



The Commercialized Student-Athlete

Connor Payton

University of North Texas



Abstract:

- A commercialized student-athlete is the term this proposal has coined to best describe the new normal that dominates intercollegiate competition.
- Student-athletes themselves can be divided into two groups: those on the few revenue-generating sport teams, and those who make up most of the universities' student-athlete population.
- The exponential commercialization of college athletics has further strained the balance initially thought to be rectified by the federal enactment of Title IX and an increase in NCAA jurisdiction and enforceability of academic violations.
- Skyrocketing television revenue that universities cannot resist, and recent judicial decisions that allow college athletes to profit off their own name
- American professional sports draft model that places the key years of player development on institutions designed for higher learning,
- This divide inhibits aspiring professional athletes during their time on campus, as well as directly reducing the quality of education allocated to professors and received by their students.

Introduction:

- Compare/contrast American professional league model with the European one
- Lack of freedom of movement in American model
- How American model benefits from continued commercialization at the collegiate level
- Higher learnings' relationship with prioritization of profitability
- Role universities play in easing or inhibiting successful professional transitions
- Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) benefits and ramifications
- Revenue generating sports versus non-revenue generating

Search Methods:

- Journal of Applied Sport Psychology
- JSTOR
- Inclusions: collegiate and professional athletes
- Exclusions: recreational and high school athletes
- Investigating protocols at the university and professional level
- Success/failure trends
- Highlight where current research is lacking



Search Results:

"People Don't Acknowledge This Process Enough" (2023)

- Surveyed current and former collegiate athletes' perceptions and experiences during their transition after their university athletic career
- **707 participants in survey, 10 structured interviews**
- Gain insight on support systems provided for them

Table 2
Frequencies of Available and Mandated Athletic Department Sponsored Programming

Programming	Athletic Dept. Offered	Athletic Dept. Mandated	Institution Offered
Access to a sport psychology consultant	40.0%	47.0%	24.8%
Nutrition workshops	33.1%	53.8%	20.2%
Career planning	31.7%	37.1%	43.4%
Exercise workshops	28.7%	35.5%	21.8%
Exit interview	25.6%	34.8%	23.1%
Engagement with retired athletes	27.2%	14.1%	21.9%
Guest speakers	23.5%	19.3%	29.7%
Networking opportunities	21.2%	21.5%	36.9%
Graduate school counseling	19.4%	35.8%	29.7%
Specific industry sessions (e.g., nursing)	16.0%	26.5%	27.9%
Grad school info sessions	15.4%	13.8%	29.3%
Money management	10.6%	22.7%	12.0%
None	5.7%	N/A	3.4%

Note. Athletic Dept. Mandated percentages indicate the percentage of mandated programming within the Athletic Dept. Offered programs.

"When it came to like, almost like grieving your loss of identity, or dealing with body image as a retired athlete, or finding your new identity, or anything like that, I would have liked to see more. Maybe I just missed the email, but to my knowledge, there wasn't as much of that. It wasn't visible."

"The Culture Cover-Up of College Athletics: How Organizational Culture perpetuates and Unrealistic and Idealized Balancing Act" (2016)

- Displays how a major university forms their idealized image of both academic and athletic success
- **Interviewed 20 athletes and stakeholders**
- **All from the same Division One university**
- Gain insight on academic & athletic compatibility
- Five-year Plan model, even for non redshirts
- Little academic pressure for those who were key members on revenue generating sports
- Lack of emphasis on degree for those with professional aspirations

"Athletes have unrealistic goals of playing in the NFL, and they have everyone telling them they were cheated and short-changed if they don't make it."

"Evaluating NFL Player Health and Performance: Legal and Ethical Issues" (2017)

- Investigate transitional process of collegiate athletes' progression into the NFL
- Evaluate health and performance violations
- **Violation of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) & Generic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA)**
- Collective Bargaining Agreement between NFL and NFLPA forces incoming athletes to undergo extensive medical and personal evaluations
- Results directly influence draft selection position, which defines compensation levels
- NFL Scouting Combine, annual event with 300 recent college athletes
- Star Lotulelei: Misdiagnosed at Combine, selected below expectations, costing him millions
- Privacy violations in interviews, along with family health history
- Affliction to well-being and personal relationships with a lack of involvement in relocation after draft selection
- Four "C" for the NFL to provided enhanced autonomy and privacy
- **Compliance:** follow federal ADA and GINA statues
- **Clarification:** address legal ambiguities, "job-related" health inquires loophole
- **Circumvention Prevention:** call for the clubs themselves to avoid common practices that consistently bypass privacy laws
- **Changes:** needed legislative intervention to protect players' rights and limit health and genetic discrimination

Results Continued:

"The College Sports Reform Movement: Reframing the Edutainment Industry" (2007)

- Examine corruption within college athletics
- Specifically with revenue-generating sports
- Five critiques: Commercialization, university involvement in the entertainment industry, damage to the integrity of higher education, exploitation of athletes, harm to nonathletes
- **12 interviews with sports reformers, examined hundreds of archival documents, and participated and recorded two discussion sessions on college sports reform**
- Provided historical progression and contemporary analysis on the financial figures universities invest into successful athletics
- **40 out of the 50 states' highest paid public official is a college football or men's basketball coach**
- NFL benefits on a free minor-league system
- Academic fraud, exploitation, violence against women, removal of non-revenue generating sports, lack of institutional integrity



"The heart of the problem facing college sports was commercialization: an interlocking network that included expanded press coverage, public interests, alumni involvement and recruiting abuses. The victim was the student-athlete in particular, the diminishing of educational and intellectual values in general. Also, students (including non-athletes) were the losers because they had been denied their rightful involvement in sports."

Implications & Conclusions:

- American draft system and universities' exponential growth of commercialization have continued to perpetuate this system
- Overlap of higher learning with the billion-dollar NCAA athletic industry is incompatible without compromising the students and facility
- Exploitation of student-athletes within dangerous sports
- Compromised privacy of athletes with university and professional collaboration
- Conference realignment straining already overlooked athletic programs
- Universities' prioritization of growth through athletic success
- Needed further research into how new judicial decisions will influence the future makeup of intercollegiate athletic competition