Tracking Transfer in Division I Men’s Basketball

National data indicate that many of today’s college graduates transfer at some point on their way to a degree. This is true among student-athletes (SAs) as well, and may be most visible in Division I men’s basketball (MBB). Tracking movement from school-to-school for research purposes can be difficult, but recent NCAA studies have done just that and uncovered some interesting findings:

- The rate of transfer between 4-year colleges in Division I MBB is high relative to most other sports, but not the highest (see tables in full report).
- The number of 4-4 transfers on Division I MBB squads has increased over the past decade (blue line in Figure 1). This is coupled with a decrease in 2-year college transfers in MBB (red line).
- That said, about 40% of all MBB players who enter Division I directly out of high school depart their initial school by the end of their sophomore year.

Where do these transfers end up? We tracked the 633 MBB student-athletes listed on ESPN’s 2016 transfer list to determine their destination for 2016-17. Only 546 of the players on the list were identified as transferring to another school and joining the basketball team. 46% of the transfers went to another Division I school (often to a less competitive program), while the others typically left for Division II, NAIA or 2-year colleges (Figure 2).

The 2016 transfer numbers were similar to those observed in 2015 (546 vs. 528), as were the numbers of so-called “graduate transfers” on the ESPN list. However, in contrast to undergraduate MBB transfers, graduate transfers are more likely to “up-transfer” to a more prestigious Division I program.

Generally, close to 90% of all MBB transfers say they leave for athletic reasons. Absent proper academic planning, many of these SAs lose credits upon transfer and register lower Academic Progress Rates (APRs) and graduation rates at their new schools than seen among non-transfers.

PowerPoint describing methods and data in more detail.

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