

Peer Helping in an Intercollegiate Athletic Environment

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Intercollegiate student-athletes face a variety of unique responsibilities and stressors. Balancing practice, training, traveling, and academics can be overwhelming. To assist student-athletes with these issues, the peer helper program called the Student Peer Athlete Network (SPAN) was developed. SPAN was designed to train specific student-athletes in peer helper skills so they, in turn can assist other student-athletes who need support or assistance for certain personal, academic, or athletic concerns. Empowering student-athletes promotes a sense a self-responsibility and benefits the entire student-athlete population.

Intercollegiate student-athletes face a variety of demands and stressors that are unique to their population. In addition to the commitment and long hours that must be put into practice and training, student-athletes must take a full course load to remain eligible, find a way to balance their academic and athletic pursuits effectively, yet still make time for themselves personally (Parham, 1993). The extent to which intercollegiate student-athletes are able to balance the roles of student and athlete is not an easy undertaking (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991).

During the season, it is not uncommon for student-athletes to spend an inordinate amount of time preparing for competition and dealing with a variety of athletic stressors, including pressure to perform, ambiguity of team roles, travel to athletic events, threat of injury, fear of failing, and amount of time spent in the weight room and athletic training room. As a result, they often suffer from stress and chronic fatigue, time management and/or other study skill problems, personal identity issues, and interpersonal relationship problems (Petipas, 1981; Sowa & Gressard, 1983). Couple this with the fact that student-athletes have limited opportunities to develop friendships or social networks outside their athletic peer subcultures, and the stress can become overwhelming (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Lanning, 1982).

Difficulty in meeting the multiple demands and roles may create particular developmental problems for those less prepared for the rigor of life as an intercollegiate student-athlete (Blann, 1985; Danish & Hale, 1981; Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1990; Ferrante, 1989; Nelson, 1983; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Petitpas & Champagne, 1988; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982; Sowa & Gressard, 1983). For instance, freshman student-athletes often struggle to adapt to the unique nuances of college life. Being away from the comforts of home for the first time, they have to deal with a variety of

transition and adjustment issues, such as learning to adapt to a new environment, new living arrangements, new team, new coaches, and new school. In addition, most were the stars of their high school teams and, as freshmen in college, most have to deal with the "little fish in a big sea" syndrome. Similarly, sophomores, juniors, and seniors have their own developmental needs and concerns to confront. If not managed properly, the cumulative effects of stress can undermine an individual's confidence and self-esteem. Consequently, it is not uncommon for student-athletes to question the world of intercollegiate athletics. As a result, they may feel isolated, alienated, unmotivated, or homesick, all of which can possibly lead to withdrawal from the team or sport itself. In many instances, student-athletes do not know who to ask for help.

To assist student-athletes during their collegiate experience, the Academic Support Center for Student-Athletes (ASCSA) at The Pennsylvania State University developed and initiated a peer helping program—called the Student Peer Athlete Network (S.P.A.N.)—for its student-athletes. The purpose of this article is to discuss the history behind peer helping, explain the rationale for and development of a peer helping program implemented within an intercollegiate athletic environment, demonstrate how student-athletes benefit from a peer support network, and highlight areas in which sport psychologists, life skills personnel, and academic counselors can assist in the process.

PEER HELPING AND PEER TRAINING MODELS

Peer helping refers to a process in which caring persons, other than licensed or certified professional counselors, offer a set of interpersonal skills to needy individuals who are trying to work through a difficult situation in their life (Myrick & Sorenson, 1988). The process encourages people who are experiencing difficult situations to explore alternative ways of looking at problem-solving situations so that, ultimately, they can take responsibility and be more accountable for their own actions and decisions (Myrick & Sorenson, 1988; Schrupf, Crawford, & Usadel, 1991). Specific life skills like goal setting, communication, conflict resolution, stress management, responsible decision making, and self-control are often targeted.

Organized peer helping programs came into existence in the mid-sixties (Varenhorst, 1984). The word "peer" connotes that the helper has some type of general association with the person needing help (e.g., something in common such as same age, status, socioeconomic background, or interest area such as a sport team). Researchers have noted that under certain circumstances trained peer student counselors were found to be more accepted, less intimidating, more understanding, and more trustworthy than traditional older professional counselors (Carkhuff, 1969; Myrick & Sorenson, 1988; Varenhorst, 1984).

Although peer-helping programs were extensively utilized in the late sixties and seventies, it was not until the 1980's that sufficient evidence was available to evaluate their effectiveness. Many secondary schools (Bernard, 1988; Botvin & Tortu, 1988) and a limited number of universities have organized successful peer helping programs. In an extensive review regarding the effectiveness of a college-based peer helping program, Giddan (1988) found that trained peer student helpers were as effective or, in certain circumstances, more effective than their professional counterparts, particularly when specific behavior change was targeted.

The initial training model for many peer-helping programs evolved from the work

of Carkhuff and Truax (1967). Their human relations training model was based on identifying effective behavioral qualities of therapists who were believed to significantly facilitate positive change in their clients. Although many training programs are based on Carkhuff's (1969) model, the validity of the model has been criticized on the basis of methodological concerns such as lack of clarity in describing treatment procedures, inadequate use of control groups, failure to identify and investigate relevant outcome measures, and lack of systematic follow-up studies (Gormally & Hill, 1974; Vorenhorst, 1984).

Ivey's "microcounseling" model (1973) has also been used favorably within the context of peer helping programs. Ivey expanded on Carkhuff's model and attempted to convert successful attending behaviors of counselors into behavioral response categories that could be readily taught. For instance, Ivey suggests that while "attending behaviors" such as warmth, positive regard, and empathy are important qualities of an effective counselor, they are not directly observable or teachable behaviors. Using step-by-step procedures, Ivey identified 12 specific skills associated with effective counseling techniques and broke them into four distinct categories for instruction: attending behaviors, active listening skills, sharing skills, and interpretation skills. This training curriculum and educational model has been used successfully in a number of peer counseling programs.

Another useful training model for peer helping is the Helping Skills Model (Danish & D'Augelli, 1983). Within this model, students learn the nature and rationale for appropriate helping skills, observe models demonstrating these skills, then have the opportunity to practice and evaluate their effectiveness to see how these skills transfer to actual helping situations. This type of program provides students with a conceptual understanding of appropriate helping skills, gives them an opportunity to become involved in simulated role playing experiences, and provides a chance to practice modeling appropriate helping behaviors.

Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1992) recently proposed a developmental model of intervention that would appear to have direct application for sport psychologists, life skills personnel, and others in peer counseling. Their Life Development Intervention (LDI) model assumes that psychological skills acquired through participation in sport are transferable skills that have great value to athletes both in and out of sport. These transferable skills (e.g., dedication and commitment, motivation and persistence, goal-setting strategies, mental focusing skills, poise under pressure, etc.) are life skills that can help the athlete manage present and future stressors that arise in one's journey through life.

Similar to Danish and D'Augelli's Helping Skills Model, peer counselors must first develop an awareness of what constitutes "athletic" life skills and how these skills can be smoothly transferred to non-athletic settings. From a training perspective, peer counselors are sensitized to various situations that cause a student-athlete to be stressed (e.g., injuries, anxiety, transition and adjustment issues, interpersonal communication problems, etc.). Then, through realistic role-playing scenarios and structured assignments, they are given an opportunity to practice various peer-helping interventions under continuous supervision. Thus, LDI specialists (i.e., peer helpers) are taught how to assist other student-athletes in identifying, utilizing, and transferring the skills they have learned through participation in sport to various situations they might encounter in their daily lives.

The potential benefits of a similar model have been recognized by the NCAA (NCAA News, 1993). In an effort to insure that student-athletes leave college with more than athletic skills, the NCAA is encouraging every member institution to adopt a Life Skills Program for their student-athletes. Since the inception of its pilot program in 1994, over 200 NCAA Division I, II, and III colleges and universities have taken part in the program.

Social Support

An area that has received increased attention in the literature in helping individuals cope more effectively with a variety of different stressors and life transition issues is that of social support (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). According to Albrecht and Adelman (1984), individuals seek out social support in order to reduce uncertainty about themselves, others, and/or the environment with which they interact. College students must establish a new support network they can feel comfortable with during their college years. A strong social support system provides the recipient with a network of people or personal ties from which to derive companionship, empathy, and reassurance (Albrecht & Adelman, 1984; Rosenfeld, Richman, & Hardy, 1989). Designed to enhance the well-being of the recipient, it has been suggested that perceived social support depends on two things: the availability of people to whom an individual can turn in time of need, and the degree of satisfaction with the support available (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990; Shumaker & Brownell, 1984).

Researchers have conceptualized social support as a multidimensional construct, with six different types of support being offered (Pines, Aronson, & Kafry, 1981). Four of these types of support can be given by any concerned individual (listening support, emotional support, emotional challenge, and shared social reality), and two types of support require the provider to have technical expertise in the content area of support being offered (technical appreciation and technical challenge). Perhaps the most therapeutic ingredient of social support lies in the individual's belief that he/she has people who value and care about them, and who are willing to help them if assistance is needed (Sarason et al., 1990).

While the concept of social support has been applied mainly to the areas of health, personal adjustment, and social competence, its potential for the domain of sport is intriguing (Hardy & Crace, 1991; Richman, Hardy, Rosenfeld & Callanan, 1989; Sarason et al., 1990). For example, in a study examining social support networks among athletes, Rosenfeld et al. (1989) found that coaches, teammates, friends, and parents each provided their own unique contribution to the athletes' social support network. In agreement with the research of Pines et al. (1981), it was found that friends and parents primarily provided support characterized by a concerned individual would provide (e.g., listening, emotional challenge, and shared social reality). Coaches and teammates, the content experts, were found to offer technical appreciation and technical challenge support.

At the intercollegiate level, peer helping and social support involves student-athletes helping each other deal with the multiple demands and stressors associated with being a student-athlete. A peer helper can provide emotional support and shared social reality by listening to problems other student-athletes have, then offering appropriate guidance, support, and assistance. For instance, if a freshman or sophomore student-athlete is extremely nervous prior to an upcoming competition, a

trained upperclassman can provide support, words of encouragement, and/or technical expertise to help reduce pre-competitive anxiety. Similarly, trained peer helpers can help struggling freshman student-athletes cope with the anxiety and stress associated with mid-term and final exams by giving advice and sharing coping strategies that have been effective for them in the past. These social support experiences can have a direct impact on team building, group cohesion, and team development (Yukelson 1997).

In summary, most of the curricula in the aforementioned peer helper training programs have focused on teaching individuals general counseling skills associated with fostering interpersonal growth and development. These skills include understanding individual and cultural differences, facilitative conditions associated with effective helping, interpersonal communication and active listening skills, goal-setting strategies, problem-solving techniques, and decision-making strategies (Crosson-Johnson, 1976; Egan, 1994; Myrick & Sorenson, 1988). As a result, peer helpers are trained to assist others in coping with many of life's challenges. In addition, peer helpers are trained to help student-athletes broaden and develop their social support networks so they can deal more effectively with problems that arise both in and out of their sport.

INTERCOLLEGIATE PEER HELPING PROGRAMS

Until the early 1990's, few peer helping programs existed within intercollegiate athletic programs. A select few universities were experimenting with individual versions of peer helping programs which focused on drug prevention and education, peer education, and selected community outreach activities (Carr & Bauman, 1996).

For instance, the University of Virginia initiated a peer athlete helper program in 1989 called Student Athlete Mentors (S.A.M.) to help with drug and alcohol education. Elected student-athletes from each team were trained in becoming peer helpers and designing appropriate intervention programs for each of the teams. This education-based model focuses on seven segments of programming: peer recruitment practices, expectations and attitudes, drug education and programming, drug policies, drug testing, discipline procedures, and referral and counseling. The S.A.M. program has undergone annual evaluations and has become one of the "standard" peer mentoring programs that intercollegiate athletic departments can choose to utilize for their student-athlete population. This comprehensive peer education model appears to be effective because it emphasizes peer assistance and promotes student-athlete accountability and responsibility.

Similarly, Ohio State University initiated a peer-helping program called Buckeyes Against Alcohol and Drugs (B.A.A.D.) in the 1989-90 academic year. Interested in giving something back to the community, Ohio State student-athletes established organizational guidelines for their peer helping program, signed a drug-free pledge, and became actively involved in educational seminars designed to combat drug use/abuse in the surrounding community. It has evolved into their "Buckeye Power" program, which involved student-athletes in the local D.A.R.E. Program. This program utilizes trading cards for children as promotion of alcohol-free and drug-free pledges and gets athletic department personnel and athletes involved in the "Just Say No" annual rally. Student-athletes also get involved in a separate Speaker's Bureau Program.

These two peer helper programs, in addition to the Penn State SPAN Program,

were three of the predecessors of the NCAA C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills Program. The C.H.A.M.P.S. (Challenging Athletes Minds for Personal Success) Program is a model of life skills development that is designed to challenge student-athletes to be a success in life, both on and off the playing field and in life after their athletic career is completed. The C.H.A.M.P.S. Program focuses on the student-athlete as a whole—academically, athletically, and emotionally. Each major commitment of the program—academics, athletics, personal development, campus/community service, and career development—emphasizes individual needs and teaches specific skills needed during and after college.

A major component within the service commitment is a review of peer mentoring programs. Division I, II, and III universities that get involved in the C.H.A.M.P.S. Program find that initiating a peer helper program assists in getting the program off to a good start and generates interest in other spin-off programs/activities related to life skills development.

PENN STATE S.P.A.N. PROGRAM

Objectives and Description

In 1990, the Academic Support Center for Student-Athletes at Penn State University developed and initiated a peer helping program called the Student Peer Athlete Network (S.P.A.N.). S.P.A.N. was developed as a “peer mentorship” program, designed to train student-athletes in peer helping skills so they can assist other student-athletes who are in need of receiving support or assistance for specific personal, academic, or athletic concerns.

General program objectives were as follows: (1) to identify problems faced by student-athletes and to provide peer helpers with information and skills relevant to those problem areas; (2) to train peer helpers in good communication, decision making, problem solving, and referral skills; (3) to establish programs and situations in which peer helpers can use their skills to help others; (4) to provide support to the peer helpers for their own problems and for those they may encounter in helping others; (5) to decrease the incidents of so-called self-destructive behaviors (e.g., drug and alcohol use, eating disorders, etc.) by providing an enhanced support system for student-athletes; (6) to help create a healthier academic, athletic, and personal environment for Penn State student-athletes and staff; (7) to help new student-athletes adjust to the Penn State University community; (8) to bridge the different sport groups at Penn State to more effectively unify the student-athlete population; and (9) to recruit additional responsible upper-class student-athletes to serve as positive role models and mentors to younger student-athletes and children in the community.

The major advantage of adopting a peer helping model is that it capitalizes on the informal peer helper network that already exists among student-athletes (i.e., student-athletes tend to not only spend athletic time together, but many are roommates and spend social time together). In addition, it allows programming to be designed specifically to meet the developmental needs and/or concerns of the individual or sport team. Since college athletes are usually in close proximity with one another, it was hypothesized that they are more likely to turn to each other in time of need. Other advantages include easy accessibility to teammates or helpers and immediate response to concerns that might arise. It is important to point out that peer helpers are not

counselors. They are, however, a unique and important link in providing access to improved care and services for the student-athlete population.

Potential developmental and implementation problems include initial recruitment of student-athletes and lack of time for extracurricular activities. An effective manner in which to deal with this situation includes informing the student-athlete that the time commitment will be minimal and reinforce the idea of learning leadership skills, and the chance to give something back to the community. Evaluations are completed on a semester basis and appropriate changes are made for future semesters.

Currently, there are 80 active members of S.P.A.N. who represent all 29 varsity athletic teams. Every varsity athletic team is required to elect a minimum of two student-athletes to be S.P.A.N. representatives. Three faculty/staff members, including the life skills development coordinator and the sport psychologist, are regularly involved with S.P.A.N. Peer helpers choose how they wish to become involved in the program. They identify the roles and activities with which they feel most comfortable, including being group facilitators, speaking at local engagements, helping freshmen with transition and adjustment issues, providing information and referrals, writing to elementary school pen pals, serving on student-athlete panels, or other miscellaneous activities.

Initial Orientation

Each S.P.A.N. member is required to attend an orientation retreat at the beginning of the year and subsequent planning and educational meetings throughout the year. The goal of the retreat is to learn a basic level of knowledge and standard of practice in peer helping skills and to discuss various issues and concerns that impact student-athlete welfare. Based on the counseling theories outlined earlier (Carkhuff, 1969; Egan, 1994), the retreat begins with an educational orientation on basic helping skills. General topics include ingredients of a successful helping relationship, effective communication and the art of active listening, stress and its impact on motivation and self-esteem of student-athletes, critical problem-solving techniques, and responsible decision-making skills. In addition, peer helpers receive training on how to make a referral and where to find appropriate referral resources within the university community. Appropriate educational materials are provided by both the sport psychologist and the life skills development coordinator (Yukelson, 1993; Yukelson & Carlson, 1995). Other retreat goals include participation in cooperative team-building activities, group discussions regarding individual differences and cultural diversity, and the creation of a S.P.A.N. action plan for the upcoming semesters.

At the retreat, role-playing scenarios are used to sensitize peer helpers to a variety of concerns that can impact student-athletes. General awareness issues and role-playing scenarios typically cover a variety of different concerns, including homesickness and freshman adjustment issues, coping with academic and athletic pressures, interpersonal communication problems with coaches and/or teammates, injury management, stress and/or time management, drug and alcohol use/abuse, eating disorders, or issues pertaining to life after college. The following represents a typical role-playing scenario for peer helpers to discuss:

An 18-year-old female freshman track-and-field athlete, away from home for the first time, feels lonely and isolated in her new environment. Driven by the desire to compete effectively and prove her worth to teammates

and coaches, she becomes overly obsessed with training and competing well, to the point where she is neglecting her schoolwork and withdrawing from friends. To make matters worse, her coach is putting pressure on her to lose weight and run faster. In the dining hall, teammates notice she does not eat much and begin to question her eating patterns. The question posed for discussion is, "What would you do to help?"

Solutions range from ideas of what they, as peer helpers, might do to aid the student-athlete (e.g., teaching the student-athlete how to reframe stressors into things she can control, developing a new social support network, assertiveness training), to referring the student-athlete to the sport psychologist and/or sport nutritionist for individual counseling.

Consequently, peer helpers learn how to handle confrontations, set limits, and offer appropriate referral assistance. It is essential to sensitize peer helpers on how to become an "observant" teammate, that is, recognize signs when a teammate may be feeling lonely, isolated, withdrawn, or down on themselves. An important theme throughout the peer helper learning process is that individuals need to adopt a style of helping that fits their own personality and needs (Yukelson, 1993). The goal is for the peer helper to know how to confront a teammate or fellow student-athlete in time of need and, hopefully, keep the situation from escalating. Their main role is to recognize problems faced by student-athletes, provide needed support to their peers, and be the accessible link to available resources.

Other S.P.A.N. Activities

Penn State's "Penn" Pal Program

One of the more popular S.P.A.N. programs in which Penn State student-athletes participate is the "Penn" Pal Program. During the 1994-1996 academic years, over 150 student-athletes were paired with over 800 fourth-grade elementary school students in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania School District as pen pals. Themes such as the importance of doing well in school, qualities in choosing good friends, goal setting, and negative consequences associated with alcohol and other drugs were emphasized. Current programming efforts include fourth- and fifth-grade students from Warrior's Run School District in Pennsylvania.

Student-athletes commit to write letters once per month to their class of pen pals. The fourth- and fifth-graders also have the opportunity to write to the student-athletes, while learning writing, spelling, and mailing skills. At the end of the semester, the student-athletes have the opportunity to travel to the elementary school and visit with their pen pals.

Speaker's Bureau Program

Another successful programming effort that falls under the S.P.A.N. umbrella is the Speaker's Bureau Program. S.P.A.N. members and other interested student-athletes can choose to participate in public speaking engagements. All must attend a training session before they are allowed to speak in public. Two training manuals, including an overview of techniques for enhancing public speaking skills and a handout of key points to make when talking with kids, are distributed. A program called "C.H.A.M.P.S. for Life" was prepared so the student-athletes have continuity in the subject matter that is discussed. Program topics include what it takes to be a champion both on and off the athletic field, qualities of a good friend, what it is like to be a student-athlete,

how to handle success and failure, and the pitfalls associated with alcohol and other drug use. Requesting organizations range from local elementary and secondary schools, local and regional churches, banquets, and SAAD conferences, to numerous local community organization events and activities.

Big Brother/Big Sister Program

In order to assist incoming freshman and transfer student-athletes with the transition and adjustment to the University and athletic community, a Big Brother/Big Sister Program was developed. Many first-year student-athletes feel a sense of isolation and alienation upon arrival at school. Being away from home, in a new environment, with new teammates, coaches, and surroundings, it is not uncommon for freshmen to question their identity or experience a sense of homesickness. An experienced peer helper can provide a friendly suggestion or a series of suggestions that help with the transition from high school (or another college) to university life.

Any student-athlete at Penn State can become involved in the Big Brother/Big Sister Program. Incoming freshmen that are interested in joining the program get matched up with a responsible upper-class student-athlete who then signs on to serve as a Big Brother or Big Sister. This form of psychological contracting has been shown to increase an individual's commitment, motivation, and sense of responsibility (Kirschenbaum & Flanery, 1984).

Special activities are organized for the Big Brothers/ Sisters ("Veterans") and Little Brothers/Sisters ("Rookies"). At the beginning of the fall semester, "kickoff" events (including informal sporting activities and an ice cream social) take place. These alcohol-free events are avenues for freshman student-athletes to meet one another early in the year and provide a mechanism for developing solid social support networks. As the semester progresses, they get together for movies, educational seminars, bowling, or other informal activities. In general, initial evaluations and reports from student-athletes have been very positive.

Community Outreach

Members of the S.P.A.N. program have also become increasingly involved with community outreach programs. This includes volunteering to work with the Second Mile Program, helping out with Special Olympics, getting involved with the "Penn" Pal Program, or speaking to local elementary and secondary schools about what it is like to be a student-athlete and the importance of getting an education. In addition, student-athletes are actively involved with the United Way Campaign, Red Cross Blood Drives, various State College Jaycee events, and specified campus projects with other student organizations such as the Interfraternity Council's annual Dance Marathon for pediatric cancer patients. By becoming involved in community activities, student-athletes have an opportunity to demonstrate leadership skills and be positive role models.

Student-athletes are in a unique position to influence today's youth. More than just being role models, they have a tremendous amount of experience to share in terms of self-esteem development and handling life's daily struggles. Student-athletes firmly believe that lessons learned through participation in sport with regard to goal setting, commitment and belief, motivation and self-confidence, and overcoming adversity are skills that can be carried over into life and transferred to others.

DISCUSSION

Peer helping programs are increasingly being seen as an effective method to help create a healthier academic and athletic environment in intercollegiate athletic departments. Currently, the use of peer helpers in college athletics has been an underused resource. Initial research in the area of social support (Rosenfield et al., 1989) has shown promise for athletic populations. Peer helping is one form of social support and appears to offer great potential. With proper awareness and training, it will be feasible to produce powerful social support networks within and among various athletic teams on college campuses (Danish & D'Augelli, 1983; Danish, et al., 1992).

The literature clearly points to the potential for peer helpers to be powerful mediators of behavior change in college athletes. As part of the Academic Support Center for Student-Athletes' Life Skills Program, the S.P.A.N. program has begun to tap into the informal human resource pool on athletic teams in order to promote more formalized opportunities for enhanced communication and development of life skill competencies.

Life skills development coordinators, sport psychologists, and academic athletic advisors play a unique role in the peer helping process. Life skills coordinators help design programming efforts based on the five major commitments of the NCAA C.H.A.M.P.S. Program — academics, athletics, personal development, campus/community service, and career development. Each component within these five commitments emphasizes individual skills to be learned both on and off the playing field and for life after sport. Academic athletic advisors play a significant role in assisting the student-athletes by providing academic services in addition to helping them deal with the challenges of their dual roles. In addition, based on the Life Development Intervention model outlined earlier (Danish et al., 1992), sport psychologists can offer training in basic counseling skills and mental training techniques to both athletes and life skill development specialists. Goal-setting strategies, stress-management techniques, concentration training, and communication skills are excellent areas to address with peer helpers so they may assist teammates with strategies on how to cope effectively with both sport and non-sport concerns. Sport psychologists also can serve as a sounding board or resource for peer helpers, life skills facilitators, or other academic support personnel to turn to for direction and guidance on a variety of issues that affect the quality of student-athlete life.

More specifically, Gould (1994) has suggested a specific role for peer helpers in working with sport psychologists and injured athletes. Athletes who have successfully completed their recovery from a serious sport injury could be recruited as peer role models for other athletes undergoing the rigors of rehabilitation. These peer helpers could share feelings and strategies that they found useful during various stages of their recovery from injury. In addition, they could discuss various coping-skill strategies used to help deal with potential unexpected setbacks, or be there to provide emotional support in time of need (Hardy & Crace, 1991). This mentoring model could easily be adopted for other academic, athletic, personal, or social problems experienced by student-athletes in a university or high school setting. Since athletes are in close proximity to one another, they become a ideal source of

social support for teammates when coaches, academic counselors, life skills specialists, or sport psychologists are unavailable to fulfill this role.

The potential implications of peer helper programming are limitless. Empowerment through peer helping enables needy individuals to exercise better control over their own lives by offering social support and promoting a sense of self responsibility for decision making and behavioral change (Giddan, 1988; Myrick & Sorenson, 1988). The knowledge that somebody is there to turn to in time of need enhances motivation and inspires a willingness to move forward.

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