STUDENT ATHLETES' PERCEPTIONS TOWARD THEIR PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL-BASED ATHLETICS

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by Robert D. Christy
University of Dayton
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approved by:
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my parents, Bernard and Jo Ann Christy, for their unwavering support of me throughout my life. Thanks for your dedication to making this world a better place.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose for the Study

Negative publicity surrounding student athletes has dominated the press in recent years. As this type of coverage continues, more and more negative perceptions about student athletes are developing. These perceptions are not only being developed by non-athletes, but student athletes themselves are beginning to perceive themselves in a more negative sense. The overall worth of school-based athletic programs is being called into question. Continual budget cuts are forcing many school districts and universities to cut back, or in some cases, eliminate school-based athletics. As this case scenario unfolds an age-old debate has been refueled: Are school-based athletic programs a necessary part of a secondary school or university curriculum? There are valid arguments presented by both sides of the debate.

Supporters of school-based athletic programs feel that the allotted budget money is well spent. Those in favor of school-based athletics feel the benefits of these type of programs outweigh the financial costs. Many argue the benefits of athletic programs include the teaching of value based lessons, such as: teamwork, citizenship, discipline, and responsibility (DeVoe & Carroll, 1994; Yaffe, 1982). On the other hand, opponents of school-based athletics feel that such programs hurt the overall quality of education (Yaffe, 1982). Opponents of these athletic programs view athletics as promotional for negative virtues that exist in society. Those that argue against school-based athletics view such programs as promotional for violence, gender bias, and elitism. Furthermore, athletics have been found to slow down normal progress in several developmental areas (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991).
The researcher feels it is important for student athletes to examine their participation in school-based activities. One important reason is for student athletes to be able to perceive themselves in a positive context; not only in the athletic realm, but also in academic and other social situations. Previous research has shown that although student athletes often display certain qualities and skills that allow them to be successful on the playing field, they often have difficulty transferring those qualities and skills beyond the playing field; to the classroom or other social situations (Naylor, 1993). If an athlete is unable to transfer those skills and lessons learned through athletics to other settings, then the athletic system is failing to meet the needs of student athletes. Also the researcher feels analyzing student athletes’ perceptions will enable communities and schools to create an atmosphere that will accentuate the positive aspects of school-based athletics.

Much research has been developed on the positive aspects of school-based athletics (DeVoe & Carroll, 1994; Dodson, 1992; Yaffe, 1982). Schools and communities must find ways to showcase the positive skills and lessons that are being taught through the median of school-based athletic programs. "Sports events ... can be wonderful occasions. They can serve to activate parents and the community" (Begel, 1990, p.28). Finally, the researcher feels the information gathered during this study will help coaches and administrators to be better equipped to develop solutions to problems of misperceptions that currently exist in school-based athletics.

Recent cases of violence and unethical behavior (not only by athletes, but also on the behalf of coaches and administrators) have left a tarnished image on school-based athletics. Educators and administrators must be able to analyze the problems that exist in school-based programs. Furthermore, educators and administrators must go beyond the analysis of the problems;
developing solutions and successfully implementing these solutions.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to analyze the perceptions of student athletes toward their participation in school-based athletics.

Assumptions

In order for the results of this study to effective, the following assumptions must be made. First, the student athletes that respond to the questionnaire and interview questions will do so with well-thought, honest responses. Also, the researcher assumes that all cited material has been gathered with integrity and limited bias. Finally, the researcher assumes that the Likert-type questionnaire will accurately measure the student athletes’ perceptions.

Limitations

One limitation to the study is the limited setting in which it will be conducted. The findings could perhaps be more conclusive if student athletes from a wider geographical range could respond to the questionnaire and interview questions. Another limitation is that some of the student athletes may be aware of the researcher’s position within the settings’ athletic program, and answer questionnaires and interview questions in a manner that may create some bias in the findings. A final limitation to the study is wording in the Likert-type questionnaire is difficult to understand and respond to accordingly.

Definition of Terms

**Student athlete.** This term relates to an enrolled student (secondary school) or full-time student (12 college credit hours) that fully participates on a school-based athletic team.

**School-based athletics.** This term refers to athletic teams that are fully supported by the
school which it represents. Team members are eligible for a varsity letter award.

**Participation.** For this particular study, participation refers to a student athlete’s involvement in a team’s practice sessions and games for a full season.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The review of the related literature is divided into four specific sections: 1.) the positive and negative aspects of school-based athletic programs, 2.) student athletes' perceptions of themselves, 3.) others' perceptions of student athletes, and 4.) possible solutions to the misperceptions of student athletes that currently exist.

Positive and Negative Aspects of School-Based Athletics. A vast amount of research has been completed on the effects of athletic participation. Athletics are no different than any other research topic, in that arguments have surfaced both in favor and against the necessity and effects of student athlete participation in school-based athletic programs.

For years athletic programs have been viewed as inherently good, not only for the athletes themselves, but for the overall educational process. A study conducted by Butterfield, Brown, and Perrone, (1991), points out: "Athletics are used to teach self-discipline, work ethic, perseverance, courage, and teamwork" (DeVoe & Carroll, 1994, p.63). All of these values are considered by society as good in and of themselves (Frey & Massengale, 1988). Also, with the multitude of social and moral problems currently facing schools, (issues such as: high drop-out rates, alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, the AIDS risk, gang violence, etc.) "it seems inconceivable for anyone to seriously consider decreasing our well-supervised, wholesome activities" (Dodson, 1992, p.101). Athletics seem to offer hope and solutions to many young people currently furthering their education. Proof of this is shown by the fact that student athletes are 1.7 times less likely to drop-out of school than non-athletes (McNeal, 1995). This single activity research model conducted by McNeal is of even greater significance considering that it
holds consistent with previous research conducted in this area. Furthermore, research has proven that most athletes "perform academically as well as or better than other students at both the college and high school levels" (Lapchick, 1989, p.12). After pondering the benefits of school-based athletic programs, many people not only view athletics as beneficial, but as the second half of the educational process (Dodson, 1992; Ericson, 1991; Yaffe, 1982).

On the other side of the issue, others view school-based athletic programs as detrimental to the educational process. An argumentative paper by Yaffe (1982) points out that opponents of school-based athletic programs view these programs as, "pre-professional athletic training for a select number of students... which hurts the overall quality of education" (p. 179). Whereas others view athletics as promotional for violence, furthering the lack of gender equity, and nurturing unethical academic practices (Yaffe, 1982; Lapchick, 1989; Burke, 1993). Furthermore, there is research to support the argument that athletics hurt the overall quality of education. In 1978, Remer, Tongate, and Watson conducted a study by taping discussions with collegiate student athletes, administrators, and faculty members at a large Midwestern state university. The results of the study suggested student athletes often lack social skills, academic skills, self-confidence in many areas, and sensitivity to others (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). Likewise studies conducted by Blann (1985), Lawrence (1986), Petitpas (1981), and Sowa & Gossard (1983) all ascertain that involvement in sports does not allow for normal progress on several developmental areas (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). Using a revised Situational Attitude Scale (SAS), Engstrom and Sedlacek measured the attitudes of incoming first year students at a large public Eastern university. Based on the researchers' belief that student athletes are of their own culture, they found non-athletes (traditional students) to be less trusting and suspicious of student athletes.
Student Athletes' Perceptions of Themselves. The manner on which student athletes perceive themselves is essential to their success, not only in the playing field, but also in all their other endeavors away from their particular sport. Having a low self-esteem can significantly inhibit anyone's ability to obtain success. Both male and female student athletes were found to have significantly higher self-esteem scores than those students which did not participate in sports (Holland & Andre, 1994). Holland and Andre's investigation also showed that over fifty percent of all student athletes surveyed wanted to be remembered as star athletes (1994). Expanding a previously validated questionnaire (Ewing & Seefeldt, 1990), DeVoe and Carroll (1994) examined both coaches (112) and high school male and female student athletes (3,900) perceptions toward participation in school-based athletics. They discovered that student athletes perceive themselves as participating in athletics for the dual purpose of having fun, while at the same time improving their skills. If student athletes are able to accomplish both of these goals, they will continue to nurture their confidence and self-esteem.

As athletes enter into their careers, as student athletes, they have high expectations for themselves and their future (Adler & Adler, 1985). It is at this point that student athletes begin to have troubles with their perceptions. The "dumb jock" stereotype has become prevalent in society. The "dumb jock" stereotype is the perception that student athletes are unable to perform as well as non-athletes academically or socially. This particular stereotype has created an effect of dissonance on student athletes' self-esteem (Kirk & Kirk, 1993). This stereotype has no effect on student athletes while they are participating on the playing field. Instead the effect of dissonance occurs when the student athlete is attempting to perform in the classroom or social setting.
Research has shown that student athletes have trouble transferring their perceived skills and abilities from the playing field to the classroom (Naylor, 1983). In light of this information, it can be concluded that overall student athletes do have higher self-esteem scores than non-athletes when within an athletic environment. Beyond the athletic setting though, there seems to be no significant difference in self-esteem perceptions between athletes and non-athletes.

**Non-Athletes' Perceptions of Student Athletes.** The aspect of others' perceptions of student athletes is intriguing. It is intriguing in that student athletes' peers view them in a positive context in one setting, yet in another setting student athletes are held in negative regard by their peers. Based upon personal observations, the researcher has noticed non-athletes enjoying the company of student athletes in social settings, but have the same non-athletes be cautious and/or weary of student athletes in the classroom.

Within the social setting, student athletes seem to have an advantage over non-athletes. Holland and Andre (1994) found that student athletes are viewed in a positive context within the social setting. Both males and females most often selected athletes as a dating partner or a friend over non-athletes. Despite these findings, student athletes are, at the same time, seen as unintelligent and single-mindedly focused outside of the realm of athletics (Gerdy, 1987). Gerdy's findings concluded that athletes are simply not viewed as very intelligent or well-rounded people. Despite the previously mentioned findings of student athletes performing as well as or better than other students academically; the classroom is where others hold negative perceptions toward the student athlete. Quite simply put, non-athletes have negative perceptions of students in the area of academics (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). This perception of academic inaptitude goes much further than the student athletes' peer group. The public, in general, views student athletes as
performing less effectively in the classroom than other students (Burke, 1993). Burke states this is due to the fact that "mind and body have historically been viewed as separate and because there is a tendency to assume that one or the other is dominant" (p.93).

Possible Solutions to the Misperceptions of Student Athletes. The researcher previously states that one of the purposes for this study is for educators and administrators to be able to analyze and develop solutions to the current misperceptions of student athletes. The utilization of two major views could play a significant role in repairing the damage that has been done to school-based athletic programs.

The first step to correcting the current problems that exist is a restructuring of the athletic system (Frey & Massengale, 1988, Gerdy, 1987). It is agreed by all the authors that change must begin at the collegiate level and trickle down to the athletic systems below.

In his article, "No More 'Dumb Jocks'", Gerdy (1987) explains a three step restructuring process. The first step begins with the college president and moves its way down the ladder during the hiring process of administrators. Gerdy (1987) states that college presidents must search to hire more well-rounded athletic directors, and in turn athletic directors must search for more well-rounded individuals as coaches. In order to produce more well-rounded student athletes there must be a filtering down process beginning at the top. Along with the first step, coaches and administrators "must not only work to develop professionally but, more important, they must work to improve personally" (p.3). The final step to Gerdy's solution is for coaches and administrators to push athletes to follow their example; developing themselves on a more well-rounded sense(socially, academically, and personally). School systems and athletes can help themselves by taking these corrective measures to help eliminate the "dumb jock" image. The
researcher also feels these steps will be beneficial in reducing the number of "off the field" incidents that have recently plagued athletic programs. A more well-rounded and educated student athlete should be better equipped to cope with ethically questionable situations.

Frey and Massengale also feel that a restructuring of the athletic system would be beneficial (1988). The major goals of this restructuring is to revive the ethical standards in athletic programs and to replace the win at all costs attitude with the value of commitment to the pursuit of excellence. The restructuring presented by Frey and Massengale includes fourteen reforms:

1. Athletes would be mainstreamed.
2. No post-season tournaments.
3. One season sports.
4. No athletic events held at a time when academic events or classes are held.
5. Coaches are part-time and hold faculty appointment.
6. No full-time administrators.
7. Players are allowed to experiment with leadership and personal responsibility.
8. Coaches can not earn more money than teachers.
9. Reduced dominance of athletic facilities and teams.
10. A coach's win/loss record is irrelevant.
11. No booster clubs.
12. Value training exercises associated with athletic activity.
13. No athletic scholarships.
14. No transfer restrictions. (p.44)
The researcher feels the most important reform is the one that coincides most closely with Gerdy's proposal. This reform states "athletes would be mainstreamed. The star system would be negated by not isolating the athlete, but by encouraging full participation in the social and academic life of fellow students" (Frey & Massengale, 1988, p.44). Again the emphasis is placed not solely on the athletic ability of a student athlete, but encourages the student athlete to become more well-rounded as an individual. The researcher believes increasing student athletes involvement, both academically and socially, with the rest of the student body and general public will help in the reduction of poor perceptions of student athletes. Also, the recommitment to the pursuit of excellence, instead of winning, will help in reducing the numerous incidents of unethical behavior (illegal recruiting, illegal payments, academic fraud, etc.) that occur at the administrative levels.

The second step to improving the image of student athletes and athletic programs is to better educate the public. Burke (1993) points out that "inasmuch the ("dumb jock") stereotype arises from misconceptions, it should be addressed from a public image standpoint" (Kirk & Kirk, p.95) The more public relations done in the area of the positive aspects of student athletes' achievements, academically and socially, the closer athletic programs can move toward dispelling the currently existing misperceptions.

Some educators are realizing the potential for athletics, as a tool, to help improve public relations for both athletic programs and school systems. "Sports events in high school can be wonderful occasions. They can serve to activate parents and the community" (Begel, 1990, p.28). There are five rules, according to Begel, that will enable athletic programs to be used as a positive public relations tool.
The rules are:

1. Schools must keep their programs clean. Schools can not afford to install a win at all costs attitude. It is important for schools to pay close attention to the rules, to ensure that no negative attitudes will surface.

2. Tie sports into education. Schools must be able to carry the benefits of their programs beyond the playing field. It is vital for the community to understand the long-term benefits that their children will be able to receive from their participation in athletic programs.

3. Remember the female student athletes. It is important for administrators to keep an equal balance between male and female athletic programs (which the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has recently mandated).

4. Schools need to look for alternative media. In other words, do not rely solely on the local newspaper for positive coverage. Be creative in looking for other media avenues to convey positive public statements to the community.

5. Avoid the cult of personality. Try to avoid letting a student athlete become larger than the athletic program or school itself. Stress the team aspects of athletic programs.

"There is a vast public fascination with the world of athletics" (p.29). Negative perceptions and attitudes are beginning to cast a shadow over school-based athletic programs. Schools and universities would be better off using their athletic programs as a positive public relations tool, rather than a negative tool.
CHAPTER III
PROCEDURE

Subjects

The researcher conducted the study using eighty randomly selected student athletes (fifty-three males and twenty-seven females). The selected student athletes were chosen from 330 male and female student athletes that participated on sixteen school-based athletic teams during the current school year. Of the 330 student athletes 213 were male and 117 were female. Forty-six percent of the student athletes surveyed were classified as first year students. Of the remaining fifty-four percent of the participants thirty-three percent were sophomores, fourteen percent were juniors, and seven percent were seniors. Also, the population from which the subjects were drawn is represented by six different races, including: African-American (twenty-three), International (two), Hispanic (one), American-Indian (two), Asian-Pacific (one), and Caucasian (301). Furthermore, fifty-two of the student athletes selected had a grade point average (GPA) that fell somewhere between 2.0 - 3.19 on a four point scale.

Setting

School. The study was conducted at a private, Catholic university located in the Midwestern United States of America. The university was considered to be a mid-sized institution with ninety-four countries being represented by the student body population. Also, the university offered seventy different academic majors, with class sizes that average twenty-six students to every one professor. Ninety-four percent of the student body resides within the campus community.
Community. The university was located in a community of approximately 950,000 people who lived within the metropolitan area. The campus is located two miles southwest of the downtown area and was bordered by a quiet, upscale neighborhood. The city was home for a wide variety of international and national corporations, and was well-known as a leader in research and technology.

Data Collection

Construction of the Data Collection Instrument. During the second semester of academic year, the researcher constructed a forced choice (Likert-scale) questionnaire (Appendix i) to gather the information regarding the student athletes' perceptions. The questionnaire contained five questions in regards to demographic information about the chosen participants. Following a brief set of instructions, the respondents were asked to respond to eleven statements by stating to what degree of intensity they agreed or disagreed with the statements. The statements were drawn from the literature reviewed in Chapter II (see Bibliography). The statements were designed to have student athletes, in this particular setting, express how they perceived themselves, as well as how they felt they were perceived by non-athletes. The researcher also utilized space for the respondents to make general comments. This space was made available for the randomly selected student athletes to feel free to state any unrestricted opinions or comments they might of had in regards to themselves or the athletic system in which they were involved.

Administration of the Data Collection Instrument. Following the random selection of the student athletes and the completion of the survey, two possible administators were contacted. The administration was executed by two assistant coaches from within the setting. They were
chosen based upon their accessibility to student athletes within the setting, and their familiarity of student athletes in general. One of the coaches has received his Masters of Counseling degree and has been within the setting for over twenty years. The other assistant coach is working on his undergraduate degree in Math Education and has three years of experience coaching and educating within various settings. At the end of February, the researcher met independently with the administrators of the survey. Each of the administrators were instructed to briefly introduce the study and the purpose of the study. Furthermore, each administrator was instructed to inform the student athletes that there were no right or wrong answers to the survey, and the answer would remain confidential. One administrator chose to distribute the survey to three groups of twenty male student athletes. The other administrator distributed forty surveys on an individual basis to the randomly selected female student athletes. The administration of the surveys took place during the first week of March. The surveys were collected after the student athletes felt they completed the survey to satisfaction. The administrators returned the surveys to the researcher within a week of their completion. Of the male student athletes that responded to the surveys in a group setting twelve were left blank. Thirty-two of the forty surveys distributed to the female student athletes, on an individual basis, were completed to satisfaction.

Once the surveys were returned to the researcher, the results were broken down. The researcher broke the results down three ways: 1) how male student athletes responded to each statement, 2) how female student athletes responded to each statement, and 3) how the sample group as a whole responded to each statement. The results were then expressed in number of individual responses to each statements, and the percentage of responses to each statement.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The following chapter will report the results of the study. The data is presented in accordance to the percentage of specific responses to each of the eleven statements on the survey. The results are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3. Table 1 shows the what percentage of the whole sample responded in what intensity to each statement. The remaining tables show the respective percentages of how male (Table 2) and female (Table 3) student athletes responded to the statements that were presented.

Of the randomly selected student athletes thirty-four percent were female student athletes. The remaining sixty-six percent were male student athletes from within the same setting. Of the eighty student athletes that completed the survey seventy-nine percent were in their first two years of their collegiate eligibility. Only five of the student athletes were in their senior year of school (all of which were female student athletes). The remainder of the student athletes surveyed were in the second semester of their junior year.

One of the demographic requests asked for the student athletes to fit their grade point average (GPA) into a certain range (see Appendix i). Of the randomly selected student athletes, only three had a GPA that ranged from 1.9 or below (two males and one female). The bulk of the student athletes (sixty-four percent) were in two ranges (3.19-2.8 and 2.79-2.0). Forty-nine percent of the selected female student athletes fit in above these ranges (into ranges "a" and "b"). Albeit, there were only twenty percent of the male student athletes that fit into the GPA ranges that covered 4.0-3.2.
The first statement, in regards to participation increasing student athletes' self-esteem, was strongly agreed with (SA) or agreed with (A) by ninety-one percent of all student athletes. Although female student athletes tended to be more undecided (U) on the issue (nineteen percent responded U). On the other hand, only two percent of the male student athletes responded in a similar manner (see Tables 2 and 3).

Responding to the second statement, fifty-five percent of all student athletes tended to disagree with the notion that non-athletes viewed student athletes as inadequate in the classroom. The female student athletes felt more strongly about this issue than the male student athletes (see Tables 2 and 3). In fact, the majority of male student athletes (fifty-eight percent) were undecided on the issue of non-athletes' classroom perceptions of them.

Statements three and four were overwhelming responded to with SA or A (see Table 1). Ninety-four percent of all the student athletes responded in a positive manner to statement three. This shows that most student athletes feel comfortable that the lessons they learn through sports are easily transferred to other aspects of their life. Only three percent of the student athletes were able to disagree with statement four. Eighty-seven percent were able to SA or A that they participate in athletic competition because they enjoy their sport. Furthermore, statement five was either strongly agreed with or agreed with by eighty-four percent of the student athletes that responded to the survey. This shows that student athletes, both male and female, feel that the lessons they learn while participating in their chosen sports will help them obtain future successes.

Statement six asked student athletes to respond to whether or not they felt their peers viewed them as more attractive, due to their participation in athletics. Forty-three percent of all student athletes responded that they were undecided (U) on this matter. Although, female student
athletes tended to disagree with this statement about three times as much as male student athletes. Thirty-three percent of female student athletes did not view themselves as more attractive, whereas thirty percent of the male student athletes did feel more attractive.

The researcher feels that results of statement seven are somewhat inconclusive due to the wording of the statement. Viewing Table 1, there is a rather even distribution of responses between agreeability (thirty-five percent), indecision (thirty-one percent), and disagreeably (twenty-five percent). Reflecting on the results of statements three, four, and five, the researcher felt if the statement would have been better worded there would have been more SA and A responses.

Statement eight referred to whether or not student athletes felt intelligent while participating in their chosen sport. The majority of student athletes (fifty-nine percent) agreed with statement eight. There seemed to be a discrepancy between male and female student athletes. Eighty percent of the male student athletes responded either SA or A, but only forty-five female student athletes responded on the same manner (see Graph 2 and 3).

Referring back to the second statement, the researcher again asked student athletes to respond as to how they felt non-athletes viewed them in the classroom. The results to statement nine were very similar to the results of statement two. In fact, the female student athletes (see Table 3) were almost identical. The male student athlete responses changed slightly, as more of the previously undecided changed their response to disagree. The researcher feels the change in response was due to the difference in the language of the two statements. Statement two referred to student athletes as being inadequate in the classroom, whereas statement nine referred to student athletes as "dumb jocks". Statement nine was, according to the researcher, viewed as
much more offensive and easier to disagree with.

The final two statements of the survey were agreed with by the majority of the student athletes. Although about a quarter of the student athletes were undecided on the issue of athletic programs being suited to meet their needs (statement ten), sixty percent either responded SA or A to the statement. Responses to the final statement were similar with slightly more (sixty-one percent) responding with agreeability.

Few student athletes took advantage of the general comments section. Although, the researcher feels that the comments that were made were of some significance to the research project. Two strong comments were made on the behalf of the benefits of school-based athletic programs. One senior, female student athlete (Elementary Education) wrote, "Athletics has helped me most in terms of teamwork, something that will definitely come in handy in the future." Then a junior, male student athlete (Finance) stated that during the season he receives better grades to the forced issue of time management. Both of these comments hit on important lessons that can be taught through the medium of school-based athletics: teamwork and time management.

Also, there were three comments of similar a similar nature that point out the "microscope" under which student athletes operate. Three female student athletes commented that athletes are treated unfairly when it comes to discipline by the university. All three females felt that student athletes were recipients of double jeopardy when it came to punishment. The researcher felt that these comments were significant. They are significant because it is an example of how student athletes are expected to be above and beyond non-athletes when it comes to the classroom or social setting. If a student athlete falters along the way be sure that it will be known.
TABLE 1

Percentage of responses to each statement by whole sample of student athletes

<table>
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TABLE 2

Percentage of responses to each statement by sample of male student athletes

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TABLE 3

Percentage of responses to each statement by sample of female student athletes

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GRAPH 1

This graph shows the comparison of similar responses to each statement by all eighty of the randomly selected student athletes.
This graph shows the comparison of similar responses to each statement by the fifty-two randomly selected male student athletes.
This graph shows the comparison of similar responses to each statement by the twenty-seven randomly selected female student athletes.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The reasons for this study were three-fold. The researcher felt it was important for student athletes to better perceive themselves in a positive context academically, socially, and athletically. Also, the researcher thought by analyzing student athletes perceptions, schools and communities would be enabled to better emphasize the positive aspects of school-based athletics. The researcher's main focus was for coaches and administrators to be better equipped to develop solutions to problems of misperceptions of student athletes. The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of student athletes toward their participation in school-based athletics.

The study was conducted within the limited setting of a mid-sized Midwestern, Catholic university. From within the setting eighty randomly selected student athletes (fifty-three male and twenty-seven female) were chosen to complete an Likert-scale questionnaire that contained eleven statement related to the student athletes' perceptions. The student athletes were asked to respond to the statements by stating to what degree they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The questionnaire was distributed to the eighty student athletes by two volunteer assistant coaches from within the setting. Upon completion of the questionnaires, the results were broken down and analyzed by the researcher.

Due to this setting the researcher feels that it may be difficult to be able to transcend the results across the board. For instance, the same survey at a large state school may have found much different results. Furthermore, the student athletes from within the setting should be considered a somewhat homogeneous group. The researcher feels this is true because of the
private nature and admission requirements of the university in this setting. Also, the researcher is concerned with the lack of general comments made by the student athletes. The researcher feels that this lack of interest in change, on the student athletes' part.

The analytic results brought about some expected results, and some results that were not expected. The researcher expected male and female responses to the statement to be somewhat similar, and they were. This was expected. One reason being due to the size of the university used for the study. The other reason being the culture of the university. By combining the mid-sized student population and the socially active culture of the university, the researcher expected most of the student athletes (male and female) to respond to the statements in a somewhat similar manner. The surprising aspect of the results came from the generally positive aspect in which the student athletes perceived themselves, in the classroom. Burke (1993) had suggested that student athletes had the tendency to have a feeling of dissonance with their self-esteem when it came to classroom performance. Also, the majority of the student athletes felt as though others (non-athletes, educators, etc.) also perceived them in a positive manner. Previous research by Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991) had pointed that non-athletes viewed student athletes as incompetent in the classroom. The overwhelming majority of the student athletes that responded to the survey though failed to see or feel this animosity toward their classroom performance.

Conclusions

Previous research (Naylor, 1983; Lapchick 1989; Engstrom & Sedlacek; Burke, 1993; Kirk & Kirk, 1993) all pointed out negative effects of school-based athletics on student athletes, as well as negative perceptions that were harbored by student athletes. The results from this study point in an altogether different direction. Responding to the statements that referred to the
student athletes' perceptions of themselves, or the effects that their participation, in school-based athletics, had on them, the student athletes responded in an overwhelmingly positive manner. For example, statement one required student athletes to respond to the effects of their participation in athletics in regards to their self-esteem. Ninety-one percent responded that they strongly agree or agree that participation in school-based athletics had a positive effect on their self-esteem. Statements three and five received similar types of responses. The researcher feels that these results further substantiate the previous findings of Holland and Andre (1994), which concluded that student athletes have a substantially higher self-esteem than non-athletes. Furthermore these results agree with the findings that student athletes have high expectations for themselves and their future (Adler & Adler, 1985).

In regards to non-athletes' perceptions of student athletes, the student athletes from within the setting tended to disagree with previous researchers' findings. Gerdy (1987), Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991), and Burke (1993) all state that student athletes are poorly perceived by their peers and the public in general when it comes to academics. The randomly chosen student athletes tended to disagree with the idea that their peers and educators viewed them as inadequate in the classroom setting. Although male student athletes were not as convinced as female student athletes on this matter. In fact, fifty-eight percent and forty percent of the male student athletes were undecided when respectively responding to statements two and nine. On the other hand, at least eighty-eight percent of female student athletes either disagreed or strongly disagreed with statements two and nine. Although this particular setting disagreed with the previous research, the researcher does not feel that it was convincing enough to disregard the previous research. The researcher feels this way due to indecision on the part of the male student athletes. There
could be a case made for the fact that many times male student athletes are more visible or well-known in a school setting, therefore these perceptions by non-athletes may be less prevalent towards the female student athletes.

The researcher concluded that there are both similarities and differences in the results of this study and the previous research completed on this matter. The similarities further substantiate findings on the positive effects of school-based athletics on student athletes' perceptions of themselves. At the same time, the results show that student athletes are not completely convinced that non-athletes view them in a negative sense. Female student athletes are more secure on the matter of how non-athletes view them within the classroom. At the same time, the majority of both male and female student athletes feel comfortable with their social status. Which agrees with Holland and Andre's (1994) findings on the social acceptance of student athletes. The researcher feels there is a reason for the positive aspects of school-based athletics being reinforced by the findings, while at the same time the negative aspects being somewhat refuted. The reason must be seen as both a limitation to the study, as well as an recommendation.

Recommendations

The researcher feels the reason for the positive being accentuated and the negative being refuted is due to the administration and coaches from within the setting. The administration does an excellent job of promoting their athletic teams in a positive context. Student athletes are always presented to the media and to the general public as students first and athletes second. This coincides with Begel (1990) and Burke's (1993) recommendation to attack to poor image of school-based athletics from a public relations standpoint. Although the university has recently received some poor press, the public has always received the truth from the school. There have
been no attempts to cover wrong doings; mistakes are admitted and positive aspects are promoted. Expanding on Begel's suggestions, coaches within the setting do an excellent job of tying education into sports. This is evident by the twenty-three male and female student athletes that have been named to Academic All-American teams since 1971.

Furthermore, heeding Gerdy's (1987) suggestions, there is well-rounded people within the athletic system from the top down. Much like Gerdy anticipated well-roundedness has been effective in helping eliminate the "dumb jock" stereotype. Student athletes must be encouraged to do more than be athletes. The must be encouraged to take on outside interests, and be socially active. Being more active outside of athletics will allow for student athletes to improve their self-confidence further, while at the same time help even further in eliminating non-athletes' poor perceptions.

Finally, the point-of-stress in athletics must be the pursuit of excellence (Frey & Massengale 1988). Athletic programs can no longer afford to have a win at all cost attitude. In recent years the win at all costs attitude has lead to the down fall of interscholastic athletics. Year after year programs at all levels are found to be engaged in illegal and unethical behavior. This type of activity can not be accepted if schools want their athletic programs to be positive aspects of their institutions. A highly moral and ethical program will bring far more rewards in the long run. It may not be seen in the win/loss record, but it will be seen in the future successes of student athletes.
APPENDICES
Appendix i

STUDENT ATHLETES' PERCEPTIONS

Demographic Information: (Please circle one or fill-in)

- Current Classification:
  a.) First Year  b.) Sophomore  c.) Junior  d.) Senior  e.) Other

- Sex:
  a.) Male  b.) Female

- Which varsity sport do you participate in?

- Which range does your GPA presently fit in?
  a.) 4.0 - 3.6  b.) 3.59 - 3.2  c.) 3.19 - 2.8  d.) 2.79 - 2.0  e.) 1.9 or below

- What is your major?

Directions:
Please respond to the following statements by circling to which degree of intensity you agree or disagree with the following statements (SA = strongly agree, A = agree, U = undecided, D = disagree, SD = strongly disagree).

1.) My participation in a varsity sport better enables me to perceive myself in a positive manner.
   SA       A       U       D       SD

2.) Due to my being a student athlete, other students view me as inadequate in the classroom.
   SA       A       U       D       SD

3.) Lessons learned through participation in athletics (e.g. responsibility, dedication, teamwork, etc.) are easily transferred to other aspects of my life (e.g. the classroom or my social life).
   SA       A       U       D       SD

4.) I participate in a varsity sport because I enjoy the sport (or to have fun).
   SA       A       U       D       SD

5.) My participation in a sport will help me obtain future successes, in what field I choose.
   SA       A       U       D       SD

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Appendix i (cont'd)

6.) My peers view me as more attractive, due to my student athlete status.
   SA         A       U       D       SD

7.) Varsity sports are not necessary for a well-rounded education.
   SA         A       U       D       SD

8.) I feel intelligent when participating in my particular sport.
   SA         A       U       D       SD

9.) Others view me as a "dumb jock" in the classroom setting.
   SA         A       U       D       SD

10.) The general system of athletic programs is well-suited to meet my needs.
    SA         A       U       D       SD

11.) The public views athletics as inherently good for the educational process.
    SA         A       U       D       SD

General Comments:


