "Very" or "A lot." Examples of authentic pride words included: "accomplished" and "fulfilled." Examples of hubristic pride words included: "arrogant" and "conceited."

**Demographics:** Participants completed several questions related to their current sport experience and personal demographics including: age, year of eligibility, gender, starter/playing status, number of hours of training per week, injury status, and competitive sport.

### PROCEDURES:

Following Institutional Review Board approval, strength coaches of athletic teams were contacted to seek cooperation for athletes to participate in the study. Research team members met with potential participants either before, during, or after a conditioning session. Potential participants were told the purpose, made aware of their voluntary participation rights, and provided time to ask questions about the study. Questionnaire packets and informed consents were distributed. The total time to complete the study questionnaire was between 15-30 minutes.

### DATA ANALYSIS:

- Following data entry and verification, descriptive analyses, included frequencies, descriptives, reliabilities, and correlations
- Each scale demonstrated adequate reliability ( $\alpha > .70$ ).
- The participants were then grouped based on year of eligibility: upperclassmen and underclassmen
- In order to determine if differences existed between upper- and underclassmen on sport commitment constructs, pride, and athletic identity, a series of MANOVAs were conducted
- The two groups were compared on: (a) enthusiastic and constrained commitment; (b) the original predictors of sport commitment, and (c) pride and athletic identity
- To determine the significant predictors of enthusiastic and constrained commitment, separate multiple regression analyses were conducted ( $p < .05$ ).

## Results

### Differences Between Upper- and Underclassmen

1. Underclassmen ( $M = 4.42$ ) reported significantly greater enthusiastic commitment than did upperclassmen ( $M = 4.20$ )
2. Upperclassmen ( $M = 2.77$ ) reported significantly greater constrained commitment than did underclassmen ( $M = 2.45$ )
3. No differences emerged between these two groups on the original predictors of commitment, including: enjoyment, social constraints, valuable opportunities, other priorities, and personal investments (Wilks'  $\lambda = .95$ ,  $F(5, 169) = 1.72$ ,  $p = .13$ )
4. No differences emerged between the two groups on authentic and hubristic pride, nor athletic identity (Wilks'  $\lambda = .98$ ,  $F(5, 169) = .57$ ,  $p = .72$ )

### Predictors of Enthusiastic and Constrained Commitment by Group

#### Underclassmen:

1. Lower enjoyment and higher social constraints and other priorities predicted greater *constrained* commitment
2. Higher enjoyment and valuable opportunities, and lower other priorities predicted greater *enthusiastic* commitment
3. Stronger athletic identity and greater authentic pride predicted greater *enthusiastic* commitment
4. Higher authentic pride predicted lower *constrained* commitment

#### Upperclassmen:

1. Lower enjoyment and higher social constraints predicted higher *constrained* commitment
2. Higher enjoyment and valuable opportunities predicted higher *enthusiastic* commitment
3. Stronger athletic identity and greater authentic pride predicted greater *enthusiastic* commitment
4. Higher authentic pride predicted lower *constrained* commitment

## Discussion

- More similarities rather than differences emerged between under- and upperclassmen with regards to the predictors of both constrained and enthusiastic commitment.
- Consistent with past research, higher enjoyment predicted "want to" commitment, whereas lower enjoyment predicted "have to" commitment for both groups (e.g., Weiss & Weiss, 2003, 2006).
- The perceived obligation to important others (i.e., social constraints) also predicted greater "have to" commitment. This is consistent with past research (e.g., Weiss & Aloe, 2018).
- Feelings of authentic pride, such as a sense of achievement due to hard work, emerged as an important predictor of enthusiastic commitment. Coaches can help create feelings of pride based on the type of motivational climate created as well as through the use of positive feedback and reinforcement.
- Future research should continue to explore the role of pride as an emotion in motivation in sport. Perhaps enjoyment is a source of commitment, but authentic pride may play an important role in sustained motivation and persistence to high level sport.