University of Nevada, Reno

A Study of International Student-Athlete Recruitment
in Intercollegiate Tennis

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Education

by

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May 2019
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

We recommend that the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

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Entitled
A Study of International Student-Athlete Recruitment in Intercollegiate Tennis

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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May-2019
Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how coaches recruit international students and how ISAs secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams. Participants were chosen based on their experience with recruiting ISAs or being recruited as an ISA. A phenomenological framework was used to look at these questions and analyze the data that was produced through semi-structured interviews. Participants were four NCAA Division I women’s tennis coaches, two NCAA Division I men’s tennis coaches, one national tennis administrator, four NCAA Division I women’s tennis players, and one NCAA Division I men’s tennis player. In this study, doing recruiting and being recruited were viewed as two different but interrelated phenomena. Accordingly, I explored the experiences of coaches and ISAs in order to understand where their experiences intersected or diverged.

Two major themes that expressed participants’ shared experiences as they relate to the separate yet interconnected phenomena of doing recruiting and being recruiting were identified. These two major themes were (a) the recruitment process and (b) the significance of an athletic scholarship. Within the first major theme, the recruitment process, three sub-themes emerged. The three sub-themes were: (a) the use of recruiting agencies; (b) the importance of word of mouth recruiting and referrals; and (c) the significance of the Universal Tennis Rating System (UTR).
Dedication

To Joanna, my beautiful wife and eternal companion. Without your love, patience, and support I never would have completed this journey.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank those who have dedicated their time and energy to patiently guide me through the dissertation process. First, I would like to sincerely thank my advisor Dr. Kenneth Coll for his patience, encouragement, and contagious optimism. I would like to thank Dr. Diane Barone for always leaving her door open. Your advice and encouragement have been critical throughout every step of my journey. I would like to thank my other committee members: Dr. David Johnson, Dr. Amber Warren, and Dr. Todd Hall. Thank you for your guidance and support. I would also like to thank my friend and mentor Cary Groth. You have taught me how to work hard while treating all of those around me with respect.

I would like to thank those who participated in this study. Thank you for sharing your stories and your personal experiences with me. I would also like to thank Aunt Di for your tireless support and words of encouragement.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. Joanna you are my best friend and eternal companion. Your love, patience, and support have lifted me up on countless occasions and given me the confidence and courage to keep walking. Cooper, Ila, and Chad, nothing in this world brings me greater joy than you.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent decades, the globalization of sport has opened new opportunities for athletes to leave their home countries and compete abroad (Bale & Maguire, 1994; Cameron, 2000; Lee, 2010; Love & Kim, 2011). Speaking of sport globalization, Lee (2010) reported, “As the sport industry has become commercialized and thus, globalized, more and more athletes and coaches freely transcend national borders. Sport labour migration is becoming a ubiquitous and vivid signal of globalization in sport” (p. 153). Weston (2006) described the international movement of athletes as “essentially sports version of free trade” (p. 831). A recent examination of the rosters of several teams competing in many of the world’s largest professional sports leagues revealed that nationally, culturally, and ethnically diverse rosters are common characteristic of contemporary professional sports (Maguire & Falcous, 2010). The establishment of international sports organizations and governing bodies, the standardization of international rules, the creation global competitions such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup, are examples of global sports development that have helped enhance the number of opportunities for athletes around the globe (Bale & Maguire, 1994). However, the movement of athletes has not been limited to professional athletes. Just as professional teams use contracts to lure athletes away from their home countries, American colleges and universities use athletic scholarships and the potential athletic and academic benefits that come with intercollegiate athletic participation to entice thousands of amateur athletes to lure international student-athlete (ISA) away from their home countries.
Statement of the Problem

ISAs have been competing in the United States since the beginning of the twentieth century (Bale, 1991). However, in recent decades, an increasing number of intercollegiate coaches have made the calculated decision to recruit elite international amateur talent and consequently record numbers of international athletes have decided to compete abroad for American colleges and universities (Bale, 1991; Love & Kim, 2011; Weston, 2006). As shown in Table 1, intercollegiate athletics in the United States are now more ethnically and nationally diverse than ever before (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018a).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 20 Home Countries of NCAA Division I Student-Athletes 2016-17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country of Origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Each year ISAs represent a larger portion of the small overall student-athlete population in the United States (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018b). Between the 1991-92 and the 2015-16 academic years, the overall number of ISAs competing at the NCAA Division I, level increased by 221% (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 1996; 2018b). The most recent data from the NCAA shows that between the 2009-10 and the 2016-17 academic year the percent of first year ISAs competing at the NCAA Division I level increased by four percent. During the same period the number of first year ISAs competing at the NCAA Division II level increased by approximately three percent (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018b). Yet, as Popp, Pierce, and Hums (2011) argued, despite these increases, “very little empirical research has examined the recruitment process for international student-athletes” (p. 177).
Why NCAA Division I tennis.

The movement of amateur athletes has not uniformly affected all sports. During the 2016-17 academic year, less than one percent of the first-year student-athletes who participated in baseball were ISAs and less than one percent of first year student-athletes who participated in football, wrestling and softball were ISAs (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018b). However, during the same year 62% of the first-year student-athletes who participated in men’s tennis and 59% of the first-year student-athletes who participated in women’s tennis were ISAs (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018b). Overall, more ISAs competed in men’s and women’s tennis than any other sports during the 2015-16 academic year (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018a).

Although some researchers have examined the recruitment of ISAs (Bale, 1991; Cameron, 2000; Foo, 2015; Kirk & Weaver, 2018; Pierce, Popp, & Meadows 2012) no researcher has specifically explored ISA recruitment in intercollegiate tennis. Given the fact that the number of ISAs competing in men’s and women’s Division I tennis increased by 168% in the last three decades (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 1996; 2018b) more specialized research that explores how NCAA Division I tennis coaches recruit international students and how ISAs secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams was needed. Due to this data, I specifically chose to study recruitment within NCAA Division I tennis because, as shown in Tables 2 and 3, relative to other sports, the dynamics of internationalization have been much more pervasive and longstanding in intercollegiate tennis. Emphasizing the prominent role
ISAs now play in intercollegiate tennis, Chris Woodruff, head men’s tennis coach for the University of Tennessee, recently argued “Obviously it’s very global. You cannot win a championship now, I don’t think, with all American players” (Culpepper, 2017, para. 6).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Country</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Hockey</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacrosse</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skiing</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>974</td>
<td>1690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squash</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming and Diving</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track and Field</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Polo</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrestling</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,226</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,714</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,147</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,282</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3

*Number of Student-athletes in NCAA Women's Sports 1991-92 and 2015-16*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beach Volleyball</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowling</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Country</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Hockey</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In a recent report, both the United States Tennis Association (USTA) and the Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) argued that “there is probably no single area of college tennis that has involved more controversy, emotion, and misunderstandings, over the past two decades than the matter of international players” (United States Tennis Association, Intercollegiate Tennis Association n.d., para. 1). Despite this claim, no research has specifically explored the processes or tools associated with this recruitment...
such as how NCAA Division I tennis coaches identify and contact international students or how ISAs contact American coaches and display their skills as tennis players.

Furthermore, current trends in tennis recruiting show that at least some of the conclusions drawn by earlier scholars are not representative of college tennis in the twenty-first century. For example, Bale (1991) argued that the primary recruiters of ISAs in the 1970s and 1980s were coaches from small colleges and universities who were unable to recruit top domestic talent. However, current data shows that while small schools, those from non-Power Five athletic conferences, continue to recruit ISAs; schools from Power Five athletic conferences also now recruit ISAs. For example, as of May 2018, 7 of the top 10 players in both the men’s and women’s NCAA Division I national singles rankings were ISAs. Of the 13 schools these 20 ISAs represented, 12 are members of a Power 5 athletic conference (National College Tennis Rankings and Results, 2018). Figure 1 shows the percentages of ISAs listed on men’s and women’s tennis roster in the Big 12 Conference (a Power Five athletic conference) during the 2018-19 season. Figure 2 shows the percentages of ISAs listed on men’s and women’s tennis rosters in the Big Sky Conference (a non-Power Five athletic conference) during the same season. These figures show that well over 50% of the athletes listed on the men’s and women’s tennis rosters for schools in both conferences are ISAs.
Figure 1. Percentage of international student-athletes on men’s and women’s tennis rosters in the Big 12 Conference

Note. Data were compiled from team rosters found on each university’s web page.

Figure 2. Percentage of international student-athletes on men’s and women’s tennis rosters in the Big 12 Conference

Note. Data were compiled from team rosters found on each university’s web page.

Despite their statistical, cultural, and competitive impact on men’s and women’s collegiate tennis, little is known about the tools and techniques coaches use to discover
and recruit international tennis players. Additionally, little is known about how ISAs secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams. Using qualitative methods this study adds to the current literature on ISAs as the lived experience of NCAA Division I men’s and women’s tennis coaches as well as men’s and women’s NCAA Division I tennis players as they relate to recruitment are examined.

**Importance of the Study**

Why do a significant number of tennis coaches choose to spend precious time and resources recruiting ISAs rather than recruiting top domestic talent? Can a coach build a successful program with ISAs? What factors motivate talented athletes to move to the United States to compete as an intercollegiate athlete? These are questions scholars’ previously explored (Bale, 1991; Jones, Koo, Kim, Andrew, & Hardin, 2008; Pierce et al., 2012). Addressing the question, why a significant number of tennis coaches choose to spend precious time and resources recruiting ISAs rather than recruiting top domestic talent, Weston (2006) argued that “Many Division I coaches’ jobs are predicated on the strength of their programs, causing them to recruit the best talent they can find, in many cases from the international pool” (p. 860). Addressing the question can a coach build a successful program with ISAs, Pierce et al. (2012) argued, “Not only can coaches create winning programs through the recruitment of international athletes, but coaches can also maintain successful teams with international athletes through the establishment of talent pipelines” (para. 4).

As for the motivations of ISAs, Bale (1991) found that both track and field athletes, as well as swimmers from several countries in Europe were interested in coming to the United States because they believed that their countries lacked high quality
facilities and coaches. Jones et al. (2008) supported these findings and discovered that environmental attractiveness and independence were also reported motives for taking part in American intercollegiate athletics.

Rather than asking why coaches recruit international talent or why ISAs choose to compete in the U.S., this study focused on how coaches recruit international students and how ISAs secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams because there is still a dearth of information about these processes. The findings of this research will help scholars understand the world of recruitment in NCAA Division I tennis from the perspective of both men’s and women’s coaches and the ISAs they recruit. Additionally, this study offers athletic administrators, tennis coaches, and their colleagues from other sports information that may help them improve their international recruiting techniques. This study offers prospective ISAs the opportunity to obtain valuable information that could improve their chances of securing a position on a collegiate tennis team in the United States.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study was to explore how coaches recruit international students and how ISAs secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams.

**Research Questions**

The following overarching research questions guided this study:

1. How do NCAA Division I tennis coaches recruit international student-athletes?
2. How do international student-athletes secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams?
Summary

Globalization and the global expansion of sports have increased the international migration of professional and amateur athletes (Bale, 1991; Bale & Maguire, 1994; Lee, 2010; Love & Kim, 2011; Maguire & Falcous, 2010). Despite recent increases in international student-athlete participation in the United States, intercollegiate athletics remains an understudied branch of global sport migration (Love & Kim, 2011). According to Judson, James, and Aurand (2004), “As competition for top athletes intensifies, and as challenges associated with recruitment increase, universities must develop and employ recruiting strategies based upon attributes that student-athletes identify as important to their decision-making process” (p. 23). The findings of this research will help scholars understand the world of recruitment in NCAA Division I tennis from the perspective of both men’s and women’s coaches and the ISAs they recruit. Additionally, this study offers athletic administrators, tennis coaches, and their colleagues from other sports information that may help them improve their international recruiting techniques. This study offers prospective ISAs the opportunity to obtain valuable information that could improve their chances of securing a position on a collegiate tennis team in the United States.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Bale (1991) noted, “despite the migration of athletic talent to American universities, we know relatively little about it in comparison with academic-talent migration” (p. xi). Two decades later, Lee and Opio (2011) echoed this sentiment arguing, “There is a considerable lack of literature on international student-athletes despite the extent to which colleges and universities are increasingly relying on them to heighten the winning reputation of their sports programs” (p. 629). Love and Kim (2011) maintained, “Much like the ‘relative infancy’ of sport labor migration research in general, academic inquiry into the topic of labor migration in U.S. collegiate sport appears to be at a similar stage of development” (p. 91).

This chapter examines primary publications related to ISAs. An in-depth review of scholarly publications in this field revealed that scholars have primarily studied ISAs motivations for competing in the United States, their experiences on American campuses, or their recruitment. The literature reviewed examined published studies associated with each of these areas and helps to explain how this research study fills a gap in the current literature on ISAs. The exploration of how NCAA Division I tennis coaches recruit international student-athletes and how these same athletes secured positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams is designed to build on the existing work of scholars in this area.

Factors that Motivate ISAs to Compete in the United States

Over the last three decades, thousands of international student-athletes have competed in the United States as intercollegiate athletes. What factors motivated them to leave their homes and compete abroad? This is explored in four published studies (Bale,
Bale (1991) was the first scholar to explore the factors that motivated international student-athletes to leave their home and compete in the United States. In his pioneering monograph, *The Brawn Drain: Foreign Student-Athletes in American Universities*. The individuals who participated in this portion of his study were 200 swimmers and runners who came from Britain, Sweden, and the Netherlands. He reported, according to push-pull theory, push factors related to athletics such as limited training opportunities, poor coaching, and a low level of competition at home motivated international student-athletes to migrate. He also reported that pull factors such as coaches and friends already residing in the United States, the academic reputation of the school, and the athletic reputation of the school influenced ISAs decisions.

Nearly two decades later, Jones et al. (2008) revisited this topic and expanded on the work of Bale (1991). In discussing the work of Bale (1991), they reported that his reliance on descriptive statistics limited his ability to examine statistical differences among groups, making it difficult to conclusively report that his findings were accurate. Moreover, they argued that his study was limited because he only studied two sports in one region of the world. They also argued that because his research was nearly two decades old it was possibly not reflective of contemporary student motives. To overcome these reported limitations, the researchers surveyed a total of 212 male and female student-athletes from 49 different countries who played a total of 17 sports in order to quantitatively measure the motivations of international student-athletes while exploring differences in motives according to the attributes of gender, types of scholarship received, type of sports participation (individual vs team), and region of the world.
They factor-analyzed the results of their 29-item survey and identified four general categories: intercollegiate athletics attractiveness; school attractiveness; desire for independency; and environmental attractiveness. Significant items were then loaded into the general categories. Three items: competition level of U.S. athletics; sport season schedule; and NCAA college conference were loaded in intercollegiate athletics attractiveness. Six factors: library resources; campus dining and meal plan opportunities; closeness of athletic facilities to campus, athletic therapy resources/personal trainers; academic advising opportunities, and information technology operations were loaded in school attractiveness. Three factors: chance to gain independence from home; chance to leave hometown; and possibility to leave parental influence at home were loaded in desire for independency. Finally, three factors, location of the university, size of city, and weather/climate of city were loaded in living environment or environmental attractiveness. The findings also indicated differences in the factors that motivated athletes according to the type of sport they played (team versus individual) as well as an athlete’s home region. Participants who played an individual sport were more motivated by intercollegiate athletic and environmental attractiveness than their counterparts who played a team sport while participants from Africa were significantly more motivated by athletic and environmental attractiveness than student-athletes from other areas. According to the researchers, this second phenomenon may be explained by the fact that most of the participants from Africa played individual sports.

They identified the top two motivators were athletic and academic attractiveness. The discovery that athletic attractiveness was the top motivator supported the earlier findings of Bale (1991). The third highest motivator, environmental attractiveness,
revealed that a school’s location, city size, and climate are factors that international student-athletes may have considered when they determined which school they wanted to attend. The fourth motivator, desire for independence, although not a strong motivator, indicated that the opportunity to gain independence by leaving their hometown and their parents’ influence motivated some athletes.

**Domestic versus international athletes.**

In their more recent research on the topic, Popp et al. (2009) argued that the earlier work of Jones et al. (2008) did not specifically examine why a prospective ISAs selected one specific school over another. Additionally, they argued that because the researchers had not surveyed domestic student-athletes they could not determine if the motivational factors they identified were specific to international student-athletes.

Grounding their study in push-pull theory, this team of researchers quantitatively (a) explored the factors that were the most important when an international student-athlete chose to attend an American university, (b) compared the most important factors identified by international and domestic student-athletes and determined if significant differences existed between the two groups; and (c) determined if there were gender differences in the college choice process between international and domestic student-athletes. The researchers developed a 39-item questionnaire that was completed by 355 student-athletes (163 domestic student-athletes and 192 international student-athletes). The sports with the highest representation were men’s and women’s tennis, men’s baseball, women’s track and field, men’s golf, women’s golf, men’s soccer, and women’s soccer.

The five most important items identified by domestic student-athletes were: (a) a
degree from the school leading to a good job; (b) overall reputation of the school; (c) the level of competition at which the team competes; (d) getting to know other members of the team; and (e) personality of the head coach. The five most important items identified by international student-athletes were: (a) the value of athletic scholarships offered; (b) the personality of the head coach; (c) a degree from the school leading to a good job; (d) the level of competition at which the team competes; and (e) the academic reputation of the school.

The finding that the value of an athletic scholarship was the most influential factor for international student-athletes supported Bale (1991) who identified athletic scholarships as a key motivator and Mazzarol, Kemp, and Savery (1997) who reported that general international students see cost issues as one of the top six factors that influenced decisions to study abroad. Furthermore, as the researchers explained, some ISAs may depend on their athletic scholarships to document that they will have the funds required to receive a student visa. While other researchers have identified coaching personality as common motivator for domestic student-athletes, this was a new finding for ISAs. Therefore, Popp et al. (2009) concluded that because they are often the recruiter and the only contact a prospective student has with the school a head coach may be very influential.

Additionally, the results showed that the top two factors for ISAs were athletic in nature, while the top two factors for domestic athletes were not. The authors argued that this difference in priorities can be attributed to the fact that domestic athletes are more familiar with the colleges recruiting them and consequently more concerned with the school’s academic reputation while international student-athletes are more likely to base
their decision on factors like cost of tuition and their relationship with the coach because they are the more familiar with these factors. Bale (1991) and Jones et al. (2008) both found that international student-athletes believed they would have access to better training facilities and receive better coaching in the United States. According to Popp et al. (2009), their finding that international student-athletes were more likely to believe that playing college sports in the United States would give them a greater chance of turning professional in their sport at least partially supported these conclusions.

To accomplish the second purpose of their study, the researchers performed a factor analysis on the 39-item survey and identified five over-arching factors that influenced the college choice of prospective student-athletes. These factors were: (a) athletic experience; (b) university athletic program; (c) outside influences; (d) school attributes; and (e) academic factors. For both cohorts, academic factors rated highest; however, as the authors indicated this small sample contained relatively few athletes from the revenue-generating sports of football and men’s basketball that are criticized for recruiting students that are academically ill prepared and more interested in their sport than their education. Furthermore, as the authors reported, these results could not distinguish students who genuinely believed that these factors were the most important from students who reported what they had been told or what they wanted others to think.

While Bale (1991) reported that international-student-athletes heard about athletic opportunities and scholarships through friends or acquaintances who currently or previously competed in the United States, participants from Popp et al. (2009) reported that items like the influence of friends and advice from parents or club coaches were significantly less important. Consequently, Popp et al. (2009) concluded that perhaps
recruitment and outreach efforts of contemporary coaches and recruiters are more effective. It should be noted that neither Bale (1991), Jones et al. (2008) nor Popp et al. (2009) reported on the influence of international agencies that specialize in helping international student-athletes acquire roster spots in the United States.

**ISAs Typologies.**

Using qualitative methods, Love and Kim (2011) offered additional insight into the motivational factors that drive international athletes to compete in the United States while also connecting research related to the internationalization of intercollegiate athletics in the United States and global sport labor migration. To accomplish these objectives, the researchers used the migrant athlete typologies previously developed by Maguire (1999) and Magee and Sugden (2002) as a conceptual framework for analysis. To develop his typologies, Maguire (1999) interviewed professional soccer, basketball, cricket, and rugby players. His typologies included the categories of mercenaries, settlers, nomadic cosmopolitans, pioneers, and returnees. Magee and Sugden (2002) interviewed professional soccer players in England and added the typologies of ambitionist, exile, and expelled to the earlier typologies of Maguire (1999).

Using purposeful sampling, Love and Kim (2011) interviewed 12 current student-athletes or graduate students who recently completed their collegiate careers. The 12 participants (five males and seven females) competed in a variety of sports including tennis, volleyball, soccer, basketball, swimming and diving, and track and field. The participants came from Australia, Brazil, Congo, England, Germany, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Spain.

Reporting on the category mercenary, the researchers argued that this typology
was relevant even though immediate economic rewards did not motivate their participants. They argued that it was relevant because their participants linked the possibility of long-term gains to their potential experiences in the United States. As for the category, nomadic cosmopolitan, the researchers reported that because international student-athletes reported a desire to experience new countries and cultures they were like professional athletes who played and lived in several world cities. Furthermore, non-English speaking athletes reported that English was an important motivational factor. These participants connected the desire to learn English to potential long-term benefits at home. For them English language acquisition was considered a transferable skill that would pay short and long-term dividends. Therefore, the desire to learn English or experience an English-speaking culture was also connected to the category of nomadic cosmopolitan and mercenary.

The notion of international athletes as settlers refers to each participant because they had all spent at least two academic semesters in the United States. Graduate students were classified as advanced settlers because they had made the decision to remain in the United States after completing their athletic eligibility. The possibility of remaining in the United States after college was not a factor that motivated participants to compete as an international student-athlete; however, after spending time in the United States all the participants expressed a desire to remain after graduation. Some participants hoped to complete a graduate degree while others hoped to find full-time employment. According to Maguire (1999), the category of migrant referred to athletes who returned from time abroad. Because the participants were still living in the United States none of them met this classification. However, many indicated that they may eventually return to their
home country; therefore, in the future this category may apply to those participants.

Magee and Sugden (2002) added the categories of exile and the expelled to those of previously identified by Maguire (1999). Love and Kim (2011) reported that threats to their liberty or life were not motivational factors for participants; however, perceived threats to their athletic or educational careers were motivations. All the participants indicated that at home it would be extremely difficult or impossible to train, compete at a high level, and study full-time. Because their desire to compete at an advanced level while attending college forced them to leave their home countries the researchers reported that the categories of exile and expelled applied to the participants. The participants indicated that they had the desire to play their sports and obtain a degree while obtaining independence; therefore, Love and Kim (2011) argued that the category of ambitionist was relevant.

The researchers reported participant’s overall level of satisfaction with their collegiate athletic experience was a key theme. All participants reported that they were happy with their decision to compete in the United States. In fact, they all indicated that they would endorse the experience. However, many participants felt that international student-athletes were most commonly recruited by universities that were not the most sought after by domestic athletes. This finding supports Popp et al. (2009) who argued that domestic athletes are more concerned with certain academic attributes while international athletes were more likely to base their decision on factors like cost of tuition and their relationship with the coach.

**Experiences of ISAs at American Colleges and Universities**

The experiences of international student-athletes at American college and
universities are a second thread explored by researchers (Lee & Opio, 2011; Popp, Love, Kim, & Hums, 2010; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000a, Ridinger & Pastore, 2000b). It is important for coaches and athletic administrators to understand the unique experiences of international student-athletes because they face the unique challenges of adjusting to a new country and community while attempting to navigate the complex waters of American academic and athletic culture.

**Adjusting to college in the United States.**

In their research study, Ridinger and Pastore (2000a) explored the experiences of international student-athletes as they related to adjusting to college in the United States. Through an extensive literature review of applicable research studies from disciplines such as business, education, and cross-cultural studies, they proposed a theoretical model to measure international student-athlete adjustment to college. As they explained, this framework was specifically designed to explore relationships among antecedents and outcomes that may be associated with adjustment to college in the United States. Their framework consisted of three components: antecedents of adjustment, adjustment to college, and outcomes that may be associated with the antecedents or adjustments to college.

Within their first component they identified personal, interpersonal, perceptual, and cultural distance dimensions. According to the researchers, the personal dimension included both athletic and academic components as well as technological aptitude. The researchers argued that many international student-athletes may find it difficult to adjust academically because the American system of higher education is likely different than the system they would have experienced at home—even if they were more academically
prepared than their domestic peers. Furthermore, they argued that coaches and international program administrators need to coordinate their efforts because language barriers can be a major academic obstacle for international student-athletes. Included within the interpersonal dimension were items that improved a student’s ability to effectively interact with teammates, coaches, and administrators. The researchers identified a common sports ideology as a bridge that connects international student-athletes to their coaches and peers within this dimension. The perceptual dimension looks at items that may impact a student-athlete’s perception of the university, team, or athletic department. According to the researchers, information provided by athletic or university personnel to establish realistic expectations and assist with adjustment, fall into this category. The final dimension, cultural distance, was defined by the Ridinger and Pastore (2000a) as “the degree of incongruence between the campus culture and the culture of the student-athletes’ hometown” (p. 15). In other words, the more linguistically or culturally distant a student’s home culture is from American culture, the longer it may take a student to adjust.

In their examination of the second component, outcomes that may be associated with the antecedents, the researchers provided a review of literature related to the student adjustment to college questionnaire (SACQ). They pointed out previous researchers had never used the SACQ to study student-athletes. Consequently, they recommended the use of this instrument for comparing the experiences of student-athletes and non-student-athletes. Ridinger and Pastore (2000b) consequently completed this proposed study. The final component, outcomes, or consequences of adjustment to college, included items such as athletic performance, academic performance, and overall satisfaction with the
college experience. They argued that although coaches and administrators are generally focused on athletic and academic success, overall satisfaction should be viewed as a legitimate outcome.

According to Ridinger and Pastore (2000a), the framework identified in this study could conceptually serve as a foundation upon which a psychometrically scale of student-athlete adjustment could be developed sound and it could serve as a premise for future research such as that completed by Popp et al. (2010).

In a second study, Ridinger and Pastore (2000b) quantitatively explored whether significant differences in adjustment to college existed between student-athlete and non-athlete populations (i.e., in-state, out-of-state, and international). They also explored whether significant differences in adjustment to college existed among the student-athlete and non-athlete populations based on demographic variables (i.e., gender and ethnicity). Using the 67-item SACQ questionnaire, the researchers surveyed a total of 245 students. However, as they indicated, because they used nonrandom sampling to select the domestic non-athlete participants and the sample size for the international student-athlete population was small (n=16) the study was limited.

The researchers reported that international student-athletes were significantly more well-adjusted than general international students. They also reported that the home regions of the sample population may be attributed to this finding. As reported, most of the general international students in the study came from Asia whereas most of the international student-athletes came from North America or Europe. Supporting their earlier work, the researchers argued that North American and European students may have adjusted better because the cultural distance was shorter for these students. Bale
(1991) argued that because athletes often form strong social bonds with teammates a favorable environment for adjustment may be created; however, the participants in his study also came from Europe. Of all the sample populations, international student-athletes had the highest mean score on the academic adjustment subscale. This supported the earlier work of Bale (1991) and Cameron (2000) who reported that most international student-athletes were academically well prepared. Ridinger and Pastore (2000b) did not report differences between athletes who competed in individual sports versus team sports, nor did they indicate whether athletes had few or several international student-athletes on their team and they did not show whether athletes had domestic or international coaches. Future research should explore whether a coach’s nationality has any connection to student adjustment.

Using qualitative methods, Popp, Love, Kim, and Hums (2010) explored whether the factors identified by Ridinger and Pastore (2000a) were the best indicators of an international student-athlete’s successful adjustment to college while also seeking to determine if other factors not identified by Ridinger and Pastore (2000a) were also relevant. To accomplish these goals, the researchers completed semi-structured interviews with a total of 13 international student-athletes from four institutions. The participants included four males and nine females from nine countries (Australia, Brazil, Canada, Congo, England, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Spain). The participants played several sports including basketball, diving, golf, softball, tennis, and volleyball.

According to the researchers, most of the factors identified by Ridinger and Pastore (2000a) were expressed by their participants. In addition to these factors, Popp et al. (2010) added sense of adventure and previous international travel experience to the
Ridinger and Pastore (2000a) model as subtopics under the headings of personal dimensions and family influence under the perceptual dimension.

Within the personal dimension, the researchers reported that because their recruitment made them feel that they had already secured a place on their team, participants were not concerned about athletic aptitude. However, they did report that participants did not want to miss the opportunity to complete a college degree even though they believed they were talented enough to compete professionally at home. This finding supports Love and Kim’s (2010) conclusions regarding perceived threats to an athlete’s athletic or educational careers. Additionally, it showed this group had the unique ambition to play their sport at an advanced level and obtain a degree which supports Love and Kim’s (2010) conclusion that these students were ambitionists. As for academic aptitude, the results supported the earlier work of Cameron (2000) who argued that international student-athletes are often more prepared academically than their domestic peers and Ridinger and Pastore (2000b) who argued that international student-athletes were more academically well-adjusted than domestic students. Furthermore, participants indicated that the courses they had taken in their final years of high school abroad were as hard or harder than the courses they were required to take as freshman in the United States. Popp et al. (2010) concluded that this gave international student-athletes the self-confidence necessary to be successful in an American classroom. While English language proficiency was a reported barrier to adjustment, many of the participants also cited the opportunity to enhance their English language skills as a motivator. Once again, this finding supported the earlier findings of Love and Kim (2011) regarding English language acquisition. Popp et al. (2010) also added sense of adventure and previous
international travel experience to the Ridinger and Pastore (2000a) model under the
heading of personal dimensions, because nearly all the participants indicated that these
two factors played a role in their adjustment. According to the researchers, as elite
athletes most of the participants had previous experience playing in highly competitive
international competitions. Participants reported that their pre-departure anxiety was
lessened because they already had a passport and previous experience traveling and
acquiring the documentation necessary for international travel. This conclusion could
also support Love and Kim’s (2011) decision to classify them as nomadic cosmopolitans.

As for the interpersonal dimension, Popp et al. (2010) once again supported the
earlier findings of Ridinger and Pastore (2000a). Participants reported that building
relationships with their peers played a crucial role in their adjustment. Participants also
identified three peer groups, athletes from their home country who had already adjusted
to life as an international student-athlete, international student-athletes who attended the
same school and, in some cases played the same sport, and domestic teammates, as
groups that helped them adjust. In many cases athletes from their home country provided
critical advice during the decision-making process, even though they did not attend the
same university. The researchers concluded that international student-athletes bonded,
even if they did not come from the same country, because they experienced the same
cross-cultural adjustment process. Although the impact of domestic teammates was more
limited, they were also identified as a key peer group. As for coaches, most participants
reported that the head coach or an assistant was instrumental in the recruiting process and
helpful when it came to cultural adjustment. However, some participants indicated that
the nurturing relationship that developed during their recruitment did not follow them to
campus. Yet once again this study did not examine the nationality of participant’s coaches. Interestingly, none of the participants expressed a strong relationship with professors or other faculty members. The researchers suggested that perhaps these relationships do not develop because athletes at large Division I institutions receive academic support and advising from the athletic department.

Bale (1991) showed that there was a time when international athletes arrived on campus without knowing what to expect or later learning that recruiters misled them. Popp et al. (2010) suggested that this was no longer the case for most athletes. Before departing for the United States, their participants were aware of the NCAA and its governing principles. Furthermore, participants reported that information about the school and the athletic program was readily available online and they had several conversations with their coaches before their arrival. According to the researchers, the influence of family was a key factor missing from the Ridinger and Pastore’s (2000a) perceptual dimension. Popp et al. (2010) discovered several participants who cited family influence as a significant factor related to their adjustment to college. Participants reported that their parents encouraged them to go abroad because they had raised them to be responsible, hard-working, and independent. Furthermore, many of their parents were former athletes who emphasized the importance of academic achievement.

**Challenges ISAs faced on American campuses.**

Unlike Ridinger and Pastore (2000a; 2000b) and Popp et al. (2010) who explored the adjustment issues and experiences of a wide range of intentional student-athletes from several world regions, Lee and Opio (2011) used the theoretical framework of neo-racism to explore challenges and difficulties that African student-athletes faced on American
Lee and Opio (2011) defined neo-racism as “the subordination of ethnic minorities on the basis of culture” (p. 630). Using qualitative study methods, they completed their study in two phases. During phase one, a researcher acted as an insider and observed student-athletes during training, travel to and from competitions, athletic meetings, and leisure. The observations allowed the researcher to observe social dynamics, such as friendship groups among athletes, conversations with the coaches and helped the researchers gain a better understanding of the overall context before they moved onto the interview phase. Following the observations, interviews were conducted with 16 African student-athletes (11 males and five females) from Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Burundi, Uganda, Zambia, and Morocco. These participants competed in a variety of sports including cross-country, track and field, swimming, and basketball. The interviews focused on the expectations each had prior to entering the United States and their experiences as an international student-athlete. According to the researchers, evidence of neo-racism among African student-athletes was discovered and documented within the themes: burden of ignorance; negative stereotypes; and discrimination.

In discussing the theme burden of ignorance, the researchers explained because these athletes were all raised in Africa, most participants had not been confronted with discrimination based on the color of an individual’s skin. Participants, except for one athlete from South Africa, had always been members of the majority race at home. Athletes reported that the need to overcome the ignorant assumptions of Americans was burdening to them. Additionally, while some participants reported feelings of indifference from Americans others felt like they could only fit in if they were willing to drop their cultural identity and beliefs.
According to the researches, the theme of negative stereotypes emerged as participants reflected on their experiences with domestic students as well as staff members on campus. A Moroccan student felt that his physical appearance and Muslim identity led domestic students to stereotype him as someone who associated with terrorists and was consequently anti-American. Another student from Nigeria felt because she was from Africa her intelligence was questioned by her athletic advisor. Participants believed these stereotypes were at least, in part, the result of negative media portrayals of Africa. According to them, Africans are generally portrayed as poor and African males are portrayed as physically aggressive sexists.

Within the theme of discrimination, the researchers reported that some participants were confronted with discrimination in the form of verbal insults and harassment in the classroom and on the track or playing field. Within the competitive sphere, African and Arab athletes reported that they were targeted with negative insults more often than other student-athletes. Furthermore, several participants felt that they were negatively targeted by faculty members and other staff on campus. Some participants even reported that they chose not to meet with faculty members during their office hours because they felt uncomfortable. Love and Kim (2011) reported their participants were happy with their decision to compete in the United States. In fact, they all indicated that if queried by a prospective international student-athlete they would endorse the opportunity. In contrast to these findings, Lee and Opio (2011) reported their participants were worried and frustrated because they felt unwelcome in the United States. These student-athletes felt like they had to endure the situation without drawing attention to it because they could do nothing to change the negative attitudes of
Americans.

**International Student-Athlete Recruitment**

As part of his study of international student-athletes, Bale (1991) explored ISA recruitment. He showed that colleges and universities used international talent to build winning teams and successful programs. He also discovered that using “friend-to-friend” or word of mouth recruiting coaches had developed talent pipelines into certain regions or countries. As he reported, the University of Texas, El Paso and Washington State University successfully developed pipelines that brought elite runners from Kenya while the University of Missouri and Mississippi State University developed similar pipelines which brought runners from Nigeria to their campuses in the 1970s and 1980s. An important aspect of Bales argument was that coaches chose to look for international talent because their institutions’ location or lack of prestige prevented them from recruiting top domestic talent. Three decades later, Love and Kim (2011) reported that international student-athletes familiar with the American system of higher education were aware that international athletes were often recruited by schools that were less attractive to domestic student-athletes.

Cameron (2000) qualitatively explored the recruitment of ISAs from New Zealand. As reported, over a 20-30-year period approximately 230 elite athletes from 13 sports had been recruited to compete in the United States. Consequently, Cameron (2000) asked why coaches rely on international recruits to build successful programs and more specifically, why they recruit New Zealanders? To answer these questions Cameron (2000) interviewed 27 athletic administrators and coaches, 54 international student-athletes, and 14 staff members from either the NCAA or American colleges.
Cameron (2000) showed that although some New Zealanders solicited an invitation to compete in the United States, American coaches recruited the clear majority. She also reported these coaches discovered athletes by scanning New Zealand and international results, watching competitions in New Zealand, watching New Zealanders competing at international competitions, and receiving word of mouth recommendations from current and former student-athletes. Cameron (2000) supported Bale’s (1991) talent pipeline thesis and quick fix theory. According to Cameron (2000), coaches had used current student-athletes to recruit other prospective athletes and help them set up pipelines in New Zealand while small colleges and universities or colleges and universities without an athletic reputation relied on international student-athletes as a “quick fix” to help them build a winning reputation.

Cameron (2000) reported answers to her questions were grounded in the achievement ideology of college sports or the belief that an athlete’s desire and dedication may be more important than his or her natural talent. Accordingly, coaches reported the versatility, experience, and maturity of New Zealanders helped them perform at a high level on the field and made them easy to manage off the field. In addition to these competitive advantages, Cameron (2000) argued because international students generally do not make campus visits it may be cheaper to recruit an international student, thus making the recruitment of international student more economical for small schools with limited budgets.

In addition to the reported rationales for recruiting international student-athletes, Cameron (2000) discovered factors such as the desire to compete at a high level, excellent training facilities, athletic scholarships, opportunities for travel, and the desire
for independence motivated New Zealanders to compete in the United States. Once again, these findings supported earlier scholarship (Bale, 1991; Jones et al., 2008; Popp et al., 2011).

Cameron (2000) also placed the migration of New Zealanders into the larger global context of sports migration and argued the migration of college athletes differs from that of professional athletes. She showed while the majority of professional athletes leave New Zealand to play rugby, most of the athletes who leave to compete at the collegiate level play Olympic sports. Unlike rugby, these sports have numerically small numbers of participants in New Zealand even though they are high-profile sports considered to be politically important. Furthermore, Cameron (2000) showed a free education motivated collegiate athletes rather than immediate financial rewards. Thus, Love and Kim (2011) would likely agree New Zealand athletes should be placed their mercenary typology. However, Cameron (2000) did not report athletes from New Zealand expressed a strong desire to become professionals.

Finally, Cameron (2000) made an important connection between the recruitment of international athletes and feelings of hostility and animosity that existed within sport organizations in New Zealand, Britain, Canada, and Ireland. Earlier histories of international student-athlete recruitment (Bale, 1991) focused on the views of American coaches, players, and sport organizations. The underlying assumption was Americans opposed the recruitment of international student-athletes while other countries wanted their athletes to compete at an elite level and receive advanced athletic training in the United States. However, as Cameron (2000) showed, this was not the case. In fact, according to her study many sport organizations and coaches in other countries have
historically opposed the exodus of their elite athletes.

Pierce et al. (2012) explored the perspectives of international student-athletes as they related to their recruitment and experiences transitioning into intercollegiate athletics in the United States. Their research specifically explored the following five questions (1) what is the most difficult aspect of the international university experience?; (2) what do international athletes identify as the most important factor for a successful transition to American college?; (3) how did international athletes hear about athletic opportunities in the United States; (4) what advice would current international athletes give international athletes considering a move to the United States to participate in intercollegiate sport?; and (5) what would the athletes have done had they not played college sports in the United States? Overall, the researchers surveyed 192 international student-athletes from 15 NCAA Division I universities and 57 countries. The top three countries represented in the results were Canada, England, and Puerto Rico and 45% of the participants were male while 55% of the participants were female.

The researchers identified a total of ten variables for the question, what is the most difficult aspect of the international university experience? They identified homesickness as the most difficult aspect followed by adjusting to American culture and adjusting to the language. They identified seven variables for the question, what were the most important factors in helping you transition to university life in the United States? More than one-third of the respondents reported that a support system of teammates and coaches was important while 20% indicated a support system of family and friends at home was the most important.

The researchers identified eight variables for the question, how did you first learn
about opportunities to earn university sports scholarships in the United States? One quarter of the participants reported they learned about opportunities from friends, family, or other athletes. One quarter of the participants reported they learned about opportunities from former student-athletes. Just under one quarter (23.9%) reported they learned about opportunities from individuals related to collegiate sports in the United States such as coaches and administrators. Significantly, a Chi square analysis revealed that athletes who played a team sport were more likely to obtain information from coaches and administrators. Additionally, athletes who played a team sport were more likely to learn about scholarship opportunities through coaches and administrators while those playing an individual sport were more likely to learn from family, friends, and athletes. However, the researchers did not report athletes learning about athletic opportunities from international agencies that specialize in obtaining scholarships for international athletes.

The researchers identified fourteen variables for the question what advice would current international athletes give international athletes considering a move to the United States to take part in intercollegiate sport? One-fifth of the respondents reported they would advise prospective student-athletes regarding the focus, dedication, hard work, and persistence necessary to become a successful intercollegiate athlete. Just under 20% of the participants would encourage prospective athletes to adequately research schools and to get to know the coaches, other athletes, and facilities before deciding what school to attend. Less than 12% reported they would advise prospective athletes to consider academic factors such as majors resulting in employment opportunities at home.

When asked what they would be doing now if they had not taken the opportunity to compete in the United States, only 7.6% reported they would be studying in the United
States. One hundred and five reported they would be attending college at home yet only 33 reported they would still be competing at home. Notably, when participants were asked about the athletic facilities in their home country and those in the United States, a majority of participants reported the United States offered better athletic facilities and opportunities.

Foo (2015) qualitatively explored international student-athlete recruitment while studying stressors associated with cultural and athletic migration. He argued previous research studies on this topic had not considered factors such as an athletes’ ability to pay for expenses (visa or airline ticket) are not included in their scholarship. Furthermore, he argued these studies have not explored how athletes support themselves financially while they are in the United States. As he explained, it is likely that even a full scholarship will not cover all the costs associated with attending an American college or university. According to Foo (2015), these additional costs may be a deterrent for talented international athletes who are unable to support themselves. Moreover, Foo (2015) argued, variability was a problem in earlier studies. As he explained, the experiences of a female tennis player from New Zealand could be vastly different than those of a male soccer player coming from Trinidad and Tobago. In his attempt to limit this variability, Foo (2015) interviewed a total of eight current male soccer players from Trinidad and Tobago who attended NAIA institutions.

Foo (2015), argued his results revealed the experiences of his participant group did not match those of other international student-athletes or international students. His participants reported a desire to improve themselves personally through migration to the United States and the desire to play professional soccer motivated them. Consequently,
he identified four themes (exodus, personal development, professional soccer, and financial concerns) he connected to these two overarching driving forces. Reporting on the theme of exodus, he argued this theme was important because all the participants reported they were leaving their home country in order to find a “seemingly better” life in the United States. As for the theme personal development, Foo (2015) reported his participants viewed recruitment as a legitimate avenue and means of professional development. Bale (1991) and Cameron (2000) reported better facilities, coaching, and levels of competition motivated international student-athletes while Foo (2015) discovered the opportunity for a better life and a higher standard of living motivated his participants. Furthermore, the results of this study indicated while they were being recruited his participants, unlike those in the work of Love and Kim (2010), considered the possibility of settling in the United States long-term.

Regarding the theme of professional soccer, he explained while participants saw their recruitment as an opportunity to showcase their soccer talents and possibly become a professional player, they were also aware that American intercollegiate athletics offered them the rare opportunity to pursue both a professional soccer career and a college degree. Participants reported while they hoped this experience would result in the opportunity to play professionally, they believed that a college education was a safety net. The final theme reported by Foo (2015) was financial concerns. Although each of the participants desired to travel to the United States in order to develop personally and pursue a professional soccer career, the participants reported these goals were contingent upon their ability to obtain the funds necessary to cover their initial upfront costs as well as their ability to maintain themselves financially while in the United States. One
participant reported in order to compete his first year he had to rely on his father’s meager savings. Another participant reported even with his scholarship he had to work two part-time jobs. Additionally, Foo (2015) reported currency rates were a major problem for these athletes. At the time of the study the exchange rate was $1 dollar to $6.41 in Trinidad and Tobago currency.

Building on the earlier work of Foo (2015), Kirk and Weaver (2018) explored the contemporary internationalization of men’s intercollegiate soccer while assessing the factors driving change in the sport. The researchers felt their study was necessary because the overall number of international soccer players competing for American colleges and universities has exponentially grown in the last two decades. To identify the factors driving this change, the researchers completed a three-phase research study.

First, they compiled a database of NCAA team rosters dating back to 1990. The database included the name and reported hometown of 124,000 players. Next, identifying both stakeholders and the migration pathways of potential players resulted from interviewing 12 current and former international student-athletes and six coaches. Finally, they developed an electronic survey using data from earlier studies and their interviews. The survey was then distributed to 387 intercollegiate men’s head soccer coaches.

An analysis of their database revealed only 7% to 10% of soccer players reported an international hometown between 1990 and 2004. That number increased by an estimated one percent each year from 2005 to 2016. By 2016, they estimated more than 20% of soccer players were ISAs. Additionally, the data showed the number of teams with at least one international player increased from 67% in 2005 to 80% in 2016 while the percentage of teams with more than 25% international players increased from 12% in
2005 to 33% in 2016. The data also showed the overall percentage of international student-athletes on American intercollegiate soccer rosters increased across all three NCAA Divisions as well as the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). Furthermore, the research showed since 1990, players from a total of 196 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) recognized countries had competed in the United States. Overall, England had the highest number of international soccer players while in 2016 approximately 21% of all international soccer players came from countries within the United Kingdom. Knowing fewer scholarships are available for men’s soccer than other sports such as basketball researchers should explore the connection between finances and recruitment. Does the U.K. really produce the most talented soccer players or are they the players most likely to have the finances necessary to cover the added costs Foo (2015) identified.

In identifying factors that may be attributed to this international growth they supported the quick fix argument that small schools or schools without a strong athletic reputation recruit internationally to build successful programs (Bale, 1991; Cameron, 2000). However, they argued other factors, such as the global expansion of the internet must also be responsible for the recent expansion of international talent. They also argued, while a college degree is an important pull-factor, an increasing number of players were choosing to play college soccer in the United States instead of playing professionally or semi-professionally in their home countries because college soccer has become recognized as a potential pathway to a professional career. Furthermore, athletes know even if they do not make it in the professional ranks, they have the added security of a college degree. They also showed 22% of the coaches they surveyed self-identified
as international coaches and an estimated 23% of coaches at the NCAA and NAIA levels in 2016 were foreign-born. Their data confirmed many of these coaches, who were former international student-athletes themselves, established their own international talent pipelines and recruited internationally because they were familiar with international recruitment and the culture of international rosters. Unfortunately, they did not report any information regarding the comfort level of international coaches when it came to recruiting international players versus domestic players. Additionally, they did not report whether coaches felt their international status gave them a recruiting advantage over American born coaches.

In addition to expanding on these earlier findings, they introduced two new factors. First, they argued that the emergence of international agencies that specialize in helping international student-athletes acquire roster spots in the United States has directly affected international student-athlete recruitment. Kirk and Weaver (2018) identified a total of 68 different firms who were advertising support for international players seeking athletic scholarship in the United States. Most of these agencies were headquartered in the U.K., Australia, or the United States; however, many reported they had agents throughout the world. A reported 85% of these agencies were founded after 2000 and their fees ranged from $500 to $3500. They also reported these agencies offered a variety of services ranging from hosting showcase events for coaches during their international recruiting trips to negotiating scholarships. Kirk and Weaver (2018) felt the impact of these agencies regarding the global exposure of college soccer has been an under-appreciated factor.
Second, they reported on the perceptions of men’s college soccer coaches across all divisions as they relate to factors associated with the growth of ISA participation in collegiate soccer. The highest rated factors were new technologies, recruiting agencies, and increasing international recruiting.

**Summary**

As this review has shown, in recent decades scholars have studied factors that motivate ISAs to compete in the United States, the experiences of ISAs on American campuses, and the recruitment of ISAs. This research study was specifically designed to update and advance our understanding of ISA recruitment. More precisely, it explores this topic within the sphere of NCAA men’s and women’s tennis. Since Bale (1991) published his foundational work in this area the overall ISA participation at the Division I level has increased by 221%. More specifically, ISA participation in men’s and women’s NCAA Division I tennis has increased by 186% over the same period (see Tables 1 and 2).

In his work, Bale (1991) identified his quick fix and his pipeline models. His quick fix model asserted that coaches who were unable to attract high level domestic athletes, because their school lacked either athletic or academic prestige, used ISAs to quickly build winning programs. His pipeline model asserted that coaches used friend-to-friend or word of mouth recruiting to identify and recruit ISAs and establish recruiting pipelines in certain regions of the world. In her study, Cameron (2000) supported both of Bale’s theories. However, her work, like Bale’s, was completed during the pre-internet era. Consequently, there is a need to explore ISA recruitment process in the era of global internet access. Researchers need to understand how, if at all, the ISA recruitment process
has changed over the last three decades. While Pierce et al. (2012) touched on the recruitment process, their exploration specifically sought to understand how ISAs heard about athletic opportunities in the United States. Foo (2015) also explored the recruitment process, but he primarily focused on the stressors that may prevent ISAs from participating in collegiate athletics. The first researchers to explore either the impact of technology on recruitment in the global internet era or the influence of recruiting agencies were Kirk and Weaver (2018). However, rather than exploring how coaches recruit ISAs or how ISAs secure positions in the era of global internet accessibility, they identified primary factors that could explain the recent growth of ISA participation in men’s soccer.

This study built on these earlier studies as it explored ISA recruitment process within the setting of global internet access. Like Bale (1991), this study explored the recruitment process and explored the tools and resources used by both coaches and ISAs. However, while Bale’s primary focus in this part of his work was on track and field, this study focused on men’s and women’s tennis. Building on the work of Kirk and Weaver (2018), it explored what impact, if any, new technologies and recruiting agencies, have had on recruitment process within NCAA Division I men’s and women’s tennis. Tennis was selected for this study because relative to other sports the dynamics of internationalization have been much more pervasive and longstanding in intercollegiate tennis.
Chapter 3: Method

The contemporary American system of intercollegiate athletics offers domestic and international athletes the unique opportunity to pursue a college degree while competing at an elite level as an ISA (Bale, 1991). Consequently, an ever-increasing number of coaches search globally for talent to fill their rosters as rising numbers of international athletes seek out intercollegiate athletic opportunities in the United States (Bale, 1991; Cameron, 2000; Love & Kim, 2011; Pierce et al. 2012).

The tremendous numerical growth of ISAs on American campuses has led researchers to explore this culturally, ethnically, and geographically diverse group of students. However, to date, no research has reported on the shared experiences of Division I tennis coaches and ISAs as they relate to recruitment. I chose to explore tennis because relative to other sports the dynamics of internationalization have been much more pervasive and longstanding in intercollegiate tennis. In fact, 24% of all ISAs competing in men’s sports at the Division I level during the 2015-16 academic year played tennis and 25% ISAs competing in women’s sports during the same period played tennis (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018a). The purpose of this research study was to explore how coaches recruit international students and how ISAs secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams.

Research Questions

The following overarching research questions guided this study:

1. How do NCAA Division I tennis coaches recruit international student-athletes?
2. How do international students secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams?

Research Design

To enrich the literature related to the understanding of the individual and group experiences of NCAA Division I men’s and women’s tennis coaches and players as they relate to the phenomenon of ISA recruitment, I selected a phenomenological design (Creswell, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). According to Creswell, Hanson, Clark, Plano, and Morales (2007), researchers using phenomenological designs gather data from individuals who have experienced an identified phenomenon and then describe what the participants had in common as they experienced the phenomenon. In this study, I viewed doing recruiting and being recruited as two different but interrelated phenomena, and explored how the experiences of coaches and players intersected or diverged. To explore these phenomena the study examined the experiences of both coaches and ISAs as they related to ISA recruitment in college tennis.

Researcher Background

As an academic advisor and university lecturer, I have worked with domestic and international student-athletes and athletic administrators for more than eight years at two separate NCAA Division I institutions. Although I worked closely with athletics departments and dozens of student-athletes I never worked inside an athletics department, so I was always an outsider. Because I have never been a Division I tennis coach or an ISA, I also approached this study as an outsider.
Validity and Trustworthiness

According to Creswell (2013), in qualitative research, validation is “an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (p. 251). Consequently, to secure validity, Creswell (2013) recommended that a researcher use at least two of the eight validation strategies that he described as most used by qualitative researchers. This study used three of the strategies described by Creswell.

The first strategy I used, member checks, has been described as the “most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). This strategy can be conducted formally or informally (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and it involves “systematically soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). For this study, I used semi-structured interviews. Of these interviews, two one-on-one interviews were completed via the web conferencing platform GotoWebinar, 10 one-on-one interviews where completed via phone calls, one one-on-one interview was conducted in person, and one group interview was conducted in person. Each participant was given a copy of his or her interview transcript via email as soon as it was completed. I asked each participant to review their interview transcript for accuracy. Furthermore, each participant was given a draft of my analysis/description of the participants’ narrative to verify “accuracy of the account and to identify any other aspects that should be included” (Battle, 2016, p. 81).

The second validation strategy used in this research study was peer review or debriefing. To accomplish this, I enlisted the help of a peer. This party reviewed the research study and provided critical feedback regarding the study’s methods and
interpretations. This feedback was provided by the peer reviewer during a peer debriefing session. During this session, I took notes so the results of the peer review could be referred to and reviewed later as further data analysis was done.

The third validation strategy used for this study was clarifying research bias or engaging in reflexivity. Creswell (2013) recommends that a researcher “become conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative study (p. 216). Reflexivity involved acknowledging my experiences with the phenomenon of ISA recruitment as well as understanding how my experiences with the phenomenon shaped my research findings and interpretations (Battle, 2016). In addition to acknowledging and reflecting on previous experiences, I evaluated the project as it developed over time by keeping a research journal and engaging in “reflective commentary” (Shenton, 2004).

**Participants**

**Sampling procedures.**

For this study, I used purposeful, snowball and convenience sampling techniques to identify participants. First, I used purposeful sampling to identify many current NCAA Division I men’s or women’s tennis coaches whose current rosters indicated they recruit ISAs. Once I identified these potential participants, I contacted them either via phone or email and invited them to participate in the research study. Next, I used either snowball sampling or convenience sampling to identify other potential coaches or ISAs for the study. As Table 4 shows, several participants were secured through each of these three methods.
**Participant descriptions.**

**Laura** is in her second season as the head women’s tennis coach at a large NCAA Division I institution in the western United States. Overall, she has more than a decade of coaching experience in both men’s and women’s collegiate tennis. Prior to accepting this position, she served as a graduate assistant at an NCAA Division I university and as an assistant coach at two other NCAA Division I universities and one NAIA university. Laura played college tennis at a large NCAA university in the midwestern United States where she was named a team captain as well as a member of the conference all-academic team.

**Chad** is in his second season as the head women’s tennis coach at a large NCAA Division I university in the southeastern United States. He has more than 20 years of coaching experience and more than 15 years of collegiate coaching experience. He has coached both men’s and women’s tennis at the NCAA Division I, II, and III levels and won two NCAA women’s national championships. Chad played collegiate tennis at a junior college in the northeastern United States where he was named team captain and player coach.

**Aaron** is in his third season as the head women’s tennis coach at an NCAA Division I university in the western United States where he has won two consecutive conference championships. Prior to accepting his current position he coached men’s and women’s tennis at the collegiate and high school levels in the United States and south Asia. Aaron played collegiate tennis at an NCAA Division I university in the southeastern United States.
Alex is in his tenth season as the head women’s tennis coach at an NCAA Division I university in the midwestern United States. Prior to accepting his current position he spent three years as an assistant women’s tennis coach at an NCAA Division I institution in the southwestern United States. He played collegiate tennis at an NCAA Division I institution in the midwestern United States where he finished his career as the team's Most Valuable Player. Over the past decade he has been named his conference’s Coach of the Year five times.

Adam is in his sixth season as the head men’s tennis coach at an NCAA Division I university in the eastern United States. Prior to accepting his current position Adam spent three decades coaching both men’s and women’s tennis at four NCAA Division I institutions in western, midwestern, and eastern United States. During his time at a large NCAA Division I institution in the midwestern United States Alex’s teams won five conference championships and had a 45-match in conference winning streak (including four undefeated regular-season campaigns). During this time, he was awarded conference coach of the year honors three times while his teams had 12 straight NCAA Championship appearances.

Brett is currently in his twentieth season as the head men’s tennis coach at a large NCAA Division I university in the southwestern United States. Overall he has nearly three decades of head coaching experience at two large NCAA Division I universities. His teams have made 24 NCAA tournament appearances and three Final Four appearances. He has coached sixteen players that have earned a total of 28 ITA All-American honors and received a number of individual awards including conference coach
of the year on nine occasions. Brett played NCAA Division I men’s tennis at a large university in the midwestern United States.

**Gary** is currently an administrator at a national tennis organization and has more than twenty years of experience as an NCAA Division I tennis coach at two universities. As a coach he consistently won conference championships and his teams regularly appeared in the NCAA tournament. He played collegiate tennis at an NCAA Division I university in the southwestern United States where he was an All-American. He was also inducted into the ITA Hall of Fame for his work in collegiate tennis.

**Isabella** is a senior at an NCAA Division I university in the southeastern United States. She was born and raised in Spain and she transferred to her current university after spending two season at an NCAA Division II university in the southeastern United States. Last season she was a member of her school’s Academic Honor Roll while earning the All-Conference Second Team Doubles award. As a junior tennis player she was ranked number 88 in her home country.

**Oliva** is a Sophomore at an NCAA Division I institution in the southeastern United States. She was born a raised in the Netherlands. Last season she was a member of her school’s Academic Honor Roll while earning the All-Conference Second Team Doubles award.

**Sofia** is a current graduate student and assistant women’s tennis coach at an NCAA Division I university in the western United States. She was born and raised in Spain and as an undergraduate student she played for the university she now coaches. She is tied for the top singles season in her school’s history. She was named to the all-
conference singles team three times, and the all-conference doubles team once. She was also named as her conference’s Player of the Year.

**Emma** is a senior at an NCAA Division I university in the western United States. She was born and raised in Canada and as a junior tennis player she participated in her country’s U18 Outdoor Championships and Finished 7th in the Outdoor Provincial Championships. As a collegiate tennis player she was a three-time letter winner.

**Liam** is a Junior at a large NCAA Division I university in the eastern United States. He was raised in the Bonaire but played high school tennis in the United States where he won state championships his junior and senior years. As a collegiate player he is a two-time letter winner who served as a team captain last season. He has been a member of his conferences Academic Honor Roll and was named an ITA Scholar Athlete.

**Participant demographics.**

Coaches who participated in this research study represented two countries and six different Division I universities in the United States. Four of the coaches who participated coach women’s tennis and two of the participants coach men’s tennis. Three of the women’s coaches are males and one is a female. Both men’s coaches are males. Four of the coaches, as well as the national tennis administrator, played Division I men’s tennis and one woman played Division I women’s tennis. The overall coaching experience of the participants ranges from 5 to 36 years.

ISAs who participated in the study represented four countries (Bonaire, Canada, Spain, and the Netherlands) and four native language (Dutch, English, Papiamentu, and Spanish). All the ISAs who participated in the study were listed on the tennis roster of a
Division I school during the 2017-18 academic year. Four of the participants were listed on women’s tennis rosters and one of the participants was listed on a men’s tennis roster.

**Descriptions of the Institutions**

Coaches and ISAs who participated in this research study represented eight different Division I universities. Each of these universities currently sponsors both men’s and women’s tennis.

Table 4

*Participant Demographics - Coaches and Administrator*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Sampling Procedure</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Native Region</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Years of Coaching Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Women's Tennis Coach</td>
<td>Purposeful Sampling</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>5-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Women's Tennis Coach</td>
<td>Purposeful Sampling</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>20-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>Women's Tennis Coach</td>
<td>Purposeful Sampling</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Women's Tennis Coach</td>
<td>Purposeful Sampling</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>10-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Men's Tennis Coach</td>
<td>Snowball Sampling</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>&gt;30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett</td>
<td>Men's Tennis Coach</td>
<td>Snowball Sampling</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>25-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Snowball Sampling</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>20-25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

*Participant Demographics - International Student Athletes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Sampling Technique</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Native Country</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>Women's Tennis</td>
<td>Convenience Sampling</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>Women's Tennis</td>
<td>Snowball Sampling</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Women's Tennis</td>
<td>Snowball Sampling</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Tennis</td>
<td>Convenience Sampling</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men's Tennis</td>
<td>Convenience Sampling</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bonaire</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6
*NCAA Division I Athletic Conferences Represented by Study Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conference Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Athletic Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big 12 Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Sky Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial Athletic Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain West Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunbelt Conference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Institution A:** Founded in the mid-twentieth century, this urban public institution is in the western United States. The university offers dozens of undergraduate and graduate degrees programs and enrolls more than 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students each year. More than 400 domestic and international student-athletes annually take part in the eight men’s sports (baseball, basketball, cross country, football, golf, soccer, tennis, track and field) and eleven women’s sports (basketball, beach volleyball, cross country, golf, gymnastics, rowing, soccer, softball, tennis, track and field, and volleyball). The university currently competes at the NCAA Division I level.

**Institution B:** Founded in the early twentieth century, this rural public institution is in the southeastern United States. The university offers dozens of undergraduate and
graduate degrees programs and enrolls more than 26,000 undergraduate and graduate students each year. More than 300 domestic and international student-athletes annually take part in the six men’s sports (baseball, basketball, football, golf, soccer, tennis) and 10 women’s sports (basketball, golf, rifle, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, cross country and volleyball). The university currently competes at the NCAA Division I level as a member of the Sunbelt Conference.

**Institution C:** Founded in the nineteenth century, this urban public institution is in the mid-western United States. The university offers dozens of undergraduate and graduate degrees programs and enrolls more than 15,000 undergraduate and graduate students each year. More than 400 domestic and international student-athletes annually take part in the seven men’s sports (baseball, basketball, cross country, golf, tennis, track and field) and seven women’s sports (basketball, cross country, golf, softball, tennis, track and field, and volleyball). The university currently competes at the NCAA Division I level.

**Institution D:** Founded in the nineteenth century, this rural public land grant institution is in the western United States. The university offers dozens of undergraduate and graduate degrees programs and enrolls more than 13,000 undergraduate and graduate students each year. More than 400 domestic and international student-athletes annually take part in the six men’s sports (basketball, football, golf, tennis, track and field, and cross country) and eight women’s sports (basketball, golf, soccer, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, cross country and volleyball). The university currently competes at the NCAA Division I level.
**Institution E:** Founded in the eighteenth century, this urban public institution is in the southern United States. The university offers dozens of undergraduate and graduate degrees programs and enrolls more than 45,000 undergraduate and graduate students each year. More than 500 domestic and international student-athletes annually take part in the eight men’s sports (baseball, basketball, football, golf, swimming and diving, tennis, cross country, track and field) and ten women’s sports (basketball, cross country, rowing, golf, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, and volleyball). The university currently competes at the NCAA Division I level.

**Institution F:** Founded in the eighteenth century, this urban private land institution is in the eastern United States. The university offers dozens of undergraduate and graduate degrees programs and enrolls more than 25,000 undergraduate and graduate students each year. More than 1,000 domestic and international student-athletes annually take part in the 16 men’s sports (baseball, basketball, cross country, fencing, football, sprint football, golf, lacrosse, rowing heavy, rowing light, soccer, squash, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, and wrestling) and 15 women’s sports (basketball, cross country, fencing, field hockey, golf, gymnastics, lacrosse, rowing, soccer, softball, squash, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, and volleyball). The university currently competes at the NCAA Division I level.

**Institution G:** Founded in the nineteenth century, this urban public land grant institution is in the western United States. The university offers dozens of undergraduate and graduate degrees programs and enrolls more than 23,000 undergraduate and graduate students each year. More than 400 domestic and international student-athletes annually take part in the six men’s sports (baseball, basketball, football, golf, rifle, tennis) and 10
women’s sports (basketball, cross country, golf, rifle, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, and volleyball). The university currently competes at the NCAA Division I level.

**Institution H:** Founded in the eighteenth century, this urban public institution is in the eastern United States. The university offers dozens of undergraduate and graduate degrees programs and enrolls more than 20,000 undergraduate and graduate students each year. More than 400 domestic and international student-athletes annually take part in the eight men’s sports (baseball, basketball, football, golf, lacrosse, soccer, swimming and diving, and tennis) and twelve women’s sports (basketball, cross country, field hockey, golf, lacrosse, rowing, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, and volleyball). The university currently competes at the NCAA Division I level.

**Data Collection**

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period. The primary source of information was semi-structured interviews with NCAA Division I men’s and women’s tennis coaches, a national tennis administrator, an NCAA Division I men’s tennis player, and NCAA Division I women’s tennis players. Each participant completed one interview and whenever possible I completed a second semi-structured interview. I made the interview process convenient for all participants. Consequently, two interviews were conducted in person and 15 interviews where completed via phone calls. A total of six participants completed two interviews and six others completed one interview. In both cases, I followed up with the participants and sent them a series of follow-up questions via email. Each interview lasted 30-75 minutes and was audio recorded using an Apple iPhone. A total of 16 interviews were completed as one-on-one interviews and one
interview was completed as a group interview with two participants. I saved all interview files as encrypted computer files in a secure area where only I have access.

Each interview began with a series of pre-formatted open-ended questions I designed after carefully reviewing and analyzing relevant literature on the topic. These questions focused on the individual’s background in athletics and tennis (see Appendices A and B). I then asked questions focusing on the participants’ experiences as a head tennis coach or prospective student-athletes as they relate to the recruitment process (see Appendices C and D). When necessary, probing or follow-up questions were asked to obtain more information from participants. Each interview was transcribed and a copy was sent to each participant via email for their review.

Data Analysis

According to Wong (2008):

Data analysis is the part of qualitative research that most distinctively differentiates from quantitative research methods. It is not a technical exercise as in quantitative methods, but more of a dynamic, intuitive, and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing. In contrast to quantitative research, which uses statistical methods, qualitative research focuses on the exploration of values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts, experiences, feelings, and characteristic of the phenomenon under investigation (para. 4).

Collected data was analyzed from the semi-structured interviews and follow-up emails using the six-step approach for analyzing phenomenological data that Creswell (2007) described. This six-step approach is fundamentally based on the Stevick-Colaizzi-
Keen method Moustakas (1994) discussed. The following six steps were used to analyze the data.

*Uncover and bracket researcher bias*

Before I began data collection or analysis, I bracketed and examined my own experiences with this research topic (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). This step represents what Moustakas (1994) described as “epoche a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (p. 33) It was important to complete this step before analysis of phenomenological data to ensure that the analysis would reflect the participants experiences, not my own biases.

*Read transcribed interview data for significant statements*

After each interview was completed the audio recording was uploaded to a password protected Otter account. Otter is an online tool that converts speech into text. Using Otter, the I listened to the audio files and compared the audio files to the automatically generated text files. While comparing the audio files and the automatically generated text files I made any necessary corrections to the text file. Once this comparison was complete I had a fully transcribed interview that contained only text—other features of communication such as laughter and smiling were not captured in the transcript. While listening to and transcribing the interviews I took notes and wrote down questions on a separate note pad. These notes were used to help generate additional questions for either the follow-up interview or follow-up email.

As recommended by Seidman (2013), I attempted the deletion of speech characteristics such as “repetitious ‘uhms,’ ‘ahs’ ‘you knows,’ and other such
idiosyncrasies that do not do the participant justice in a written version of what he or she said” (p. 124). Next I reviewed each line and paragraph of each interview, ignoring insignificant statements while identifying significant statements and developing “a list of significant statements” that captured the essence of the individuals experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 159).

Develop meaning units and themes

For my third step each transcript was uploaded into the web-based application Dedoose. In Dedoose all significant statements were coded so that these could be “group[ed] into larger units of information, called ‘meaning units’” or “themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). After each of the significant statements were coded in Dedoose, the I returned to each transcript and attempted to summarize the essence of each statement. Statements that were considered to be significant for more than one category were coded for both categories.

Textural descriptions

The fourth step was the development of textual descriptions of the phenomena for each of the statements. This step helped identify the setting in which the phenomenon was experienced or “what happened” (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). As Rudd (2010) explained, “This included what the participants were feeling and thinking as it relates to the specific phenomena under study not the details of the actual events (p. 77). The descriptions also included “verbatim examples from the transcription in order to help me recreate the horizon from which the phenomena occurred” (Rudd, 2010, p. 77).

Structural descriptions
For the fifth step, I generated “structural description” of how the phenomena occurred (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). I attempted to identify the “bones of the experience for the whole group of people studied” (Patton, 2002, p. 486) so that a determination of “how all the participants experience what they experienced” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 142) could be identified.

Composite description

The final step was the creation of a “composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions” (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). Accomplishing this was done by gathering information from the textural descriptions and structural descriptions. This is the “essence of the experience and represents the culminating aspects of a phenomenological study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 159) resulted.

Reflexivity

According to Begoray and Banister (2012) “Reflexivity...is a researcher's ongoing critique and critical reflection of his or her own biases and assumptions and how these have influenced all stages of the research process” (p. 2). Warren (2012) explained, “openness to alternate explanations and continually considering one’s own position in the analysis are necessary elements to the reflexive process” (p. 181). In order to maintain “openness” throughout this research study, I recorded analytical memos in a research journal. I often used this journal to explore my changing understanding of the topic and the evolution of my own positions as they related to the study and the research questions.

My interest in this topic began several years ago when I started my career an academic advisor. As an advisor I had to opportunity to work with a number of ISAs and I often found myself wondering how American coaches recruit ISAs. I had several ideas,
for example, I assumed that they used tools such as social media and personal networks, but I had not evidence to support these assumptions. As I began to narrow down a possible dissertation topic my interest in this process emerged once again emerged and after a thorough review of relevant literature, I selected this topic for my research study. As I prepared my study, I reflected on what I knew about the topic from personal experiences with ISAs and my study of previous research.

I approached this topic as an outsider. I had no personal connections with any of the participants. Furthermore, I am a domestic student with no experience as a student-athlete, tennis player, or collegiate coach. As I designed the study, I used my limited knowledge of the topic to prepare appropriate interview guides for my semi-structured interviews. As I gathered data I often reflected on my evolving understanding of the topic and consequently adjusted my interview questions when necessary. During data analysis, I compared the information my participant’s provided to my previous understanding of the topic and reflected on how my understanding of ISA recruitment had changed over time. Although I was still an outsider, I now had a much greater understanding of this topic and well as professional, international, junior, and intercollegiate tennis.

Limitations

This study intentionally only includes the experiences of head men’s and women’s tennis coaches, a tennis administrator, and ISAs who play tennis at NCAA Division I institutions in the United States that sponsor either men’s and women’s tennis. Consequently, the study is not representative of all tennis coaches and international student-athletes in the United States. Specifically, it may not reflect the recruitment of ISAs competing at the NCAA Division II and III levels, the NAIA level, or Junior
College levels. This sampling may limit the generalizability of the study; however, as Creswell (2013) explained “particularity rather than generalizability is the hallmark of qualitative research” (p. 193).
Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how NCAA Division I men’s and women’s tennis coaches recruit ISAs, and how ISAs secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams. In this study, doing recruiting and being recruited were viewed as two different but interrelated phenomena. Accordingly, the experiences of coaches and ISAs were explored to understand where they intersected or diverged in order to answer the two primary research questions that guided this study:

1. How do NCAA Division I tennis coaches recruit international student-athletes?
2. How do international student-athletes secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams?

Participants were chosen based on their experiences either as a recruiter of ISAs or as an ISA that had been previously recruited. A phenomenological framework was used to investigate these questions and analyze the data that was produced through semi-structured interviews. Efforts were made to ensure the interview process was convenient for all participants. Consequently, two one-on-one interviews were completed via the web conferencing platform GotoWebinar, 10 one-on-one interviews where completed via phone calls, one one-on-one interview was conducted in person, and one group interview was conducted in person. All interviews were semi-structured and conducted in English. A series of follow-up questions were sent to each participant via email. The data I gathered from the interviews was analyzed using Creswell’s (2007) six-step approach for analyzing phenomenological data. This approach is fundamentally based on the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method that Moustakas (1994) discussed.
Themes and Subthemes

Each participant’s lived experiences as he or she related to the phenomena of doing recruiting or being recruited were unique to that individual. However, as I reviewed and analyzed the data, two major themes and three subthemes that expressed participants’ shared experiences as they related to these separate yet interconnected phenomena emerged. These two major themes were (a) the recruitment process and (b) the significance of an athletic scholarship. Within the first major theme, the recruitment process, three sub-themes emerged. The three sub-themes were: (a) the use of recruiting agencies; (b) the importance of word of mouth recruiting and referrals; and (c) the significance of the Universal Tennis Rating System (UTR).

These themes do more than simply illustrate each individual’s experiences. Collectively they illustrate how NCAA Division I tennis coaches recruit ISAs and how ISAs secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams.

The Recruitment Process

Each participant was asked to discuss his or her experiences as they related to either recruiting ISAs or being recruited. Coaches discussed the recruitment process and described the tools or methods they used to recruit ISAs while ISAs shared the tools and resources they used to identify college tennis opportunities in the United States and market their tennis skills to collegiate coaches. For coaches, recruitment is a continuous four-phase cycle. This cycle begins when a coach identifies a prospective ISA and ends when he or she offers a position on the team and/or tennis scholarship. In between these two phases of the cycle, coaches evaluate prospective ISAs to gauge their talent level and
contact them to advise them of athletic and academic opportunities while exploring the prospective ISA’s level of interest.

Figure 3. The recruitment cycle for tennis coaches

For ISAs, the process is a series of steps that begins when an ISA identifies potential tennis opportunities in the United States and ends when he or she makes a final decision and selects a university in the United States. In between these two steps an ISA (or their agency) is either contacted by tennis coaches in the United States or makes contact with tennis coaches in the United States and evaluates the tennis programs and universities that these coaches represent.
Figure 4. The recruitment process for international student-athletes

How do NCAA Division I tennis coaches recruit ISAs?

When they were asked to describe how they recruited ISAs, two veteran coaches (Brett and Adam) who each have more than 30 years of coaching and recruiting experience at both mid-major and Power Five levels began by describing how they identified, evaluated, and contacted prospective ISAs during the “pre-internet” era. Later they joined other coaches as they discussed the resources and methods they used to discover and recruit ISAs in the era of global internet access. A careful evaluation of both pre-internet and current recruiting processes and procedures showed that although the processes coaches used to identify, evaluate, and contact players has remained the same, the “technological globalization” and “internet revolution” (Kirk & Weaver, 2018, para. 32) that have taken place over the last three decades have changed the tools and resources they used to complete this process.
Pre-internet recruiting practices.

Before the internet became widely available, coaches did not have instant access to tools and resources that helped them identify, evaluate, and contact players. Describing how he recruited ISAs as the men’s head coach at a Power Five school in the 1980s and 1990s, Brett recalled:

It was a little bit more difficult and challenging to find results and find out how good players were. You had to kind of go word of mouth and call people and dig around....When I was at the [school name] you might get a letter or you might know a former player and you contacted them and said, hey, any players that you know of that are looking to go to school that you would recommend?

Echoing these sentiments, Adam explained:

Before the internet you would write and get countries rankings. You'd have to get a letter from them, or you'd have to have an international kid on your team and say, hey, do you have some buddies that are pretty good that want to come over? You could do it that way or you could fly over to Sweden or somewhere and go watch their junior national championships, which wasn't done that much.

Based on this information the recruitment process was further fleshed out for those coaches doing recruitment in the pre-internet days. Figure 5 shows that during that time coaches relied on either letters or word of mouth referrals to identify players. It also shows that coaches then evaluated a player using his or her country rankings or on some rare occasions by watching the prospective ISA play in a tournament. Contact between players and coaches was carried out through letters or long distance phone calls.
Current recruiting practices.

A careful evaluation of both pre-internet and current recruiting processes and procedures shows that although many of the tools and resources coaches used to identify, evaluate, and contact players have evolved along with changing technology, the overall cycle remains the same. As Figure 6 shows, letters have been replaced by email and country rankings have been replaced by new web based tools and videos. Furthermore, letters and long distance phone calls have been replaced by social media and Skype. However, word of mouth recruiting was still identified as a relevant and important tool.
Laura is a relatively young coach with less than five years of experience as a head coach at a mid-major school in the western United States. Consequently, she is still establishing herself as a coach and a recruiter. When she was asked to describe how she recruits ISAs she explained, “We kind of have a system going on where both myself and my assistant are full on recruiting all year long...” Her “active recruiting” (where she is actively seeking people out) is done during the summer, while the rest of the year she is “getting emails from players, from coaches, from academies, from people that run showcases, from everywhere.” According to her she is “probably getting as many as 50
emails a day.” She passes these emails along to her assistant coach who serves as the initial screener, unless the email comes from someone she knows. Once the emails have been evaluated, Laura’s assistant “gets in touch with them via email, and then phone.” Laura then explained that if they have a potential recruit they are really interested in, she enters as the “closer.” She then explained the next steps in the cycle:

So, once we have someone that we're really interested in, she's seen them play, or I've seen them play, and we've talked a couple of times, we'll do either an in person, depending on where they are… or we'll talk over video conference. And then if they are a great fit, we'll get them in for a visit and kind of see where we're at. Then we ideally offer while they're either on their visit or after their visit, it depends on the person.

Aaron is an international coach, who like Laura, has less than five years of experience as a head coach. When he was asked to discuss how he discovers and recruits international players, he described resources and steps that fit the recruiting cycle outlined in Figure 5. He began by explaining that he has “three sources.” The first source he identified is international showcases. According to him:

One is you go to these showcases. You get invited to go all over Europe or the U.S. and see the kids that are playing so you can look at them and decide if these are the types of kids you want to look at. European showcases are something that I want to go to more of, because that's my main market for recruiting.

The second source he identified was word of mouth recruiting or referrals. He continued:

Two, which has been the most successful for me in my very little experience, is word of mouth. A lot of the kids that I've recruited talk with other friends of theirs. So, we must be doing something right if a kid is telling their friends hey, why don't you come over and play with us. That's been a big thing for me. A lot of my recruiting, is hey, do you have a friend back in Italy or in Portugal, or Taiwan who wants to play tennis. I get a lot of recommendations from my own players.

The final source he identified is recruiting agents. He explained:
The third thing is agents. You have these agents. . .they're trying to upsell the players and they’re trying to tell me that, hey this player is better than what they look like or what not. But what you're doing is you're going to these recruiting agents to get a good idea of which ones you want to work with, and you make almost like a relationship with them. Then you can use them to branch out and find other agents and other people. So, those are the three sources.

Aaron then explained how he moves onto the second and third steps in the cycle: evaluation and contact. He explained:

Then you do some research on their results [ISAs], see what kind of matches they're winning, what level they're playing, and then you reach out to them. You can use either Facebook or Instagram to start a conversation, ask them if they're interested, and let them know about your school. Then you have a few Skype calls to get to know them and get a feel for what type of questions they're asking you and what kind of people they are.

Unlike Aaron and Laura, Alex is an established coach who has been recruiting internationally for more than ten years. During his time at a mid-major university in the Midwest, he has built a winning women’s tennis program that is consistently ranked in the top 50 of Division I. When he was asked to discuss how he discovers and recruits international players, he also described the resources he used as he completed each of the four steps in the cycle. He began by explaining that he “keeps a really good database of all the rankings and different tournaments.” According to him he is “constantly checking results and rankings and adding to the database, updating it for each country, and trying to keep a list...” Next he explained that he will:

Periodically contact them [ISAs]—usually through Facebook and write everyone who's at an appropriate recruiting age and just introducing myself. More and more now, players know a lot about college tennis, you know, they've either got friends here, or they've already been contacted by a lot of coaches, or they've got recruiting agencies that are trying to help place them in school that are also trying to court them. So, they're getting better versed in what we have to offer. But some, players don't really know much about it. So, we explain the opportunity here and what sets our school apart from others.
In evaluating these conversations and through a comparison of Figures 5 and 6 we can see that the recruitment cycle has not changed over the last three decades. What has changed are many of the tools or resources coaches used to identify, evaluate, and contact recruits. Coaches now receive emails, not letters, and oftentimes these emails are sent by agencies rather than individuals. Rather than requesting and waiting for physical copies of a recruit’s results and rankings, coaches used web-based tools and databases that are readily available to them. While Alex indicated that he used web-based tools to build his database and check results, Aaron explained that he used them to check results, discover the level the prospective ISAs are playing at, and identify the types of matches prospective ISAs are playing and winning. However, the one tool or resource that has remained constant is word of mouth recruiting or referrals.

**How do ISAs secure positions on NCAA Division I tennis teams?**

ISAs were asked to describe how they secured a position on an NCAA Division I tennis team. Each participant’s responses show their experiences are unique to his or her life and circumstances; however, some of the responses also show that many of the participants had some shared experiences. While the recruitment process is a continual cycle for coaches, for ISAs it is more like a process that ends when they arrive on campus to begin practicing and attending class.

Isabella is a senior from Spain who currently competes at a Division I school in the southeastern United States. Unlike all the other ISAs in this study, she transferred from a Division II school to a Division I school. While many ISAs may choose to transfer because they feel they selected the wrong school or coach, this was not the case with Isabella. She transferred because after her freshman year her school’s state Board of
Regents consolidated her school into a larger Division I school in the region.

Consequently, to continue competing as an ISA she had to find a new school. So, in a sense she was recruited twice. At the time of her transfer she had scholarship offers from several large Division I universities; however, she chose to remain with her coach and transfer to his new university. Interestingly, Isabella was originally recruited by this NCAA Division I school but she chose her NCAA Division II school instead. When Isabella was asked how she learned about college tennis opportunities in the United States, she explained:

> So, we had a few guys in my club that were three or four years older than me and they came to the U.S. So, they were coming back home and explaining to us what it was like to live here and be a student-athlete. We also had a lot of agencies that were contacting us through Facebook or email and sometimes at competitions they were talking to us about all this stuff. This is how I learned about the U.S.

Olivia is a sophomore from the Netherlands, and she is currently Isabella’s teammate. While Isabella transferred into institution B, it was Olivia’s first choice; however, Olivia was recruited by a coach who resigned before she arrived on campus. So, while this school was her first selection, the coach was not. Whereas, Isabella’s coach was her first choice, but her current school was not. Olivia was asked when she started to think about playing tennis in the United States. She explained:

> It was actually pretty late. There's an agency that recruited me, an agent who brings all kinds of athletes to the states, all kinds of sports. I received a Facebook message from the agency asking if I was interested in going to America. Then we started talking to him in, I think it was November or December 2016. So, I was already 17 years old. We had a conversation about going to America and what I would need to do. That was when I started thinking about coming here and playing college tennis. But before that, I actually didn't know about it.

Sofia is a graduate student from Spain who attends a Division I university in the western United States. She recently completed her tennis career at this university and is
now an Assistant Coach. While discussing her background she explained how she learned about opportunities in the United States and why she chose to play collegiate tennis. She explained:

I tried to play pro tennis, back home, but I didn't achieve the goals I wanted. So, after a while they [her club coaches] asked me, why don't you just go to the states and you can continue studying and playing tennis at the same time—which you cannot do back home. At the beginning I refused, I was like, I really want to go pro. I had a feeling like, if I go there, I'm just quitting like going pro. But I always liked studying and I wanted to have a degree, it was always on my mind. So, then I said, okay, let's give it a try. I started the process with an agent and then I decided it was probably the best choice for me to come here to study and continue playing tennis.

Sara is a student from Canada who attends a Division I university in the western United States where she played tennis with Sofia. She is the only ISA who is a native English speaker and she is also the only ISA who committed to a university without receiving an athletic scholarship. When she was asked to describe how she learned about college tennis opportunities in the United States she explained:

I had a bunch of friends who were a year older than me that went. So, if I had any questions, that's who I would ask. My coach at the time, knew a little bit about it, but not that much. And then there were some friends who were doing the same thing as me. So, we would just ask our older friends. That's how we figured some stuff out too.

Liam is a junior from Bonaire who currently plays for a Division I school in the eastern United States. He is the only men’s tennis player who participated in the research study and he is also the only participant who attended high school in the United States. While each of the other ISAs in the study were specifically recruited to play college tennis in the United States, his recruitment began when a high school tennis academy recruited him to come and play for them. Consequently, he left home at the age of 15 and played high school tennis in the United States for three years before entering college.
Like Olivia, Liam does not play for the coach who recruited him. Before she left the Netherlands, Olivia was aware that a coaching change had occurred, and she still chose to attend institution B. However, Liam was not told about the coaching change on his campus until he arrived for orientation. In fact, since his initial recruitment, Liam has had four different coaches at Institution G. When Liam was asked when he first thought about playing college tennis in the United States he responded:

So, when I was like 13, we had other people from the island already in college and also people from Curaçao which, is our neighbor island, which we are very close with. So that's when we decided, that's what I'm doing.

He was then asked if these other individuals from his island were also recruited to play high school tennis for an academy or whether they were recruited to play college tennis. He explained, “Yeah, they were all in the states before. So, to my knowledge, no one has been directly recruited from the island.”

**Recruiting agencies.**

Many coaches and ISAs identified recruiting agencies when they were either discussing how they recruited ISAs or how they were recruited. The excerpts below will explore recruiting agencies and the niche they have carved out for themselves in collegiate tennis. Despite their growth, relatively little is known about them and how they operate. Many coaches identified agencies as a resource they used or were aware of for recruiting ISAs (coaches did not mention agencies in relation to domestic recruitment). All three ISAs from Europe reported that they used an agency during the recruitment process.
How do coaches use recruiting agencies?

Each coach in the study either discussed how they used agencies or acknowledged they are a resource used by other coaches. Several coaches also discussed how they feel about them. Some argued that they are a valuable tool that helps parents and students while others explained they are concerned about the motives and practices of recruiting agencies.

When Aaron was specifically asked about the primary resources he used to discover and recruit prospective ISAs he explained, “The big one is these recruiting agencies. There's three or four people that I've kind of built up a relationship with over the last few years. I trust their judgement.” When he was asked about recruiting agencies, Brett explained:

We interact with some of them. I don't know all of them, but there are a few that I'll call, and they'll call me, and we'll speak at length about the players. Usually they know the player much better than I do. They’ve seen them play a lot more and they know them personally.

When Adam was asked if he used recruiting agencies, he described how he believes they are used by coaches. According to him:

Well I think everybody's probably used a recruiting agency, but it's not like you really use them. What happens is they send you an email and say, I have a good player, and would you be interested? So that's what happens, but it's not like, I don't think most coaches just, say hey, go find us a good player.

For Adam, academic qualifications are as important as athletic qualifications because he coaches a men’s tennis team at an Ivy League school with strict entrance standards. Consequently, he explained:

You know the recruiting agency sends you an email with a list of a couple guys they're representing, and you can kind of pick somebody that you like or looks interesting to you. So, I don't really use recruiting agencies a lot and most of the
times it's, I would say, 90% of the kids that the recruiting agencies try to push on you either aren't good enough academically or aren't good enough athletically. So, it's very rare...it's less than 10% of the time that they'll send you a guy that can make your team and qualify academically.

While explaining how he identified and recruited his top three players for next year, Chad specifically identified agencies as a key resource. He explained that although he had to sell the recruits on the school and program, he used his contacts at agencies in Germany and Spain to connect him with his top recruits. He stated:

So, the [country name] girl, she's probably one of the top four or five players graduating this year from [country name]. I had a relationship with an agency in [country name] that helps represent the top tennis players. That agency is called [agency name] and the owner of [agency name] is a [Division II school name] grad. So, one of his things every year was to find the top guy or the top girl and see if his alma mater could somehow use those top kids...so, we were lucky enough to get one of the top six or seven girls last year and like I said, I think we're probably getting the second, third, or fourth best girl from [country name] that's graduating this year. But we were introduced to her by [agency name] ...The two [country name] girls [are] both the same scenario... I worked with another company called [agency name], and [agency name] is based out of [country name]. So, they helped me get those two girls as well as others over the years.

How do coaches feel about recruiting agencies?

Although each of the coaches in the study were aware of agencies, some indicated they believe agencies often reserve their most talented athletes for Power Five schools, or they expressed strong concerns about the motives and practices of recruiting agencies. While Adam argued parents and students do not need agencies others argued they are a valuable tool that helps parents and students.

Over the last decade Alex has developed a women’s tennis program that is “consistently in the top 50 of DI.” However, he felt like these achievements are overlooked by agents who often reserve their most talented athletes for Power Five schools. According to him:
My experience has been, I mean, we're consistently in the top 50 of DI and the players that I'm able to get or that I've recruited are certainly capable of playing at a lot of Power Five schools. Those recruiting agencies know that their best players are good enough to play at a Power Five, but they just don't know my program is successful. They know our program well, but...they just tend to steer their best players to some of those Power Five schools. Then they've got the next level of players that they say are good for a mid-major school. And that may be true, but we're one of the best mid-major schools, so it's not the right fit for us. So, I go straight to the players and our players have done a good job helping me recruit some of their friends or people from back home. So, I just kind of do it on my own.

Like Alex, Aaron also indicated that he believes agencies often reserve their most talented athletes for Power Five schools. He stated:

A lot of times these agencies are trying to upsell or their trying to get you a kid who maybe won't start somewhere but may work their way up while holding all the good kids for the big schools...I am in touch with those agencies. They do send me their low tier kids. It is a little frustrating because they don't always send you their best kids. You kind of have to push them and say like, hey, I want somebody who's a little higher Universal Tennis Ranking (UTR). I want somebody who’s got a few more wins.

Like Alex and Aaron, Laura is a women’s tennis coach at a mid-major university.

When she was specifically asked if she works with agencies’ she expressed concerns about the motives and practices of recruiting agencies. She explained:

I don't really enjoy working with agencies because I think they're all in it for the money and not for the good of the kids. There's a few that are trying to help because they've been through the experience and their trying to help these kids get to great places and get an education, but they're really few and far between. So, for my graduate school final project I actually created a business or recruiting service. I was planning to open it up in South Africa because they don't have any down there. The ones that they do have, this is from working with three different student athletes from South Africa, are just trying to take your money and they aren't even doing the process correctly. They don't know better because they don't have anyone to really follow. So, they go through these agencies, and they aren't really doing a great job, or they oversell because they're just trying to get their bonus. So right now, I'd say I try not to use recruiting services unless I know the people that run them, because I think they have some ulterior motives for themselves and for their business. They put their business first, before the student-athletes that are using them.
Other coaches indicated that because it is the agents’ job to place athletes at American schools you need to do your own research and make sure the players they are promoting are the right player for your program. While discussing his interactions with agencies Brett explained:

It's their job to help place these kids, so you have to be careful with them and not be oversold. They're being paid to help find spots for these kids, so you have to take some things with a grain of salt. You got to really do your own research on top of what they're telling you. You can't just take their word for it and say, okay, that's my guy. You've got to do your due diligence.

This is a sentiment that was also echoed by Aaron who explained:

You can't just rely on one or two agencies because those agencies are talking to 10 or 15 different schools. Those agencies are getting kids and they're in the business of providing kids...they've got a great tennis player, but what kind of a person is that kid, right? Is he or she, are they going to work well in a team? Are they there just for tennis? If somebody is there just for tennis that kind of makes me nervous, because I think you're missing the whole point of college athletics or college tennis...there's some bigger schools where there's a lot of money involved, I get it, but tennis is, you’re in a very good place where you get to compete and not have to worry too much about anything else.

Later, when he was asked how he specifically felt about recruiting agencies, he explained:

I think they get you great access to a whole bunch of kids that you might never of heard of, but they are another tool in your arsenal of recruiting....I feel like what these agencies also do is they lie and sometimes they lie to the players, sometimes they lie to the coaches or you know, and not all of them, but some of them just kind of inflate the information or tell a kid something just to get them to sign. I just feel like once the agent kind of gets you in touch with the kids, they should back off. Whatever commission they're getting, they should get, but I would rather deal with an athlete. In some cases, I've spoken to athletes and these agents are sending me an email going, hey, how dare you talk to this kid without me present. For me personally, this takes away from the experience that I'm trying to create. These are not professionals. These are amateurs. These are kids who, if they go through an agency, and the agent is just to make money, it's going to be a rip off for everyone.
However, Aaron later clarified that he does not believe all agencies are bad. While discussing recruiting agencies and the role they play in international recruitment, he explained:

Again, like I said, most of these guys are doing a fantastic job. Most of them are unbelievable, they'll send great kids, but I just feel uncomfortable, maybe because I wasn't, I didn't go through that process. My recruitment was a one-on-one process. So, I prefer that. But, it's a great thing...it's a mutually beneficial thing that people are making a living helping kids go to school. I think that is a good place to be in. But I think it's just like anything else. In about 10 or 15 years you'll see the good side and the bad side, because I think like the last 5 or 10 years it's kind of picked up a little bit.

The big schools, they don't go through these agencies, the big schools, they go to the kids. Like, I'm pretty sure UCLA is not going through an agency, I don't know, but I think those guys know who they're targeting. And they go after those kids when they're 16. So, it's a different world for them then it is for us.

Laura was asked how coaches generally feel about recruiting agencies. Like Aaron, she indicated she feels they are a service that is primarily used by smaller or mid-major programs. According to her:

The smaller schools or the mid majors tend to still go through more of just like oh, I got an email from this person and they keep sending me emails, let's actually look into it. Versus an Ohio State who can get whoever they want. They're not going to use a recruiting service. They're going to go out and see. So, it really just depends on the program. I think there's a lot of older coaches out there who have been around and seen the progression of it. I can tell you, when I was being recruited, I would have never even dreamed of using a service because I think it diminishes what you're going for...you become kind of a cookie cutter, like here I am, I'm the same as everyone else they're promoting, here you go. So, I don't know, but generally, I think more mid-majors or smaller schools, definitely DII, DIII and NAIA schools, are using them.

Like Aaron, Brett believes that agencies provide several valuable services for parents and ISAs. While discussing the valuable services they provide, he explained:
I don't think they're bad. I think that this world of college tennis has opened up to the world and there's a service out there to help some of these kids that don't know what the SAT is. They don't know what the TOEFL is. They don't know that they need to take certain classes and make sure that they graduate on time or that they can only play six months until their clock starts if they continue to compete longer than six months past matriculation. So, there are a lot of questions and confusion, even for the U.S. kids. They don't know a lot of the rules and regulations, so you can imagine international kids speaking a different language. They have no idea of what it takes. And so, if they're going to come here, I think that a service can be very beneficial and provide a lot of answers to the questions that the families may have.

Brett’s thoughts were contrasted by Adam’s who argued while agencies are not bad, they are not necessary. Adam believed that parents and students do not need an agency because they can do what a recruiting service does. He explained:

I think a lot of times the kid can do what the recruiting service does. I mean, you know, all I really care about is just send me your ranking. Send me your results and send me your academic scores and that's really all I need, and any kid could do that for himself. But I think some of the recruiting agencies seem [to] want to make the process appear a lot more complicated than it is so that people really need their services. They don't. If your kids a tennis player and he wants to go, pick out a bunch of schools he wants to go to, send them his resume, send them all his results, send them his SAT scores, his GPA, what classes he's taking, and what terms he’s going to be playing, and what his ranking is, and what his UTR is. That's it, the recruiting service does nothing for you. They don't. Plus, nobody's going to believe the recruiting service when they call and say, oh this kid is great. He's only a 10 UTR, but he's playing like a 14. Nobody believes that anyway.

Each of the coaches in the study were aware of agencies, some indicated they used them while others indicated that they chose not to use them because they believed that agencies often reserved their most talented athletes for Power Five schools or because they were concerned about agencies’ motives and practices. Yet, others believed they were a valuable tool that helped parents and students.
How did ISAs use recruiting agencies?

While the experiences of each ISA, as they relate to the recruitment process, are unique, all three ISAs from Europe indicated that they used a recruiting agency. However, each of the ISAs who used an agency reported he or she discovered an agency in a different manner. Isabella, reported that she was contacted by agents via social media; however, she signed with an agency that attended tournaments she was competing in. Olivia, signed with an agency that contacted her via Facebook while Sofía’s coach introduced her to her agent. Furthermore, while Isabella and Olivia used large recognizable agencies, it is unclear how established Sofía’s agent (or agency??) was.

Isabella first identified her recruiting agency when she was asked how she learned about collegiate tennis opportunities in the United States. Later when she was asked about the factors that led her to select her first university, she once again discussed her agency recalling:

I really didn't know a lot about [school name], but there was a guy in the agency that brought me here who was a former player from [school name]. He explained to me that they are a really good team and a winning team. Like everyone wanted to win the national championship and that the school was really nice. So, when I was talking to [the] coach I also liked him a lot. So. I just decided to choose [school name].

When she was asked how she contacted her recruiting agency, she explained “They start contacting you, like three or four, and then you just decide the one that you want.” She explained that she used the same agency as most of her friends. This agency had a strong connection with the coach from the university she eventually attended. After she explained how she discovered and selected an agency, Isabella was asked to describe what the agency helped her out with: According to her:
First, we had our meeting and they ask me what my goals were, if I wanted to go more for tennis or go more for studies and see what my point was. They helped me make a video of me playing, then they had me mail a paper with all the results that I had during my high school, then they put this video and the results on a webpage where a lot of coaches could see. So, then the coaches contacted the agency and me and they [her agency] helped me to choose which universities where better. They also helped me with all the paperwork before coming to the U.S.

Although she did not provide any specific details regarding her financial arrangement with the agency, she did confirm that she paid the agency for its services.

Like Isabella, Olivia indicated the agency she worked with contacted her first. However, while Isabella was contacted at a tournament she was playing in, Olivia was contacted via Facebook by an agency that is based in Belgium. According to her:

I knew some Dutch girls that were in America, but I didn't really have any idea what they were doing there. I just knew that they were playing tennis and that's basically it. I didn't know much about it until I really started talking to the agency who supported me. Before that I didn't have any idea. I wanted to go there, but it was not an option in my mind. I was more thinking, what am I going to do here? I didn't know what I wanted to study and in the Netherlands’, you don't have the option to be undeclared. You have to choose before you go to university. So, I was thinking, do I want to travel? Do I want to study? Do I want to just play tennis? And then we started talking to the agency, me and my parents, and he told me about all the options I had here like playing college tennis while being in college and studying and getting a degree. I thought that combination was amazing, because in Europe we don't have that option. You either play sports or go to university.

Later, as she discussed her parents, she indicated they were nervous about her coming to the United States because she had never been here, and she would come without ever visiting first. However, she explained that many of their fears were assuaged after they talked with a female ISA they knew from the Netherlands. This ISA had come to play tennis the previous year. Interestingly, this ISA worked with the same agency as Olivia. According to Olivia, she initially planned to attend a school where she did not
know anyone. However, she later decided to attend the same university as the ISA she knew from home. She explained “I actually preferred not knowing anyone. Just because you get a whole new experience and I wanted to have a whole new experience like not knowing anyone, figuring things out myself, making new friends and all that....”

Unlike Isabella and Olivia, Sofia was already studying and playing professional tennis in Spain when she decided to play college tennis in the United States. However, once she “started the process with an agent” she decided college tennis was the best choice for her. When she was specifically asked about the agency she used and the services they provided she explained:

It was so fast. I really didn't have much time. I did all the processing in like three months and people normally take a year or a year and a half. So, my coach actually contacted him [the agent]. It was like a friend, a very close friend. So, he helped me with all the paperwork.

Each ISA from Europe indicated that they used a recruiting agency. Although their individual experiences as the relate to the recruitment process were unique, all three ISAs indicated that agencies played an important role in informing them about opportunities that were available to them in the United States, marketing their athletic skills, and helping them navigate the recruitment and eligibility processes. These experiences were unlike those of Emma and Liam who spearheaded their own recruitment. Yet, even the experiences of Liam and Emma diverged. Liam reported that the tennis coach at his academy reached out to coaches on his behalf and established a dialogue whereas Emma reported that she identified potential schools, prepared her own recruiting profile, and contacted coaches.

**Word of mouth recruiting and referrals.**
While word of mouth recruiting was an important resource coaches used in the pre-internet era, it was not phased out like letters. In fact, even with the arrival of the internet and the growth of recruiting agencies, this was still a resource several coaches and ISAs mentioned. Coaches still identified word of mouth recruiting as a valuable resource they used to recruit ISAs while ISAs identified word of mouth recruiting as a resource they relied on when they were deciding where to play college tennis. Word of mouth recruiting did not just involve one student reaching out to another, in at least one case an agency referred a prospective ISA to a certain school, while in another case a coach asked a player to contact a prospective ISA that she knew back home.

Alex has built a very successful program in a mid-major school in the midwestern United States. Although the school is in a mid-level metropolitan area, it is a region that he claimed is relatively unknown by most prospective ISAs. When he was asked how important word of mouth recruiting has been for him throughout his career, he explained:

I mean we've gotten some players that for sure I would have had no chance to get if it weren't for the fact that somebody on my team knew the player. They either were friends with them or just knew them from traveling the junior and the low level professional tour where they played doubles together a couple times or played each other a couple times and now the player that we're now recruiting says okay, I'm familiar with someone there, I can ask them about it, or I just feel more comfortable going to a place where I know someone, which obviously makes sense.

Alex later continued:

It's important. Any program that’s successful is going to lean on, no matter where the players come from, former players for recommendations...if I'm recruiting a player from a country, I'll say, we either currently have, or have had players from that country and I’ll reach out to them and ask them questions. If we get a player on a visit, oftentimes we currently have a junior or senior on our team [from the same country], and while they're probably not going to know somebody three or four years behind them, they’ll know them by name, and it'll at least offer that level of comfort to that potential recruit that, okay, I kind of know, somebody
there, that's a big part....We've had three players, each two years apart from the same exact club in [country name], and it's a pretty small part of the country, a small city, and we've basically gotten the best player from that part of the country three times in a row. And it started with one and then the other two were just, not that I didn't have to do any work, but it was easy. It was just like, she's coming with me, and then the next one was like yep, she's coming with me.

When he was then asked if his current players generally talk or text with prospective players during the recruitment process, Alex explained:

Really only if they knew one of our players or maybe, I mean, if they're from the same country, there's a high likelihood that they know them or at least are familiar with them. So, not if it's just kind of somebody that doesn't have any prior connection with anyone on our team, at least not until you know maybe after they've come on a visit then yes, they'll keep in touch.

Aaron is a coach at a mid-major program in a rural region of the western United States. Consequently, when he was asked to describe the most important resources he used, he identified word of mouth recruiting as one of his most valuable tools. He expressed this sentiment when he stated:

Generally, up until now, it's been, kids who have kind of reached out to us, I've been lucky in that sense, for whatever reason. The two girls I've signed for next year already came to me, they wanted to transfer in, because the team has competed and they like what we do on the tennis court. So, you know, from teams outside of our conference, big, you know, Power Five kids were like, hey, you know what, I don't like it here can we come to you? And so, I take that as a compliment, that there's kids out there that are willing to take a step down in terms of money and all that stuff but wanting to compete. So, I think it's not, it's I'm more of an organic like, kids will kind of, you'll, attract the type of people based on what you've been doing. So, I've been very lucky that my athletes have recommended this school to their friends. And most of them without, any publicity from my end or anything. They are just kind of like, hey, my friend is having a great time at [school name], they're playing hard, they're winning, they're doing well in school, what else do you need? So, I think that's been my number one source of recruitment.
Word of mouth recruitment is not limited to referrals from current or former players. When he was asked how he was able to find and secure his recruits for the upcoming season, Chad explained:

I had a relationship with an agency in [country name] that helps represent the top tennis players....And so, one of his things every year was to find the top guy or the top girl and see if his alma mater could somehow use those top kids...And so, we were lucky enough to get one of the top six or seven girls last year. Like I said, I think we're probably getting the second third or fourth best girl from [country name] that's graduating this year.... The two [country name] girls both the same scenario.... So, they, are kind of friendly. They came on separate weekends, but they know each other pretty well. They're also friends with the girl I brought from [Division II school name] who's from [country name]. So, they all know each other pretty well. And they thought, wouldn’t it be great if we went together, especially now that we know that this really good [country name] girl's coming, who a lot of the girls know because of the international tennis scene. And so, their idea was, well, we can come in as three really strong freshman and make a big difference.

While coaches identified word of mouth recruiting as a valuable resource they used to recruit ISAs, some ISAs identified word of mouth recruiting as a resource they relied on when they were deciding where to play college tennis.

When Isabella was asked about the factors that led her to select her first university, she explained:

I really didn't know a lot about [school name], but there was a guy in the agency that brought me here who was a former player from [school name]. He explained to me that they are a really good team and a winning team. Like everyone wanted to win the national championship and that the school was really nice. So, when I was talking to coach, I also liked him a lot. So, I just decided to choose [school name].

When Olivia was trying to decide where she would play college tennis, she reported she was contacted by a female ISA that she knew from home who was currently
playing tennis for a Division I school in the United States. When she was asked why this
ISA decided to reach out to her she explained:

Her coach asked if she knew me and what kind of player I was and what kind of
girl I was like. Their coach didn't want any girls who were known to be like not
good or not nice or whatever. So, her coach, the one who recruited me, asked her
to reach out to me and talk to me, so we would call her and text her or whatever.

Olivia then explained what types of questions she was asking this ISA. According to her:

I basically asked the same, I asked her the same questions that I asked the coach,
because I wanted to know both sides of the story. I asked her how it was to be a
student-athlete, if school was harder, if it was hard to manage your time, if she
had a hard time with other things, how she experienced the university herself, and
how things worked here.... So basically, the same questions that I asked the coach,
but from the athletes’ perspective.

Liam’s case is unique, because he was first recruited to play high school tennis in
the United States when he was 15 years old. However, as he explained, he was not the
first member of his family to do this. According to him, his older brother left and
attended the academy for a year before his parents agreed to let him go. He reported that
his parents let him go because his older brother was having a positive experience. Once
he began to look for college tennis opportunities, Liam and his brother once again relied
on each other. Liam’s older brother graduated from high school a year before him, so he
was already playing college tennis when Liam was being recruited. However, according
to Liam, he and his brother were able to get a deal in place that allowed his older brother
to transfer to the school Liam would be attending. They have now played three years of
college tennis together at the same Division I school.

The Universal Tennis Rating System (UTR).

Technological advances now allow coaches to make real time data-based
decisions. Rather than waiting for someone to send them a physical copy of a country’s
rankings or an athlete’s results, they can now identify a prospective athletes UTR score and use the score to compare them against other prospective recruits. When Gary was asked to identify tools or resources that have contributed to the expansion of ISA recruitment, he immediately identified UTR. He expressed this by explaining:

The other thing that's of late is UTR. No doubt UTR is the standard that all the coaches are using to evaluate players. And so now you have a pretty reliable tool that's comparing every player in the world from a level-based system and so a 13.1 American or a 13.2 international, the coaches think well he's a 13.2 he's a better player.

When Alex was specifically asked to explain what resources he used to build his database, he stated:

Well, I mean now UTR is getting more and more accurate. So that's always a good go-to to begin with…then it's just you know I'll look through their results and even if there's, you know, some close losses to good players that can kind of stand out that may not be noteworthy to another coach, that's kind of how I've been able to find some players under the radar a little bit. You know a player that maybe doesn't have the funding or just doesn't have the flexibility to [go] with whatever their educational situation is, to play a ton of tournaments and maybe they only play a few tournaments and kinda get some bad draws, and just run into some tough players, but they played them close. And then they kind of disappeared off the international scene. So that players UTR isn't going to be as high as it could or should be because they don't have, the number of matches. So, like I said, UTR is a good starting point. But it's not the end all be all in determining someone's level. So, I'll look a lot closer at their results and if there's interest on both sides I’ll say well can I get a video.

While discussing the differences that he’s seen since his recruitment in the early 2000s, Aaron specifically mentioned UTR. He explained:

Now you have unbelievable tools that give you perspective and give you some sort of a benchmark. There's a UTR system that measures stuff… it really kind of judges every tennis match possible, who's competed at a certain level at a single scale, whether it's men's or women's athletes so that helps.

When he was asked to describe the primary tools or resources, he used to find prospective ISAs Adam replied:
The primary ways that we find our players are, some of the kids write us, but basically, I go to tournaments and I see the kids play and I use a combination of tennis recruiting.net and UTR to look up the kids to see their results. So, I would say that's pretty much it. Go watch the kids play at some of the national events and look at their rankings and follow all their results on tennisrecruiting.net and the UTR site.

When he was asked to discuss UTR and explain its importance to him as a recruiter Adam explained:

Well I'm not sure that, unless it's really high, UTR never really gets you a scholarship or never really gets you a recruiting spot, but UTR gets you eliminated. So, if you're a big-time program your top 25 in the country and somebody's not even a 12 on the UTR there's not really much investigating left to do. You just kind of pass. Whereas before everybody could have some country ranking and could come up with a resume that looked pretty good, but UTR really kind of simplified data. So, as I said, it doesn't get you a scholarship unless you're like a 14. If the kids a 14 you know, the kid can play but if he's a 12 or something you kind of gotta go watch the kid play still.

When Brett was asked how important UTR is for him, he quickly responded that it is the most important “measuring gauge” he used. He described his use of UTR by explaining:

I would say it's emerged, there were other measures of, whether it's their ITF ranking or their ATP ranking, but I would say it's probably the first thing that I look at. I look at a lot of different measuring sticks, but it gives me a basic overview of where they're at with the UTR. Then I start to back that up with other data and then I make some phone calls, you know, what is this kid like, and what not, but I would say it's definitely up there as number one, or tied for number one, as far as a measuring gauge.

Just as coaches were able to identify UTR as a benchmark that they use for recruitment, Liam described his UTR as something that limited his choice of schools. As he recalled this experience, he explained:

I mostly emailed coaches. I emailed a lot of coaches. In tennis, there's this thing called UTR, which is Universal Tennis Ranking. So, my ranking was not super high, but my academic side of it was very high. So, I wanted a good balance. I
always wanted to play DI, so I wanted a good balance between high academics and like mid-level athletics. So, it was very hard for me because I'm also doing engineering and most of the good, the better engineering programs, the top 50, are also top 50 athletic programs. So, it's very hard to find, the right school for me, the right balance.

When Claudia was asked how important the UTR score was during her recruitment Claudia explained that at the time of her recruitment she had no idea what UTR was or even that she had a UTR score. She expressed this stating:

I had no idea what my UTR was because at home we have national rankings. I had no idea about UTR. So, when I was being recruited, I never knew that UTR existed, I had no clue. I learned about it after I was here for like one or two years. And so, as a player, I cannot tell you because for me, I had zero idea, no clue.

She then went onto explain that since she began working as an assistant coach, she had come to understand just how important UTR is for prospective ISAs. She stated:

But now as a coach, it's actually really important. So, the UTR is the only, it's actually pretty accurate for like tennis players. So, in recruiting we look at a lot of, we look at a lot of results in the home country and in the UTR to see how everyone is doing. It's the only fact that we actually have, and we can't make a decision without knowing a player, because a video can be so good or so bad and you don't actually see that person playing. I think the UTR is the most accurate thing for deciding if we want to keep looking at a player or not.

Technological advances now allow coaches to make real time data-based decisions. Rather than waiting for someone to send them a physical copy of a country’s rankings, they can use resources such as a prospective athlete’s UTR score. Coaches acknowledged UTR as their primary data gathering tool while players are beginning to understand that their UTR may be the most important weapon in their arsenal when they enter the arena of collegiate tennis recruiting.
The Importance of Athletic Scholarships

Popp et al. (2009) reported that the value of an athletic scholarship was the most influential factor for ISAs. This finding supported Bale (1991) who identified athletic scholarships as a key motivator. Mazzarol et al. (1997) reported general international students see cost issues as one of the top six factors that influenced decisions to study abroad.

Coaches views of scholarships.

When coaches were asked to describe factor’s they considered to be the most important for prospective ISAs, they quickly identified athletic scholarships as a consideration that was more important than other items such as a school’s academic reputation or location. Most of the ISAs identified athletic scholarships as the most important item for them and their families.

Chad has more than 25 years of experience as a men’s and women’s tennis coach at the NCAA Division I, II, and III levels. Because he previously identified the name or perceived status of a university as a primary factor for domestic student-athletes, he was asked if ISAs are also concerned about a university’s name or academic reputation. He responded:

They are not. It is polar opposite. They would be more likely to take a full scholarship at Eastern Kentucky than they would be to take a 90% scholarship at Louisville. And I've seen it countless dozens of times...especially with women's tennis where everybody pretty much ends up with a full scholarship at the Division I level. But, on the men's side, there can be a great discrepancy. So, a lot of times, the international players will go where the money is. They'll go to where they think they can get a full scholarship, or even cost of attendance.

They'll sooner go to a school where they could possibly pocket an additional $3,000 or $4,000 in cash with a full scholarship than maybe taking a little bit less at a named school. No doubt, no doubt.
A lot of them...if they were going to start school in their country, they probably would go to school for free. Most of the Europeans have opportunities to go and pay no tuition. And if they went to school, in the city they already live in, then there's no room and board. So, they're just living at home and attending university. But obviously, they're not getting the experience of playing athletics

So, a lot of those kids, a lot of the families, don't necessarily put money away from a young age for those kids to go to college. And then especially if they start playing tennis and they become better, they realize, hey, if we can just send them to the states...they'll get a free education and they'll pay for room and board.

He then provided an example of a German student who chose to attend a lesser known school over the University of Miami, Florida because the smaller school offered him a full scholarship.

For example, we had a boy at [school name], a German boy, who came in and as a freshman was the conference player of the year, the rookie of the year. He was ridiculous, just an amazingly talented kid. And he chose us on full scholarship at [school name] over a 75% scholarship at the University of Miami, Florida.

For him, it all came down to, not what school he knew by name, Miami tennis was far better than [school name], but the fact that he could possibly get something where he didn't have to pay a penny, and everything was paid for. Ultimately, he wound up leaving after one year to go play professionally. He felt like he improved enough that he could try to take a chance, right then. He did okay. But for the most part, the international kids don't see the name recognition. A lot of these kids just really don't care. They might go to where they get the best scholarship, then, if both scholarships are the same, they start looking at location, maybe not necessarily looking at academics, that might be second or third, that could be a second or third thing. First, the scholarship and the amount of money, then second would be location, third would be the academics, fourth would be the notoriety of the university.

Although Aaron coaches at a mid-major university with a very small recruiting budget, like Alex, he has built a very successful program without recruiting domestic students. Because he is a women’s tennis coach, he can offer a full scholarship to eight
players. When he was asked how important a full scholarship offer is for his recruits, he responded:

Oh, the scholarship is the number one thing. Most internationals cannot afford an American education, it's just not going to happen. It's very expensive, it's very demanding, and most people are not going to be able to pay for it, or their parents can't afford it. So, the only way they can afford to even think of an American education is if they get a scholarship. And because we're fully funded, we can offer them a full scholarship. I would not be able to include any of these kids if I didn't have scholarship money, it's that simple.

Later when he was commenting on some of the differences between domestic recruits and international recruits Aaron stated that unlike ISAs, domestic student-athletes have what he called “associations.” According to him this means:

You have an association with your state, you have an association with your team. Your team could be your local team, or just somewhere that your Dad went. For some reason there’s these amazing associations that these kids grow up with.

He argued that in many cases these associations lead American players to walk-on at a certain school without a scholarship, when they may have a full scholarship offer from another school. He explained:

I was talking with a coach at [school name] and he said, we have 14 kids and 12 of the 14 girls on our team could play number one or number two at most DI or DII schools, but they decided to come here for a few reasons. One, like I said, association. They want to associate with the school. They understand what a [school name] degree means. They want to go there for the culture, for the experience, for the whole college experience. They want to go there because they want to be part of a winning team.

He then explained that in many cases an American student can do this because he or she has access to resources such as financial aid that are not available to ISAs. He explained this stating:

Two, they have access to financial aid, so they can afford to take a risk. They can afford to go to a school where maybe they won't get assigned a scholarship, but
they can still pay for it and get a degree and pay it back. Internationals do not have that option. One, they don't have any associations. My father went to [school name] and he played at [school name] in the 70s, so I have this is unbelievable love for [school name] and [school name] tennis and [school name] anything, but I'm very unusual. Most internationals will go wherever they get the most money. It's a simple deal. If they're good enough they get to pick a school where they will get a degree and have more choices....Most kids are coming from places where their parents either cannot afford to pay for a U.S. education...or the other option is, hey, if it's going to cost me this much, I might as well stay at home....For me, international kids do not care if it's [school name], or if it's [school name], but a good kid from California will care if she goes to UCLA, USC, UCSD or Florida.

Like Chad and Aaron, Laura also identified an athletic scholarship as the most important factor for ISAs. She explained:

I really think it's the scholarship. Every single one of them is searching, it's very, very rare to get a walk-on that is international. The area that you're in, in the U.S. helps. So, I think having like [state name] behind your name helps because that's what they see in the movies. That's what they hear about the U.S. They hear about California, Texas, and Florida, you know, so I think that helps. But when it comes down to it, I don't think I've had anyone not mention scholarships right away.

Laura was then asked why she believes an athletic scholarship is such an important factor for ISAs. She responded:

I really think it's just because the U.S. is really the only place that has a college sporting system to the extent that we do. I know that you can play, like in England you can play at the schools, but it's almost like a club play. So, everyone has this idea of coming to the U.S. and playing on this collegiate team and being a part of a team, but they're not able to do it unless they get the funds.

When comparing the importance of a school’s name or reputation for an ISAs versus a scholarship offer Alex explained:

I mean, the scholarship offer I think, is first and foremost, and then they can, you know, navigate through, not necessarily the name recognition, because there really isn't a ton of that unless it's Florida, or Texas, or UCLA, people all over the world have heard of those. But if it's a whole list of other schools then there's probably not a whole bunch of differentiation between schools as far as name recognition with an international recruit.
The NCAA allows women’s tennis teams to award a total of eight full scholarships; however, it only allows men’s teams to award a total of four and a half scholarships. Consequently, unlike women’s coaches, men’s coaches must make tactical decisions concerning who will receive a scholarship and what percentage of a scholarship they will receive.

Knowing that he can only award four and a half scholarships Brett was asked to explain the importance a scholarship offers is to his recruits he stated, “Well it's critical....” When he was asked how quickly his recruits bring up the topic of an athletic scholarship, he explained:

Pretty quickly, quickly. Yeah, so, we try to put package deals together, where maybe they pay a little bit one year, and then they get a little bit more the next couple years. And we've had some kids that at the end of the day we just couldn't put together the money for, even over the course of four years. So, they end up going elsewhere.

Brett explained that despite his school’s size and notoriety, it is becoming more difficult to award enough scholarships to ISAs. According to him:

That's become a serious, serious challenge for us. Particularly at the bigger public schools. In [state name], there's so many kids that want to go to [school name], that they don't really give out financial aid. They don't give free money, because there's so many kids, so many great students, we’ve got 26 or 27 million people in the state and if your kids are going to school, they want to come here.

When asked how he persuades an athlete to attend his school if he can only offer a partial scholarship, Brett explained:

Well it's getting harder and harder because the cost of higher education continues to increase. You know, when I first started, $16,000 was a full scholarship for an out of state kids in the year 2000. Now it's $54,000 a year you know. If inflation and gone up like that we'd all be broke. Some of the private schools will find different funding and different ways to help people out, there are different
scholarships available out there. Maybe you have a South American scholarship. So, there are all sorts of different ways that people are trying to find money to recruit these kids and it's, that's become probably the most challenging part of my job.

When discussing how women’s teams are given eight scholarships and men’s teams are only given four and a half, Brett commented, “They wouldn't even know what to do, they have no idea what we deal with. I’m a dealmaker, constantly renegotiating or trying to maneuver...it's a constant battle. It's a huge part of my job.”

Knowing that the Ivy League does not offer athletic scholarships, Adam was asked to identify the most important factors for his recruits. According to him:

Well, I think a lot of kids are interested in majoring in business and I got, I don't know what the best business school in the world is, but if you Google it, our business school probably comes up…. So that attracts a lot of kids. Some of the kids have enough money and they don't care, they don't want a scholarship, all they want is the best academics they can possibly get and a degree that will help set them up in life....Other kids have come to realize that the Ivy league has loosened up the financial aid restrictions, so in a lot of cases, the Ivy Leagues financial aid will beat what a scholarship school can offer on the men's side....So basically, if you're looking at an Ivy League school and your parents make less than $80,000 a year you can come for free. So, I guess that's what's making the Ivy League so much better and so much more competitive is just the fact that the kids can come, and they can get a decent amount of money.

When he was asked to compare his experience in the Ivy League to his previous experiences at state schools, he commented, “Then the money was everything to them. It was all about the scholarship. It was about how good is our tennis team and how much money can I get.”

Adam then explained how he worked with the four and a half scholarship limitation.

According to him:

At scholarships schools, the game is simple. The game is, get the best players you possibly can and give them the least amount of money you can. And it's kind of in
contrast with what the kid wants. The kid wants the best school you can possibly go to tennis wise or academic wise while getting the most amount of money he can. I mean, that's, the way it is.

I know that Dick Leach at USC used to say, look, I want to beat Stanford, and every kid I don't give a full scholarship to isn't good enough to beat Stanford. So, he gave four full scholarships. And so, his top four guys all have full scholarships, then he would rotate one guy that would take a semester off each year. So that's basically a full scholarship, because it's only for half a year. So, there's four and a half. Then he said, I find one good player whose dad’s got the gold American Express card and doesn't care. That's how he did his.

What I tried to do was, I didn't want to really have any scholarship debates like, well how come he's got 57% and I've got 48%, I'm better than him, so I would say, look, I'll give you all your books, fees and tuition, and you pay for your room and board. I'm going to pay for all your books, fees, and tuition. And that was about 75%. And so, if I give six kids six starters, 75% that's four and a half scholarships. It didn't always work out that slick. I mean, some kids wanted more, you can get some kids for less, but that was the basic model I tried to use.

Coaches considered athletic scholarships to be more important than other items such as a school’s academic reputation or location. Most of the ISAs who participated also identified athletic scholarships as the most important item for them and their families.

**ISA’s views of scholarships.**

Sofia attended school and played professional tennis in Spain before choosing to play college tennis in the United States. Because she was on the pro circuit for more than six months, NCAA rules stipulated that she would have to sit out a year and lose a year of eligibility before she could play Division I tennis. Consequently, several of the NCAA Division I schools who recruited her explained that she would not be eligible to receive a scholarship during her first year. However, according to her:

I never would have been able to afford it without a 100% scholarship. A lot of good schools like Texas A&M, told me, if you need to sit you need to pay for it and I was like I'm not gonna pay for it. I cannot, my parents cannot afford to pay
100%, at Texas A&M. That's why I came here. First, it meant a lot to me that the coach wanted me even though I was not gonna be playing a year. He was losing a player, he was losing a scholarship, but you want me that means that you want me a lot. And as far as money, I wouldn't have to pay like a cent to come to the U.S. and do what I want. So yeah, it's just crazy because back home it's so not possible to do this...it was just crazy for us to think that they could invest so much money in someone that you don't even know. I could come be here and been a total mess. So, it's just crazy that they can invest so much money and give us a chance to play tennis and study here for four years.

Like Sofia, Isabella was contacted by a several schools. When she was asked how many schools offered her a scholarship, she responded, “all of them offered for me scholarship. I just wanted to come here with a scholarship. I was not looking to pay.” She then explained that at her NCAA Division II school her scholarship included “everything except the taxes and the books” while at her NCAA Division I school her scholarship includes everything other than her flights.

Olivia was asked how important an athletic scholarship was for her. In response to this question she explained: For me, the scholarship was important because my parents cannot afford for me to go here. So, I would only be able to go here if I have a full scholarship.” Later she once again emphasized this fact stating, “If I did not get a full scholarship I could not afford to come here.” When she was asked what her scholarship included, she explained “I get housing, academics, books, food, money for a meal plan, obviously the athletic stuff, like shoes, rackets, and clothes. My tuition is paid, and I get cost of attendance.”

Unlike Isabella, Olivia, and Sofia, Liam identified academics as his primary motive for selecting his school. He explained, “it was more on the academic side. I got a good deal with the tennis coach and the academic side was very strong at [school name] so I was very happy with that option. I liked the location and the campus. So, I felt like
that was a good fit for me.” Nevertheless, when he was asked about the importance of his scholarship, he explained:

It was very important for me, especially because my brother was coming in and he wasn't able to get a deal because of the time of his transfer. So, it was very important for us because my parents could not pay full tuition for both of us. So that was very important for us.

Like Liam, Emma identified academics as the most important factor for her.

However, unlike every other ISA in the study, Emma explained that because her family could afford to send her to school, her career did not depend on an athletic scholarship.

When she was asked to explain why she chose her school, she explained:

The coach was super important...he just kind of made it feel welcoming, like you want to come here. And then for me, it was really important too, that I could study kinesiology because that was a big problem I had with a lot of coaches. Actually, all the coaches that I was talking to, really wanted us to go into different majors that they picked out because they thought that we could handle them with tennis, and I don't think that's really a factor that they can decide with every person. I think it depends on the person.... And then the team. When I visited, I really liked them. My family has a Polish background and there was a Polish girl and that was really nice. And there was also [a] Canadian girl too. So, they just made me feel really welcome. I loved the campus when I came here, and it was pretty close to home. Like I said, I didn't want to go to Florida. I had visits there that I canceled because I could be a three-hour flight from home instead of a six-hour flight from home. So those were big factors for me.

Several of the ISAs felt that an athletic scholarship was more important than other items such as a school’s academic reputation or location. Furthermore, although Liam stated that academics were his top priority, his family needed him to have a scholarship. Like Olivia, Isabella, and Sofia, Liam’s ability to attend a school in the United States depended on a scholarship offer. Like Liam, Emma reported that academics were the most important factor for her; however, unlike Liam, she reported that she could afford to
attend school without a scholarship. Consequently, in addition to academics she focused on other factors such as the coach’s personality and location.

**Summary**

Each participant was asked to discuss his or her experiences as they relate to either recruiting ISAs or being recruited. Coaches explained how they recruited ISAs and described the resources or methods they utilized to discover and recruit prospective ISAs. These descriptions revealed that for coaches the recruitment is a fluid cycle that never ends. ISAs discussed how they learned about athletic opportunities in the United States, described the individuals or organizations that helped them identify and secure positions in the United States, and identified factors that influenced their final decision. These descriptions revealed that for ISAs recruitment is a process or series of steps that ends when they arrive on campus to begin practicing and attending class.

Each participant’s lived experiences as they relate to the phenomena of doing recruiting or being recruited were unique to that individual. However, these experiences revealed interconnected or shared resources that both coaches and ISAs identified and discussed.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how coaches recruit ISAs and how ISAs secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams. To examine these separate yet interconnected phenomena semi-structured interviews were conducted with current NCAA Division I men’s and women’s tennis coaches, one national tennis administrator, and ISAs who compete or have recently competed as NCAA Division I men’s or women’s tennis players.

Through an analysis of the semi-structured interviews, I identified two major themes that described participants’ shared experiences as they related to the separate yet interconnected phenomena of doing recruiting or being recruited. These two major themes were (a) the recruitment process and (b) the significance of athletic scholarships. Within the first major theme, the recruitment process, three sub-themes also emerged. The three sub-themes were: (a) the use of recruiting agencies; (b) the importance of word of mouth recruiting and referrals; and (c) the significance of the Universal Tennis Rating System (UTR). In the following sections I identified and discussed how findings relate to earlier scholarship. I discussed topics that did not emerge as themes but should be explored in greater detail by future researchers.

The Recruitment Process

Participants were asked to discuss their experiences as they related to either recruiting ISAs or being recruited. Coaches discussed the recruitment process and described the tools or methods they used to recruit ISAs while ISAs discussed the tools and resources, they used to identify collegiate tennis opportunities in the United States and market their tennis skills to coaches. Coaches described the recruitment process as a
fluid multi-phase cycle in which they are simultaneously involved in several steps at any given (Figure 3). ISAs described the recruitment process as a series of steps that began when they started identifying potential tennis opportunities in the United States and ended when they made a final decision and selected a university (Figure 4). The basic characteristics of the coaches’ cycle and the ISAs process were previously documented by scholars such as Bale (1991) and Cameron (2000). However, a careful evaluation of both pre-internet and current recruiting processes and procedures shows although the process coaches used to identify, evaluate, and contact players have remained the same, many of the tools and resources they used to complete this process have changed as a result of the “technological globalization” and “internet revolution” that has taken place since the mid-1990s (Kirk & Weaver, 2018, para. 32). Comparably, the evolution of the tools and resources used by ISAs is also reflective of these technological advances.

As Bale analyzed how ISA recruitment occurred in the 1980s, he (1991) reported it was “almost serendipitous” (p. 100). In his analysis, he emphasized the important role of word of mouth recruiting and cited a variety of examples to show how coaches used referrals from various individuals including current or former athletes and coaches to identify recruits and establish talent pipelines. Cameron (2000) supported Bale’s findings and reported that in the late 1990s American coaches discovered ISAs from New Zealand by reviewing New Zealand and international results, watching competitions in New Zealand, and watching New Zealanders at international competitions. In their descriptions of the tools and resources they used to recruit ISAs during this pre-internet period, study participants who were actively recruited during this period also reported they relied on international results and word of mouth recruiting. Although participants
indicated they did not personally attend international tournaments, Adam acknowledged some coaches did this on occasion. As the dialogue transitioned into a review of the tools and resources coaches currently use to identify and evaluate prospective ISAs, it became apparent that with the exceptions of word of mouth recruiting and attending tournaments, each tool had been replaced with a technologically advanced equivalent. For example, letters from prospective ISAs were replaced by emails from prospective ISAs or recruiting agencies while tournament results were replaced by the more comprehensive UTR system.

When coaches were asked how they identify prospective ISAs, every coach who participated, regardless of the size of the school or gender they coached, identified UTRs as the most important tool they used to identify and evaluate recruits. The importance of UTRs was emphasized by Gary who stated: “No doubt UTR is the standard that all the coaches are using to evaluate players.” UTR, which launched in 2008, has emerged as the leading tool for coaches because it provides them with accurate and up to date information which allows them to make data-based decisions. Instead of combing through hundreds of emails or videos, they can access current scores and identify prospective ISAs from any region of the world. According to UTR an individual’s scores are calculated by an algorithm that use a player’s “last 30 eligible match scores from the last 12 months. For each eligible match, the algorithm calculates a match rating and a match weight; a player’s UTR is the weighted average of all the match ratings (How UTR Works, 2019). After reviewing scores, they can identify specific individuals and then review their videos, reach out to them and gauge their level of interest, and then if they have enough funds, they can plan a trip to watch them play in person. UTR’s may
augment the impact of word of mouth recruiting because now a coach can identify a prospective ISAs using UTR and then select a current player or alumnus to contact who serves as an initial contact who introduces them to a coach. Furthermore, as Liam reported, the use of UTR is not limited to coaches. Liam used his knowledge of his UTR score to identify universities with his desired major who recruited players at his level. Coaches did indicate that, soon, they expect domestic athletes to use UTR in this manner. However, they did not indicate they expect ISAs to use UTR. This variance may exist because domestic athletes are more familiar with college tennis and the American university system, so they can begin evaluating schools before they are contacted by coaches, whereas ISAs may have less familiarity and consequently depend on other resources, such as agencies, to help them evaluate schools. Liam’s case is unique, because although he is an ISA, he completed three years of high school in the United States, so he had a solid understating of the American college system.

In addition to these new resources, coaches also noted they could now stream a prospective ISA’s matches at some international tournaments. Yet, despite these advances, it was reported during this era of global technology and instant communication the recruiting budgets at large Power Five universities have increased to the point where many coaches now travel overseas several times a year to identify and evaluate prospective ISAs at tournaments and showcases. Both Adam and Brett explained that an increasing number of coaches are even sending their assistant coaches to Europe for several months each summer so they can identify and evaluate prospective ISAs. However, while some coaches identified these budget increases and tools which have positively impacted their ability to identify and evaluate ISAs, some coaches from
smaller mid-major schools reported their recruiting budgets have not increased. In fact, Alex explained that his budget was nonexistent. For coaches not having the budget to travel the globe and recruit, these technological advances have an even greater significance.

As he discussed the experiences of ISAs, Bale (1991) also explained that during the pre-internet period ISAs primarily learned about athletic opportunities in the United States through direct contact with a representative of the university, friends and family members (including current and former ISAs), advertisements, or, in some rare cases, a personal application to the university. Two decades later, Pierce et al. (2012) asked ISAs how they learned about collegiate opportunities in the United States. Consistent with Bale’s (1991) primary findings they stated the most important groups or individuals were family, friends, athletes, individuals who previously participated in collegiate athletics, and coaches and recruiters involved in U.S. college sports. They also reported that a small percentage of ISAs (2.2%) also stated they were informed by a “sports recruitment service.” However, six years later Kirk and Weaver (2018), reported men’s collegiate soccer coaches identified the growth of recruiting agencies as a leading factor that could explain the recent growth of ISA participation in men’s soccer. This increase can possibly be attributed to the growth of this industry. According to Kirk and Weaver (2018) approximately 85% of the agencies they were able to identify were founded after 2000.

Findings from this study show coaches and current or former ISAs are important sources of information used by ISAs to learn about and identify collegiate tennis opportunities in the United States. However, all three of the participants from Europe also indicated they employed a recruitment agency and reported their agency was an
important source of information. Kirk and Weaver (2018) argued that “recruiting agencies likely have an oversized and under-appreciated impact on the expanding global exposure of college soccer” (p. 30). Findings from this study suggest that may also be the case in college tennis.

Coaches frequently discussed recruiting agencies and showed they have successfully carved out a niche for themselves in college tennis. Findings show each coach was familiar with recruiting agencies, their objectives, and the services they provide. However, finding also show coaches may know very little about the financial arrangements prospective ISAs and their families make with these agencies. While some coaches identified agencies as a resource they used to identify and evaluate prospective ISAs, others explained they do not work with agencies because they are concerned about agencies’ motives and practices. One coach reported he has established relationships with agencies in Germany and Spain while other coaches indicated they do not exclusively work with any agency. Furthermore, while some coaches argued that these agencies offer a valuable tool that can help prospective ISAs and their parents, Adam reported families could do all these things without the help of an agency.

Findings from this study also indicate noteworthy differences exist between the three ISAs who used an agency and the two ISAs who coordinated their own recruitment. The ISAs who spearheaded their own recruitment reported they used the internet to evaluate a large number of schools and then contacted coaches and selected schools they identified while ISAs who used a recruiting agency reported they did not begin to evaluate schools until after a coach or their agent had contacted them. Additionally, these ISAs only evaluated schools that contacted them. Consequently, steps two and three in
the ISA recruitment process are interchangeable. In addition to this procedural difference, it was also discovered the two ISAs who evaluated schools before contacting coaches, were the only two ISAs not required to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language, or TOEFL exam. They were also the two ISAs most familiar with the American college system. In their study Ridinger and Pastore (2000a) defined cultural distance as “the degree of incongruence between the campus culture and the culture of the student-athletes’ hometown” (p. 15). Perhaps it was easier for these two ISAs to conduct independent research because the cultural distance they had to bridge was much shorter than that of their European peers. Moreover, the two ISAs who did not use agencies reported academic factors were more important than tennis, while their European peers reported tennis and academics were equally important.

In the pre-internet era coaches and ISAs had very few communication options available to them. They could write letters, make long distance phone calls, make an in person visit or communicate through a third party. Once again, findings show technology has improved this step for coaches and ISAs. Coaches indicated they used social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, to initially contact prospective ISAs while both groups reported they commonly used video conferencing platforms such as Skype to communicate throughout the remainder of the recruitment process.

For coaches and ISAs, the final step in the recruitment process was to either offer a roster spot and/or scholarship or accept a roster spot and/or scholarship. When Bale (1991) asked ISAs how important an athletic scholarship was to the chance of them gaining an education a reported 100% of ISAs indicated that it was important. When he asked ISAs how important a scholarship was for them to gain athletic training and
experience, 92% reported the scholarship was important. Popp et al. (2009) explored the factors most important when an ISA chose to attend an American university and discovered the value of an athletic scholarship was the most influential factor for this group. When the coaches in this study were asked to describe factors, they considered to be the most important for prospective ISAs, they quickly identified athletic scholarships as a consideration more important than other items such as a school’s academic reputation or location. These sentiments were supported by four of the five ISAs who participated in the research study. Each of these ISAs reported an athletic scholarship was very important because it would be difficult, if not impossible, to attend an American institution without a scholarship. It is important to note that because the NCAA allows women’s tennis coaches who may award eight scholarships to players on their roster don’t have to try and sell their program without offering a full scholarship, while men’s coaches are deal makers who must make tactical decisions concerning who will receive a scholarship and what percentage of a scholarship they will receive as the NCAA only allowed to award four and a half scholarships to players on their roster.

**Scholarly Contribution**

Despite recent increases in ISA participation in the United States, intercollegiate athletics has been an understudied, although not ignored, branch of global sport migration studies (Love & Kim, 2011). In recent decades, scholars have studied factors that motivated ISAs to compete in the United States, the experiences of ISAs on American campuses, and the recruitment of ISAs. This study specifically added to our understanding of the third category, the recruitment of ISAs. Building on earlier works it explored ISA recruitment process within the setting of global internet access. The first
researchers to explore either the impact of technology on recruitment in the global internet era or the influence of recruiting agencies were Kirk and Weaver (2018). However, rather than exploring how coaches recruit ISAs or how ISAs secure positions in the era of global internet accessibility, they identified primary factors that could explain the recent growth of ISA participation in men’s soccer.

For this study NCAA Division I men’s and women’s tennis was selected because relative to other sports the dynamics of internationalization have been much more pervasive and longstanding in intercollegiate tennis. Coaches and ISAs were selected to participate in the study because recent research has explored the logistics of ISA recruitment and consequently not given them a voice. This is the first study to explore how coaches recruit international students and how ISAs secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams.

**Future Research**

In addition to these findings additional research should explore three areas that some coaches briefly discussed in their semi-structured interviews. These topics are (a) domestic versus international recruitment; (b) the TOEFL examination and its impact on recruitment; and (c) debates over international recruitment and its perceived consequences.

**Domestic versus international recruitment.**

In their discussions of the recruitment process coaches compared the domestic recruitment process to the international recruitment process and identified key differences. Some of the identified differences included the role of parents, the importance of a school’s name and reputation, differences in the recruitment time table,
and differences in the attitudes of domestic and international student-athletes. Future research should explore these differences while including the perspectives of both domestic and international student-athletes.

**The TOEFL examination.**

When Alex was asked about the tools he used to attract players to his campus and program he specifically mentioned English placement examinations and explained rather than requiring a minimum TOEFL score his university allows students to complete an intensive English language program. Because this policy allows him to recruit players whose test scores prevent them from enrolling at other colleges or universities in the United States, he considers this policy to be an important recruitment tool for him. Unlike Alex, Adam and Brett described their institutions high TOEFL requirements as a hindrance that limited the scope of their recruitment. They consequently discussed how they strategically recruit in areas where prospective ISAs are either native English speakers or are known to have high levels of English proficiency. Future research should explore this topic and specifically investigate how, if at all, TOEFL requirements affect ISA recruitment and what, if any, impact TOEFL requirements have on the final decisions of ISAs from non-English speaking countries.

** Debates over international recruitment and its perceived consequences.**

As coaches discussed their experiences with ISA recruitment, they often indicated that coaches, parents, community members, and other stake holders still actively debate ISA recruitment and its perceived consequences. More specifically they debate the real or perceived impact of ISA recruitment on American junior and collegiate tennis. Furthermore, coaches indicated that because recent changes to the International Tennis
Association (ITA) professional circuit will eliminate thousands of professional tennis opportunities collegiate tennis may soon see and even greater influx of ISAs. Future research should explore what, if any, impact ISA recruitment has on American junior and collegiate tennis while seeking to identify any changes resulting from the changes enacted at the professional level.

**Conclusion**

In recent decades, the globalization of sport has opened new opportunities for athletes to leave their home countries and compete abroad (Bale & Maguire, 1994; Cameron, 2000; Lee, 2010; Love & Kim, 2011). The purpose of this research study was to explore how coaches recruit international students and how ISAs secure positions on men’s or women’s NCAA Division I tennis teams. To examine these separate yet interconnected phenomena, semi-structured interviews were conducted with current NCAA Division I men’s and women’s tennis coaches, one national tennis administrator, and ISAs who compete or have recently competed as NCAA Division I men’s or women’s tennis players.

In this study, coaches described the recruitment process as a fluid multi-phase cycle in which they are simultaneously involved in several steps at any given time while ISAs described the recruitment process as a series of steps which begins when they started identifying potential tennis opportunities in the United States and ended when they made a final decision and selected a university. The basic characteristics of the coaches’ cycle and the ISAs process were previously documented by earlier scholars (Bale, 1991; Cameron, 2000). However, a careful evaluation of both pre-internet and current recruiting processes and procedures shows, although process coaches used to
identify, evaluate, and contact players have remained the same, technological advances, as well as the growth of recruiting agencies, impacted the process. However, while many things have changed, word of mouth recruiting has continued to serve as an effective tool coaches use to identify prospective ISAs and ISAs use to identify college tennis opportunities in the United States. Additionally, college scholarships are still a fundamental factor for ISAs considering college tennis opportunities in the United States. Comparably, the evolution of the tools and resources used by ISAs is also reflective of these technological advances.
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Appendix A: Interview 1 Questions for Coaches

Topic Domain: Demographic Information & Coaching Background

1. Tell me about your athletic background.
2. Tell me about your experience as a college athlete.
3. Tell me about your experiences as a coach.
4. Tell me about the athletes that you currently coach.
5. Tell me about your current coaching position.
Appendix B: Interview 1 Questions for International Student-Athletes

Topic Domain: Demographic Information & Athletic Background

1. Tell me about your home country.

2. Tell me about your experiences as an athlete.
   a. When did you start playing tennis?
   b. Did you play any other sports?
   c. Does anyone else in your family play competitive sports?
   d. Did you play for a club or national team at home?

3. What does the term student-athlete mean to you?

4. Before starting college, had you ever visited to the U.S.?
   a. Tell me about your visit. Why were you here, where did you visit?

5. Describe what it was like for you to transition to the U.S.

6. Explain what it is like to be a student-athlete in the United States.
   a. What is the most difficult part of being a student-athlete?
   b. What is the best part of being a student-athlete?
   c. What athletic goals do you hope to accomplish while you are in the U.S.?
Appendix C: Interview 2 Questions for Coaches

Topic Domain: International Student-Athlete Recruitment

1. Tell me about your experiences working with international student-athletes.

2. How do you recruit international student-athletes?
   a. What tools do you use for recruitment?
   b. How do you decide where to go to recruit student-athletes?

3. Tell me why you chose to begin recruiting international student-athletes?

4. Could you explain the most difficult part of recruiting international-student-athletes?

5. Based off your experience, what do you perceive as the benefits or risks associated with recruiting international student-athletes?

6. From your experience, how do other coaches feel about the recruitment of international student-athletes
Appendix D: Interview 2 Questions for International Student-Athletes

Topic Domain: Recruitment

1. Explain why you chose to play college tennis in the U.S.

2. Tell me how you learned about college tennis in the U.S.? Were you recruited by an American school/coach or did you reach out to schools and coaches in the U.S.?

3. Tell me about the recruitment process.
   a. How were you contacted or how did your contact schools?
   b. How many universities recruited you? What schools?

4. Describe how your family, friends, and coaches at home feel about your decision to play tennis in the U.S.

5. Explain what factors helped you decide which university to attend.

6. Was this institution your first choice? Could you explain why or why not?

7. Did you transfer to this university from another university? If so, could you explain why you chose to transfer?

8. Describe your relationship with your teammates and coaches.

9. Explain what you plan to do after graduation.

10. Do you still think that playing college tennis in the U.S. was the right decision for you? Could you explain why?

11. Would you recommend this opportunity to other international tennis players? Could you explain why?