

1989

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Peters, Kathleen M., "The demands of dual roles for student-athletes" (1989). *Graduate Research Papers*. 3095.

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The demands of dual roles for student-athletes

Abstract

Since the beginning of intercollegiate athletics in this country, there has been controversy regarding the role they play in the total program of higher education. More recently, attention has been focused on the commercial enterprise college athletics have become. Both aspects of the controversy have affected the student-athlete. Frey (1982) stated that ever since the first intercollegiate event in 1852, a crew race between Harvard and Yale, "the history of intercollegiate athletics has been one of balancing the demands of external interests (e.g., alumni/booster, entertainment and promotion) with those of the internal, educational constituency who asked questions about institutional control" (p. 14). Athletic competition plays an important role in higher education. The lessons and values learned through athletic competition can be a valuable aspect of the total educational process.

THE DEMANDS OF DUAL ROLES FOR
STUDENT-ATHLETES

A Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

by
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August 1989

Since the beginning of intercollegiate athletics in this country, there has been controversy regarding the role they play in the total program of higher education. More recently, attention has been focused on the commercial enterprise college athletics have become. Both aspects of the controversy have affected the student-athlete.

Frey (1982) stated that ever since the first intercollegiate event in 1852, a crew race between Harvard and Yale, "the history of intercollegiate athletics has been one of balancing the demands of external interests (e.g., alumni/booster, entertainment and promotion) with those of the internal, educational constituency who asked questions about institutional control" (p. 14). Athletic competition plays an important role in higher education. The lessons and values learned through athletic competition can be a valuable aspect of the total educational process.

Intercollegiate athletics involve teamwork, ingenuity, hard work, fortitude, self-discipline, and self-motivation. Golden (1984) further stated that to participate in intercollegiate athletics is to become a member of a unique minority group based upon a social binding of dedication, recognition, and commitment. However, the reason a student attends college should be

to earn an academic degree, not to major in athletics. The college experience is best when students engage in balanced academic-athletic-recreational activities.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the conflicts inherent in the dual roles faced by collegiate student-athletes. Focusing upon the high profile sports of football and basketball will reveal the demands and challenges required of the student-athletes on and off the playing field. Individuals affiliated with the student-athlete must be responsible for the manner in which the intellectual and physical domains of postsecondary education are united. Discussion will include: the images of the student-athletes as perceived by the popular and professional literature, the demands on student-athletes, and the positive measures used to enhance the academic and athletic development of student-athletes.

Perceptions of Student-Athletes

Popular and professional literature portraying various aspects of intercollegiate athletics has a direct influence on the public's image of the college athlete, both as a group and as individuals.

Whitner (1988) defined popular literature as written work that has no scientific base and is often

highly opinionated. Examples of popular literature include newspapers, magazines, and brochures. Professional literature, on the other hand, does contain a scientific foundation and is written by individuals knowledgeable in a particular area. Professional literature includes textbooks, journals, theses, and dissertations. Both popular and professional literature have a significant impact upon intercollegiate athletics.

Often reported in the popular literature is information of a human interest nature that portrays the public and private life of the athlete. The academic and athletic image of the student-athlete can be reflected both positive and negatively. If the popular literature is incomplete, inaccurate, or possesses insufficient data, the public forms their own interpretations and opinions. This can lead to public myths and stereotypes of the student-athlete.

Gup (1989) reported that the "national obsession with winning and moneymaking is turning big-time college sports into an educational scandal that, for too many players, leads down a one-way path to broken dreams" (p. 50). These "broken dreams" can be results of the betrayal of a promise of an education by

recruiters, institutional self-interest, and/or the student-athlete's own blind love of the sport.

One case reported by Gup (1989) was that of Reggie Ford from rural South Carolina. This high school senior averaged 22 points per game and earned a 2.0 grade point average. More than a dozen universities recruited Reggie, but it was basketball coach Bob Ballisti of Northwestern Oklahoma State University who finally persuaded Reggie to attend his institution. Reggie was the first member of his family to attend college, so the family felt fortunate that Battisti was looking out for Reggie's best interest by promising a tutor to assist him with academics.

Reggie initially enjoyed an athletic and social relationship with his coaches, but when Reggie asked about a tutor, he was put off. When Reggie injured his knee, the coaches ignored him, his grades dropped, and his scholarship was withdrawn. Reggie left the university, moved back to South Carolina to live with his family, and collects unemployment.

Battisti admitted that his school did not have a budget for formal tutoring and that he and some team members occasionally helped Reggie with his studies. According to Battisti, the real problem was that Reggie failed to apply himself. Reggie's teachers, on the

other hand, say he did try, struggled to overcome a third-grade reading level, and fought the exhaustion of basketball practice and studying. In the end, Reggie realized he could not catch up academically. He seemed to have the initiative to make up the deficiency, but did not receive the promised support services.

Institutional self-interest can also result in the student-athlete not completing his college education (Gup, 1989). Brian Rahilly was a white, middle-class high school senior from Oklahoma, recruited by dozens of colleges before choosing the University of Tulsa. Brian hoped to play college and professional basketball and become a sportscaster.

Four years later, Brian left the university without a degree. In the four years he attended the University of Tulsa, Brian's coaches made his decisions, from arranging summer employment to selecting courses. The athletic department enrolled Brian in an academic department in which he had no interest. After his sophomore year, Brian asked to transfer to another department (communications) that he was interested in, but by then his grades were too low for him to transfer. The physical education department agreed to enroll Brian, and he remained there for the next two

years. Brian never did major in communications, even though his coach said every attempt was made for Brian to pursue his field of interest.

Brian trusted the institution and coaching staff. He feels like a piece of equipment the athletic department owned. Currently earning \$8,000 a year playing for the Topeka Sizzlers of the minor-league Continental Basketball Association, Brian feels cheated of his academic and athletic careers and wonders what lies ahead for him.

If institutions of higher education assume responsibility for keeping intercollegiate athletics in perspective, perhaps student-athletes would not have unrealistic expectations of the institution and the sport. A positive experience reported by Gup (1989) has enabled Fred Brown to meet the challenge of uniting academics and athletics. Fred grew up poor in the South Bronx. His father was imprisoned when Fred was three, and his mother raised a family of six on an annual salary of \$4,000.

Fred credits his intercollegiate athletic experience as an outlet to channel that talent into usable life skills. A major in sociology, Fred graduated from Georgetown and was employed by Xerox as a marketing representative. Fred became active in

real estate investments, calling upon several of his sports contacts. Currently, Fred is enrolled at Georgetown law school. While the road of success has not been an easy one for Fred, he was realistic about his talent and determined to succeed academically and become educated. Without basketball, Fred feels he would have been dead or in jail if he had not taken advantage of his talent.

Fred Brown's success at Georgetown is no doubt attributed to basketball head coach, John Thompson. Leavy (1985) profiled Thompson's successful basketball program in Ebony. The article pointed out that the student-athletes must perform in the classroom or they can forget about performing on the basketball court. The key to Thompson's success is in recruiting talented athletes who think a Georgetown education is more important than Georgetown basketball. Utilizing athletic academic advisors helps Thompson keep his players progressing toward a degree. Those players not putting forth the effort to progress academically are dropped from the team. In less severe cases, student-athletes are encouraged to drop basketball temporarily to concentrate on their studies. Thompson does not want to be perceived as exploiting student-athletes; he

has an eye on the future and knows the dangers associated with the seductiveness of athletic success.

Professional literature contributes to the perceptions of a more informed audience who are more directly involved in and affected by the academic and athletic performance of student-athletes. This audience includes coaches, faculty, and local and governing association administration. Whitner (1988) determined that student-athletes were academically similar to other students on their campuses. The only difference is that the student-athlete is in the public eye. The athletes are loved and hated, admired and despised by the public. They are viewed, on one hand, as saviors to the institution for creating high revenue, but are also viewed as spoiled individuals for the benefits they receive. The athletes are seen as strong, mature, and confident individuals, but often they are unable to perform as well academically as they do athletically.

Too many students are losing chances at life's success by neglecting academics in pursuit of athletic dreams. Of the millions of high school athletes, only 1 in 50 will receive a scholarship to play college athletics. Of the top players receiving scholarships

in football and basketball, fewer than 30 percent will graduate from college after four years (Lapchick, 1987).

(Lapchick, 1987) reported that student-athletes must fulfill the following high school requirements in order to compete in intercollegiate athletics as freshmen: 1) a 2.0 (C) grade point average, 2) a 700 combined score on the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) or 15 on the American College Test (ACT) examination, and 3) pass a core curriculum with a 2.0 in each course. If a college freshman has a 2.1 grade point average or higher in core subjects, he can qualify for athletic competition with SAT scores as low as 680 or ACT scores of 14. Freshmen with a grade point average of 1.9 will need an SAT score of 720 or an ACT score of 16. These eligibility requirements set forth by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) are known as Proposition #16 (formerly Proposition #48), which went into effect in August, 1986. Since that date, a debate regarding minimum academic standards for student-athletes has consumed intercollegiate athletics.

Institutions of higher education must have a philosophy of athletics that is congruent with their academic mission, goals, and objectives. Golden (1984)

perceived that this philosophy seldom actualizes the term "student-athlete." The background and unique demands placed upon student-athletes in college require understanding from the administration, faculty, general student body, and fans.

Demands on Student-Athletes

The needs of student-athletes are special because of the unique demands placed upon their time, energies, and egos as a consequence of their athletic participation. Student-athletes are college students who happen to also be athletes. These individuals are at the base of intercollegiate athletics, and how athletics are organized, structured, and operated has a direct impact upon those individuals (Shriberg and Brodzinski, 1984).

The student-athlete is said to be serving two masters. Rhatigan (1984) stated that the public does not understand what the student-athlete experiences. Many think that the student-athlete is "overprivileged, takes easy courses, and coasts through college by doing very little work of substance" (p. 43). In reality, student-athletes face rigorous practices and extensive travel and playing schedules. They miss 20 percent of their classes, have to get class notes from other students, and must make up missed quizzes or exams.

Hurley and Cunningham (1984) reported that the needs of student-athletes are special because of the unique demands that are placed upon them as a consequence of their athletic participation. These needs include: 1) time and energy, 2) psychological demands, 3) academic support/studying/tutoring, 4) communication with faculty, 5) advisement and registration procedures, 6) psychological services, 7) university services, and 8) placement upon graduation from the institution. Intercollegiate athletics require student-athletes to manage their time and energy to adjust to both the academic and athletic worlds. Being a member of an athletic team sets the student-athlete apart from nonathletes and forces the student-athlete to seek a second family within his team and coaching staff. Administrators and faculty with access to academic and athletic administration should serve as academic advisors to the student-athlete.

Sparent (1988) reported that intercollegiate athletics are not going to change radically in the near future. The same issues have been appearing in the academic arena the past fifty years. Institutions of higher education will continue to promote their

intercollegiate athletics. The student-athlete will certainly possess the physical skill, but his/her academic skill may be questionable.

Education, for the student-athlete, is not always put first. High school athletes are recruited for college athletics with the hope that the institutions will get a monetary/public relations return on their investment. Athletes must believe they need an education.

Purdy, Eitzen, and Hufnagel (1982), in their study of academic achievement of athletes at Colorado State University from Fall 1970 through Spring 1980, found that football and basketball players have a lesser chance of earning a degree than do nonathletes or athletes in other sports. A serious concern is that the overemphasis on winning is a burden on the players in these revenue-producing sports. In conjunction with this emphasis is the likelihood that athletes are recruited who are exceptional in the sport but less qualified for the academic aspect of higher education. These student-athletes are kept eligible by meeting, in one way or another, NCAA, athletic conference, and institutional academic requirements. To this extent, the student-athlete is being exploited. To continually ignore the special needs of collegiate

student-athletes will escalate the imbalance of academics and athletics. This is especially true of black student-athletes.

The Black Student-Athlete

Leach and Connors (1984) stated that athletic success becomes a powerful lure that draws student-athletes from less rewarding experiences in the classroom. They perform well on the playing field, but little is expected from them academically. This only reinforces the "dumb jock" stereotype. One group in particular--the black male--seems to be perceived more as the "dumb jock." Edwards (1984) stated that this population has "three strikes" against them from the beginning: 1) the connotation and social reverberation of the traditional "dumb jock," 2) the myth of "innate black athletic superiority," and 3) the overall blatant racist stereotype of the "dumb Negro." Since these stereotypes have been in existence, "the shameful situation of the black student athlete has been for so long not only widely tolerated but expected and institutionally accepted" (Edwards, 1984, p. 8).

Sports have a reputation of providing socioeconomic and career opportunities to black males. Edwards (1983) reported that while blacks, in 1981, constituted 11.7 percent of the United States population, 24 of the

28 first-round National Football League (NFL) draft choices were blacks. In 1982, 55 percent of the NFL players were black. The National Basketball Association (NBA) roster in the 1982-83 season was 70 percent black, as were 80 percent of the starters.

Black athletes are disproportionately visible as role models than are blacks in other high prestige occupations (i.e., doctors, lawyers, educators)--all the more reason for black student-athletes to be educated. The Des Moines Register (1989) reported a recent NCAA study which revealed that most black athletes playing football and basketball lag academically. This issue, as well as others related to student-athletes, has become a major issue at the University of Iowa. Each day brings new information regarding Proposition 48, student recruitment and eligibility, and the possibility of banning freshmen from athletic participation. Currently, nationwide attention focused on two former University of Iowa football players and their academic records. This investigation led university president Hunter Rawlings to introduce a ban on freshman athletics in order to improve academics.

College athletic programs are in danger of losing their educational credibility. "Academicians are

responsible as individuals and as institutional representatives for the moral character of college sports and the ethics of student participation" (Mihalich, 1984, p. 72). In order to develop both minds and bodies in achieving intellectual and physical excellence, institutional and external controls must be implemented.

Governing College Athletics

Since the beginning of intercollegiate athletics, various circumstances, such as violence on the playing field and unfair rules, have led to the creation of governing bodies. The governing body for most intercollegiate athletics is the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). There are other governing associations, such as the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), and the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). Each of these associations has its own set of rules and regulations, but the NCAA is most prominent in institutions of higher education across the country.

Members of the NCAA are institutions of higher education that meet defined conditions and subscribe to those conditions as well as the mission of the NCAA. The mission was expanded from simply defining the rules

of play to controlling violence in athletics through legislating and enforcing rules of conduct and play. The NCAA has eleven principles which constitute the basis for its rules and regulations which govern a wide variety of athletic programs on a competitive, but fair, basis on and off the playing field. The rules governing recruiting and eligibility of athletes are the most frequently and intensely considered, because they directly affect the student-athletes, which ultimately depends upon the institution's commitment to apply the rules (Scott, 1984).

The NCAA (1988) stated the following policy for all of its activities:

The competitive athletic programs of the colleges are designed to be a vital part of the educational system. A basic purpose of this association is to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and the athlete as an integral part of the student body and, by so doing, retain a clear line of demarcation between college athletics and professional sports (p. 7).

Summary

The examination of conflicts regarding the dual roles of student-athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics involves personnel in both the academic and athletic components of higher education. The controversy between academics and intercollegiate athletics continues to affect the student-athlete from all views. Individual institutions must take responsibility for administering academic programs that meet NCAA, conference, and their own requirements for graduation. The goals of higher education include developing the person to his maximum potential intellectually, socially, aesthetically, spiritually, and physically.

To work effectively with student-athletes and maximize their academic experience, university administration, faculty, and staff must be aware of the difference between student-athletes and nonathletes. Student development personnel must become aware of student-athletes' academic and career goals, as well as academic developmental difficulties. Strategies, if not already implemented, must facilitate the student-athletes growth. This is especially true for the black student-athlete.

Student-athletes must also bear responsibility for their education and improving their lives. Edwards (1984) stated that education is not given to the student-athlete; it must be earned. University boards and presidents must become and/or remain concerned about the relation between academics and athletics when establishing institutional priorities. Also, the student-athletes themselves must insist upon equality and integrity in academics and athletics.

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