

The College Student Athlete: Special Needs And Development Interventions A survey of the literature

by
Wendy Whittemore
University of Maryland

INTRODUCTION

Counselor education has for years addressed itself to the needs of special populations. Yet, until recently, the legitimacy of student athletes as a special population has been questioned (Lanning, 1982). In many ways, freshmen students athletes are like all freshmen, they "Face all the (same) issues and tasks—independence; separation from old friends and making new acquaintances; group living; lack of supervision/monitoring regarding class attendance and studying; a new environment with its mix of values, attitudes and expectations; the need for academic planning and pursuit of leisure expectations. It is generally recognized that the transition from school to college is a big step for most entering freshmen. "(Yet) students athletes have some additional tasks and issues to confront—the impact of moving from a "star" situation back home to being one of many competent performers in a much larger arena; media pressure from radio, newspapers and TV, which for many means living in a fishbowl; learning to live with new coaches and their expectations; heavy time pressures because of practice, game demands and

travel; and little time for socializing during one's "sports participation. In addition, for many freshmen, there are the realities of little actual game playing time and unrealistic expectations regarding the relationship between being a student first and an athlete second (...conflicting messages...result in many value and attitude conflicts)"(Farwell and Perrone, 1983, pp. 24-25).

Given this introduction by Farwell and Perrone, it will be the purpose of this paper to: (1) elaborate on the college experience as it is lived by many Division I athletes, including the resultant differences in the athletes' socio-emotional development, and (2) review the literature describing currently existing developmental counseling and/or educational support programs which enhance the athletes' college experience.

THE ATHLETIC EXPERIENCE AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The athletic experience affects many aspects of a student's life: peer relationships, time management, education and career planning, the development of self-concept, the perceptions of the student athlete by others, and the fan/media environment. Black athletes and female athletes express additional concerns based on their unique experiences as blacks and females. It has been estimated by some that the Division I athlete in season commits up to 40 hours per week in athletic-related activities (Gurney, Robinson & Fygetakis, 1983); simply because of the time spent on this activity, the athlete experience has probably the single greatest influence on the student's college experience.

For example, because of the time factor, student athletes experience specialized peer group relationships; their friends are almost always other athletes. Yet, athletic friendships involve a competitive aspect not found in non-athletes' friendships, for often teammates compete for the opportunity to play (Lanning, 1982; Remer, Tongate & Watson, 1978). Further, if practice time and competition combine to informally segregate the athlete from his/her non-athlete peers, athletic housing arrangements make it formal (Harrison, 1981). Having spent so little time in non-athletic environments, many athletes feel uncomfortable approaching a typical university situation. In some cases, their behavior is irresponsible (Harrison, 1981). In almost any case, there are few peer relationships which are experienced as automatically comfortable and safe (Lanning, 1982). Together with this, one of the biggest difficulties in the non-athletic arena is

the combination of highly positive and highly negative perceptions of athletes held by others.

Coaches, under the gun to win, see as their main job recruiting, scouting, organizing and planning. The coach can arrange for tutors and advisors; the coach can spend much time counseling and advising; but ultimately, the athlete must take the tests and write the papers. Faculty members are often resistant to helping athletes when "the only time the Athletic Department calls is to ask if I'll pass some guy who hasn't done a lick of work all semester." The Athletic Director, beset with financial problems, can't always provide the funds for academic support s/he might like. Finally, the athlete's non-athlete peers exert perhaps the most difficult combination of pressures of all: high expectations and negative stereotypes. Non-athletes alternate between excitement, awe and fan club mentality on the one hand, and jealousy with regard to academic support and "pandering;" anger with regard to "typical Jock attitudes"; and accusations about narrow social skills on the other (Remer, Tongate & Watson, 1978). Clearly, the only friend the athlete may feel s/he has is another athlete.

A second area of concern faced by the students athlete centers around time management and study skills (e.g., note taking, reading and writing skills, and test-taking). A tremendous amount of time is already planned for the athlete, but that does not mean s/he manages well the time left over. Time management and study skills, like athletic skills, can be taught. However, in attempting to do so, the counselor/advisor often encounters attitudinal resistance which is a by-product of the third area of concern: inadequate career planning (Lanning, 1982).

It is well-known that many male Division I athletes, particularly those in football and basketball, aspire to a professional career (Coakley, 1978; Nelson, 1982; Remer, Tongate and Watson, 1978). What is less well-recognized is that for women athletes and many male athletes, the college experience is the athletic career (Nelson, 1982). As a result, for the vast majority of men, professional athletics is an unrealistic expectation; and for women and men playing non-revenue sports, career expectations may be absent altogether. Either way, male and female students-athletes are usually ignorant of alternative career options or don't know how to make sense of them. Many men are focused into business and sales—which, from a career development perspective, is often an exploitation of the athletic image and/or discrimination against the individual's other skills and interests. Often the results are frustration and unhappiness and, sometimes, disaster (Lanning, 1982). For women, career patterns following athletic participation is less clear.

A fourth area of concern is the athlete's development of self-concept. As with all these areas, the athlete is not unique in this concern so much as the context within which it develops. The university athlete, by virtue of his/her skills, has the potential to excel. Not unlike others with unique abilities, the challenge of coming to a bigger arena filled with peers of equal or greater talent can be overwhelming. Suddenly the high school "star" may be a bench-warmer and the athlete's formerly secure self-concept is challenged. The freshman (and/or non-starting) athlete who has tied who s/he is and what s/he can do to his/her performance on the field is at a loss for defining his/her self-worth, not only to him/herself, but to teammates and non-athlete peers when s/he does not play. The impact of injury is similar, if not even more difficult, since the loss of athletic participation may be permanent. In either case, the non-playing athlete must cope with a self-perceived loss of self-worth, an often traumatic re-direction of goals, and changes in peer relationships, team relationships, and social lives. Often, these adjustments are characterized by debilitating anger and confusion (Lanning, 1982).

Finally, the athlete exists in a fan/media environment different from virtually all but an occasional student leader. As implied earlier, the fan/media phenomenon reinforces only a small slice of the spectrum of an athlete's abilities—the athletic abilities. Therefore, unless the athlete possesses a natural scholastic aptitude, it is unlikely that academic performance can assume equal importance in the athlete's mind or ego. In fact, given scholastic deficiencies, classwork is viewed by many athletes as a bothersome and ego-threatening experience. The fan/media factor has the additional effect of influencing the athlete to think and feel obligated, i.e., the athlete receives praise, recognition and respect in return for performance. While playing for praise and recognition may adequately satisfy the athlete's immediate emotional and psychological needs, it has definite drawbacks in the long run when the athlete is unable to continue playing (Harrison, 1981).

In addition to these concerns, black and female athletes are faced with other issues. Of the black athletes interviewed by Green (1972 a,b), only seven percent felt that their coaches expected them to graduate. In addition, many expressed concerns about athletics as an alternative mode of servitude, and felt frustration with a loss of individual identity, the rigidly controlled life, and regulated social relationships. While interracial relationships have improved since this study was conducted, it is unfortunate and probable that many stereotypes and, consequently, many of these concerns continue to exist. Female athletes experience similar frustration. In this case, "stereotyping occurs in three forms: (1) a negative stigma...is attached to all female athletes, but more so to those in 'masculine' sports; (2) a loss of femininity...(is) perceived as a possible outcome of sport competition; and

sport in general....(is) believed to masculinize the female participant, not only physically, but also psychologically and behaviorally" (Anthrop & Allison, 1983). In any event, both black and female athletes perform in the face of stereotypes and conditions even more complex socio-emotionally than do white male athletes and each deserves sensitivity and support.

In conclusion, the experiences and, therefore, the needs of student athletes differ significantly from those of non-athletes (Sowa, 1983). While on the one hand, student athletes may benefit from the attention they receive, on the other they may be blocked from "normal" development. According to Remer, Tongate & Watson (1978), "Athletes are a group in need—in a predicament they aren't aware of, and locked into a system that has a vested interest in perpetuating itself" (p. 626). Among the typical problems they face as students include: lack of opportunities for psycho-social maturation, including the development of social skills and self-confidence in areas other than athletics, lack of realistic life expectancies and career goals, lack of reinforcement for the development of academic skills, and lack of time management skills.

CURRENTLY EXISTING PROGRAMS IN ASSESSMENT AND COUNSELING: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Recently, a Task Force of Student Athletes sponsored by the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) surveyed 260 institutions supporting NCAA Division I Football and Men's Basketball programs (survey reported in Gurney, Robinson and Fygetakis, 1983). Of these institutions, 43% (n=114) returned the survey questionnaires.

The report described staffing patterns and support programs, including the degree to which institutions used assessment in designing these programs. Among the surveyed institutions, 55% of the athletic programs provided one or more staff members for psychological or academic support. These individuals typically served as: liaisons with faculty, counselors, scholarship administrators, advisors and rule interpreters. Of the principle athletic counselors, 30.6% had a professional counseling background, 38% were para-professionals and 27.4% had coaching backgrounds. Those programs without trained counselors sponsored traditional modes of academic support: academic monitoring, tutoring and study-table. One of the most disturbing findings, say Gurney, Robinson and Fygetakis (1983), is that fully 50.9% of the responding athletic departments were engaged in direct scheduling of student athletes without the concurrence of faculty members.

"Recent criticism and legal suits directed at athletic departments for willfully impeding the normal academic progress of student-athletes may be warranted if this practice is to continue. Institutions must be aware of the obvious dangers of conflict of interest..." (p. 44).

A table of the types and frequency of assessment programs (from Gurney, Robinson and Fygetakis, 1983) is given below:

Assessment Target	% Responding Institutions Conducting	Frequently Used Assessment Tools
Pre-admission identification of high academic-risk student-athletes	68%*	High school class rank SAT, ACT scores Personal interviews High school transcripts
Reading Skills	33%	Nelson/Denny Reading Test McGraw-Hill Reading Test Stanford Reading Test
Career Development	18%	Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory (SCII) Kuder Occupational Interest Inventory
Writing Skills	25%	Writing Sample
Study Skills	18%	
Learning Disabilities	13%	Woodcock-Johnson Weschler
Personality Assessment	15%	Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) Cattell's 16 PF

*72% of the institutions routinely assessed their athletes; 27.3% tested in special cases only

Reviewing these results, it is somewhat disheartening to turn these results around and realize how much assessment isn't being done. Needs assessment is critical to the design of developmental programs. "Developmental" is distinguished from "remedial" philosophically: "developmental" implies a pro-active enhancement intervention, in contrast to the reactive, almost crisis-to-crisis approach which typifies a "remedial" intervention. Jones (1983) suggest a three-step approach based on Coyne's (1983) Model of Primary Prevention: Diagnose (Assess), Intervene, Prevent. Essentially, what she describes is a pro-active, population-based program that anticipates needs when possible, minimizes harmful circumstances, and focuses on the student-athlete's overall development through direct and indirect service delivery. While the ACPA report and the existence of such professional associations as the National Association of Athletic Academic Advisors attest to the fact that there is both strong interest and steady growth in staffing and developmental programming, it is evident there yet remains much to be done before Jones' approach can be considered typical of most athletic departments.

Despite the overall need for improved support services for student-athletes, there are a number of model programs already in existence which deserve recognition.

Toscano (1982) describes a primarily academic support program at Charles County (Maryland) Community college in which each athlete is paired with an academic advisor who reviews with the athlete his/her reading and math assessment results. The advisor ensures that there are no academic-athletic conflicts in the athlete's program, and coordinates academic information and assistance directly with the faculty and coaches. The athlete is an active participant in this process. The goal is to achieve a campus-wide support network in which the athletic department is viewed as an integral and supportive member. While Toscano does not provide quantitative data to demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach, he asserts that it has led to increased cooperation and understanding among the various constituencies of the community college campus.

Nelson (1982) reports that the assessment of an athlete's career interests (using the SCII) combined with the athlete's participation in five 2-hour career counseling workshops: improves academic performance, increases realistic career aspirations, and establishes a higher degree of satisfaction with college majors. She conducted this study in the Fall of 1979 with 65 freshman athletes representing 22 men's and women's teams at James Madison University in Virginia. The purpose of the Experimental workshop sessions was to examine personal characteristics and influences (including SCII results) in an organized, structured fashion. In addition, the exercises

were intended to facilitate the integration of increased personal knowledge with new information about existing careers and the job market. She notes that these career counseling workshops were complemented by academic advising workshops at the close of each Fall and Spring semester.

In contrast to the Control athlete group, which earned an average G.P.A. of 2.17 at the close of Fall semester, Nelson (1982) reported that the Experimental athlete group earned a 2.41. At the close of the second semester, the rest of the freshman class (non-athletes) averaged 2.61, while the Experimental athlete group averaged 2.5; the Control group averaged 2.25. Analysis revealed that, in contrast to the athlete controls, there was no significant difference between the Experimental athlete group and the rest of the freshman class. All athletes were enrolled in University required core courses.

Similar findings were revealed at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) where, in 1983, the athletic department in conjunction with the campus career development center, established a trial skills-identification program for 30 freshman athletes. When it is fully implemented, the career planning program will involve four components: Skills Identification and Goal-Setting for Skills Development (year one); Educational Exploration (year two); Career Exploration and Internship (year three); and Job-Seeking Skills (year four). Although the program was not designed to bolster grades, a preliminary analysis conducted following the program's first year showed a marked improvement in 28 of 30 participants' academic performance. So successful was this program judged to be, 100 freshman athletes were scheduled for those workshops in 1984 (Naylor, 1983).

Furthermore, that career workshops are effective in raising G.P.A.'s is consistent with work by Super (1957) and Holland (1973) who believed that vocational choice (and, for students, choice of major) is more enhancing to the individual when it is congruent with the self-concept. The implications of these studies are great, for they suggest by fostering realistic goals consonant with the student athlete's personality, the athlete's likelihood of persistence to graduation is enhanced (Nelson, 1982).

Tootle (1980) describes a developmental program in place at the Ohio State University which involves four components. As with the previous two programs (Nelson, 1982; Toscano, 1982), freshman athletes attend University Orientation programs with the other freshmen. Parts of this program are specifically directed at the athletes, however: reminding the athletes of the eligibility requirements and their responsibilities towards them, reinforcing the cooperative attitude and efforts between the Academic Advising Office and the Athletic Department, and encouraging the student

athletes to participate in *all* aspects of University life, not just athletics. The second component involves a 1:1 relationship with an academic advisor. The third component is a required 1-credit survey course offered Fall quarter, taught by the academic advisor, which encompasses the following topics: study methods, career planning, university resources, time management, adjusting to the positive and negative perceptions of athletes held by the University community, involvement in student government, clubs and activities, and establishing goals and priorities. Finally, the fourth component is a Spring quarter reception honoring those athletes who have begun to distinguish themselves academically and/or through student activities, and featuring Ohio State alumni athletes who are successful in a variety of careers, emphasizing the importance of a well-rounded University experience.

Finally, Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips and Waters (1981) describe the University of Florida program. Here, too, freshman student athletes are required to enroll in a course, this time including such topics as: interpersonal skills and effective communication, communal (residence hall) living, university support services, leadership skills, career planning and decision-making, academic planning, effective social skills and the understanding of one's self-concept, time management, and skills in meeting the press. Personal and career assessment are vital aspects of this course, and each freshman athlete takes the SCII (Strong, 1935), the MBTI (Myers-Briggs, 1976), the Incomplete Sentences Test (Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips & Waters, 1981) and the Athletic Motivation Inventory (Ogilvie, Tutko & Lyon, 1973). Following this, each athlete meets with a trained counselor for the interpretation of each inventory, and writes a paper entitled "Understanding Myself" based on the results of these instruments. The remainder of the course involves outside assignments, guest lecturers, group projects and class participation.

As in the previous model programs, all athletes in the Florida program are paired with a facilitator/counselor, in this case, graduate student in the Student Personnel Services for Athletes Program (a sub-speciality in the Counseling and Student Personnel Services Program). In an attempt to improve accessibility, the counselor's offices are located in the athletics residence hall. In addition to the 1:1 counseling, several discussion groups are established each year to provide additional structure and support; while student athletes experiencing personal and/or academic difficulties are required to participate, all athletes are welcomed. Approximately 40 athletes were involved in this program at the time the authors published their articles.

Finally, senior athletes participate in a non-credit Senior Exit Seminar intended to ease the transition associated with graduation. Senior Exit Seminar topics have included: Marriage and Your Future, Resumes and Job Interviews, How to Finance a Home, Buying an Automobile, Insurance: How Much? What Kind? and Your Role as a Florida Alumnus. These seminars were held over dinner and featured former Florida lettermen with a competency in the area of interest.

In conclusion, a variety of academic and psychological support programs exists which foster the full development of the student athlete. Assessment tools have been used to diagnose individual needs and to design appropriate interventions. In each of these programs, support by the coaches was instrumental in the program's success. In at least two of the programs, strong connections between the institution's Athletic Department and Counseling and Student Personnel Services Department maximized the developmental aspects of the programs. The goals of these programs included: to ease the freshman transition into college; to integrate and enhance the athlete's physical, intellectual and socio-emotional growth; to provide a foundation for the future; and to use a systematic assessment program for the purpose of developing both self-understanding on the part of the athlete and developmental interventions on the part of the staff.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Systematic assessment and developmental interventions are increasingly becoming a part of the Athletic Department's daily functioning, as evidenced by the establishment of the National Association of Athletic Advisors in 1976 (Gurney, Robinson and Fygetakis, 1983). Nevertheless, several authors suggest that progress on particular campuses may be difficult and slow. Remer, Tongate and Watson (1978) suggest that individuals initiating developmental programs: (1) move slowly along the paths of least resistance, (2) meet immediate academic support and performance-related needs (e.g., anxiety reduction, motivation) before attempting longer-range developmental needs, and (3) be supportive and understanding of the unique pressures and traditions of athletic life. Simply because of the time requirements involved, athletes' lives often revolve around the athletic department, creating both special needs and special opportunities. A variety of assessment tools have been described, including the extent to which they are currently being used among NCAA Division I institutions. Model programs integrating assessment with developmental programs do exist and should be recognized. The success of these programs required the support of coaches, and several of the programs coordinated their efforts with the

graduate department of Counseling and Student Personnel Services. Contrary to popular belief, participation in collegiate athletics provides very few opportunities for upward mobility (Coakley, 1978; Dubois, 1979); nevertheless, it does give some athletes a "free" education that, if taken seriously, can provide a future basis for upward mobility (Coakley, 1978). It would be this author's hope that as much as student athletes enhance the lives of their respective universities, so will the universities provide the programs necessary to enhance theirs.

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