

Mis-education a disease among athletes

The business of "mis-education" of this nation's athletes, especially black athletes, is no laughing matter. Research literature, the courtrooms and our nation's college dormitories are full of evidence that this mis-education exists and further, that little is being done to prevent this disease from spreading.

In dealing with an issue, the provision of prototypical examples is important. In this instance, the controversy surrounding Kevin Ross and Creighton University can be used.



Matthew Stelly

Since the advent of affirmative action and other such programs, "disadvantaged" students historically have been made scapegoats for the inadequacies or shortcomings of these programs. In Kevin Ross' case, former Creighton Coach Tom Apke said, "One of Kevin's biggest problems was a reading disability, not lack of intelligence... he had average grades at an average high school in Kansas City." Apke went on to state that Ross didn't do well on college entrance examinations.

"The rationale was that we had to have Kevin playing and happy to have a chance to reach him educationally," Apke said.

Since when does a student's "happiness" come before telling him or her the truth about his or her academic potential or life's chances? And while college entrance tests do, indeed, have cultural biases, that does not excuse Creighton or Apke from recruiting a student who they knew full well had reading disabilities.

The fact of the matter is Creighton recruiters saw a tall black kid who could dunk the ball, and they wanted him to perform on the court, not in the classroom. As a matter of fact, Creighton officials were able to get the NCAA to pay for tutorial services for Ross after his sophomore year, a time when they found that when Ross would read, his eye inadvertently skipped two or three lines. But they told no one,

and it was business as usual, justified by Apke's contention that, "in light of his desire to play basketball, that (Ross taking a year off from basketball) didn't seem feasible at the time."

In an attempt to raise Ross' grade point average at the midterm of his junior year, athletic director Dan Offenberger conceded that yes, he indeed had given Ross an easier course load. So now the problem is exacerbated: Ross has reading problems, he cannot do college-level work, he is reading at the second-grade level even as a junior in college, but the university opts to put a BandAid on a broken leg by simply allowing Ross to take fluff courses to pad his GPA and thereby remain eligible.

Now, if this happened to an athlete who, in four years of playing ball at Creighton, started only 10 games and averaged a scant six points per contest, what will such institutions do to keep star-caliber players eligible? Will these institutions suspend a player who brings in poor grades or will they "work things out" where somehow, mystically and magically, this athlete does "extra homework" and therefore remains eligible? In either case, we have the student athlete being treated primarily (and oftentimes solely) as an athlete. His or her status as a "student" becomes secondary, yet it is the student aspect of his or her development on which their future prospects are built or buried!

There is yet another dimension many "experts" are intentionally overlooking: the fact that the bulk of the blue-chip athletes come from lower-income areas. That includes the ghetto, the barrio and even predominantly white rural communities (e.g. Dean Steinkuhler). What we find then, is that in these areas, the level of education is not comparable to private or suburban institutions. The recruiters who go to these areas, then, are well aware of this fact. This, then, seems to be the reason why there are discussions of playing time, trophies and other trivia, and a roundabout discussion (when mentioned at all) about the student's chances of getting his or her degree.

We know educational attainment and income, in most cases, are related. We also know many athletes are being

mis-educated and are not receiving their degrees — degrees that enhance job opportunities. In light of this, I think these athletic departments should guarantee the athlete that they recruit a job at the end of their athletic career. After all, it is the athletic program that is taking precedent over their student status; it is the athletic program that is taking up time that could be used studying; and it is the athletic program that circulates and skillfully exploits the term "student athlete." So if mis-education is to continue (and it will), and if minority athletes and those from impoverished areas are going to be academically punished by breaking their backs four years and leaving empty-handed, then it is the role and responsibility of the institution to at least guarantee that athlete a job the job, in turn, would enable the athlete to: 1) accomplish a highly-held goal in life; 2) support his or her return to the campus to complete the degree that he or she did not receive; 3) receive payment for four years of free slave labor

for which they receive only crumbs, and 4) benefit from the millions of dollars the university made during that particular athlete's tenure.

It has been said that, "you can't teach what you don't know and you can't lead where you won't go." The universities across this nation that are guilty of mis-education cannot overturn their own inadequacies any more than a robber who has successfully gotten away with his money would return that money because of a "crisis of conscience." The institutions of higher learning in this country have to be made accountable for what they are doing to those who, because of skin color or academic deficiencies, already will have a rough enough time in the world of the 1980's.

A guaranteed job for these athletes would be a necessary beginning, an economic security blanket in lieu of having to foolishly make moral appeals to institutional power barons who, in fact, have no morals.

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