



Indigenous Student-Athlete Representation in Canadian Universities: Addressing Data Gaps and Promoting Equity

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Abstract

Background: Indigenous representation in Canadian university sport remains poorly understood, despite growing attention to Indigenous enrollment in post-secondary education. At the University of Saskatchewan (USask), only 3% of student-athletes self-identify as Indigenous, compared to 12.7% of the overall student body (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.; Tomin & Schaefer, 2025). The absence of disaggregated data reflects systemic invisibility, limiting institutions' ability to assess equity, identify barriers, and track progress toward reconciliation in sport (Forsyth et al., 2023; Smith, 2012). Colonization disrupted Indigenous physical activity systems, replacing them with Eurocentric models that continue to shape post-secondary sport (Forsyth, 2020; Robidoux & Mason, 2017). Although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) calls for inclusive sport policies, Indigenous participation remains under-documented and under-supported.

Methodology: This research addresses the data gap in two phases. Phase one employs a cross-sectional, quantitative analysis of Indigenous student-athlete participation across U15 Canadian universities, disaggregated by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit identities. Phase two uses semi-structured interviews with student-athletes, teachers, coaches, and community leaders to examine perceived barriers, pathways, and culturally relevant strategies for fostering inclusion. Both phases are grounded in Indigenous research methodologies emphasizing relational accountability, narrative sovereignty, and ethical engagement (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

Results & Conclusion: By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, this project will generate the first national dataset on Indigenous student-athlete representation while centering Indigenous voices in sport. Findings will inform institutional policies, athletic programming, and national strategies to advance equity, inclusion, and reconciliation in Canadian university athletics. Rooted in both lived experience and scholarly training, this research seeks to illuminate systemic inequities and provide actionable insights that support Indigenous self-determination in post-secondary sport.

Keywords: Indigenous student-athletes; Indigenous representation; university sport, reconciliation; mixed methods



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