BOOK REVIEW

Gaining the Competitive Edge: Enriching the Collegiate Experienceof the New Student-Athlete

By Stephen Robinson (Eds.) Published 1999 by The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience & Student in Transition. The University of South Carolina.

Reviewed by Matthew L. Kelly, The Florida State University

This book contains eleven concise chapters regarding the experiences of first-time and continuing student-athletes in a collegiate setting. The chapter authors – some of the most well respected people within the profession of intercollegiate athletics – have a background in the subject areas examined in their particular chapters. The editor of this book, Stephen Robinson, is the Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Services at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Robinson's introduction details the importance of the relationship between student-athletes and the other areas of the university outside of athletics. He sets up the reader for the many ideas that will follow.

Chapter one, which sets the tone for the entire book, is an insightful interview of Mike McGee, the Athletics Director at the University of South Carolina. McGee, who has had a lengthy and successful career, is candid in his remarks. The main revelation of this first chapter, however, is that it shows how the book can be useful for those in athletics as well as other members of the campus community.

The remaining chapters have a logical and systematic connection as they build upon each other. Following McGee's interview are chapters that cover areas on providing effective support services, successful collaboration between advisors and coaches, problems and innovations in counseling student-athletes, and a brief history of student-athlete counseling as a profession. This set of chapters is wrapped up nicely in chapter five by author Daniel Boggan, Jr., Senior Vice-President for Internal Operations at the NCAA. Boggan, through his use of citations of many of the NCAA bylaws that pertain to the welfare of the student-athlete, gives strength to the ideas and suggestions from the previous chapters.

The middle chapters of the book focus on the potential for student-athlete development through the use of the NCAA CHAMPS / life skills programs. Meg Murray successfully shows and relates the results of the "Help Seeking Survey Research Project" in chapter 6. The following chapters discuss the evolution of the CHAMPS / life skills program and the historical effects of Proposition 48 and 16 on preparation for college by the student-athlete. Jerry Kingston uses this information to show how these initiatives have affected graduation rates over the last decade and how they are helpful when planning for the future. Unfortunately, the chapter on the history of the CHAMPS / life skills program lacks original ideas. Although this chapter is well written, six of its seven pages are a mere adaptation of the NCAA book on CHAMPS / life skills program administration.

The book concludes with a series of connected specialty chapters that each covers a unique subject area of concern when dealing with student-athletes. Karl Mooney writes on the challenges of dealing with the junior college transfer as they enter their second "first-year experience." Involved in this is a discussion on how to deal with a new student-athlete on campus with some college experience. Carol Gruber deals with the first-year female student-athlete and the unique challenges that she may face. Finally, Richard Lapchick writes on the current state of race and college sports.

Overall, each author provides a well-written, unique, and valuable perspective concerning his or her particular subject area. Although this book is quite short at 126 pages, it does contain a lot a useful material and ideas throughout its overview of college athletics and student-athlete services. There is certainly room for additional material on each topic as eight of the eleven chapters could be expanded into stand-alone books. The information offered, however, is a great starting point and helpful generator of ideas. Any individual in the profession could take these thoughts as a jumping off point into other more detailed writings. Lastly, athletic departments that find they are lacking in any one content area could certainly learn and brainstorm after reading this book.