

The Impact of Title IX on the Discontinuation of NCAA Division I Wrestling Programs

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■ INTRODUCTION

Athletic administrators from local high schools, municipal recreation programs, and perhaps most visibly, colleges and universities are finding a common issue at the top of their concerns — gender equity. Compliance with Title IX requires equity in the distribution of athletic scholarships, berths on teams, operating budgets, and program services. Athletic directors are split on how to achieve this. Some feel equity can be achieved by adding women's sports, encouraging more female walk-ons, and increasing funds for women's programs and scholarships. Others believe the answer lies in cutting men's sports, capping men's squad sizes, limiting men's recruiting budgets, reducing men's scholarships, restricting travel for men and women, and slashing administrative costs. Somewhere between these two positions lies football.

Football is a problem in the gender equity equation. With football removed from that equation, many schools fare rather well in their compliance with Title IX. To complicate matters further, Lopiano (1992) points out that 55% of the Division I-A football programs are either self-supporting or generate revenue to help pay for other sports. In women's athletics, there is no sport comparable to football; consequently, football is a prime candidate for scholarship reductions to strike a better balance between men's and women's sports. However, because of football's rather lofty status, high visibility, revenue generating power, and potential for television and bowl exposure, many athletic programs are attempting to find other ways to comply with Title IX.

For some athletic departments, the answer to the gender equity question is being found in the wrestling rooms of Division I-A schools. Wrestling and football are similar in that they have no comparable women's sport, but they differ in one important way — wrestling is not typically a revenue generating sport in most Division I-A schools. According to some university officials, budget reductions

have warranted the elimination of wrestling programs. However, to understand the details of this situation further, one must explore budget reduction measures in light of increased financial demands being placed upon athletic programs from the perspective of Title IX compliance. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the impact of Title IX on the decision to discontinue wrestling by surveying NCAA Division I-A athletic directors.

■ METHODOLOGY

To accomplish the purpose of this study, 63 athletic directors at NCAA Division I-A institutions which have discontinued wrestling since the conclusion of the 1981-82 season were surveyed to determine their reasons for discontinuing wrestling. Programs to be surveyed were identified by comparing the sports sponsorship lists of the NCAA from the 1982-83 season through the 1993-94 season. These particular years were selected for study because: (a) a decline in wrestling sponsorship over the last 10 years was apparent in the recent literature, (b) a study by Williamson (1983) identified reasons wrestling was discontinued from 1979-80 through 1981-82, and (c) the *Grove City College v. Bell* decision of 1984 and the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 significantly changed the interpretation and effects of Title IX. Athletic directors were selected as subjects because of their positions of leadership in the intercollegiate athletic structure and their presumed knowledge of the major decisions made within their programs. A 15-question survey was administered to gather data related to the specific reasons wrestling was discontinued at each respective school. The common reasons for eliminating wrestling were identified by Williamson (1983) and a review of current literature. Prospective reasons were listed on the survey in random order. A 17-question demographic survey was also administered to collect data in this study.

A 5-point Likert scale was used to identify the importance of each of the 14 reasons commonly given for discontinuing NCAA Division I-A wrestling. A response of "5" indicated a reason was "very important" in the decision to discontinue wrestling. A response of "4" indicated a reason was "important" in the decision to discontinue wrestling. A response of "3" indicated a reason was "neither important nor unimportant" in the decision to discontinue wrestling. A response of "2" indicated a reason was "unimportant" in the decision to discontinue wrestling. A response of "1" indicated a reason was "very unimportant" in the decision to discontinue wrestling.

Subjects were sent a survey, a cover letter, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Two weeks after the initial mailing, subjects who had not yet responded were sent another copy of the survey, a cover letter, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Of the 63 subjects in the population, 41 chose to participate by sending a response. Among the 41 respondents, three indicated they still maintained their wrestling programs in a different or lower level of competition. An examination of the National Directory of College Athletics identified three other schools that had once sponsored Division I wrestling and chose to retain the program in a different or lower division. Subtracting these active programs from the list of discontinued ones brought the total number of NCAA Division I wrestling programs dropped

since the 1981-82 season to 57. One school declined to participate in the study because its wrestling program was involved in litigation, while six others indicated no one was presently employed who could answer the survey. Therefore, the final return rate was 71.9% (N=41). Of the 57 subjects in the population, 54.3% returned completed surveys (N=31).

■ ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The statistical analyses for this study included the calculation of means and standard deviations for the survey items 1 through 14 (potential reasons for discontinuing wrestling) and all demographic questions. T-tests were conducted to compare mean responses to the 14 survey items of the schools that discontinued wrestling from the 1984-85 season through the 1987-88 season (i.e., active *Grove City v. Bell* years; narrow interpretation of Title IX) with the mean responses to the 14 survey items of the schools that discontinued wrestling from the 1982-83 season through the 1983-84 season and 1988 to the 1993-94 season (i.e., active Title IX years; broad interpretation of Title IX) to determine if the *Grove City* decision had an effect on the relative importance of the reasons for discontinuing wrestling. A significance level of .05 was used for these statistical analyses.

■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Data

Current position of the respondents

Of those who returned completed surveys (N=31), a majority were athletic directors (n=15, 48.4%), while 35.5% of the respondents were associate athletic directors (n=11), 3.2% were former wrestling coaches (n=1), and 9.7% were either athletic business managers (n=2) or directors of media relations (n=1). No data were available for 3.2% of the respondents.

Year wrestling was discontinued

Results showed that 25.8% of the schools dropped wrestling in 1983 (n=8), 16.1% dropped it in 1985 (n=5), 9.7% dropped it in 1986, 16.1% dropped it in 1987 (n=5), 6.5% dropped it in 1988 (n=2), 9.7% dropped it in 1989 (n=3), 3.2% dropped it in 1990 (n=1), 6.5% dropped it in 1991 (n=2), 3.2% dropped it in 1992 (n=1), and 3.2% dropped it in 1994 (n=1).

Undergraduate enrollment of the institutions

The mean undergraduate enrollment of institutions responding to the survey was 10,714 students, with an enrollment range of 1,200 to 26,000. No data were available for 6.5% of the respondents. Within the institutions' total undergraduate enrollment, the mean percentage of male students was 52.50%, and the mean percentage of female students was 47.50%. No data were available for 9.7% of the respondents.

Sport participation, offerings, and spending

Results showed that the average participation rate for men and women in scholarship sports was 268 and 130 respectively. No data were available for 19.4% of the respondents. Institutions responding offered an average of 9.2 male scholarship sports and 7.7 female scholarship sports during the schools' last competitive season of wrestling. No data were available from 22.6% of the respondents. Schools spent an average of 69.8% of their scholarship money for male student-athletes and 30.0% of their scholarship money on female student-athletes. No data were available for 22.6% of the respondents.

Athletic and wrestling budgets

The average athletic department budget at responding institutions was \$4.1 million, with a range of \$300,000. to \$17 million. No data were available for 45.2% of the respondents. Results showed responding institutions had a mean wrestling budget of \$69,441., with a range of \$1,500. to \$400,000. No data were available for 45.2% of the respondents.

Paid and volunteer coaches

A majority of institutions employed 1 wrestling coach (n=16, 51.6%), while 35.5% employed 2 (n=11), and 3.2% employed 4 (n=1). No data were available for 6.5% of the respondents. Responding institutions averaged 1 volunteer wrestling coach, with a range of 0 to 4. No data were available for 9.7% of the respondents.

Conference and regional alignment

Results showed that 35.5% of the respondents had been aligned as an East Independent (n=11), while 16.1% had been West Independents (n=5), 6.5% had been in the East Coast Conference (n=2), 6.5% had been in the Mid-American Conference (n=2), 6.5% had been in the Pacific Ten Conference (n=2), 6.5% had been in the Southern Conference (n=2), 6.5% had been in the Big Sky Conference (n=2), 6.5% had been in the Western Athletic Conference (n=2), and 3.2% had been in the Atlantic Coast Conference (n=1).

Perceived success of the wrestling program at time of discontinuation

In rating the success of the institution's wrestling program at the time of its discontinuation, 6.5% of the respondents perceived their program to be "very successful" (n=2), while 19.4% perceived their program as "unsuccessful" (n=6), 35.5% as "neither unsuccessful nor successful" (n=11), 35.5% as "successful" (n=11), and 3.2% as "very unsuccessful" (n=1).

Programmatic Data

Table 1 shows the ranked composite means and their corresponding standard deviations for the survey items 1 through 14 (potential reasons for discontinuing wrestling).

Table 1. Ranked composite means and standard deviations for 14 potential reasons for discontinuing wrestling (N=31).

Descriptor	Rank	Mean	S.D.
Conference alignment	1	3.645	1.355
Shifting resources	2	3.613	1.308
Inconvenient travel	3	3.419	1.119
Too costly	3	3.419	1.148
Few spectators	5	3.323	1.107
Low student interest	6	3.067	1.230
Title IX	7	2.935	1.590
Injury liability potential	8	2.900	1.322
Domino effect	9	2.733	1.143
Lack of recruits	10	2.613	1.407
Lack of coaches	11	2.600	1.329
Yield to administration	12	2.194	1.138
Blood pathogens concern	13	2.133	1.106
Alternate programs	14	2.129	1.118

T-tests were conducted on each of the 14 potential reasons for discontinuing wrestling with regard to the scope of interpretation of Title IX during the year wrestling was discontinued at the respondents' institutions. The results showed no significant differences across any of the 14 potential reasons for discontinuing wrestling in light of the nature of the interpretation of Title IX at the time wrestling was discontinued. That is to say, none of the 14 potential reasons was more or less important during either the time when Title IX was being interpreted narrowly (1984-87) or broadly (1988-93).

According to 18 NCAA Division I athletic directors in a study by Williamson (1983), lack of student interest, high cost, lack of recruitable prospects, and lack of spectator appeal were the top reasons for discontinuing wrestling in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Attempting to fulfill the requirements of Title IX by striving to achieve gender equity in the athletic program was tied for seventh on the list. Since 1983, however, Title IX has become a driving force behind the restructuring of college athletics. Wrestling programs have continued to be dropped, with cost of maintaining the program often cited as the main reason. This study expected to identify Title IX, in addition to the issue of cost since implementing Title IX invariably costs money, as one of the main factors involved in the decision to discontinue wrestling. However, that in fact was not the case. Title IX was ranked in seventh position, as it was in a 1983 study by Williamson. A college in Montana plans to discontinue wrestling at the end of the 1995-96 academic year in an effort

to strike a better gender balance among its opportunities for student-athletes. At this time, 81% of the student-athletes are male and 19% are female. By discontinuing wrestling and adding a women's sport, this college will be closer to matching the gender balance of its undergraduate student population. However, according to the results of this survey conducted at the NCAA Division I-A level, the respondents indicated that Title IX is not one of the leading factors in their decision to discontinue wrestling.

References

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