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## The Gagliardi effect?

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## Quad 136

### The Gagliardi Effect?

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## The Gagliardi Effect?



The [recent blog post about the Flutie Effect](#) (exploring the impact of athletic success at the Division I level on the academic parts of the university) prompted thoughts (and even several comments from readers) about something similar happening at the Division III level. What impact does a successful athletic program—at the national or conference level—have on a Division III school? Saint John's enviable record of football success is an obvious case in point.

I think it is probably safe to say that the publicity and dollars are orders of magnitude smaller rather than similar success for a DI program, but certainly within a state or region that publicity could have an impact.

**Academic Reputation.** As was noted in the earlier post, the impact of athletic success on academic reputation for any institution is very hard to measure and, to me at least, seems likely to be pretty minor, either in the positive or negative direction. The academic reputation is something built over many years based on the success of graduates as they move through their professional and personal lives. As I look at higher education, I see no correlation between athletic success and academic reputation. This is certainly not to say that an individual student's athletic experiences cannot affect their post-graduate lives, just that at the institution level there is no obvious correlation.

**Admissions.** The Flutie Effect was first touted in admissions, with athletic success allegedly leading to more student applications. A closer look at this hypothesis, as noted in the previous post, suggests that the evidence for this link is not as strong as initially thought. Admissions is affected by many variables and a winning (or losing) football team appears not to have a significant impact. This is likely to be even more true at the D3 level as the fan support and game day experience are quite different than at a D1 school. Students may well want to go to a place where there is a football program, but desiring such a social occasion is often more important to such students than the actual outcome of the game.

Interestingly, at Saint John's we have some natural experiments to examine. According to Fr. Donald LeMay, Director of Admissions in the 1960s, enrollment did see a significant spike following the two national championships in 1963 and 1965. Conversely, an analysis of enrollment in the couple years following the 2003 national championship, done by our Director of Institutional Research Jon McGee, suggested no impact from that successful season. Fr. Donald and Jon would both admit that the quality of the statistical work and our confidence in its conclusions is highly problematic when we are looking at one or two or three data points. In fact the evidence is properly called anecdotal, not statistical.



**Student-Athletes.** There is a hypothesis that might reconcile the two anecdotal observations at Saint John's, and likely identifies the true impact of successful athletics at the Division 3 level. I think the true impact on the institution of excellent athletics comes in the form of student-athletes. Many of the young men and women who are drawn to residential liberal arts institutions are interested in continuing their high school athletic endeavors, even as they pursue an excellent academic experience. To participate in a program that has been successful at the conference or national level is likely to be an attraction. Furthermore, to play for a particular coach might also serve

as a draw. I suspect what Fr. Donald saw in the early 1960s was an increase in student athletes who wanted to play for John Gagliardi, and when SJU had a small student body, those 20 or 30 additional guys had a noticeable impact on enrollment. (There were, of course, other significant factors like the GI Bill and the general growth in college enrollments across the country.) By 2003, the student body had grown to the point where 20 or 30 extra football players, attracted by the football program's success, might well not have not been as noticeable in the usual fluctuations of an entering class of about 500 students.

Admittedly, this is speculation on my part, but the D3 equivalent of the Flutie Effect (which may not be real) might be called the Gagliardi Effect, where an excellent athletic program draws student-athletes in large enough numbers to have a real impact on enrollment over time. I know that we pay careful attention to the one-third of students who come to SJU to participate, at least in their first year, in varsity athletics. It would be interesting to explore this question at other institutions to see if there was a Westering Effect at Pacific Lutheran or a Kehres Effect at Mount Union.

Selfishly, I hope we can turn the Gagliardi Effect into the Fasching Effect at Saint John's. I'd love our 2014 conference championship and Gary's MIAC Coach of the Year honors to translate into 20 or 30 more students in the class of 2019. We shall see.

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By [Michael Hemesath](#) | January 16th, 2015 | Categories: [Higher Education](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).