

James Best

Prof. deVries

English 120 D

13 May 2015

Should the NCAA change requirements and standards to help College Football and Basketball programs academically?

Imagine an education without the freedom to explore. Being a part of a structured environment where every aspect of your life is controlled by someone else and not by yourself. The National Collegiate Athletic Association is perceived as an organization which gives young men and women the opportunity to receive a free education while playing the sport that they love. In reality, these student athletes are ill equipped to deal with the challenges of the real world. The NCAA sets academic standards for Division I College Football and Basketball players that are significantly lower than the average standards of the university that students must meet. With this distinction in the academic progress of these athletes, one has to question whether the NCAA has the power to change the standards for the admission and eligibility of college athletes. The NCAA, in collaboration with the university should change the requirements for College athletes, especially for Mens College Football and Basketball programs, and help them to improve in the classroom as well as on the field.

Many Division I College Basketball and Football players dream to become a professional one day. They dream of making a living off of playing the sport they adore. However, that dream is not always realized by the professional teams around the nation. Each year, 1,618,110 High School Basketball and Football Players are recruited to play at the Division 1 Collegiate Level,

but only 77,823 go on to actually play in College. It is even more disturbing that out of these 77,823 athletes only 294 make it to the professional level (NCAA Research). The other 77,529 student athletes must move on with their lives and pursue a career in something other than the sport they were recruited to come to the school for. This is why it is important for the NCAA to prepare these athletes for the real world rather than deter them from receiving a quality education.

As of now, a prospective Division I College athlete applying to a university is held to a different standard than the normal student applying to the University. According to the NCAA website a prospective student athlete must:

...graduate from High School and complete 16 core courses and receive a minimum GPA of 2.0 in those courses. These requirements include 4 years of English, 3 years of Math (Algebra 1 or higher), 2 years of Natural or Physical Science, 2 years of Social Science, 1 extra year of English, Math or Science and 4 years of Religion, Philosophy, or Foreign Language. ” The student must also “take the SAT or ACT and score a minimum of 400 on the SAT (Math and Reading only) or 37 on the ACT (sum score).” The “core course GPA combined with the SAT/ACT score must meet the minimum requirements as laid out by the NCAA Sliding Scale (Frank, 1).

Student athletes are expected to have more difficulty learning subject material and taking examinations because they are not prepared for the increased level of coursework. For example, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* newspaper, which studied 54 public universities within the College Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) and College Basketball top 25 noted: “Football players average 220 points lower on the SAT than their classmates. Men's basketball was 227 points lower.”(Go, 1) The variation of these scores on College preparatory exams show that

many athletes do not display a knowledge of the material needed to be a successful student at the institution. By giving these athletes a pass based on what they can do on the field or court they are being left behind in the classroom before their first day. If the NCAA really wanted their student athletes to succeed in the classroom they would make sure that they are prepared to deal with the rigors of a collegiate education. This starts with exam scores and GPA requirements. Schools set these standards in order to insure that they accept the right type of student that can handle the course work assigned by professors. If a student is accepted based on athletics and not academics, they are automatically at a disadvantage than the normal student attending the university.

Many of these colleges and universities try their best to keep their athletes eligible for participation in their respective sports. They ensure that they get the best tutoring available on campus. However many of these athletes are required to be in a structured learning environment. Each college program keeps an academic advisor on staff to aid in any educational support they may need. Some schools even ask their academic advisor to pick and decide classes for their athletes so that they can work around the athletic schedule that the student athlete endures. At times many of the classes that these athletes take do not equate to obtaining an actual degree but simply to assist in meeting the academic standards of the NCAA so that the athletes can play in their games.

In fact, an intensive investigation at the University of North Carolina (UNC) found many football players guilty of academic fraud. Jack Stripling wrote in his article, *At Chapel Hill, a scandal that won't die.*, about the ramifications of the ongoing scandal that has been prevalent in the sports media for years. He says:

In late 2012, James G. Martin, a former governor of North Carolina, wrote the university's most definitive account to date on the academic fraud. After a four-month investigation, he identified 216 suspect courses and 454 potentially unauthorized grade changes made over a period of years, sometimes with forged faculty signatures. The problems, he said, appeared to involve just two rogue administrators--not coaches or athletics counselors--and were isolated to the department of African and Afro-American studies, which is often called AFAM... This was not an athletics scandal," said Governor Martin, who was a chemistry professor at Davidson College before he entered politics. "This was an academic scandal, which is worse" (Stripling, 1).

All of this information is completely true. Athletic scandals are more common among College programs. There is often backlash at the ridiculously strict bylaws set by the NCAA in order to ensure that competition in College stays "amateur". In reality many college programs do not follow these laws and often result in many recruiting and athlete compensation violations. These scandals are often brought to light but nothing is really thought of it because of the negative perception of these unrealistic rules made by a group of grown adults benefiting off of students.

However, when it comes to academic scandals, they are held in higher regard. Stripling continues saying:

Throughout the scandal, the university has sought to contain such conflicts and control the flow of information, a standard part of the playbook for any institution under scrutiny. But its attempts to control the story have largely failed. ...In 2011, for instance, readers of a message board popular with North Carolina State University fans dissected a paper written by Michael McAdoo, a former Tar Heel football player. They discovered multiple

instances of apparent plagiarism in the paper, which Mr. McAdoo had submitted for a Swahili class in the AFAM department.” (Stripling, 2)

This is not uncommon among players. Often due to intensive work out and practice schedules many student athletes use the tutors to help them edit their papers. These tutors distort the borderline between helping and changing and therefore sometimes unknowingly commit academic fraud. In all honesty, who could blame them when the University and the NCAA places more importance on the success of the athlete on the field than on the success of the athlete in the classroom?

It is understandable that many of these colleges and institutions build state of the art academic centers for their athletes, but it is questionable if the motivation for providing academic support is for the purpose of helping the student pursue a degree or just to keep them eligible to play a sport. Academic tutors fight to balance the level of importance of academics or athletics as a part of their job. Jack Stripling wrote another article called *Athletics Advisers' Ethical Dilemma; under pressure to keep players eligible, academic advisers struggle to help them just enough, but not too much*. In the article he explains, “In the world of big-time college sports, advisers are under severe pressure to do whatever coaches believe is necessary to keep students academically eligible for play.” He writes about Bruce Smith, who played football at Brown University and received a doctorate degree in Education from the University of Cal-Berkley. Smith recalled his experience working as an academic advisor for the University of Arizona football team, saying, “Less attention has been paid to whether advisers “hyper manage” athletes, stunting their intellectual growth and preventing them from becoming self-sufficient.” He even said, “College seniors could not even locate the main administrative building because they had never had to go there themselves.”(Stripling, 1) Smith believed that college athletes "grow to

expect other people to do things for them.” He realized that “the demands of college sports undermined the academic goals of athletes, particularly black men like himself. Part of the problem, he surmises, is that the pressure to keep players academically eligible impedes their opportunities to grow and explore.” (Stripling, 2) Smith is definitely right. This quote exemplifies the underlying problem of Division I college athletics; the fact that they leave the athletes with very little time to explore the horizons of their major. They deny them the opportunity to progress in ways that help them in a possible career other than on the football field or basketball court.

Of course not all institutions are the same. Ivy League schools such as Cornell, Princeton, Harvard, Yale, and Columbia all require their students to be admitted academically to the institution before joining any athletic program. Highly regarded universities, such as Northwestern and Stanford, adhere to the same rules. Not to say that these athletes are worse than the ones that play for big name colleges and universities but that the level of competition that these Ivy League programs compete in is significantly different than your top 25 or Football Bowl Subdivision teams. Schools that follow the NCAA academic eligibility rules have more leniency when it comes to selecting their pool of athletes. It is often difficult to find the perfectly balanced college athlete who excels both on the field or court and in the classroom but it is not impossible. In the fall of 2013, the University of Stanford Cardinal Football team defeated the University of Oregon Ducks in a 26-20 upset that shocked the nation. The Cardinal, who consistently compete for Pacific 12 Conference Championship each year were considered an underdog to the Oregon Ducks powerhouse led by a budding college superstar in redshirt sophomore quarterback, Marcus Mariota. After the win Stanford players Shane Skov, Tyler Gaffney and AJ Tarpley entered the press conference room wearing thick black glasses with

white tape on the rim. When asked why they decided to wear the glasses they responded, "it's Nerd Nation, We take pride in what we do." Bruce Jenkins said in the article "For Stanford players, nerd is the word. ...Countless universities place a premium on football glory. Others take pride in the bright, worldly students they send into mainstream society. Stanford offers both - in huge doses. They attack you with shoulder pads and grade-point averages, a punishing tackle and a thoughtful essay" (Jenkins, 1). Jenkins makes some interesting points realizing that for Stanford athletes do care about both academics and athletics.

There are those that challenge the caliber of athletes that attend the university, Jenkins answers stating "Nerd Nation, as a widely known entity, really began with Andrew Luck,[1st overall pick in the 2012 NFL Draft and starting Quarterback of the Indianapolis Colts] the bearded, swashbuckling quarterback actually seeking out contact on running plays, then eagerly retreating to the classroom to pursue his degree in architectural design. He used words like "vociferous" and "anemic" and refused to talk about himself, ever. "Let's face it, he's a total dork," teammate Michael Thomas said during Luck's senior year. (Jenkins, 2)

This is an example of an athlete doing great things on the field and in the classroom because their school gives them the opportunity to. At Stanford University the administration stands by their decision to treat athletes equal to regular students because they feel it is an honor to attend the university. It is something that is earned by hard work and not given based on athletic ability. This is why the athletes that attend these universities often make some of the best professionals in sports and working world. If the NCAA followed these school's examples they would no longer have to deal with their students being left behind because they would be ready to handle what it takes to be a college student athlete.

In College Football a student athlete is allowed to forgo his senior year of college in order to enter the NFL draft as an underclassman. If a player is good enough to garner attention from scouts early in their collegiate career they can set themselves up for a smooth and comfortable transition into the professional ranks. This choice deters student athletes from completing the opportunity that the NCAA prides itself on, a quality education. If these college football programs were really focused on making sure their student athletes accomplish the goal of collegiate education they would make it mandatory to graduate in order to enter into professional football. This situation is even more prevalent in respect to College Basketball which has a “one and done” rule; allowing a student athlete to leave and enter the NBA draft after their first year in college. This defeats the purpose of a college scholarship, something that is supposed to give a young adult a free education when in reality most schools treat their programs as stepping stones to the NBA. Schools like Alabama, Ohio State, Duke, and North Carolina are known as “factories” to the NFL and NBA. They treat their programs and players as if they are professionals but neglect that these men are still attending the university as students. This adds to the madness that the NCAA creates by paying attention to the value of a quality higher education.

The NCAA has an extreme amount of power in these young men’s lives. As the comic book pioneer Stan Lee once wrote “with great power comes great responsibility.” They can change the whole perspective of what it means to actually get a higher education with a few minor changes in requirements for these athletes. First of all, the student athletes should be required to receive their degree in order to be eligible to enter the professional ranks. Now of course in the sport of basketball which originally allowed young men to enter the NBA Draft at 18, forgoing a college education all together, prospects may decide to leave the country and play



in Europe or China and enter the NBA Draft a year later, but overall it should have an impact on students attending classes, learning and will decrease this need of college programs to commit academic fraud under the table.

Second, the NCAA allows College Programs to “redshirt” certain players in cases of serious injury, or in order for the player to get a year of development in the sport before competing in games. Occasionally in College Football programs coaches “gray shirt” a prospective athlete delaying their enrollment until the spring semester. This allows the student to attend a local community college or junior college to attempt to improve their grades and prepare them for a college environment. The NCAA should make redshirting or gray shirting mandatory for first year students. For many first year students the adjustment to college is rough. Imagine that times ten for a college athlete adjusting to the level of competition and preparation required to play at the Division I level. Most Division I quarterbacks redshirt their freshman years in order to learn the playbook and to study the techniques of the starting quarterback. This helps them to be better prepared when they are called on to play. It could also help first year students who struggle academically to adjust to what it’s like being a college student athlete.

If the NCAA makes it mandatory it will improve many statistics for student athletes GPA’s and test scores helping them exceed expectations. It is proven that these students can excel. The quarterbacks in the past who have redshirted in their first years include 2012 first round pick Andrew Luck, who graduated from Stanford in his redshirt Junior year with a degree in architectural design, and 2012 second overall pick Robert Griffin III, who graduated from Baylor University with a degree in Political Science after being medically redshirted his freshman year. These are examples of students who excelled both on the field and off because they had the opportunity to be redshirted their freshman year and to get accustomed to the life of

a college student. It's not a matter of when but of who will step up and decide what is best for these young men. It starts with the NCAA and then the schools will follow. If the NCAA really wants to provide these young men with the best education possible they should help them by providing first year students with a mandatory redshirt year.

Work Cited

Frank, David. "Athletic Scholarships." Make Sure You Meet the NCAA and NAIA College Academic Requirements. Athleticscholarships.net, n.d. Web. 13 May 2015.

Stripling, Jack. "Athletics Advisers' Ethical Dilemma; Under pressure to keep players eligible, academic advisers struggle to help them just enough, but not too much." The Chronicle of Higher Education 61.09 (2014). Academic OneFile. Web. 10 Apr. 2015.

Stripling, Jack "At Chapel Hill, A Scandal That Won't Die." Chronicle Of Higher Education 61.2 (2014): A14-A18. Academic Search Complete. Web. 1 May 2015.

Go, Alison. "Athletes Show Huge Gap in SAT Scores." US News. U.S.News & World Report, 30 Dec. 2015. Web. 13 May 2015.

Jenkins, Bruce. "For Stanford Players, Nerd Is the Word." SFGate. SFGate, 9 Nov. 2013. Web. 13 May 2015.