If You Build It: Facility Investment Impact on DI Men’s Basketball Recruitment and Winning

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Abstract:

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Within intercollegiate athletics, it is becoming increasingly important for universities to invest in facilities to recruit and retain elite athletes. With an apparent facilities arms race raging over the past few decades, many prospective recruits place modern facilities atop their college “must-haves” (Czekanski & Barnhill 2015; Huml et al., 2019). By constructing new and more technologically advanced arenas, some universities hope that state-of-the-art venues will help lure in star athletes and improve team performance. This research sought to determine whether there is a relationship between construction or major renovation spending on basketball arenas at the NCAA Division I level and the national ranking of their recruiting class or the winning percentage of the team.
Methods: Schools with new arena construction or major renovations were identified via athletic department websites and online articles through local and national news outlets from the time spanning 2011 to 2020 with a minimum venue investment of $5M. For these schools, data from the 247 Sports Team Recruiting Ranking were collected from eight time periods in relation to completing the arena project (from five years prior through two years post). Winning percentages were determined for each season from team records over these same periods. The relationship between the arena spending levels and both the recruiting rankings and seasonal win percentages were assessed via Pearson Correlation analyses for each of the periods, and the differences in mean recruiting rankings and mean winning percentages over these time periods were assessed via ANOVA analyses.

Results: A total of 30 schools were included in this study and they spent over $3.4 billion completing arena construction or major renovation from 2011-2020. Correlational analyses of the arena costs to recruiting ranks were found to be significant for two years before renovation completion (r = -.319, p < .001). However, there were no significant correlations between arena cost and winning percentage (r = -.094, p = .152). ANOVA analyses revealed no difference in the mean recruiting rankings for the eight time periods assessed, although the mean recruiting rankings did drop across the time periods. ANOVA analyses for the winning percentages were similarly insignificant; however, the mean winning percentages tended to drop or worsen over the eight years observed.

Implications: The results of this research did not fully support our hypothesis that increased expenditures on basketball arenas will lead to measurably better recruiting classes and winning percentages. While the significant correlation between venue spending and recruiting ranking may support the concept of “go big or go home” concerning arena investment, on average the
changes to recruiting ranking and winning percentage were not statistically significant. While some arena amenities like locker rooms and team lounges might directly impact the athletes, many costly arena amenities like premium seating, loge boxes, and luxury suites primarily address fan experience and athletic department revenue generation. However, considering the continued collegiate facility spending trends, additional research should seek to better identify the most vital aspects college athlete recruiting along with the role of facilities within this process.

References
