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Investigating Academic Timing and the Relative Age Effect in Interuniversity Volleyball

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In sports and education, organizations establish cut-off dates to allow for equal opportunities among individuals. Through this process, the relative age effect (RAE) becomes prevalent. The RAE is a developmental advantage experienced by those born immediately after the cut-off date when compared to those born later in the selection year (Barnsley et al., 1985). Interuniversity sports exist in an academic setting, and encompass many age groups within a single team. As a result, the academic timing (AT) of student-athletes is an important factor to consider with athletic participation, and is used to determine whether student-athletes are 'on-time' or 'delayed' with regards to their academic status and eligibility (Dixon et al., 2013; Glamser & Marciani, 1992). To be considered 'on-time,' student-athletes' birthdates must coincide with their expected athletic eligibility status; meanwhile, 'academically delayed' student-athletes have athletic eligibilities corresponding to a younger age cohort.
To date, the RAE has been examined across multiple sports and competitive levels (Cobley et al., 2009) with limited focus on volleyball (viz., Okazaki et al., 2011), and no studies being conducted within an interuniversity volleyball setting. The current study examined the impact of AT on the RAE among 'U Sports' (previously known as 'Canadian Interuniversity Sport') male ($n = 1046$) and female ($n = 1374$) volleyball players competing in the 2011-'12, 2012-'13, and 2013-'14 seasons. Data were collected from CIS eligibility certificates for the aforementioned seasons. Chi-square goodness of fit tests (X^2) were used to compare the observed distribution of student-athletes' births with the expected frequency across each quartile. Additionally, Cramér's phi (φ) was used to calculate effect sizes. A significant RAE was exhibited across all three years for the overall male samples ($p = 0.05$, $\varphi = 0.125$ to 0.221), as well as for those considered 'on-time' ($p = 0.05$, $\varphi = 0.209$ to 0.340). Furthermore, a significant RAE was recognized for the overall ($p = 0.018$, $\varphi = $ p.153) and 'on-time' ($p < 0.001$, $\varphi = 0.238$) female samples in 2013-'14. The clearly defined RAE pattern suggests that those born in the months immediately following the designated cut-off date are advantaged when it comes to playing at the highest competitive level for this age group.