

# Professional Discourse: An Editorial Comment

Editorial responsibility for the *Journal* has, for a time, been passed along to me. Gerald Gurney has moved from editor to the editorial board. At the outset I want to thank Gerry for the splendid work that he has done. I hope to sustain the positive impetus that he has provided and, by working closely with him, our publishers, and the rest of our fine editorial board, I am confident that we can do so.

While the editorial policy of the *Journal* will remain essentially unchanged, one modification will be made in its format. Beginning with the Fall, 1987 number, we will include short notes and comments on issues of salient concern to members of the profession. The readership is invited to submit brief commentaries on topics of interest. Ideas germane to the national debate on the proper balance between education and athletics are particularly encouraged. Henceforth, the *Journal* will provide a mechanism by which to continue the lively discussions that have characterized our recent national and regional meetings.

As a start, I have two proposals to set forth. These, of course, are purely personal, and should not in any way be construed as representing official positions of the NAAAA. The first proposal is a modification of NCAA Bylaw 1-1-(b)-(3). That rule stipulates what printed materials may be provided to prospective student-athletes. Conspicuously omitted are student-athlete handbooks. These handbooks can and should be a valuable source of information about academic support programs. It seems evident that prospective student-athletes should be as thoroughly informed as possible on this vital aspect of an athletic program. I suggest the bylaw be changed to allow prospective student-athletes to receive and evaluate one student-athlete handbook from an institution.

My second proposal concerns Bylaw 5-1-(j) and is, *ipso facto*, complex and controversial. Whatever the strengths and weaknesses inherent in this reform legislation, there is one disturbing aspect of it which has not, in my opinion, received sufficient attention: the stigma associated with being publicly identified as a non-qualifier. Highly visible student-athletes who do not satisfy the criteria of 5-1-(j) cannot avoid being permanently stereotyped as "dumb jocks." Underprepared—as opposed to truly unqualified—students simply do not have an opportunity to overcome their educational deficiencies without public humiliation. We don't know what the pernicious consequences of this are, but it is likely that they are considerable. As the eminent psychiatrist C. Knight Aldrich put it, "The expectation of behaviour

by others is . . . a determinant of the behaviour it prophesies" (*Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 1974, 8:127).

If we must use scores and grades, I think that we should stand 5-1-(j) on its head. That is, we should establish fairly high criteria that leave little doubt that a high school student is prepared to handle the dual roles of college student and athlete. For the sake of simplicity, let us assume that 1000 SAT and 3.000 high school GPA were the established threshold of preparation. Students meeting this standard would be allowed to participate in athletics, and indentionation in the press would not constitute a problem. Freshman ineligibility would apply for all others.

This proposal would seem to offer a compromise between John Slaughter's view that freshmen need an athletics-free year and Theodore Hesburgh's position that athletics does not create problems for freshmen athletes. (*NCAA News*, May 20, 1987.) More importantly, it seems to address the very real concerns that engendered 5-1-(j), while removing the stigma. It does, as they say, "accentuate the positive."

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