The Impact of Participation in Intercollegiate Athletics on Income and Graduation


Long and Caudill test previous notions of collegiate athletic participation—which suggest that athletes perform more poorly in the classroom and post-graduation than non-athletes. Evidence for the poorer performance of college athletes was found in a 1988 study conducted by the NCAA and the American Institute for Research—which showed that the average college athlete had lower grades and more psychological problems than a non-athlete student. The authors utilize a dataset from the American Council on Education, which interviewed 10,000 incoming freshmen to 487 American universities and colleges in 1971—then interviewed the same individuals 10 years later on various aspects of their working lives, including income. The sample used contains 9,787 individuals—with 15% of the males and 5% of the females having participated in college athletics. Using this data, the authors develop a model which attempts to explain income with—among other variables—the individual’s participation in college athletics as a dichotomous variable. The model is described as follows:

\[ \text{Annual income of college graduate} = f(\text{Athlete*}, \text{Black*}, \text{Married*}, \text{Children*}, \text{Veteran*}, \text{Self-employed*}, \text{Part-time*}, \text{Family size}, \text{Firm Size}, \text{ACT score}, \text{College GPA, Bachelors degree*}, \text{Masters degree*}, \text{PHD*}, \text{Private college*}, \text{college size}, \text{Midwest*}, \text{South*}, \text{west*}, \text{drive}, \text{succeed}, \text{well-off}) \]

The variables denoted (*) are dichotomous variables, where as the “drive”, “succeed”, and “well-off” variables are based on self-reported values from the survey.

The authors find that, for males, participation in college athletics resulted in a 4% higher income. They find no income premium for females who participated in college athletics. The authors conclude that male college graduates who participated in collegiate sports receive a premium, early in their careers. This is evident because the survey data is based on results early after graduation. The results suggest that athletics may have a positive impact on academic performance as well as confidence and psychological stability.