

The Perceived Impact of Social Support Received from Coaches
by Injured College Athletes

by

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ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

The positive effects of social support received by injured college athletes is beneficial to their recovery. Their college coaches play a tremendous role by providing a portion of this support.

A large amount of social support can enhance an injured athlete's recovery rate and academic performance. Conversely, a lack of social support can diminish an injured athlete's recovery rate and academic performance.

This study consisted of male and female athletes. They participated in football, basketball, soccer and cross-country at the University of Wisconsin- Stout. A total of 198 non-injured athletes were surveyed prior to their athletic seasons. Upon the conclusion of these teams' seasons a total of 25 injured athletes were again surveyed.

The Life Events Survey for College Athletes, Petrie, T.A. (1992) and Social Support Inventory, Brown, Brady, Lent, Wolfert & Hall (1987) and academic-demographic sheets were administered to the 25 injured athletes. Results were then analyzed for each injured athlete as well as for the total group of injured athletes.

Results indicated that starting athletes received more social support than non-starters from their coaches. There were notable differences between those who perceived high levels of social support and those who reported receiving a low level of support. Those who perceived a high level of support reported a relative change in stress levels that was better than those who received less support. The group with a high level of support had a quicker recovery period and did not show as great of a decline in semester grade point average and had quicker recovery times than the group with low support.

The results of this study will be of special interest to college and high school coaches who deal with injured athletes. It is important that these coaches are aware of their role in the recovery

process. They may be able to help these students with their recovery process and academic success by providing special attention to their injured players.

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Chapter I

Introduction

It has been estimated that the number of injuries sustained by athletic sport participants is as high as 3 to 4 million per year. Interscholastic sports injuries account for one third of these afflictions (Kraus & Conroy, 1984). This high rate of injury should be of interest to collegiate athletes, their coaches, professors, and the other individuals who compose the athletes' social network. These supporters may help the athlete's recovery by reducing some of the negative psychological consequences associated with injury.

There is a significant correlation between stress and athletic injury in collegiate football players (Cryan & Alles, 1984). By providing these individuals with adequate social support, the number of recurring injuries may be diminished and the time spent on recovery may be greatly reduced. Quick recoveries and a reduction in the number of injuries would not only save health care dollars, but may also provide athletes with confidence and the self efficacy necessary to succeed in areas unrelated to sport. One of these areas is academic performance.

It has been shown that the grade point averages of college football players drop when these athletes are faced with life stress (Petrie & Russell, 1995). Because injury causes stress, and stress results in a decline in academic performance, it is reasonable to conclude that athletic injuries may contribute to poor academic achievement. Efforts by an athlete's social network to reduce the negative impact of an injury may help prevent this academic decline.

The athlete's perception that they are not alone in dealing with an injury is important. It has been shown that the degree of support from the social network positively relates to indices that measure psychological well being. This degree of support is also negatively related to various measures of psychological distress (Cohen & Wills, 1985). If social support mediates life stress, it

can be concluded that social support for injured athletes can diminish the negative effects of stress caused by athletic injury.

One group of people critical to the support network of an injured athlete is the coaching staff. However, this group seems to be busy with other duties. Their attention is focused on the remaining uninjured players, and the current decisions that must be made to assure team success. However, when injured athletes complete their recovery and rejoin the team, they have trouble assimilating into the group, disrupting the team's cohesiveness. It has been stated that injuries not only detrimentally affect an individual, they also negatively impact the overall objectives of the entire team (Blackwell & McCullagh, 1990). Because injuries are always present in college athletics, the success of these teams is therefore compromised.

Based upon the preceding observations, it is obvious that the coaching staff should be involved in an injured athlete's social support network. Coaches must do this in order to maintain team unity and to help temper the negative psychological and academic effects that are associated with injury. Their contribution may prevent academic decline and overall team disruption. However, it is not known whether coaches are meeting this expectation. It is not known if injured athletes perceive their coaches as being supportive or unsupportive. This study attempts to answer that question. It will measure the amount of perceived social support that injured collegiate football players receive from their coaches.

A review of literature shows that a link exists between stress and athletic injury in college football players. Studies show that academic performance for college football players drops when these athletes are faced with life stress. Research also indicates a connection between social support and the reduction of stress. Therefore, the research hypothesis for this study is that injured college

athletes who receive social support will have significantly lower levels of stress and better academic success than those who receive less social support.

By simply raising this research question, awareness of the coach's role as a member of the social network may be heightened. Making coaches aware of the fact that an individual athlete's injury can negatively impact the team, may allow them to modify the manner by which they handle injured athletes. By becoming more supportive during an individual's recovery, a coach may improve the psychological condition of the entire team. Ross & Berger (1996) have also shown that injured individuals who perceive that they receive adequate social support return to competition sooner than those who do not share this perception. Thus a larger amount of social support should lead to an increase in successful athletic contests and a greater achievement of team goals.

The greatest benefit of a coach's heightened awareness of his or her role in dealing with an injured athlete may be to the injured individual. The athlete who receives encouragement and support from his or her coaches may not suffer from the negative psychological effects that injury produces. Even if the support of the coaches does not entirely eliminate the negative consequences, it may provide a significant reduction in the impact that these consequences have on the lives of the athletes.

It has previously been established that life stress is directly related to a decline in quality academic performance. Because a college athlete's most important role is that of a student, a significant effort should be made by the coaching staff to ensure that this role is not compromised by competition.

This study is also important because it reminds coaches of the fact that social support is a variable that is perceived by an athlete. There is no formula by which a coach can effectively administer social support. Each athlete gains something different from the same gesture of support.

An emphasis on individual perception is important because it prevents coaches from treating each member of the team in the same manner. It prevents coaches from providing insincere assistance to his or her athletes. Insincere attempts at support, no matter how well intended, may actually be perceived by the athlete in a negative fashion, adding to his or her stress.

It is hoped as a result of this study college and high school coaches will have a raised awareness of the issue of social support. It is important that they learn about this aspect of their role in the recovery process. By providing their athletes with individual attention they may be able to help these students maintain good mental health. They may also help these athletes maintain a good scholastic record.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the amount of social support that injured college athletes report receiving from their coaches. The players will be selected from the University of Wisconsin Stout's women's soccer, basketball, cross country and men's football teams. A questionnaire will be given to all athletes to measure their levels of stress before their injuries as well as after their recoveries. Social support received will also be measured at the end of their recovery periods. Academic-Demographic sheets will also be used to determine the injured athletes' progress before their injuries and at the completion of their rehabilitation. This study will determine how injured college athlete's feel about the social support they receive from their coaches. It will also explore the impact that this has on their academic performance and physical recovery. This research should help coaches better identify the needs of their injured athletes. This should help these student athletes by decreasing stress and preventing a decline in academic performance.

Objectives

The purpose of this study is to determine the amount of social support that injured college athletes report receiving from their coaches. This study will focus on the following objectives:

1. To determine the level of perceived social support received by injured athletes from their coaches.
2. To determine stress levels of injured college athlete's based on the amount of social support they receive from their college coaches.
3. To determine the effects of social support on the academic performance of injured athletes.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

By attempting to understand the effects of social support related to injured college athletes, coaches should be able to help aid in the recovery of their injured players. This form of social support will not only assist injured players in their attempt to return to competition, but also promote psychologically wellness and academic success. This review of literature will address the following; (a) why there is a need for social support for injured athletes, (b) how life stress and social support relate, (c) how stress and the lack of social support effect an athlete academically, and (d) how coaches and athletic trainers perceive stress and social support.

It has been argued that social factors can be important components of pain and injury experiences (Nixon, 1994). The ability for the athlete to communicate with others about his or her personal feelings related to the injury is essential to the recovery process. The Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which states that athletes handle their injury on the basis of the kinds of relationships they have with others, suggests that athletes are most likely to seek support to deal with their pain and injuries from others in similar circumstances or from those who posses a good understanding of the injured athlete's role. Thus, it is important that coaches, athletic trainers, and teammates understand that they will likely be the primary source of social support for the injured athlete.

The use of social support can have a tremendous positive effect on the injured athlete's physical and psychological well being. Considerable research now indicates that social support reduces, or buffers, the adverse psychological impacts of exposure to stressful life events and ongoing life strains (Thoits, 1986). Research also supports the conclusion that social support is critical for those handling life stress, crisis, mental and physical illness, unemployment, job stress,

bereavement, childbirth, mortality risk, and other stressors (Albrecht & Adelman, 1984; Billings & Moos, 1981; Broadhead, 1983).

Another study indicates that supported individuals are generally more mentally and physically healthy than unsupported individuals, perhaps due to the health-sustaining and stress-reducing functions of social support (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984).

A lack of social support for injured athletes can not only effect individual players negatively, but an entire team as well. Data from the National Athletic Injury/Illness Reporting System (Clarke & Buckley, 1980) indicate that approximately 25% of college football players miss at least seven days of participation due to injury. Smith and colleagues (1990) also found that athletes who received little social support and possess poor coping skills were more likely than their teammates to lose practice and playing time during their season. The ability to return injured athletes to the field quickly may be influenced by the amount of social support they receive. Ross & Berger (1996) have shown that injured individuals who perceive that they receive adequate social support return to competition sooner than those who did not share this perception. Injured athletes who recovered more rapidly than peers reported using more positive self-talk, mental imagery, and goal setting (Ievleva & Orlick, 1991). Returning injured athletes to competition faster results in a better team cohesiveness, and thus a better overall team.

Reducing the amount of stress that an injured athlete must deal with is important to that athlete's health. Stressors or stressful circumstances are defined as the experience of negative life events and chronic life strains. Negative life events are culturally or personally undesirable changes in the usual activities of an individual that require substantial behavioral readjustments (Brown & Harris, 1978; Holmes & Rahe, 1967). Past stress-injury research with football players found life stress to be an important predictor of injury occurrence (Blackwell & McCullagh, 1990; Bramwell.,

1975; Cryan & Alles, 1983; Passer & Seese, 1983). According to Anderson and Williams (1988), personality factors, history of stressors, and coping resources may all influence the stress response, which in turn influences injury. Football players with low, moderate, and high, levels of stress were predicted to be at proportionate risk for sustaining injuries (Bramwell, Masuda, Wagner & Holmes, 1975). Madden, Summer, and Brown (1990) found that athletes who reported low levels of stress also reported less frequent use of coping strategies as compared to athletes who reported high levels of competitive stress.

Social support has been hypothesized to enhance health by reducing or preventing the psychological consequences of stress (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983). Anderson and Williams (1988) proposed a model of stress and athletic injury that includes social support having both buffering and direct effects. They argued that the presence of a well-defined social support system either directly reduces a participant's rate of injury or attenuates the debilitating effects of stress, which in turn reduces the probability of injury. This type of social support not only helps with the athlete's injury; it also benefits the athlete's academic performance by reducing the amount of stress in the individual life.

Most studies of college athletes have found a negative relationship between athletic participation and academic performance (Edwards, 1984; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagal, 1982). These studies conclude that athletes are unprepared for and uninterested in academics, that they come to college to advance their athletic careers rather than their academic careers.

It also has been shown that college athletes do not get off on the right start when entering into college. Pascarella (1991) found that intercollegiate athletic participation was found to have significant adverse consequences for the general cognitive development of both men and women during their first year of college. In a separate study, Sparent (1988) states, that the college athletic

environment, with its rigid schedule, lack of opportunity for expanded social interaction, strong emphasis on authority figures, and directive approach to leadership, encourages student athletes to see the world in dichotomous terms of right and wrong. Counter to these findings, MacKenzie (1981) found that the graduation rates of college athletes were higher than that of the graduation rates of non-college athletes.

Other studies (Garrity & Ries, 1985; Lloyd, Alexander, Rice, & Greenfield, 1980) attempting to explain the academic performances of college students have focused on the effects of a psychosocial variable, life events stress, which has been defined as individuals psychological reactions and adaptations to the occurrence of major life events. For example, significant negative relationships have been reported between life stress and grade point averages taken at one and two year intervals (Lloyd, Alexander, Rice, & Greenfield, 1980). Students who are distracted by an outside interest (i.e., a job or an avocation), who belong to a peer group that de-emphasizes the value of academics (i.e., a fraternity), and who become frustrated in the academic realm are likely to be academically unsuccessful in college (Alder & Alder, 1985). The role of stress and psychosocial variables play an important part in the academic performance of students athletes.

Petrie and Russell (1995) found that psychosocial variables were strongly associated with lower academic performance and that high levels of life stress and anxiety may have appraised examination situations as threatening or overwhelming for college football players. Athletes who are overwhelmed by the demands and the intensity of the athletic environment or find themselves socially isolated from other students must be identified and helped before the student falls behind academically. It has been noted earlier that social support might moderate, or buffer, the potentially detrimental effects of life stress (Thoits, 1986). Seeking support for a negative life stress, like poor

academic performance, is a must for the overall health of the student athlete. Coaches must be able to give social support to their troubled athletes.

The role of a college coach extends far beyond the playing field. Identifying and developing early interventions for these at-risk individuals is important to the overall success of the athlete, not only athletically but also academically. Petrie and Russell (1995) state that coaches must seek college counselors to assist student athletes with the identification and intervention of academic performance problems. Making an athlete feel comfortable enough to talk, about any subject, is not an easy task. In a study done by Nixon (1994), on the relationship between pain and injury, he found about two thirds of the athletes said they had avoided coaches or had tried to hide pain or injuries from coaches when they were hurt, and nearly half had to try to avoid or hide from trainers and teammates. Further, more than 40% said they felt pressed by teammates to play hurt and nearly 50% said they felt this kind of influence from coaches.

This form of pressure on athletes to play may have been instilled by coaches as an unwritten rule of college athletics. Although expressing concern for the welfare of athletes, the coaches at the same time acknowledged that athletes were likely to do everything possible to play. Most coaches respect all athletes who played hurt, try comebacks from serious injuries, and have a “never quit” attitude. In addition, nearly all coaches believed that athletes needed to push themselves to the limit. They also tended to believe that athletes occasionally tried to avoid them when they were playing hurt (Nixon, 1992).

The willingness of athletes to talk or turn to the authority figures of coaches and trainers or physical therapists in their interactive relationships is affected by the sympathetic or caring attitude of these significant others (Nixon, 1994). More specifically (Hardy, Richman, & Rosenfeld, 1991) found that listening support and emotional support, were reported to be provided primarily by

friends and parents, whereas technical support, (et. the acknowledgment of task effort and encouragement) were reported to be reported by coaches and teammates.

College athletes will likely rely on the social support from significant others in their interactive relationships to deal with their pain and injuries. Athletes need to be assured that when they turn to an athletic trainer for help they will not be penalized by coaches or teammates. This form of assurances in athletic programs is an important issue that must be evaluated by athletic administrators.

Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine the amount of social support that injured college athletes report receiving from their coaches. The following section will give a detailed description of the participants involved, the instrumentation that was used, the procedure used to gather the information, and how the data was analyzed.

Participants:

The subjects that participated in this study were injured, NCAA Division III male and female college athletes. The athletic teams that participated in this study were from the University of Wisconsin Stout. No players who participated in this study receive any form of athletic scholarship. The ages of the participants were ranged from 18-24 years old. The athlete's athletic eligibility and years in school varied from their first to fifth year.

The instrumentation that was used in this study looked at four elements of the injured college athlete: (a) the amount of stress in their life, (b) the amount of social support perceived from coaches, (c) the injury and rehabilitation, and (d) the academic standing of the athlete. Each part was used to give an overall and individual assessment of the injured college athlete.

Instrumentation:

To determine the amount of life stress that an athlete has the study used, The Life Events Survey for Collegiate Athletes (LESCA). The LESCA, a 69-item life events survey, was developed using a sample of 322 male and female athletes representing 22 different Division I collegiate sports (Petrie, 1992). For each life event experienced during the previous 12 months, the athlete will indicated the event's impact at the time of occurrence on an 8-point Likert scale (-4, extremely negative, to +4, extremely positive). The LESCA provided three scores: total life stress score (TLS), the positive life score (PLS), and the negative life score (NLS). The combination of the three scores provided a somewhat accurate representation of the stress levels of the participant.

Social Support. A modified version of the Social Support Inventory (SSI) developed by Brown, Brady, Lent, Wolfert, & Hall, 1987, was used to determine the amount of social support received by injured college athletes from their coaches. Using a 5-point Likert scale (0, not at all satisfied to 4, very satisfied), participants indicated their level of satisfaction with the support/help they received during their rehabilitation. All scores were then totaled. These scores provided an accurate conclusion of the level of support received by that given athlete.

Injury. Athletic trainers did obtain injury data from their injured athletes. Maintenance of a team injury log is a standard procedure followed by athletic trainers. The log is a record of injuries incurred by college athletes. Information collected by the athletic trainers included the date of injury, specific body part involved, evaluation notes by the athletic trainer, official diagnosis of the team physician, date that activity may be resumed, and the rehabilitation plan. The athletic trainer was asked to give the level of severity (mild, moderate, severe) of their injury. Following an injury classification system used in previous research (Petrie, 1992), injuries were categorized as either minor (missing one to seven days of practice/competition due to injury), moderate (missing eight to 21 days due to injury), or severe (missing more than 21 days due to injury). The athletic trainer classified each injury during the initial evaluation. This classification was based upon the number of days that an athlete with the specific condition would normally miss.

Academics. An Academic-Demographic Sheet was used to obtain each participant's academic standing prior to and during this study. This determined the academic progress of each athlete during his recovery period.

Procedure:

Prior to the start of the athletic season, each athlete of the participating team completed an academic-demographic sheet and the LESCA during the first team meeting of the fall season's training camp.

The academic-demographic sheet was completed twice during this study. The first assessment was at the beginning of the fall season's training camp and the second, was at the end of their rehabilitation from injury. The first assessment was based on their grade point average from the previous year. The second collection of the academic achievement sheet was based on their current classes. The teams' athletic trainers collected these.

The Social Support Inventory (SSI) was given to the injured athlete at the end of their rehabilitation process. This gave the injured athlete the opportunity to evaluate the level of social support received from their college coaches.

All data was collected at the completion of the injured athlete's rehabilitation. This data provided basic essential information about the injury and personal rehabilitation of the injured athlete.

Data Analysis:

After the completion of the LESCA, the results were tallied and evaluated. This study focused on a population of normal student athletes. Normal is defined as college athletes who are not coping with major life stresses, such as a death in the family or divorce. The population of students with abnormally high life stress was identified by their score on the LESCA and then eliminated from the study. By eliminating these individuals with extremely stressful situations, the study can focus on the support needs of the general population of student athletes. Therefore, the needs and the expectations of all students participating in this study were similar.

The Academic-Demographic Sheets were used to compare the academic achievement of the participant before and after their injuries. This showed how the presence of or the lack of social support effects the student academically.

The amount of social support from the coaching staff that was perceived by the athletes was measured with the Social Support Inventory.

Chapter IV

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the amount of social support that injured college athletes from the University of Wisconsin-Stout reported receiving from their coaches in the fall of 1998. This information hopefully should help coaches better identify the needs of their injured athletes. The study measured the athlete's perceived social support from their coach by addressing the following issues:

- 1) Examining the amount of perceived social support by each injured athlete.
- 2) Examining the amount of stress that each injured athlete reported before and after their injury.
- 3) Examining the academic performance of the injured athletes during their injury.

Results will be discussed in three categories:

- 1) Athlete's perceived social support.
- 2) The level of stress for each injured athlete.
- 3) Athlete's academic performance.

Prior to the beginning of the fall semester of 1998 a total of 198 college athletes agreed to participate in this study. Of those 198 college athletes, 70 were female and 128 were male. Each of those athletes were given a demographic sheet and the LESCA pretest stress survey. By the end of the study, 25 athletes, (6 female and 19 male), were injured during the season and were eligible to be surveyed. Of those 25 athletes, 2 (1 female and 1 male) were eliminated from the study because of an above average LESCA pretest stress score. The final number of subjects that were surveyed and fit the criteria were 23 (5 female and 18 male).

The degree of perceived social support was determined by the use of Social Support Inventory (SSI). Using a five point Likert scale (0,not at all satisfied to 4, very satisfied), participants indicated their level of satisfaction with support they received during their rehabilitation. All of the scores were than totaled to give an average overall score for that individual. The scale for the SSI range from 0 to 100,(0 being extremely low and 100 being extremely high, and 50 being average). Of the 23 subjects tested the average score was 43, below average. With information from the demographic sheet, of these 23 subjects, 14 were starters and 9 were nonstarters for their respected sports. Based on averages from the (SSI) for the starters and nonstarters, starters received a score of 50 compared to non starters who received a score of 35.

Individual Social Support Scores vs. LESCA Stress Change

At the beginning of the study, all of the athletes were given a LESCA stress survey to determine their individual level of stress. This was to ensure that each athlete would not have other stressors in their life (last 12 months), from a normal college athlete, that would require added special attention, thus effecting the amount of social support they received. Using a Likert eight point scale(-4,extremely negative to 4,extremely positive), participants indicated their level of stress in their life at that given time. All scores were than totaled to give an average score for that individual. The scale ranged from a -100 to 100 (-100 being extremely high levels of stress and 100 being extremely low levels of stress, and 0 being average levels stress). Of the 23 subjects that fit the criteria, their scores fell in to the range of -10 to 10 on the pretest LESCA.

The subjects completed a second LESCA survey at the end of their rehabilitation from injury. In comparing the pre-LESCA survey with the post-LESCA survey, 18 of the subjects stress levels went up and 5 of the subject stress levels went down or stayed close to the same. Of those, 18 subjects reported that their stress levels went up, 10 of those subjects increase their LESCA score by 20 points or more from the pre-LESCA score.

Along with the post-LESCA survey students were asked to complete the (SSI). By comparing the amount of social support from the (SSI) and the amount of stress reported from the pre-LESCA to the post-LESCA subjects showed positive effects of social support. A finding of this study was that the more social support received by the injured athlete, a less amount of stress was reported by that athlete.

Academic Performance of Injured Athletes

At the beginning of the study, all of the athletes were given a Academic-Demographic Sheet to determine their individual academic standing prior to and at the end of their rehabilitation from injury. This determined the academic progress of each athlete during his or her recovery period. To determine the athlete's academic standing, each athlete was asked to rate their own academic level based on their current grade point average. Using the standard 4.0 grade point system, (3.0 or higher-Above Average, 2.9 to 2.0-Average, 1.9 or lower-Below Average) students rated themselves as above average, average or below average.

The results of the first Academic-Demographic Sheet showed that of the 23 subjects in the study, 14 subjects had a grade point average of 3.0 or higher and 9 subjects had a grade point average between 2.9 and 2.0. The results of the second Academic-Demographic Sheet did not show much change in the academic standing of the 23 subjects. Of the 23 subjects, 15 rated their grade point average at 3.0 or higher, 7 subjects had a grade point average between 2.9 and 2.0 and 1 subject had a grade point average at 2.0 or lower.

An overall assessment of the subjects would indicate that there was no significant change in the academic standing of the subjects prior to their season to their injury.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

Findings from the research are notable in that they show some unrecognized needs of injured college athletes. Findings from this study are in some areas compatible with those described in the review of literature as the need for more social support for injured athletes from their coaches. In this section, specific results will be discussed as well as their implications for coaches and their awareness of an injured athletes needs. Suggestions for further research will also discussed.

Social support and stress has been identified as the primary concern for injured athletes throughout the literature. Results of this research study indicate that there is a tremendous need for increase social support from coaches and a reduction of stress for the injured athlete. Social support for all of the subjects was reported below average with a (SSI) score of 43. When broken down further by dividing the subjects into starters and nonstarters the results were different. The results showed that starters received more social support than nonstarters. Starters reported 15 more points on the average than nonstarters. The data indicated that coaches not only showed a low level of social support overall, but also varied their level of social support to specific injured athletes. The bias between a starter and a nonstarter for a coach is a fine line. Coaches unfortunately look at their own personal needs as a coach and the needs of the team at that specific time in the season.

Other factors that may affect the amount of social support for an injured athlete is the personal feelings of the athlete. Each player has his or her personal outlook on the season as a whole and their own personal goals as an athlete. Examples of this is an athletes non-concern for playing time or the desire to miss practice due to an injury. Any amount social support from a coach would not help the athlete change their personal outlook. More factors that may be involved is the simple fear of being re-injured again. Often times athletes who have been injured have a

severe fear of doing the same thing again. This often has the athlete playing tentatively, thus causing them to get injured again and not necessarily the same injury they received in the past.

The year that the student athlete is in school also plays a role in the athlete's desire to return to practice. An in-coming freshman who gets injured while playing may want to delay the return to practice, so that he or she may be academically red-shirted to play five years of college athletics instead of four. Also, athletes who are injured during the season, and the injury is severe enough for that athlete to miss the majority of the season, may choose to take a medical red-shirt and not return to competition till the following year. This would change the athletes outlook or approach to returning to practice or listening to the advice of their coach. This type of personal agenda may cause the athlete to have a personal bias toward the coach or team as a whole.

The opposite of that would be the coach's personal agenda for the injured athlete. The coach may want the athlete to red-shirt for their freshman year or not to take a medical red-shirt for the season. Also, the personal feelings of the coach toward the player may cause the coach to treat the injured player different than say a normal player. An example of this would be the coach desiring that the player not be with the team anymore, or the non-concern for the injured athlete because he or she is not an impact player for their team at that time or season. This would affect the amount of social support that the injured athlete would receive.

All of these factors can affect the amount of social support given and received by the injured athlete. Thus, it is important for coaches to know their athletes feelings and goals for their given sport.

It is evident that stress plays a big role in the attitude and personal outlook of the injured college athlete. Results from this study showed a tremendous increase in stress levels of 18 of the 23 subjects. Of these 18 subjects, 10 increased their level of stress by 20 points or more, 3

increased 10 points or more, and 5 increased less than 10 points according to the change in (LESCA) pre to post test score. Opposite of that, 5 subjects decrease their amount of stress from the pre to post (LESCA) score. This shows that along with social support, stress has many factors that can affect the mood of the injured athlete.

Besides the conflicts with the coach which has already been discussed other factors contribute to the stress levels of injured athletes. Examples of these would be the pressures from other players, trainers, family, and self. All of these individuals often times can pressure an injured athlete to return earlier than expected to practice. These only adds stress to the athlete to see through the pain of his or her given injury. Then when attempting to return earlier than expected often times what happens is the athlete hampers the injury even more, thus delaying the return to practice. This adds to the stress and the pressure to return to practice.

These individuals, along with their coaches should provide positive social support to the injury athlete during their entire recovery process. This is supported by the results of the amount of social support from college coaches to the change in stress levels from pre to post (LESCA) scores. Results showed that on an average the more social support the injured athlete received the less amount of stress was reported. Counter to that, the less social support received by the injured athlete the more amount of stress was reported. Of the 23 subjects, 5 of those that received a score of 60 or more on the (SSI) scored had very little change in stress levels pre to post (LESCA). This supports the need to increase the amount of social support and reduce the amount stress that the individual encounters.

Being able to handle stress for an injured athlete is not an easy task. Along with the pressures that were just discussed, injured athletes also must be able to maintain their academic standing in school. An injury to an athlete can affect the amount of time spent on academics. The

pressure to return to the field, often means more time spent in the training room to rehab the injury as fast as possible.

Results from this study showed no significant change from the pre-Academic-Demographic sheet to the post-Academic-Demographic sheet. Of the 23 subjects, only 4 showed a change in academic standing from pre to post Academic-Demographic. Of those 4, 2 of the athlete's academic standing went up a complete level (average to above average) and other 2 went down a complete level (average to below average). The results of the academic performance do not support the hypothesis that the increased stress and lack of social support would affect the academic performance of the injured athletes.

Possible reasons for the lack of change in academic performance could be based on the evaluation range of the student's grade point average and the reliability of the grades that were reported by the injured athlete. The range that was used to record the athlete academic standing may have been too broad. Athletes were asked to rate themselves as being above average (3.0 or higher), average (2.0 to 2.9) or below average (1.9 or lower). This means that if an athlete was at a 2.9 for the pre-Academic-Demographic, and then dropped in grade point average to a 2.0 for the post -Academic-Demographic, the rating for the injured athlete would still be average. Even though the athlete dropped 0.9 points in his grade point average. This would not truly represent the change in academic standing, which might have been the case for some of the 23 subjects.

The reliability of the reported grades would also have to be questioned. The grades for the pre and post Academic-Demographic sheets were based on the personal opinion of the athletes. Some of the athletes may have not been truthful in their recording of academic performance. This would cause the results to be unreliable. Also, the timing of the recording of the post Academic-Demographic sheet must be questioned. This is because that all of the athletes took the post

Academic-Demographic at any given time during the semester based on the completion of their rehab. This means that the athlete's academic performance could have been good or bad at that given time.

Overall the study showed the need for increased social support and the reduction of stress for the injured athlete. The academic performance of the athlete were unchanged, possibly because of poor collection or lack of reliable data.

Implications and Recommendations For Future Research

The results of this study indicate that there is a need to increase the amount of social support to injured college athletes. Research has shown that injured college athletes develop increase levels of stress during their recovery period. Increased levels of social support from college coaches has shown a decrease in the level of stress for the injured athlete. However, further efforts by coaches besides just talking with injured athlete could have a tremendous benefit to the injured athlete. Examples of this may be having the injured athlete be more included in team functions or visit with the injured athletes teachers and parents. Any form of caring that can go beyond just the everyday communication would help the athlete feel better about his or her situation.

Some questions this researched raised are:

- 1) Do college athletes, who know that they are not going to start or play during their first year of competition, fake or prolong their injuries?
- 2) Do females recover faster than males when it comes to injuries?
- 3) Why do coaches play favorites when it comes to specific injured athletes?

These questions can be addressed in future studies undertaken by other coaches or trainers or student who are interested in athletics.

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CHARTS AND GRAPHS

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