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Social Media Incivility & Sarcasm by Coaches in NCAA Recruitment

TREO Talk Paper

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Background:

Social media, including Twitter and Twitter direct messages, represent one of the primary recruitment methods used by NCAA Division I football coaches to recruit high school student-athletes. NCAA Division I football coaches are driven to recruit the best players to help develop a winning football program. Coaches' salary, tenure, and bonuses are driven by winning games. Winning games requires the recruitment of high school athletes with great talent or great potential. Similarly, the dream of high school football players is to be recruited to play football on an athletic scholarship. Only 2% of high school football student-athletes will earn an athletic Scholarship (NCAA). The value of an athletic scholarship is estimated to be \$100,000 over the course of 4-5 years. During the recruitment process, the student-athletes are often only 16-17 years old, and oftentimes younger. While many rules exist to protect these adolescents, communication between players and coaches via electronic means is not governed nor monitored. The drive to win by coaches and the drive to be recruited by student-athlete is extremely high. This can lead to electronic incivility and sarcasm from college coaches.

Observations:

Parents or guardians of these minor (under 18 years old) athletes may be unaware of such communications as the pressure on student-athletes may prevent them from sharing these inappropriate messages. This often occurs within Twitter's Direct Message (DM) system. Consider the following exchange:

Coach: We would love to get you out to our school.

Student-Athlete: Thanks for the invite. Your school may not be the right academic fit for me.

Coach: Sounds Good. Send your tape to Harvard. I think you would do well there.

Coach: (sent later after the student-athlete visited a different school) Our school rates higher than the school you just visited! Note: The Coach provided an image with the caption, "Just Saying").

Incivility can be defined as a type of psychological harassment and emotional aggression that violates ideals of mutual respect (Felblinger, 2008). What are the impacts on these student-athletes? Recent research relating to workplace incivility shows increased levels of psychological distress. (Zivnuska, Carlson, et al., 2020), which can lead to negative mood and psychological distress (Valle, Carlson, et al., 2020).

Conclusions:

The NCAA regulates when coaches can communicate with student-athletes and parents. These NCAA regulations do not cover electronic communications, including phone or social media. Outside of direct visits at high school, most recruitment is conducted via social media. A review of social media exchanges between coaches and student-athletes, as well as semi-structured interviews with these impacted student-athletes, could shed light on both the prevalence of incivility and sarcasm as well as the short and long-term impact of incivility and sarcasm on these student-athletes.

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