

,THE ACADEMIC/ATHLETIC CONTROVERSY:
CAN THEY CO-EXIST?,

MASTER'S PROJECT

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by

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Purpose of the Study

Many schools today are being criticized for their emphasis on athletics as opposed to academic achievement (Scherer, 1990). Critics state that young people are exploited for athletic purposes because of the "win-at-all-costs" philosophy adopted by many colleges and high schools. Critics also maintain that athletes fail to take advantage of a good education because they fall prey to the lure of the enormous financial rewards of professional sports. Finally, critics contend that schools at all levels fail to put any emphasis on the "student" part of the term "student-athlete." They argue schools are perpetuating the "dumb-jock" syndrome.

Are these criticisms well-founded? Are high schools failing the student-athlete? Lederman (1990b) found that athletes who graduated from high school and entered Division I colleges and universities in 1983 graduated at a slightly higher rate than non-athletes. This could be an indication that those students who participated in high school sports were academically prepared for college.

The authors believe that high school athletics do have a place in the total education of young people. Lessons learned, relationships acquired, and habits formed play an important role in the development of our youth. In spite of all the problems faced by athletes and the emphasis placed on athletics, the authors believe that participation in high school sports does not affect a student-athletes' grades. In fact, the authors feel that athletics is a valuable tool in the education of students.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to compare the grades of high school student-athletes during the grading periods when they were participating in a varsity sport to the grading periods when they were not participating in a sport.

Assumptions

Upon undertaking this study, the authors made certain assumptions. They assumed that the grading by teachers was fair and accurate. They also had to assume that time spent by athletes participating in the various sports was relatively equal. They further

assumed that time spent by students on their academics was relatively equal in and out of season.

Limitations

The authors were faced with some limitations in conducting this research. One limitation was the size of the group being studied. One high school was involved, therefore only one hundred twelve (112) one-sport athletes were available for study.

Another limitation faced by the authors was the lack of a cross-section of society in the sample. The student-athletes involved were all from an economically depressed urban area.

Definition of Terms

Student-Athlete is a person officially enrolled in a high school who is also a member of a varsity team.

Varsity Sport is an athletic team that competes interscholastically in high school competition.

Out-of-Season is the time period when the athlete is not involved in competition.

Grading Period is a period of forty-five (45) days of instruction, at the end of which grade cards are

issued. There are four (4) such grading periods in the school year, designated as the first, second, third, and fourth grading periods.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Educational Criticisms of Athletics

One educational criticism of athletics at the collegiate level is that athletics is not part of the educational process; it is a business. Brownlee and Linnon (1990) stated that the problems of college sports can be traced directly to economics. They found that few athletic departments operate in the black. The only way to insure income is to win, particularly in football. Therefore, the "win-at-all costs" philosophy interferes with the educational process. Sperber (1990), and other authorities, brought out the point that the purpose of college athletics is the business of entertainment and not education. Gee (1990) also stated that athletics is a business. He found that avarice played a big part in this problem. Gee cited Notre Dame's lucrative contract with the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) as a prime example of the commercialization of collegiate athletics.

Another educational criticism of athletics is that high schools do not challenge student-athletes

academically. Paterno (1990) stated that Proposition 48, legislation adopted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in 1983, put high schools on notice that they need to do a better job preparing student-athletes for the academic challenge ahead. These standards have already made a difference according to Paterno. Present high school recruits are meeting the "48" mandate.

Athletics were also criticized educationally because of rampant cheating by high school athletes. Bissinger (1990) stated that many schools place such a value on the publicity they receive for having successful athletic teams that more emphasis is placed on athletics than academics. For this reason, academic cheating has become widespread in high schools. Student-athletes are given examinations before they are to be taken, they are given tests with the answers already filled in, they are not required to complete assignments given to the rest of the class, and grades are actually changed to prevent athletes from becoming ineligible.

Another educational criticism of athletics is that athletes receive special academic treatment. Bissinger (1990) stated that in many high schools

athletes are not under the same set of academic rules as the other students. In many instances athletes are assigned easy classes or are transferred out of academically difficult classes at the very first sign of possible failure. He charged that these practices lead athletes to develop an attitude that causes them to lose their desire to be academically challenged and to always seek the easiest possible route to academic eligibility. This special treatment of athletes is further illustrated by the financial support athletics receives in some school districts. In the Texas city cited by Bissinger, the school system spends more money to operate the football program than it does for the English Departments of the community's two high schools.

Criticism of the education of athletes was presented above. In the next section the authors discuss problems faced by student-athletes.

Problems Faced by Student-Athletes

One problem faced by student-athletes is that they are separated from normal student activities. Paterno (1990) wrote that athletes have become a sub-culture on campuses, and they must be given more exposure to

normal campus life. Athletes need the opportunity to seek associations with people outside of sports for a more meaningful life.

A major problem faced by young athletes is the unrealistic goal of playing professional sports. Brownlee and Linnon (1990) felt that many athletes view college as simply a formality between them and the financial riches of professional sports. The problem is that for every athlete who makes it to the big-time, there are hundreds who neglect school by mistakenly believing they will also become wealthy by playing professionally. More than 17,600 young men play Division I-A basketball and football and only 150 of them make it to the big leagues.

This problem of unrealistic expectations is also prevalent with high school athletes. Scherer (1990) reported similar numbers and reported that only one in 10,000 high school athletes attain the goal of becoming a professional athletes. Haynes (1990) stated the percentage of basketball and football players who reached the professional level is not great and argued that educators must help students realize that academics, not athletics, is the way to achieve success.

White as well as black athletes are led to believe that participating in college sports will result in successful professional careers. Farrell (1990) stated that athletes, especially black athletes, are being recruited by colleges under the myth that participating in sports is the path to fame and fortune. This simply encourages the false belief that college is a means to a professional sports career, not a place to be educated.

Another problem faced by student-athletes is that many of them select a college for athletic, not academic, reasons. Sperber (1990) stated that athletes seldom consider the academic opportunities of a university. They are searching for a university which provides the best preparation for a professional or Olympic career. They want to "start" as freshmen and receive as much media exposure as possible during their college careers.

Student-athletes also face the problem of being lured by the media into realizing athletics is more important than academics. Lapchick (1985) pointed to the glory high school athletes attain in the media as a reason for them placing more emphasis on their athletic careers than they put into their studies. This

publicity makes the young athletes believe that they will be the one in 10,000 that will successfully rise to the professional level. He maintained that we must educate America's young athletes and not allow them to be duped into following an impossible dream.

Some of the problems faced by student-athletes were discussed above. The positive aspects of athletic participation is presented in the next section.

Positive Aspects of Athletic Participation

One positive aspect of athletic participation is that athletes have graduated from college at a slightly higher rate than other students. According to Lederman (1990d), a survey conducted by the NCAA showed that athletes who entered Division I colleges in 1983 graduated at a slightly higher rate than that of the other students at those schools. Although some sports had higher graduation rates than others, overall 47.4 percent of the recruited athletes had graduated within five years of enrolling. By contrast, 47.2 percent of all students at those institutions had graduated.

A second positive aspect of athletic competition is that former college athletes earned more money than non-athletes. Lederman (1990b) referred to a

longitudinal study of the high school class of 1972 that was done by the Education Department's Office of Research. The study followed a group of 1972 high school seniors through 1986. The study showed that former athletes were earning more money than the non-athletes. Former athletes had a higher rate of home ownership, a lower rate of unemployment, and had earnings ten percent above the average for all groups.

Another positive aspect of athletic participation is that athletics has helped students set attainable goals. Tuneberg (1987) studied a group of high school cross country runners and found them to be more motivated, goal oriented, and active in academic extracurricular activities. These students identified their involvement in cross country as a source for helping them set goals. Anderson (1990) studied the effect of athletic participation on African American males in a New York City high school and found that the athletes spent more time on their homework and had a higher cumulative grade point average (GPA) than the non-athletes. He also found that very few of the athletes had an unrealistic aspiration to be a professional athlete. The lesson of goal setting

learned in high school athletics transferred to real life situations.

A fourth positive aspect to athletic participation is that athletes have shown the ability to transfer the value of achievement to the classroom. Ballentine (1981) reviewed a number of studies and found there has been a positive relationship between athletic participation and academic achievement. He pointed to studies that showed a high degree of transfer of achievement value from sports to the classroom. A study by Rehberg and Shafer (1968) indicated that high school athletes had a higher GPA than non-athletes.

The authors have examined the criticisms that have been leveled at athletics and the problems facing athletes above. The authors will now present some solutions to these problems as offered by various experts.

Solutions to the Problems Concerning Athletics and Academics

The establishment of athletic support systems can be a useful solution to help athletes with academic problems. Newman (1990) examined an athletic support system already in place at Cal State - Berkeley.

Incoming freshmen are taught how to study, a skill very few acquired in high school. Also, all freshmen athletes are required to attend monitored study halls, which have tutors available as well. This service is also extended to the entire student body. Newman reported that from 1981-1984, Berkeley graduated 65 percent of its students, including 47 percent of its football players and 43 percent of its basketball players. Newman also reported that those providing the service at Berkeley felt graduation rates for athletes would rise as athletes begin to feel more like students.

Another solution to the problems concerning athletics and academics is an NCAA proposal that places a twenty hour per week limit on time spent in a sport (Lederman, 1990c). This limit on time demands is intended to allow athletes more time for studies and participating in normal student life.

A revenue sharing program was offered as another solution to the problem facing athletics and academics. Weistart (1988) reported that a revenue sharing program could be instrumental in changing the "win-at-all-costs" philosophy. Weistart proposed that schools receive the recognition that success brings and

that they share the profits. This would render monetary gains unimportant. This should curtail rule-bending caused by the "win-at-all-costs" philosophy.

Another solution to the problems concerning athletics and academics could be open-ended scholarships. Robinson (1988) discussed a program of open-ended scholarships to enable athletes to finish work on their degree. In this program, tuition would be free as long as the athlete has a declared major and is progressing toward a degree.

The Knight Commission was established by the NCAA to find solutions to the problems concerning athletics and academics (____, Collegian Magazine, 1991). One of the solutions proposed more university presidential control of college sports with the support and guidance of the Board of Trustees. This control would be directed toward academic integrity, financial integrity, and a system of audits and certification to demonstrate that integrity is being practiced.

Another solution to the problem facing athletics and academics is the establishment of the No Pass - No Play policy. Lederman (1990a) reported on the plan by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education to raise academic standards for college

athletes. The plan required students to maintain a 2.0 GPA to be eligible to participate in extracurricular activities. Souza (1990) reported on a similar plan established in Hawaii in 1985. The Hawaii State Board of Education established a policy whereby high school students must maintain a 2.0 GPA and pass all classes in order to be eligible to participate in co-curricular activities. Initially this policy proved to be very tough on athletes, but after schools began to attack the problem it has been shown to have a marked effect on academic achievement.

Another solution to the problems concerning athletics and academics is a proposal to have professional athletes model appropriate behavior. Schwartz (1990) stated that athletes have a tremendous influence on students. They must use this influence to impress on young people the value of not only playing hard, but also studying hard. They must also impress on student-athletes the need to use athletics as a means to getting a better education, not as an end in itself. Brown (1990) interviewed two former professional athletes who discussed the importance of competition in high school. They recognized that lessons learned in athletics are applicable to life.

They felt professional athletes should help students realize that their education comes first and their athletics second.

In this chapter the authors reviewed the literature dealing with the problem of athletics versus academics. The majority of the literature discusses problems at the collegiate level. However, the authors believe that if the problems discussed above are to be rectified, educators must examine the situations of the student-athletes at the high school level. The remainder of this study deals with high school student-athletes, particularly focusing on the grades earned by students when they are on a varsity team compared to when they are not competing in a sport.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

Subjects

The subjects were one hundred twelve (112) high school students of mixed academic abilities who participated in one varsity sport during their sophomore, junior, or senior year of high school during the 1990-91 school year. The total included thirty-eight seniors (seven girls and thirty-one boys), thirty-nine juniors (twenty-one girls and eighteen boys), and thirty-five sophomores (fourteen girls and twenty-one boys).

The subjects were sixty-two percent caucasian and thirty-eight percent minority. This represents a fairly accurate cross section of the total school population. In terms of academic ability, all types of students were represented. The students involved in this study were enrolled in regular education programs, vocational education programs, special education programs, and advanced placement programs.

Setting

School. The building is an urban three-year high school containing 1170 students. The racial make-up of the school population is sixty-five percent caucasian and thirty-five percent minority.

According to the State Department of Education, the school is classified as a comprehensive high school. This classification is for high schools that include academic and vocational education in their curricula. Therefore, there is a wide variety of interests and academic abilities within the school.

The school is classified Division I by the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA). This means its athletic teams compete against schools with the largest student populations in the state. It is a member of an athletic conference made up of eight Division I high schools.

Community. The school system is in a small city in northwest Ohio. The population of the city is 40,000. In recent times, the industrial base of the city has dwindled, thus rendering the city economically depressed. There is a high rate of unemployment in the city.

The industries in the area include aerospace, packaging, automotive, agriculture, and food-processing operations. Engines, Army tanks, electric generators, turbine engine blades, universal joints, plastic containers, bottled beverages, and farm implements are all manufactured in the community.

The location of the city and its access to transportation, both vehicular and railroad is excellent. It has overnight access to seventy percent of the country's major market areas.

There is a relatively good relationship between the community and the school system. This is evidenced by the fact that school tax issues have usually been affirmed by the voters.

Data Collection

The authors developed four tables to collect the data. These tables included information pertaining to the sex of the athletes, their grade level, and their GPA for the four grading periods.

The authors consulted the permanent records of each student-athlete in order to compile the information about the GPA. The information was compiled on charts to determine the percentage of students whose academic

performance was affected by their participation in a sport.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Presentation of Results

In this chapter the authors present the results by means of tables. There are four such tables: sophomores, juniors, seniors, and totals. The tables are used to show the percentage of student-athletes whose GPA increased, decreased, or stayed the same during the grading period they were involved in a sport. The tables show the percentages for male and female student-athletes for each grade level and the total student-athletes involved in the study.

TABLE 1
NUMBER AND PERCENT OF SOPHOMORE
STUDENT-ATHLETES WHOSE GPA INCREASED,
DECREASED, OR STAYED THE SAME DURING
PARTICIPATION IN ATHLETICS

	N	PERCENT HIGHER	PERCENT LOWER	PERCENT SAME
GIRLS	14	42.8	28.5	28.5
BOYS	21	47.6	28.5	23.8
TOTAL	35	45.7	28.5	26.2

This table illustrates that all of the sophomore student-athletes earned a higher GPA during the grading period in which they were in athletic competition.

TABLE 2
NUMBER AND PERCENT OF JUNIOR
STUDENT-ATHLETES WHOSE GPA INCREASED,
DECREASED, OR STAYED THE SAME DURING
PARTICIPATION IN ATHLETICS

	N	PERCENT HIGHER	PERCENT LOWER	PERCENT SAME
GIRLS	21	23.8	42.8	33.3
BOYS	18	61.0	27.7	11.1
TOTAL	39	42.4	35.3	22.2

This table shows that junior boy student-athletes earned a higher GPA during the grading period in which they were in athletic competition. However, junior girls earned a lower GPA while in competition.

TABLE 3
NUMBER AND PERCENT OF SENIOR
STUDENT-ATHLETES WHOSE GPA INCREASED,
DECREASED, OR STAYED THE SAME DURING
PARTICIPATION IN ATHLETICS

	N	PERCENT HIGHER	PERCENT LOWER	PERCENT SAME
GIRLS	7	57.1	14.2	28.5
BOYS	31	35.4	35.4	29.0
TOTAL	38	46.3	24.8	28.8

This table indicates that senior student-athletes earned a higher GPA during the grading period in which they were in athletic competition.

TABLE 4
NUMBER AND PERCENT OF ALL
STUDENT-ATHLETES WHOSE GPA INCREASED,
DECREASED, OR STAYED THE SAME DURING
PARTICIPATION IN ATHLETICS

	N	PERCENT HIGHER	PERCENT LOWER	PERCENT SAME
GIRLS	42	41.2	28.5	30.1
BOYS	70	48.0	38.9	21.3
TOTAL	112	44.6	33.7	25.7

This table shows that a higher percentage of all student-athletes earned a higher GPA during the grading period in which they were in athletic competition.

Discussion of Results

The study showed that the high school student-athletes involved in this study performed better academically during the grading periods when

they were involved in a varsity sport than during the grading periods when they were not involved in a sport. According to Table 4, 41.2 percent of the female student-athletes and 48 percent of the males did their best academic work while they were competing in athletics. The table also shows that 30.1 percent of the females and 21.3 percent of the males did better academically while they were out-of-season. Overall, 44.6 percent of the student-athletes earned their best grades while competing.

The results of the study demonstrated that at all three grade levels the male student-athletes did their best academic work while involved in a sport (Table 1, 2, 3). This is also true for the females in their sophomore and senior years. The only group that performed better while not involved in a sport was junior year females. In that instance, 23.8 percent did better academically during the athletic season while 42.8 percent had lower grades.

The greatest variance in percentages was for males in their junior year (Table 2). In that group, 61 percent of the student-athletes had their best grades while involved in a sport as compared to 27.7 percent who had their poorest grades and 11.1 percent who

showed no change. The least difference appeared in the group of males in their senior year (Table 4). In that category 35.4 percent of the student-athletes showed their best and worst academic achievement and 29 percent showed no change.

A noteworthy result shown in Table 4 was that while a higher percentage of males earned higher academic grades while in a sport (48 percent) than females (41.2 percent), a higher percentage of males also had a lower GPA while in competition (38.9 percent) than females (28.5 percent). The study revealed that the female student-athletes were more consistent with their grades than their male counterparts. The females showed 30.1 percent in the "no-change" column as compared to 21.3 percent for the males.

After examining the findings of this study, the researchers found that the results supported Paterno's (1990) statement. Paterno stated that because of Proposition 48, high schools are succeeding in improving student-athletes' preparation for college. The results here show that the majority are performing well, especially during the season they are competing.

Ballentine (1981) reported a positive relationship between athletic participation and academic achievement. Ballentine reported a high degree of transfer of achievement value from sports to the classroom. The results found here follow Ballentine's theory by indicating that the athletes perform at their best in the classroom while they are performing on the playing field as well.

Anderson (1990) reported that the goal-setting concepts learned in sports are transferable to real-life situations. School would be among the real-life situations where athletes use their knowledge of goal-setting. Anderson compared athletes from a high school football team to non-athletes chosen at random. Anderson found that athletes had better grades because they budgeted their time better. The athletes in this study performed better academically during their season of competition, probably due to better time budgeting and goal-setting skills.

Therefore, the results of this study agree with much of the literature found about high school athletes. With NCAA standards such as Proposition 48 and practice time limited to 20 hours per week, academic achievement will improve in college also.

Some colleges have begun study support systems for athletes which will help continue the emphasis on academics begun in high school.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Due to the criticisms being leveled at athletics in high schools and colleges across the nation, the authors felt the need to examine the place of athletics in our schools. The authors believe that participation in athletics is an important part of the total educational process. Experiences learned through athletics can be transferred to real-life situations. Habits acquired in athletics; such as goal setting, self-discipline, and the individual's contribution to a team effort; are valuable tools in developing the decision making process used in later life.

The authors undertook this study to compare the grades of high school student-athletes during the grading periods in which they participated in a varsity sport to the grading periods when they were not participating. By examining the grades in this manner, the authors hoped to draw some conclusions about the effect of athletics on the academic performance of the student-athlete.

The purpose of this study was to compare the grades of high school student-athletes during the grading periods when they were participating in a varsity sport to the grading periods when they were not participating in a sport.

The authors examined the grades from all four grading periods. They compared the one grading period during athletic participation to the three other grading periods. The results showed that the majority of student-athletes did perform better academically while participating in a sport.

Conclusions

After reviewing the results of the study, the authors were able to draw some conclusions based on the research that was done. It should be noted that these conclusions can only be applied to the school and the students that were involved in the study. The authors believe that similar results would be found in other school systems, however, there is no substantive reason to prove that belief.

One conclusion drawn by the authors is that student-athletes budget their time better during the part of the school year that they are involved in athletics. At all three grade levels the GPA of the

student-athletes was highest during the grading periods in which they were competing. This result shows that they were able to perform better academically while there was a great demand made on their time by participating in the sport. The authors concluded that the time-budgeting skills demonstrated by the student-athletes was actually forced on them by their participation in sports.

Another conclusion made by the authors was that participation in athletics is a motivator for the students to perform academically as well as athletically. However, the authors believe that this is a temporary motivating factor. While the students are involved in their sport, they are in close contact with their coaches. In most instances the coaches are questioning the players about their classes and urging them to do their best in class on a daily basis. When the season is completed, the student-athletes lose the daily contact with their coaches, thus they are no longer subject to the constant prodding about grades. Therefore, while the authors believe that participation in sports is a positive motivating force toward academic achievement, they recognize that the force is not permanent.

The results show that female student-athletes had a higher percentage in the category of no change in their GPA than males. Perhaps female student-athletes are more consistent in their academic performance throughout the entire school year. The females involved in the study had fewer changes in their GPA. The percentage of GPA improvement was lower for females and the percentage of GPA reduction was also lower.

The authors were also able to conclude from the study that the grade level of the student-athlete had no effect on their comparative GPA. The three grade levels studied (sophomore, junior, and senior) indicated that there was a higher percentage of student-athletes who had a higher GPA during the grading period that they were involved in athletics. Grade level had almost no effect whatsoever; the results show that the overall percentages were extremely close in all three grade levels involved in the study.

The authors believe that perhaps the most significant conclusion to be drawn from this study is that participation in interscholastic athletics does not have an adverse effect on the student-athletes' grades. The evidence found in this research is that

athletic participation leads to improved academic achievement. Much of the literature pointed to serious problems faced by student-athletes. Many of these problems dealt with poor academic performance by the athletes. This research refutes the literature. Participation in high school athletics can bring about a higher GPA.

The authors have also drawn the conclusion that the evidence discovered in the research does not indicate academic success or failure in future endeavors. The results of this research dealt only with the high school student-athletes at the time they were involved in the study, it can not be used to predict future academic performance. As mentioned above, a good cross-section of the entire school population was represented, there were good, average, and poor students involved. However, the results can only be applied to these subjects and can not be transferred.

Recommendations

The authors would strongly urge students to get involved in extra-curricular activities. Many practical lessons about getting along with others and overcoming adversity learned on the playing field can be applied to real-life situations. Sports participation can teach a student to think, to plan for future events, and to act on what has been thought out.

The authors would further recommend that teachers and coaches teach students how to budget their time. This would provide students with a plan to include studies as well as extra-curricular activities, namely sports, and any other interests a student may enjoy. The authors found that athletes had better grades in season due in part to structured time schedules.

The authors would urge coaches to encourage student-athletes toward good academic performance. The related literature provided ample proof that the majority of student-athletes will attain success due to their academic endeavors rather than their athletic prowess. Therefore, it is important to encourage athletes to enjoy their athletic achievement but to plan their future based on their academic achievement.

The authors urge schools to examine the grades of their student-athletes in order to ensure that they are obtaining a good education. A good education, it has been determined, is what athletes and all students need to strive toward. Participation in extra-curricular activities balanced with a strong academic program can lead to a productive and successful future.

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