

The Current Landscape of Unused Women's College Golf Scholarships

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ABSTRACT

A December 2017 article in the LA Times contends that too many NCAA golf scholarships go unclaimed and states that "according to the NCAA, it was estimated in 2009, that over 200 of the approximately 1800 female golf scholarships were not used". Regardless of the field, data from 10 years ago is likely to be antiquated. The goal of this research note is to examine the current status of scholarships in women's Division I and Division II college golf by collecting data at the 2018 Women's Golf National Coaches Convention in Las Vegas Nevada. The survey, which was completed by 100 coaches, examined the current scholarship market for women's golf, as well as sought to dive deeper into the subject to help explore why the reasons scholarships might be going unclaimed.

Keywords: NCAA, Women's Golf, Scholarship, Athletic Grant and Aid, Division I and Division II

INTRODUCTION

Scrolling down, readers will notice that many of the articles cite the NCCA 2009 article that claims that over 200 of the approximately 1800 female scholarships available went unused. This stat has become an anthem for sports writers, as well as dubious businesses which hope to use the power of framing to enroll girls and their families into paid scholarship advising services, costing upwards of five thousand dollars per year. A December 2017 article by the LA Times cited this data and suggests that "too few girls compete in the sport to qualify for these scholarships, which means many young women are missing an opportunity that could make all the difference to their education, their income and their future." The NCAA work published in 2009 provides some insight into the amount of scholarship money that is unused; however, it does not help draw any conclusions on the probable causes. The goal of this research is to understand the current landscape of scholarship in Women's College Golf, as well as to better understand the causality of unused scholarships.

DATA COLLECTION

In order to examine the question of whether the percentage of unused scholarship dollars has declined, and to better understand the actual allocation of scholarships, a survey was created and distributed via Survey Monkey to 98 of the

466 Division I and Division II women's golf teams at the 2018 Women's Golf National Coaches Convention in Las Vegas Nevada. The survey collected data on the level of college golf coached by participants, the average number of years coached and asked 4 specific questions about unused scholarship dollars. In total, 72 NCAA Division I Coaches (D1), 26 Division II (D2) completed the survey. These numbers represent about 23% of total Division I coach (72/311) and 16% of total Division II coaches (26/166). The average coach in the survey reported 13 years' experience.

The first question posed asked participants: "How many times in your coaching career have you had scholarship money left over?" The average response was 3 out of 13 years coached, or approximately 25% of the time. 30 of the 72 Division I coaches reported having no scholarship funds left over ever during their career, while 5 reported having scholarship funds left over one year whereas only three Division II coaches reported never having any scholarship used. We then allowed coaches who had not used all of their scholarship dollars to make comments. Here are four examples of the comments received as to why scholarship dollars had not been used:

A "kid quit 3 weeks into the year. Another time kid uncommitted in May and held it back in case

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of transfer or Southern Hemisphere player at semester.” NCAA Division I Coach

“Sometimes I have 5-10% in the bank, but I do that so I can reward current players for good play and good school work.” NCAA Division I Coach

“Once when a recruit didn't get into school because of language testing.” NCAA Division I Coach

The next question posed asked of participants was: For the next year, do you expect to use all of your scholarship dollars? Ninety-one percent of participants responded that they did think that they would use all their scholarship dollars.

Next, we questioned participants: “The reason I have unspent money is because the quality of the player available is not good enough to help me win – true or false?” Participants reported that this was the case 77% of the time.

Finally, we asked participants, do you believe that millions of dollars of women's golf scholarships go unused each year? 88% of respondents said no.

DISCUSSION

The data collected demonstrates that in 2018, there was still money unused for women's golf scholarships. However, it is unlikely that it was near the 11% (200/1800) reported in 2009. Instead, the percentage of unused scholarship dollars is likely 5% to 9%. At the time of signing, when scholarships can be offered to students, it is likely that this number is either zero or very close to zero, however as kids transfer and fail to meet NCAA requirements, the number rises, to the findings of about 5%-9% with most of the money becoming available in May, June or July.

Although it is impossible to know the exact amount of unused scholarship, if there are 2000 total scholarships available and the average cost of a 4-year school is \$20,000, then at 5%, the total unused scholarship dollars would be \$2 million. At 9%, the amount of unused scholarship dollars would be approximately \$3.6 million. Although a significant amount of scholarship money may still be available, these numbers seem to suggest that the funds available for scholarships don't mean that any young lady with a set of golf clubs is likely to get an immediate full ride to play college golf. Instead, the subject is far more nuanced and, while there is unused money, it is likely going to be allotted to players with sophisticated playing

records who can help the team. How good does this player have to be? According to an article on Golf WRX, in Women's Division I Golf, the last team to qualify for post-season play in 2017/18 was the University of Missouri with an average team score of 295.4 or approximately 73.75 per shots per player. The hundredth-ranked team in 2018 was from Georgetown University and they had a team stroke average of 303.64 or approximately 75 shots per player.

The numbers also account for players who sign National Letters of Intent and then do not meet the minimum academic standards and are therefore not eligible for grants and aide. Under current NCAA guidelines, to become a qualifier in NCAA Golf, players must meet certain academic standards including a minimum score on a standardized test like the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Although it is impossible to know the exact numbers, it is likely that most golfers who fail to meet the minimum academic standards are both international and seen by coaches as “impact players”. As an international student they may struggle with the SAT for a variety of reasons including poor access to preparation materials, lack of background in English or a plethora of other variables. It is also likely that if a coach has spent the time and resources to bring an international player to join their team, the coach is likely to believe the player has the potential to make a significant impact on the program. With such a strong financial investment in both scholarship and emotional equity, coaches are often willing to give international students every opportunity to earn passing grades on standardized testing. This can run into the summer, with test scores coming out as late as middle of July. With less than a month until school, if international students are unsuccessful in their testing, the coach is likely left with no comparable student athlete. They are therefore better to leave the scholarship unused or redistribute to their team, rather than sign a player with an inferior record.

According to the data collected, another reason that there may be unused scholarship dollars is that some players quit or transfer at the last minute. Two of the nine comments about unused scholarship funds suggested the problem was due to late transfers and this is not surprising considering that up to nine percent of college athletes will transfer. With student athletes incentivized to finish the full session of competition, rather than risk having their scholarship cut due to transfer, waiting until late into the spring season or even into the summer

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is not uncommon. With limited options, coaches would be wise to hold this money and wait to fill the slot with another competitive player rather than simply give the money to anyone. As per one of the comments from coaches, it is not uncommon for coaches to reallocate money amongst existing players for a number of reasons.

One of the most pervasive heuristics in the college recruiting process is that women's teams are fully funded; that is, they have the full allocation of scholarships under the rules. To date, no one really understands how many of the 466 Division I and Division II programs are fully funded, which makes estimating the total number of available scholarships difficult. If they were all fully funded, then it would mean there would be almost 2,700 full scholarships available in the NCAA each year. It is however likely that at least some programs at the Division I and Division II levels are not fully funded because of a variety of reasons and the issue deserves further research to fully understand unused scholarships.

Another limit of the survey is the inability to understand how factors like location, quality of academics' and scholarship funds all impact coach's ability to recruit or division (Division II or NAIA or NJCAA versus Division I). Although it is impossible to fully predict, the anchoring heuristic would suggest that if junior golfers believe they are talented players and there are millions of unused dollars in scholarship then they are more likely to believe they are Division I caliber golfers.

CONCLUSION

The data collected in 2018 from ninety-eight Division I and Division II Women's Coaches supports current claims that's that there are millions of dollars of unused women's golf scholarship each year, but that the number is much less than previously cited; more likely it is between two and four million dollars. Further, the data collected clearly demonstrates that while there is still unused money, it does not mean that anyone with a set of clubs is going to get a full scholarship to play golf. The data collected suggests that unused money is a result of either last minute transfers or international students who do not meet the minimum NCAA athletic requirements and is often either redistributed to other team members or held with the hopes of bringing in a comparable player as soon as possible.

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