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An Empirical Analysis of Individual Events in Collegiate Forensics

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Introduction

In competitive collegiate speech and debate (forensics), it is commonly assumed that competitors who had significant experience competing at the high school level enjoy greater competitive success than their counterparts who had less experience, on average. However, no prior evidence exists which empirically supports that claim, which holds significant implications for the funding and recruiting paradigms in the activity. This project uses a novel data set and analysis to investigate the empirical validity of this relationship for the first time.

Data

This project combined the near-universe of high school forensics competitors between 2007 and 2017 and the universe of competitors at the AFA-NIET (collegiate national championship) between 2013 and 2018. High school competitors earned points (NSDA points) through their careers based upon their success. These points were standardized and mapped onto their college counterparts. Each observation in the data is a single AFA-NIET competitor in year X . Included are that competitor’s NSDA points, level of collegiate experience in years, number of events, team, and AFA-NIET point totals for that year.

Table 3: NSDA Sample versus AFA-NIET sample

Points (SD)	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Median	Max
NSDA	150,229	0	1.000	-0.689	-0.427	14.266
AFA-NIET	2870	1.040	1.821	-0.687	0.000	14.266

Empirical Strategy

The data were analyzed utilizing the multivariate OLS regression equation:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \dots + \beta_n X_n + \varepsilon$$

Where Y is the competitor’s AFA-NIET point total for that year, β_0 is the constant, X_1 is the competitor’s NSDA point total, X_2 is the competitor’s level of AFA-NIET experience, X_3 is the competitor’s number of events, and other X_n are team-level effects for each competitor, which are not shown in this poster due to size issues. Additionally, tests were conducted on each category of AFA-NIET event.

Results (1)

NSDA and AFA-NIET Experience on AFA-NIET Outcomes

	Outcome		
	Total (1)	Mean (2)	Number of Events (3)
NSDA Points (Standard Deviation)	2.484*** (0.232)	0.858*** (0.059)	0.015 (0.013)
AFA-NIET Experience	11.641*** (0.480)	2.143*** (0.121)	0.663*** (0.028)
Constant	11.504*** (0.557)	4.531*** (0.140)	2.374*** (0.032)

Observations	2,870	2,870	2,870
R ²	0.216	0.176	0.172
Adjusted R ²	0.216	0.176	0.172
Residual Std. Error (df = 2867)	22.421	5.655	1.292
F Statistic (df = 2; 2867)	395.872***	306.594***	298.424***

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Results (2)

NSDA and AFA-NIET Experience on AFA-NIET Outcomes by AFA-NIET Event Category

	Event									
	ADS (1)	CA (2)	DI (3)	EXT (4)	IMP (5)	INFO (6)	PERS (7)	POE (8)	POI (9)	PRO (10)
NSDA Points (Standard Deviation)	0.616*** (0.169)	0.688*** (0.168)	0.696*** (0.165)	0.998*** (0.131)	0.927*** (0.126)	0.686*** (0.145)	0.509*** (0.149)	1.039*** (0.188)	1.241*** (0.176)	0.822*** (0.156)
AFA-NIET Experience	1.573*** (0.308)	2.039*** (0.321)	2.137*** (0.290)	2.280*** (0.311)	2.197*** (0.264)	1.845*** (0.271)	2.357*** (0.293)	2.405*** (0.306)	2.013*** (0.308)	1.335*** (0.266)
Constant	5.624*** (0.422)	5.429*** (0.423)	5.197*** (0.375)	4.601*** (0.412)	4.589*** (0.359)	5.178*** (0.376)	5.097*** (0.385)	5.056*** (0.383)	4.944*** (0.400)	5.541*** (0.351)
Observations	788	686	845	763	850	843	795	805	796	928
R ²	0.056	0.095	0.087	0.141	0.145	0.091	0.105	0.119	0.111	0.064
Adjusted R ²	0.053	0.093	0.085	0.139	0.143	0.089	0.103	0.116	0.108	0.062
Residual Std. Error	8.133 (df = 785)	7.801 (df = 683)	7.750 (df = 842)	8.035 (df = 760)	7.360 (df = 847)	7.521 (df = 840)	7.832 (df = 792)	7.908 (df = 802)	7.957 (df = 793)	7.473 (df = 925)
F Statistic	23.167*** (f = 2; 785)	36.019*** (f = 2; 683)	40.268*** (f = 2; 842)	62.297*** (f = 2; 760)	71.719*** (f = 2; 847)	41.956*** (f = 2; 840)	46.465*** (f = 2; 792)	53.996*** (f = 2; 802)	49.267*** (f = 2; 793)	31.410*** (f = 2; 925)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Conclusion

There is considerable evidence that collegiate forensics competitors with more experience at the high school level enjoy more competitive success at the collegiate level on average, but the magnitude of the effect is small and pales in comparison to the impact of collegiate forensics experience. These effects are patterns are also present across each category of AFA-NIET event.

Future research into this area would do well to consider debate-specific effects, other college tournaments, and metrics other than NSDA points as a measure of success.

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