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Coaches weigh in on scholarships

HoopGurlz

Moving past talent, needs or desire, and skill set, recruiting at its very base is a numbers game.

Figuring out how many scholarships a program has to offer should be a simple calculation, right? Every program gets 15 players on a roster. Subtract the graduating players and...



Our survey of college coaches revealed a surprising change in what coaches are looking for.

... well, subtract the one or two slots for transfers, maybe another for last-minute, unexpected interest by a desirable recruit. Oh, and don't forget about the redshirt.

Unless you have your calculator, or your calculus, in order, these may not be such easy equations. That's why, as part of its discussion with college coaches on eight important recruiting topics, ESPN HoopGurlz asked more than 20 head and assistant coaches or recruiting coordinators about ideal roster size and breakdown.

No single number grabbed a majority from respondents, but there was a consensus around 12 to 13 players (almost equally split between 12, 12-13 and 13). About 20 percent said they typically carry 15 players with most of those saying their rosters are split between three players at each position.

"Fifteen is a lot if you are healthy, but if not, you need the extra players," one associate head coach said. "We don't always extend all of our scholarships. It depends on available players and their positions and if we think they can make a difference in our program. We try to have depth at each position, but sometimes you just try to sign the best players available regardless of position."

The most pervasive reason given for not filling all 15 roster spots -- as one head coach put it, "You can't keep 15 happy, and unhappy kids means divisiveness on your team."

Another expanded, "I love that 15 women have this opportunity, but I don't think it is in the best interest of the program and the individual players to carry that many on a consistent basis. But I also like the

'redshirt' when mutually agreed upon as to work on the skills mentioned above so that they can be more readily rewarded for their leadership and athleticism."

The state of contentment on a team drove a lot of the discussion about roster size with the most frequently cited manifestation being transfers. On one hand, being able to survive transfers frequently was cited as a reason to fill most or all of the 15 roster spots. On the other, being able to accept transfers often was cited as a reason to leave roster spots open.

Twelve was the lowest number offered, but it was vastly in the minority. "You can manage the personalities, but you're not going to play all of them," said one coach arguing for more than 12 players. "It makes sure your practices are competitive and that you have a bench in case something happens to your top players."

Position breakdown spanned a broad range with some favoring more guards, some favoring more inside players and some favoring more wing or perimeter players. Style of play dictated the mix.

If there was any consensus, it was around the point-guard position, with many favoring two "true" point guards with support from a combo guard or wing who could handle the ball in a pinch. Four was a frequently cited number for desired number of posts on a roster.

"There won't be enough minutes to keep three point guards happy," said one coach, reflecting a sentiment offered by many of her colleagues, "but you cannot risk carrying just two and having an injury leave you hamstrung."

Our next installment will focus on the role of race in recruiting, which may seem much more of a lightning-rod issue than roster size and breakdown. However, as evidenced by our discussions, rosters prompt much thought by college coaches.

Overall, the vast majority of coaches preferred to keep roster spots open and generally do so to retain a measure of versatility.

"I don't ever like to carry 15 because I like and need to have options," said one head coach who recently changed schools. "You always play mind games with yourself about injuries. Always second guessing about that. You're going to need a buffer for that. But you also don't want to be taking away any opportunities that could potentially be out there for women to play sports. I like to figure my depth spots, and then recruit talent vs. position when I can."

Interviewers for ESPN HoopGurlz included Lisa Bodine, Chris Hansen, Kara Howe, Mark Lewis, Glenn Nelson and Kelvin Powell.

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