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Reflections of Division I Football and Basketball  
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**COLLEGIATE ATHLETES WHO MADE THE GRADE:  
REFLECTIONS OF FORMER DIVISION I  
FOOTBALL AND BASKETBALL PLAYERS**

**By**

**Barbara Bedker Meyer**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Department of Physical Education and Exercise Science**

**1991**

684-1727

## **ABSTRACT**

### **COLLEGIATE ATHLETES WHO MADE THE GRADE: REFLECTIONS OF FORMER DIVISION I FOOTBALL AND BASKETBALL PLAYERS**

**By**

**Barbara Bedker Meyer**

For over 100 years faculty committees and national organizations have been trying to reform intercollegiate sport. As an indirect result of these reform movements, intercollegiate sport has become a popular research topic for individuals in a variety of fields. While these efforts have provided us with several improvements and a great deal of knowledge, they have provided us with little insight into the actual experiences and perceptions of, or coping strategies utilized by college student-athletes; the voice of the student-athlete is consistently absent from reports on and research addressing the world of intercollegiate athletics. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to use the information gained through in-depth interviews with former male Division I football and basketball players to better understand how big-time intercollegiate student-athletes experience and perceive college. As I examined my findings through the lens of critical theory, I focused on the student-athletes' critical thoughts about their situation, how the men acted on their awareness, the circumscription of their efforts by the athletic department, and the dynamic nature of the student-athletes' experiences. Specifically, the men were aware



of what was going on around them. The men who acted on their awareness did so by defying the dependency training espoused by the athletic department and "mainstreaming" themselves into "normal" college life. The efforts of the student-athletes to express agency were not always successful, however, as they were often circumscribed by the athletic department. In the end, it appeared as though the men were successful in spite of the system. While services to advance their educations were available, they were often seen by the athletes as more detrimental than beneficial. The fact that the men in the sample graduated does not necessarily mean that the institutional and national athletic systems in which they operated were effective; many outside factors influenced the athletes, and thus were the primary forces behind their academic achievements.

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There have been many uncertainties in both my doctoral program and my dissertation. The one thing of which I have always been certain, however, is that this document would be dedicated to my husband Randall. Although there are many people who have been instrumental in the completion of this degree and this project, none has been more important. Randall has been the one consistent force in my life that allowed me to devote all of my time and energy to obtaining my degree and furthering my career. I know that it was not easy for him to put his future on hold while working long and tedious hours to support us financially. His responsibilities did not stop in the workplace, as there was always plenty of laundry and cooking for him to do when he came home. Still, he always found time to help me do research at the library, proof and edit papers, as well as challenge my thoughts and opinions by playing "devil's advocate." Only now am I able to thank him for resisting the bribes I offered if he would just write an introduction, a conclusion, or an abstract for me. Although my diploma and this dissertation have only my name embossed on them, I will always see his name there next to mine, as I could not have accomplished all of this without him. His unselfishness inspires me, and I can only hope to be half as supportive as he embarks on and progresses through law school.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although my name will appear alone on this dissertation and on my diploma, there are many other people who deserve both recognition and credit for their contributions. This project would not have been possible if it were not for the cooperation of the Executive Director of the Varsity Alumni Club at BDU. This individual (who remains anonymous for confidentiality purposes) was responsible for providing me with the names of former athletes who lived in three nearby states, as well as paying for the retrieval of these records. Similarly, I am forever indebted to the 26 former student-athletes who "are" this study. Not only did these men take time from their busy schedules to participate in this study, they freely revealed to me what must have been very painful and embarrassing perceptions and/or experiences. May other athletes (and athletic departments) unselfishly follow their example.

My advisor, mentor, and friend Annelies Knoppers was often the main force behind the completion of both this degree and dissertation. I know only a few individuals who are as cooperative, sincere, supportive, and honest as Annelies. Although this may seem contradictory, I thank Annelies most for being out of the city/country for half of my doctoral program. Her absence forced me to take charge of my own thoughts and actions, fostering both my independence and my confidence. My future advisees and colleagues will benefit greatly from my relationship with Annelies.

Marty Ewing was another important member of my doctoral committee. Her continuously open door was extremely valuable, as she was often a sounding board for new ideas. Marty also provided me with applied sport psychology experiences, which were most helpful in dealing with the athletes in my sample, and ultimately in the interview process.

I will never forget the kindness of another committee member, Jayne Schuiteman. She was instrumental in the completion of the comprehensive examination process, as well as the formative stages of my dissertation. Although Jayne was trying to complete her dissertation during this time, she always took time to read the latest draft of my proposal and provide direction. As a fellow student and a friend before becoming a committee member, Jayne was often the source of encouragement and "candid answers." Most importantly, Jayne was a role model, showing me that it could be done.

During the early days of my doctoral program I heard stories from other students about the man who would become my fourth committee member. According to them, Norm Stewart's classes were challenging, and he demanded a great deal from his students. It was those qualities, along with his unconditional support and encouragement, that made him a welcome addition to my committee. Norm always had time to discuss any concern I might have and make suggestions regarding issues of interest. He was, and will continue to be, a valuable sounding board and friend.

Finally I would like to recognize the fifth and final member of my committee member, Michael Kasavana. Although Mike and I often had ideological differences with respect to the methodological and philosophical principles applied in this dissertation, I believe that I produced a better dissertation as the result of his participation. Knowing that Mike would challenge my motives, methods, and conclusions forced me to think carefully about each and every aspect of my dissertation.

Although the above committee members were invaluable in the completion of both my degree and dissertation, several other people deserve specific recognition. I thank Linda Lyman and Mary Kimbell for always being there to support me, both academically and personally. I think the most

valuable lesson they taught me was to try to put things in a "realistic" perspective, and not always take everything so seriously. Specifically, Mary and Linda taught me that it was important to take time for myself and for recreational activities; after all, "you're smarter than you think."

What would I have done the last two years without Jackie Goodway? Jackie gave me confidence to complete whatever task I was working on at the time, as well as acting as a valuable outlet for my latest crises; her ears must still be tired from listening. (P.S. thanks to Chuck too!). I believe the greatest contribution Jackie made, however, was understanding the real reasons why I couldn't "come out and play."

I will never forget a phone call I got two days before my dissertation had to be turned in to my committee; it was Steve Walk calling to see if there was anything he could do. I am always touched by the sincere interest he took in my work. In addition to being a valuable sounding board for both academic and nonacademic pursuits, I could always count on Steve help me alleviate the stress my dissertation was causing me (i.e., attend a departmental seminar) and to interject some much needed humor into my graduate program. Most importantly, he taught me that sociological theory could be both useful and interesting.

I would also like to recognize my college roommate, Kathleen E. Hanson. Although Kathy lives five hours away, she has continued to provide me with the support, encouragement, and confidence necessary to complete my degree. She was always there to listen when I needed to complain about the all the reading or writing I had to do. I must not have complained too much, however, as Kathy is now in graduate school herself; I hope I can help her as much as she helped me.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my oldest friend, Brent W. Hoag (who probably thinks I am saving the best for last!). Brent has been with me through 22 years of school, and has supported me in many ways over the years. As early as grade school he encouraged me to believe that there was nothing I could not do... even if it was just to play "the net" in tennis. More recently, Brent has provoked me intellectually, reminding me why I chose to write this particular dissertation and why it was important. His "ignorance" about the lives of intercollegiate student-athletes motivated me to complete this project.



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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction and Review of Literature

One of the first articles to document the experiences of college student-athletes from their pre- to post-college days appeared in the popular press in 1980 (Underwood, 1980). Underwood (1980) described how many male athletes often changed academic majors so they would not have to take the more difficult classes, had tutors or others complete their assignments, allowed athletic advisors to plan their--the athletes'--every move in order to circumvent the system, and focused on professional sport careers at the exclusion of all else. In addition, in this article bright and promising former college athletes explained how they had gotten to their current stations in life as doormen and janitors. Underwood (1980) pointed out that these athletes did not accomplish this alone. They had the "help" of coaches, teachers, tutors, and teammates from junior high school to college. Underwood (1980) concluded that:

The "dumb jock" has now come into flower in the American educational system. He is fast becoming an national catastrophe. He is already a national disgrace... (p. 40).

Others (Hoch, 1972; Sage, 1990) have argued that this situation is not so much the fault of athletes as it is of universities and athletic departments. They have named this "exploitation."

Intuitively, I would have expected that this 1980 article would have led to a rash of reforms and to demands for change by athletes. Although many

changes to benefit the student-athlete were--and still are--discussed, relatively few have materialized: 1) the development of various academic support services; 2) the elevation of admission standards (i.e. Proposition 48); and 3) the disclosure of graduation rates for athletes by each university . These were all steps in the right direction, but are these changes enough? Will athletes who enter college in the 1990s face fewer incidents of exploitation and emerge better prepared educationally and occupationally than those who entered a decade before?

A decade after Underwood's consciousness-raising article there has been little change as student-athletes may still be facing exploitation. Once again an article has appeared in the popular press about men's football and basketball. According to Telander (1989), college athletes today are in no better circumstances than those who preceded them. In addition to summarizing many academic improprieties, Telander pointed to illegal use of professional sport agents, violations of recruiting regulations, inducements given to athletes illegally, and felonies committed by college athletes--and promptly covered up by coaches and/or universities.

These two articles are valuable because they helped to make the public more aware of what was going on in the world of big-time college sport; a lack of empirical evidence, however, may have left some individuals questioning the validity of Underwood and Telander's claims. Consequently, researchers have begun to investigate various dimensions of intercollegiate athletics. The academic and career development of student-athletes have been studied (see

for example, Adler & Adler, 1991; Blann, 1982; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Meyer, 1990) as have the effects of specific counseling programs aimed at enlightening student-athletes in these particular areas (see for example, Harney, Brigham, & Sanders, 1986; Nelson, 1982; Whitner & Myers, 1986) . While these and many other studies (for an overview see Coakley, 1990) have yielded interesting and applicable results, the voice of the student-athlete is consistently absent from them. Yet who can better tell us what actually goes on in the intercollegiate athletic domain or what services are needed, but the athletes themselves? Listening to their voices may give sport scientists and athletic department personnel a better understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and academic/career needs of this population. Studies in which athletes are allowed to speak may point the way to procedures or practices which may enhance both the college and life-long experiences of student-athletes. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to use the information gained through in-depth interviews with former male Division I football and basketball players to better understand how big-time intercollegiate student-athletes experience and perceive college.

The purpose of the literature review is to determine what is currently known about the student-athletes who participate in men's intercollegiate athletics. I begin this chapter by providing a brief overview of the three sociological perspectives typically used to study sport. In the second part of the review I will summarize the history of intercollegiate sport and discuss some of the problems that have existed in college sport during its 130 year existence.

This overview is important because it illustrates how the experiences of student-athletes today are in part a reflection of the history of intercollegiate sport, and how the exclusion of the voice of the student-athlete is in no way a recent occurrence. In the third part of the review I will present contradictory empirical research illustrating both the positive and negative influences of intercollegiate sport participation on student-athletes. Specifically, I will examine athletes and their academic achievements, career goals, professional sport opportunities, and retirement/disengagement processes. The fourth and final part of the review addresses the missing part of the research on the intercollegiate student-athlete experience, the voice of the athletes themselves, and the type of research methodology which may help to alleviate this void.

### Sociological Perspectives

As stated above, there are three sociological perspectives (structural functional, conflict, and critical) typically used to study and explain sport. These three frameworks will be outlined and discussed below. Although such an overview may seem unusual, it is included here since the readers of this study may come from a variety of disciplines (i.e., counseling, physical education, administration, etc.), and therefore may be unfamiliar with these particular perspectives.

### The Structural Functional Perspective

The structural functional perspective suggests that society is a system with many interrelated parts or institutions (i.e., family, sport, government, religion, education, etc.), each holding similar values and/or belief systems.

These institutions work together to help keep society functional (Coakley, 1990; Frey, 1986). This perspective assumes that society functions best when it is stable; change is only good if it enhances dominant values (Coakley, 1990; Frey, 1986). Thus, the purpose of any institution--including sport--is to create balance and interdependence within society. According to functionalists, the smooth operation of any social system depends on the satisfaction of the following four needs: pattern maintenance and tension management, adaptation, goal attainment, and social integration (Coakley, 1990).

To be functional, sport--like any institution--must contribute to the system of needs of society. Through pattern maintenance, sport serves to reinforce dominant societal values, "socializing people to fit into the mainstreams of life in their societies" (Coakley, 1990, p. 23). Specifically, participation in interscholastic and intercollegiate sport is viewed as contributing to the enhancement of achievement motivation, the acquisition of social skills, the development of character, and the creation of educational opportunity (Coakley, 1990; Frey, 1986). In addition, since sport is seen as providing both spectators and athletes alike with "harmless" outlets for their tension, hostility, and aggression, it is assumed to contribute to tension management. Thus, functionalists view the institution of intercollegiate sport as helping to keep society functioning.

Structural functionalists also see intercollegiate sport as contributing to the adaptation needs of society, that is, sport is seen as an institution which helps people cope with and adjust to the challenges of ever changing

environments. Specifically, athletic participation is assumed to contribute to the physical fitness skills of athletes, which may be necessary at some point during their lives. Since a functional society is one which celebrates commonality, functionalists assume that college sport integrates people to share common values and goals. It is quite common for thousands of individuals from different backgrounds to gather on Saturday afternoons for one purpose, to cheer their Bruins or Tar Heels to victory. Similarly, athletes also work together to achieve one common goal--victory. Functional theorists, therefore, see sport as an agent for teaching groups of seemingly different people to work together for the good of society (Coakley, 1990).

Finally, functionalists assume that intercollegiate sport helps to legitimize the goals of society. This perspective purports that sport contributes to the upward mobility and status of athletes, both of which are necessary if society is to keep functioning at its same stable level.

In a study of 15,000 athletes, for example, Ogilvie and Tutko (1985) found that successful athletes shared several characteristics. These common traits included high degrees of organization, respect for authority, great psychological endurance, self-control, and large capacities for trust (Ogilvie & Tutko, 1985). Sport participation, then, may mold individuals to benefit society.

By saying that intercollegiate sport is functional is to assume that sport has consequences for society, and that the consequences are positive (Frey, 1986). Specifically, functional theorists claim that intercollegiate sport contributes to the welfare of athletes, and ultimately society, in some of the

following ways: educational attainment, occupational attainment and success, integration of the student body, unity of members across class lines, community visibility, and increased alumni support (Coakley, 1990; Frey, 1986). The bottom line of this perspective is that intercollegiate sport serves to mold individuals to fit society. Consequently, sport will continue to exist since it makes positive contributions to and meets the needs of society. Since athletic institutions tend to be functional, then any failure to experience success is often attributed to the individual rather than to structural constraints.

### The Conflict Perspective

Another framework commonly used to explain society and intercollegiate sport is the conflict perspective. According to this set of tenets, human behavior is a result of the influence of social environment (see Coakley, 1990 for an in-depth explanation of this perspective with respect to sport). Specifically, the conflict perspective argues that social order comes from a small group of people who have the power and resources to determine who and what survives in that particular society. Hegemony is the key to the conflict perspective, suggesting that the dominant ideology of the powerful--or the "haves"--is diffused to the powerless--or the "have nots"--through various social institutions (i.e., schools, legal system, mass media, etc.) and cultural practices (i.e., welfare, etc.) (Sage, 1990). According to this perspective the ruling group works to legitimize how they operate; the powerless do not question the structure of society, and these two different entities within society view the situation as "normal." As a result, the powerless individuals do not realize that they are being manipulated,

contributing to their false consciousness and feelings of alienation. In other words, the powerful use their resources to remain in control.

As alluded to above, this is a very popular perspective for explaining intercollegiate sport in general, and the experiences of college student-athletes in particular. Coakley (1990) asserts that conflict theorists have focused on how sport is used by people in power to maintain the status quo. While hegemony and an imbalance of power and/or resources serve as the underlying principles behind this framework, conflict theorists typically examine specific relationships between sport and society to further their case against sport.

For example, by limiting the terms of the athletic scholarship, the NCAA and member institutions are using student-athletes for financial gain by operating as a sport cartel (Sage, 1986). Specifically, items covered by an athletic scholarship, interorganizational mobility, and outside employment opportunities are restricted when an athlete accepts an athletic scholarship. The rights and opportunities of coaches and other athletic department personnel, however, are not limited; these individuals are allowed to earn money from outside sources (i.e., shoe contracts, speaking engagements, television and radio programs, etc.) and switch jobs without penalty. Student-athletes are often unaware of these paradoxes, which contributes to a false sense of security. Conflict theorists would explain this situation by stressing the differences in power and resources between these two groups, showing how the athletic department used their clout to remain in control and maintain the status quo.



### The Critical Perspective

As becomes evident, the functional and conflict perspectives are at opposite ends of the theoretical continuum. Functionalists focus on the individual, and how institutions (i.e., sport) mold individuals to benefit society. From this viewpoint sport is seen as building character, facilitating upward mobility, and providing cathartic experiences. The conflict perspective, on the other hand, views human behavior as the result of environmental conditions, with social order resulting from coercion. Conflict theorists view sport as a creator of false consciousness and a facilitator of racism, sexism, elitism, and the like.

The critical perspective is, in a sense, a combination of these two frameworks, focusing on the interaction between people and their environment. Specifically, the notions of constraint, dominant ideology, and hegemony discussed by conflict theorists are combined with the idea of agency espoused by functionalists, to form the critical perspective. Critical theorists acknowledge that both shared values and conflicts of interest can co-exist in the same society, the result of constant negotiation and transformation (Coakley, 1990; Sage, 1990). While individuals may be oppressed by historical and/or economic conditions, they do not lose their ability to think critically. The extent to which they are able to act--to have agency--is constrained by structural forces. For example, athlete from working class families may have fewer options than those from privileged backgrounds.

Critical theorists assume that sport does not exist merely to meet the needs of the social system nor to reinforce the domination of the powerful (Coakley, 1990). Although critical theorists assume that power is also in the hands of certain groups, they also argue that sport is created by people interacting with each other, who use their own power and resources--or lack of them--to make sport into something that is meaningful to them (Messner, 1990; Sage, 1990). This perspective allows for diversity, as it accepts the fact that sport can reaffirm the status quo or offer opposition, as well as be a source of repression or liberation (Coakley, 1990). The extent to which this occurs depends on how individuals choose to act at that particular time. As Messner and Sabo (1990) suggest:

Culture (of which sport is one expression) is a space in which dominant classes attempt to ideologically legitimize their power. But the hegemony established by the dominant classes is always incomplete. Sport may be a cultural sphere that is dominated by the values and relations of the dominant class, but it does not fully strip working-class participants of the abilities to think critically and to reshape (at least in part) and redefine sport in such a way that it meets their needs or even becomes an arena of resistance (p. 8).

While the basketball players studied by Peter and Patty Adler (1991) arrived at college with optimistic attitudes about their impending academic experiences, they soon learned how difficult it was to combine the roles of student **and** athlete. The men realized that they would not be able to devote 100% of their time and energy to both roles, and thus one activity would have to suffer. The student-athletes who had more athletic talent chose to emphasize

the athletic role, while the student-athletes with less athletic ability chose to stress the academic role. The men were aware of the structural constraints and circumstances which affected them, and decided to act accordingly. Critical theorists would give the following explanation for this scenario:

Sport, then, is conceptualized as a cultural terrain in which meanings are always subject to contest and redefinition. In essence, dominant classes place structural and ideological constraints around people's thoughts and actions, but these constraints do not fully determine the outcome--people retain the ability to act as historical agents, thinking critically and acting transformatively (Messner & Sabo, 1990, p. 8).

According to these three frameworks sport is either good, bad, or a combination of good and bad. Similarly, one of these frameworks focuses on the individual, one focuses on the environment, and one focuses on the interaction between individuals and the environment.

#### A History of Intercollegiate Sport: Evolution and Embarrassment

The current structure of college sport had its origins in the single sex and single race colleges of the nineteenth century. Until the 1850s those individuals who attended college--generally males--were governed by very strict and conservative task masters--also males. This may have been due in part to the fact that these institutions of higher learning usually had religious affiliations. During the 1850s the students became restless and initiated sport clubs on their campuses to add excitement to their everyday schedules (Lucas & Smith, 1978). These original clubs or teams were controlled completely by the students; the

students themselves coached the teams, set up the contests, paid for uniforms and expenses, and in later years hired and/or paid the coaches.

Even in this embryonic stage, college faculty and administrators were concerned, as student-athletes were being used for financial purposes. The first competition between schools, a crew contest between Harvard and Yale in 1852, was staged primarily for commercial reasons. The race was sponsored by the Boston, Concord, and Montreal Railroad which wanted to use the occasion to promote tourism--and their railroad as a means of transportation (Lucas & Smith, 1978). Thus, commercialism in male college sport was born at the first event.

Three years later the question of eligibility arose for the first time in college sport, as the coxswain for the 1855 Harvard crew was an alumnus (Lucas & Smith, 1978). Eligibility was again an issue in the first intercollegiate football game (1869) between Princeton and Rutgers. There may have been at least one player in this game, and possibly three others, who could have been ruled academically ineligible by today's standards (Telander, 1989). Because sport was in the hands of the students, however, there was no one with whom to register complaints. Similarly, no records were kept to detail how the athletes themselves felt about such incidents, and if their academic and/or occupational achievements were affected by their athletic participation.

College sport continued to gain both popularity and profit under student rule. With the advent of commercial sponsors, the participants rarely had to support their own teams; in fact, the student-athletes were soon wearing

expensive uniforms, eating at costly training tables, and enjoying luxurious travel and accommodations (Lucas & Smith, 1978).

As these intercollegiate rivalries became more popular, college athletics began to receive coverage in the local and regional newspapers of the times; these contests generated quite a bit of free publicity and university administrators used this to their advantage. As early as the 1870s sport was used to attract desirable students to the universities, to raise money, and to gain publicity (Lucas & Smith, 1978). In fact, it has been said that Notre Dame developed a football team for the sole purpose of recruiting students to the campus (Chu, 1985). Similarly, many college presidents did all they could to support athletics as superiority in athletics seemed to give a school legitimacy both on and off the field (Sojka, 1985). Presidents engaged in practices such as attending games and congratulating victorious teams, asking the board of trustees and alumni for money for athletic facilities, granting scholarships to students who were athletes, and hiring coaches--who were given the title of directors of physical training (Lucas & Smith, 1978). While college athletics were clearly gaining more attention and popularity nationwide, there is no record of how this celebrity status may have impacted the student-athletes themselves.

As the 1880s arrived, white male intercollegiate athletics entered its third decade. While college presidents were singing the praises of athletics, faculty members were beginning to question the merit of sport on campus. They were concerned about a decrease in sportsmanship, practices held behind closed

doors, the use of biased officials, on-field player brutality, paid/professional coaches, misappropriation of gate receipts, and alumni solicitation and control (Lucas & Smith, 1978; Nixon, 1984). The faculty were also upset by the values transmitted via athletics (Lucas & Smith, 1978). Specifically, they felt that the competitors spent too much time on practice and travel, and that athletes often seemed to consider athletics more important than academics. The media glorification of the student-athlete as well as the gambling and drinking at the competitions were also seen as incongruent with the academic mission of colleges and universities. Other concerns were voiced by nonfaculty critics of sport; these concerns included brutality, paid/professional coaches, gate receipts, hiring "pseudo" students to perform on college teams, and alumni solicitation and control (Nixon, 1984).

It appears, then, that the increased commercialization, visibility and general importance of athletics may have had a detrimental effect on the entire university community. It would be interesting to know, however, how the athletes themselves perceived and coped with the professionalization and increased sport-related time demands that emerged.

The increase in faculty concern led to faculty-imposed guidelines to help govern sport, and eventually to an athletic committee composed of faculty members (Lucas & Smith, 1978). It should be noted that while these committees were implemented to clean-up college sport and put the "student" back into the student-athlete, athletes were not included as members of these committees; the voice of the athlete again went unheard.

At some institutions the first action of the faculty athletic committee was to regulate the time, place, and number of games that a team could play. The 1882 Harvard faculty took a much tougher stance by prohibiting the use of professional athletes by cancelling games on any day but Saturday, by insisting on physical exams for all athletes and a final say in all coaching decisions, and by banning football due to alleged brutality (Lucas & Smith, 1978). Although some of these actions seemed to show concern for the athletes, it appears that others were undertaken to regulate or standardize athletic routines so that no school received an "unfair" advantage.

In addition to the violence and brutality that persisted in college sport, improprieties surrounding the recruitment and utilization of noncollege players swelled. During the 1890s the University of Michigan football team played seven players who were in no way connected to the school (Telander, 1989). A similar story involving a Pennsylvania college is described below.

In 1896 he [Fielding "Hurry Up" Yost] "transferred" from West Virginia University to Lafayette (Pa.) College just before Lafayette played the most important game in its history against the University of Pennsylvania, which was riding the crest of a 36-game winning streak. With the 6' 195-pound "freshman" Yost playing tackle, Lafayette won 6-4. Yost almost immediately transferred back to West Virginia University, where he graduated a year later (Telander, 1989, p. 52-53).

As the problems in college sport continued, the first faculty controlled conference--The Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives--was developed in 1895. This conference, comprised of Big Ten universities, wanted to further control the abuses in sport and consequently set conditions or

guidelines that were to be followed. Among them were the statutes that: students who were delinquent in their studies could not participate, players would not receive compensation for their services, and professional athletes and coaches were prohibited from participating in intercollegiate athletics (Lucas & Smith, 1978).

Although this second attempt by faculty members to regulate sport was more organized and effective, serious problems in sport continued to flourish. The major concern of critics at the turn of the century involved the violence and brutality surrounding intercollegiate football. In 1905 alone, 18 players were killed and 143 were seriously injured while playing the game (Davenport, 1985). It was at this time that Chancellor Henry McCracken of New York University headed a committee--appointed by President Roosevelt--to either reform or abolish football; the corresponding rule changes gave football much of its present form (Lucas & Smith, 1978).

Shortly after the formation of this faculty controlled conference, a group of national administrators came together to try and regulate intercollegiate sport. This group eventually became known as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The development of the NCAA in 1910 was accompanied by a shift in power and control over athletics from the students to the administrators of the institutions (Davenport, 1985). This group of administrators actually began to regulate intercollegiate sport.

It should be noted that as early as the 1890s a persistent pattern was developed with regard to reform and intercollegiate athletics. New rules were



made that dealt with restraining and controlling the athletes, while little if any attention was devoted to changing the sport system that had facilitated the commercialization and professionalization in the first place. Sage (1990) claims that those in power were merely "tinkering with the system, while leaving intact the existing distribution of powers" (p. 183). He goes on to state that "hope for meaningful reform by the NCAA so that it would better serve the interests and needs of all college athletes seems nowhere to be found" (Sage, 1990, p. 183).

As soon as athletics became affiliated with a legitimate university department (physical education), athletics began receiving institutional funds, causing sport--particularly football--to become more commercialized and business-oriented than ever. Another change in college athletics at this time involved freshmen ineligibility, which was accompanied by an increase in the popularity of university intramural sport programs (Davenport, 1985). Davenport (1985) even goes so far as to suggest that intramurals were developed to keep the future athletes in shape. Again, no documentation is available to show how these changes impacted the athletes themselves.

Arguably the most important college sport-related event in the 1920s was the 1920 release of the Carnegie Report, "American College Athletics" (Davenport, 1985). This three-year investigation detailed the abuses in college sport and encouraged administrators to take control and turn things around. It was also during this time that the NCAA began to appoint special committees--Round Tables--to address special concerns or situations in college sport

(Davenport, 1985). The 1933 Round Table discussed the recruitment and subsidization of athletes, while the 1934 committee studied and presented a code of legal and illegal acts. In 1937 the Round Table focused on two issues: the need to have universities and colleges in charge of their own athletic programs, and the role of athletics in education. While on the surface it may appear as if these reports and committees were concerned about the welfare, growth, and development of the student-athletes, the fact that we are still struggling with many of these issues today suggests that these reforms may have been public relations maneuvers aimed at improving the reputation of intercollegiate athletics and universities that "sponsored" the teams.

The 1940s saw attention shift to the war effort, with less energy devoted to intercollegiate sport. This change allowed athletics to exist in a more relaxed environment (Davenport, 1985). Some of the changes that accompanied this atmosphere included the opportunity for both freshmen and first-year transfer students to participate in athletics. It was also during this decade that the NCAA gained power of control. Since the NCAA began to assume an enforcement role in this decade, there was a decrease in the amount of control that individual institutions had over their athletic programs. While the more relaxed atmosphere may have allowed the student-athlete to devote more time to educational and/or career planning, social life, and outside interests, the increased role of the NCAA and their philosophy of standardization may have denied athletes of some of their individual rights and forced athletic departments to become more covert in many of their operations.

The 1950s and 1960s saw athletics begin to separate permanently from physical education at many institutions. This split meant that coaches lost their faculty rank and winning contests became more important than ever for job security. Although no records exist as to how this change influenced student-athletes, I propose that the increased importance of winning games may have correspondingly increased the amount of time athletes were required to devote to sport. Two other factors, the implementation of athletic scholarships and the desegregation of educational institutions contributed to the professional and commercial nature of college sport (Sojka, 1985). While desegregation made it possible for African-American students--who may also have been athletes--to attend white colleges, it was the implementation of the athletic scholarship that turned those possibilities into realities. To the delight of coaches and recruiters everywhere, talented African-American athletes were now able to afford to attend college. As Coakley (1990) explained:

The history of desegregation in American sport clearly shows that when a winning season is necessary to generate revenue for a sport team, there is a tendency to recruit and play the best athletes regardless of their skin color. Although some teams tried to remain competitive without recruiting black players, they dropped their policies when they found that winning can be difficult when the talents of an entire race of people are ignored. The desire to win and make money can be very powerful (p. 209).

Again, little if anything is known about how the athletes themselves felt about this change.

In addition to the implementation of athletic scholarships, the increased attention of the media was transforming both African-American and white student-athletes into media celebrities and commodities. Sport was becoming big business as winning and making profits were becoming more and more important each year (Davenport, 1985; Sojka, 1985).

The major infraction of the 1950s involved a point shaving scandal in the New York City League, in which gamblers offered basketball players money to "shave" points off the predicted margin of victory of games (Sojka, 1985). When the state of athletics was examined during this period, it became obvious that university presidents and faculties were losing the battle of control. At some institutions athletic teams were already playing a role in the fates of their presidents (Davenport, 1985). At Norwich University, for example, it is said that President Homer L. Dodge resigned after receiving enormous pressure from alumni who were disappointed with the losing record of the football team (Davenport, 1985).

The 1960s were no different in terms of the scandalous nature of college sport. Gambling and point shaving were as popular as ever, which meant that many talented players were banished from sport and would never realize their potential at either the collegiate or professional levels (Sojka, 1985). As the decade continued, so did the allegations of irregularities.

The role of sport at this level has been in question for a long time, as the preceding review of the first century of intercollegiate athletics has shown. Individuals who studied, critiqued, and analyzed intercollegiate sport during this

time did so through a structural functional lens. The focus was on the individual and how sport helped to mold individuals to benefit society. Similarly, any failure to experience success was attributed to the individual rather than to structural constraints. Up to that point the rules designed to govern and reform sport were aimed at restricting athletes, rather than modifying the system in which they operate. As Sage (1990) suggested:

Rather than addressing the inherent structural problems that plague big-time collegiate sports, the college sport establishment disguises the fundamental issues by repeatedly blaming the victim, in this case student-athletes (p. 184).

After a century of focusing on the positive influence of intercollegiate sport and citing the individual as the most important component in structure of college athletics, researchers and theorists began to examine the power relationships and structural constraints surrounding intercollegiate athletics. Sociologist Harry Edwards was largely responsible for this change, as he exposed the racism inherent in the American sport structure. Edwards publicized this message by organizing a proposed boycott of the 1968 Olympics by African-American athletes, and by writing and speaking about the "modern-day gladiator:" African-American athletes admitted to college as a result of their athletic prowess (Eitzen & Sage, 1989; Lapchick, 1991).

While Edwards opened the eyes of the world to the plight of the African-American athlete, a book by Paul Hoch (Rip Off the Big Game: The Exploitation of Sports by the Power Elite, 1972) suggested that sport was both a reflection of and contributor to the hegemony that existed in America. Among other things,

Hoch's book traced the history of American organized sport from a conflict perspective, claiming that sport had always been a creator of false consciousness and a facilitator of racism, sexism, and elitism.

The world of intercollegiate sport witnessed many changes during the 1970s and 1980s. The passage of Title IX in 1972 meant that colleges and universities were required by federal law to provide equal opportunities for women in athletics. Title IX also increased the interest in women's athletics as scholars, the media, and the general public began to take notice. The increasing popularity of men's basketball and football led to lucrative television contracts between the NCAA/conferences/member institutions and the various television networks. In addition to increasing revenue for the conferences and institutions involved, this increased media attention was valuable for recruitment and public relations purposes. A third influential development during this period was the implementation of Proposition 48 in 1986. This rule required aspiring college athletes to meet more stringent academic standards than were previously required for admission. In addition, many colleges and universities were forced to change their recruiting practices.

The violations and moral issues that arose in the 1970s and 1980s were very similar to those that had occurred in the previous century. As before, gambling was a major problem. The occurrence of substance abuse among athletes, however, appeared to increase during the 1970s and 1980s. Drug and/or alcohol problems were not prevalent--or not reported--in the early years of college sport, yet they have become quite widespread in the past several

years. Drug buying and selling, drunk driving, and steroid use are examples of the charges brought against college athletes in the 1980s (Gup, 1989; Telander & Sullivan, 1989).

Another problem that is plaguing college sport is the tampering with and fraudulent use of academic records. While these are hardly violations of state or federal law, NCAA rules and common morality are violated by these issues. As I reported earlier, in this decade critics of intercollegiate sport have begun to question a system which seemed to support the importance of athletics at the expense of academics.

For example, during the 1980s Arizona State football players received credits for off-campus extension courses. This in itself is no violation of any sort-- the problem was that these athletes never attended the classes (Rader, 1983). Similarly, half of the schools in the PAC 10 Conference have admitted to "laundering" academic transcripts and granting false course credits to student-athletes (Rader, 1983). Similarly, Asher reported the following details of two other situations:

At Tulane, for instance, admitting athletes with minimum NCAA requirements meant in some instance taking students whose combined verbal and math college board scores were 600-700 points lower than the average Tulane freshman (Asher, 1986, p. 7).

And:

A player now at a large eastern university. Going into his final semester of high school, the player was ineligible under NCAA rules because his overall grade-point average was below a 2.0-a C. In that last senior semester, he apparently became,

relatively, an academic whiz, according to his transcript; B in language skills, B in economics, B in geometry, A in independent living, A in physical education, A in personal typing... (Asher, 1986, p. 7).

As the University of Maryland has recently spent \$220, 000 each year in academic support for its athletes, and one Big Ten institution has changed its final exam schedule so interested students can attend bowl games, it becomes ever more clear that the role of--or at least the emphasis on--athletics in institutions of higher education still need to be questioned (Asher, 1986; Davenport, 1985).

As described above, the world of intercollegiate sport experienced many changes during the 1980s. Another change during this period was the use of a third theoretical framework to explain sport. The critical perspective combines the functional and conflict perspectives, focusing on the interaction between individuals and their environment. Although this perspective is in its infancy in terms of explaining intercollegiate sport, the premise that individuals do not lose the ability to think critically even though they may be oppressed by historical and/or economic conditions has made it a popular framework for examining both racial and gender issues in sport.

I conclude this history by suggesting that intercollegiate sport is not immune from problems. While the nature of the violations and irregularities have changed, the basic unethical and often illegal behavior remains. As Gup stated in his 1989 Time article, "corruption and exploitation are as old as sport itself" (p. 55).



### The Impact of Intercollegiate Athletic Participation

As is apparent from the above review, there are a wide variety of scandals and improprieties in intercollegiate sport. What is not obvious from this review, however, is exactly what effect--if any--the big-business environment of intercollegiate sport has had on the student-athletes themselves. In an attempt to answer this question, I will examine the academic and career achievements, the professional sport opportunities, and the retirement and disengagement patterns of college athletes.

#### Athletes and Academic Achievement

As early as the 1880s, university faculty and administrators were concerned about what effects--if any--intercollegiate sport participation had on academic performance; the mission of the university, after all, was to educate student-athletes. As sport became more commercialized and business-oriented, these concerns continued. Therefore, the relationship between intercollegiate athletic participation and academic achievement--typically defined in terms of graduation rates and/or grade point averages--has been the focus of a substantial amount of research in the past decade.

Grade point averages. One method generally used to assess academic achievement has been the computation of grade point averages. The majority of the researchers who have used this method have shown that athletes tend to have lower grade point averages than nonathletes (Edwards, 1984; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982; Raney, Knapp, & Small, 1986)). The overall grade point average of athletes at Colorado State University, for example, was 2.56

while the overall grade point average of the general student population was 2.74 (Purdy et al., 1982). Variations have existed, however, among the grade point averages of athletes. In the study at Colorado State University, Purdy et al. (1982) found that female nonathletes had higher grade point averages than male nonathletes, male athletes had lower grade point averages than nonathletes, and female athletes had slightly higher grade point averages than their nonathletic counterparts.

A recent NCAA study compared the grade point averages of student-athletes with nonathletes who were involved in time-consuming extra-curricular activities (Lederman, 1988). Overall, the entire student-athlete population in this study had lower grade point averages than the nonathlete population, with football and basketball players having the lowest grade point averages of all athletes. The average grade for football and basketball players in this study was a "B", one-quarter of a grade lower than students participating in extra-curricular activities.

Racial disparities have also been uncovered. It has been suggested that minorities tend to enter the university less well prepared academically compared to whites, and that these achievement discrepancies continue through college (Kiger & Lorentzen, 1986). Purdy et al. (1982) reported that African-American athletes had a 2.11 grade point average compared to 2.61 for white athletes at Colorado State University.

Researchers have also compared grade point averages across sport. For example, Raney et al. (1986) reported that the mean grade point average of

male students at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas was 2.41, while the grade point averages for male basketball, football, and baseball players were 1.96, 2.18, and 2.48 respectively. At Colorado State University, male football players had the lowest grade point averages (2.30) while female volleyball players had the highest grade point averages (2.95). Athletes in individual sports had a higher mean grade point average than those athletes who participated in team sports (Purdy et al., 1982).

Overall, the evidence presented on the relationship between athletic participation and grade point average suggests that athletes may in fact perform less well than nonathletes--particularly male athletes in revenue-producing sports. Since the mission of colleges and universities is to educate all students, administrators and educators should be concerned that some students--by virtue of their extra-curricular activities--are not receiving equal opportunity.

Graduation Rates. The examination of graduation rates has been the other method generally used to assess academic achievement. Adler and Adler (1985) found that the majority of male athletes entering a university "feel idealistic about their impending academic experience and optimistic about their likelihood of graduating" (p. 243). They reported that 92% of the individuals in their sample entered college with hopes of getting a degree. Such optimism is delightful, but we should take a closer look to see what reality holds. Edwards (1984) asserted that athletes are uninterested in and unprepared for academics, resulting in, among other things, lower graduation rates than nonathletes. A study based on 1970-1980 data at Colorado State University

found that the graduation rate of 34.2% for athletes was lower than the 46.8% rate of graduation for the general student population (Purdy et al., 1982).

In contrast, several studies have shown positive relationships between participating in intercollegiate athletics and graduation rates. A nine-year study at the University of Utah found that 49% of the athletes graduated compared to 45% of the total student body (Henschen & Fry, 1984). Similarly, a 30-year study at Michigan State University found that athletes graduated at much higher rates than nonathletes, 80% and 45% respectively (Shapiro, 1984). Finally, a recent study of recruited Division I athletes reported that 56.1% of all the athletes and 47.9% of all the nonathletes who entered college in the fall of 1984 graduated within five years (Lederman, 1991). The results, therefore, appear to be contradictory concerning the graduation rates of college athletes.

Research has also indicated variations in the graduation rates of athletes within the same university. The previously mentioned study conducted at the University of Utah showed that male and female athletes had similar rates of graduation, 48.76% and 48.89% respectively (Henschen & Fry, 1984). Conversely, Purdy et al. (1982) at Colorado State University reported that the graduation rates for female athletes was 41% while that of their male counterparts was 38%. No comparative data were available on the graduation rates of nonathletes at Colorado State University. When researchers have examined graduation rates across race, they have consistently found that whites graduated at higher rates than African-Americans (Purdy et al., 1982; Shapiro, 1984).

Another important variable that must be examined when evaluating graduation rates is the sport in which the athlete participates. Henschen and Fry (1984) found that among males, football players had the highest graduation rate with basketball players having the lowest rate. Among females, basketball players had the highest rates and gymnasts the lowest graduation rates (Henschen & Fry, 1984). In contrast, Purdy et al. (1982) reported football players as having the lowest graduation rate when compared to other sports participants. Purdy et al. (1982) also found that athletes involved in individual sports, such as tennis and golf, were more likely to graduate than those who participated in team sports like basketball and football. Finally, a recent study of all recruited Division I athletes found that basketball and football players graduated at the lowest rates of all athletes, 31.9% and 42.5% respectively (Lederman, 1991).

While inconsistencies exist concerning the overall graduation rates of student-athletes and nonathletes, it seems safe to say that the average athlete graduates at a rate similar to that of the average nonathlete. Deviations do exist, and seem to be most prominent with respect to male athletes, African-American athletes, and those involved in revenue-producing sports.

### Development of Career Goals

Although the academic achievement of high school and college athletes has been a popular research topic for many years, it has only been recently that the occupational planning and attainment of these athletes has also come under study. Unfortunately many college athletes have seemed to focus on a

professional athletic career at the expense of a college education. Young people everywhere have sacrificed both academic and career exploration in order to concentrate on their athletic skills (Coakley, 1990; Edwards, 1984; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987). Thomas and Ermler (1988) suggested that educational institutions have abandoned the responsibilities they have in "preparing the athlete to retire from high level competition and assume a nonathletic career" (p. 137).

"I wanna grow up to be the best basketball player, I wanna be a pro" was the response of an 11-year old boy when he was interviewed by a popular television news network as to why he participated in a particular basketball program. His response, in all likelihood, is similar to the hopes and dreams of youth all over the country--including my six-year old nephew. When the numbers are analyzed, however, this dream becomes a long shot to say the least. Specifically, only one in every 7,325 high school athletes will go on to play professional football or basketball (Lapchick, 1991).

Upon closer examination of these facts, individuals with professional sport aspirations must learn to look at the big picture. Research on the average career length and salary of professional athletes has been less than optimistic (see for example, Edwards, 1984; Lapchick, 1991; Leonard, 1988; Eitzen & Sage, 1989). A look at nonathletic careers would show aspiring professional athletes that the average lifetime salary for a doctor is \$4.5 million, \$3 million for a lawyer, \$2.8 million for a businessperson, and \$1.5 million for a university professor (Sailes, 1985). Over a 40 year career, that averages out to \$112,500,

\$75,000, \$70,000, and \$37,500 per year, respectively. A simple look at some of these other options may be all that is necessary, for as Lanning (1982) suggests, many college athletes are not aware of the nonsport options available to them. While all athletes should have the opportunity to dream, I wonder how this dream might impact their college experience.

In light of such claims, the topic of career development among athletes has become a popular topic of study. Through the use of several paper and pencil instruments researchers have become more familiar with the relationship between participation in athletics and the career development of athletes.

One such instrument, The Career Maturity Inventory "measures the critical levels of attitudinal maturity and competency that exist in career decision making" (Kennedy & Dimick, 1987, p. 294). The other common method for measuring career development is the Student Developmental Task Inventory-2, which focuses on educational, occupational, and lifespan plans. As Blann (1985) explains:

Task 2 consists of three developmental subtasks, mastery of which reflects achievement of the basic task. The subtasks include mature educational plans, mature career plans, and mature life-style plans (p. 116).

A study comparing the career maturity of male scholarship athletes--football and basketball players--and male nonathletes reported that the athletes in these sports possessed lower levels of career maturity than other students at all grade levels (Kennedy & Dimick, 1987). In fact, the mean career maturity score of the athletes was no higher than that of the average ninth grader.

Kennedy and Dimick (1987) reported that the athletes in their study--particularly the African-American athletes--were extremely unrealistic in their expectations for entering professional sport. Such a claim is not surprising since the role models that African-American youngsters look up to have tended to be concentrated in the sportsworld (Edwards, 1984). Similarly, white coaches may have given these athletes unrealistic expectations; by reinforcing athletic abilities in their athletes and thus justifying the time devoted to winning games coaches may have encouraged athletes to focus on athletics at the expense of all else. Concluding their study, Kennedy and Dimick (1987) claimed that their findings suggest:

Athletes may be unprepared to take advantage of one of the most highly valued aspects of the college experience--the initiation and development of viable vocational plans (p. 296).

Blann (1985) investigated the relationship of competitive level of participation in sport--Division I and Division III--and ability to formulate mature educational and career plans. He found that freshmen and sophomore male nonathletes formulated more mature educational and career plans than freshmen and sophomore male student-athletes at both levels of competition. Conversely, junior and senior male student-athletes at both levels were similar to junior and senior nonathletes in the development of mature plans, suggesting a more realistic perspective of their professional opportunities than their underclassmen teammates. The females in the study were all similar in their



abilities to formulate mature educational and career plans, regardless of grade, level, or athletic participation.

Blann (1985) concluded that male college athletes are preoccupied with preparing for and participating in sports, and thus do not give adequate attention to educational and career plans. As a result, he makes the following suggestion:

Student affairs administrators who oversee intercollegiate athletic programs might consult directors of athletics and coaches to help athletes, especially male underclass athletes, use academic and career planning services. By doing so, they can ensure that athletes give adequate attention to their educational and career plans (p. 118).

Sowa and Gressard (1983) investigated the relationship between intercollegiate athletic participation and achievement of developmental tasks. They found that athletes had a more difficult time than nonathletes in formulating educational goals and gaining personal satisfaction from their educational experiences. When male and female athletes were compared, the females averaged higher scores than the males on most of the measures of interest. Sowa and Gressard (1983) concluded their study by stating:

... athletic participation does affect student development. The time in sports-related activities on the high school level may inhibit the development of career and educational planning skills (p. 238).

Overall, these three studies show that intercollegiate athletes, especially males, tended to have a more difficult time than nonathletes in developing realistic and mature career goals. Those who focused on sport at the expense of everything

else were particularly vulnerable, as they wound up with few options when a professional career failed to materialize. As Lanning (1982) stated:

Love of athletics does not mean that athletes must devote their entire life to them at the expense of what they might be doing at the termination of their eligibility. To bypass or ignore all of the career development issues in an athlete's life during the college years is to irretrievably lose some of the most satisfying options for a career that may have been.

### Retirement and Disengagement

One of the increasingly popular topics among sport scientists concerns the retirement and/or disengagement of college and professional athletes from sport. The lower levels of academic and career achievement among athletes (Blann, 1985; Edwards, 1984; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Purdy et al., 1982; Raney et al., 1986; Sowa & Gressard, 1983), as well as the saliency of the male athletic identity (Messner, 1985), have increased the interest in the nonathletic careers of college and professional athletes. The research in this area tends to be focused primarily on life satisfaction after leaving sport (see for example, Kleiber, Greendorfer, Blinde, & Samdahl, 1987; Lerch, 1981). While the general findings tend to be contradictory (i.e., some studies [Kleiber et al., 1987; Lerch, 1981] show athletes being less satisfied than nonathletes, others [Haerle, 1975] claim the reverse is true), many claim that athletes who focused on academics and graduated from college were happier in their post-sport careers than those who had received neither good educations nor diplomas.

In studies of former baseball players, Lerch (1981) found that a high level of education was related to a high level of life satisfaction after retirement. Haerle (1975) reported that level of education exerted the strongest effect on the occupational attainment and status of the athletes. Similarly, Dubois (1985) found that the male intercollegiate athletes in his sample were no better than their nonathletic cohorts in terms of occupational prestige or earnings. In fact, the athletes were earning approximately \$4000 less per year than the nonathletes.

In a study of former Big Ten athletes, Kleiber et al. (1987) found that level of education was related to increased levels of life satisfaction, and that it was also the best predictor of occupational status. Thomas and Ermler (1989) echoed the sentiments discussed thus far and added that a smooth transition from athlete to nonathlete at any level is dependent upon the possession of a good education and marketable skills.

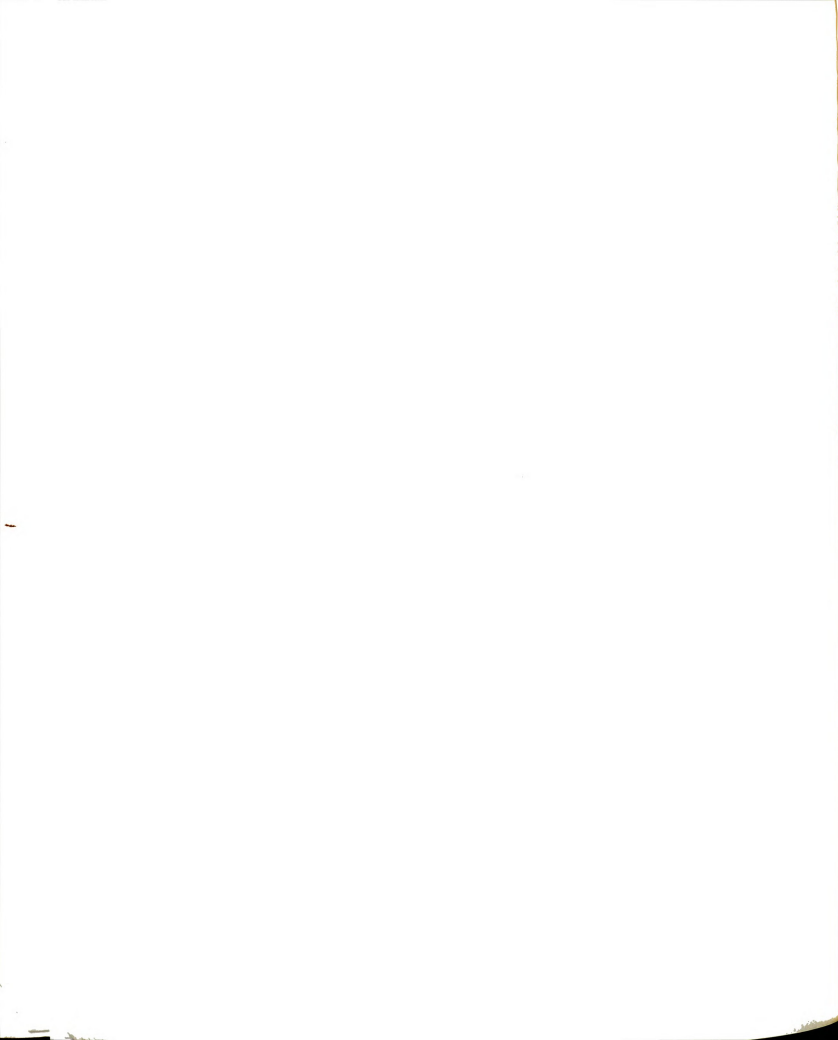
When addressing retirement adjustment problems, Rosenberg (1984) claimed that there was a positive correlation between perceived likelihood of a professional athletic career and athletic retirement adjustment problems, and an inverse relationship between post-playing options and retirement adjustment problems. He went on to suggest that in many cases the attractiveness of voluntary (versus involuntary) retirement depends on the availability of post-career options. Rosenberg (1984) further suggested that the responsibility for the

retirement and disengagement problems faced by many former athletes lie with sport organizations and institutions. These organizations, however, tended to be ambivalent toward the post-playing plans of their players (Rosenberg, 1984).

Rosenberg (1984) further asserted that pre-retirement planning is underutilized in athletics. Seventy-five percent of the professional baseball players in Haerle's (1975) study did not think about retirement and their post-baseball plans until they were in the last one-fourth of their athletic careers. This lack of planning may also be true of individuals in non-sport careers. However, professional athletes tend to have a sport career of three to five years, while nonathletes typically have a career of thirty to forty years. Thus, athletes have a more urgent need to plan. This, in addition to the fact that many athletes have concentrated primarily on their athletic development at the expense of all else since elementary school means that we are:

often left with "athlete brats" who are unlikely to know themselves and less likely to be able to care for themselves, particularly when they leave the comfortable confines of the paternal athletic nest (Thomas & Ermler, 1989, p. 139).

How much influence does prior sport participation have on occupational attainment? Haerle (1975) claimed that while an employer may initially be dazzled by the prospect of having a well-known athlete associated with his or her organization, the novelty soon wears off. It is at this time that the athlete's nonathletic ability, strongly influenced by



years of education, became the top priority. Eitzen and Sage (1989) also found upward mobility in athletes to be related to athletic participation **and** college graduation. Coakley (1990) found previous athletic performance influenced occupational attainment to whatever degree the employer wished. Specifically, previous athletic participation was seen as an advantage only when employers were influenced by beliefs about supposed characteristics of athletes (i.e., have character, team player, etc.).

So what actually facilitates upward mobility among athletes? According to Coakley (1990), the following three factors contributed to social mobility of college athletes: 1) completing degrees and learning something valuable in the process; 2) coming from stable environments that stress overall growth and development; and 3) networking with and being exposed to role models outside sport. Downward mobility was expected when the opposites were true.

Overall then, it appears that the retirement and disengagement issues that arose in both professional and intercollegiate sport could have been tempered through the implementation--or at least the suggestion--of some type of career counseling program. Thomas and Ermler (1989) best summarized the reasons for such an action.

To develop in an athlete only athletic excellence is a waste of human resources by a group of professionals who are in one of the best positions to reclaim those resources. The moral imperative to develop human

resources through the athletic medium appears clear. Not doing so makes no contribution to the larger society of which athletics are a part and creates a liability rather than an asset when the athlete retires to the nonsport world (p. 149).

#### Rationale for the Study and Statement of the Problem

The archival, experimental, and survey research reviewed above provides us with a great deal of knowledge regarding the history of intercollegiate athletics, as well as the educational and occupational achievements, the opportunities in professional sport, and the retirement and disengagement patterns, of intercollegiate athletes. These data furnish us with little insight, however, into the actual experiences and perceptions of, or coping strategies utilized by college student-athletes; the voice of the student-athlete is consistently absent in reports on and research addressing the world of intercollegiate athletics.

Recently however, two studies have addressed those exact issues, examining the more personal experiences and perceptions of intercollegiate athletes. During the 1980s sociologists Peter and Patty Adler conducted a four-year participant-observation study of a successful Division I men's basketball program (Adler & Adler, 1991). Through interviews and observations, the Adlers learned how their sample of male basketball players viewed educational and athletic systems and how they made choices to cope with the pressures they

faced both on and off the court. Their findings are summarized as follows:

Contrary to popular belief, most athletes enter college with optimistic attitudes about their impending academic careers. However, their athletic, social, and classroom experiences lead them to become progressively detached from academics. As a result, they make pragmatic adjustments, abandoning their earlier aspirations and expectations and gradually reassigning themselves to inferior academic performance (Adler & Adler, 1985, p. 241).

Qualitative research techniques have also been used to study female athletes. Specifically, semistructured interviews were utilized by Meyer (1988, 1990) in a series of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies designed to examine the attitudes and subjective feelings of female collegiate athletes concerning their roles as student-athletes. The female basketball and volleyball players in her sample began college with an idealistic view of education; this view was strengthened over time. The athletic subculture of which the women were a part, as well as their classroom and academic experiences, may to some degree have influenced or reinforced their educational optimism.

As alluded to above, the primary value of qualitative research in studying intercollegiate athletics is that the athletes are allowed to speak for themselves. The implementation of such an approach may also send a message to athletes that they are valued for their thinking abilities, indicating that they are capable of more than athletic performances. In



other words, their thoughts are taken seriously! For researchers and readers, qualitative data may provide a key to an insider's view of intercollegiate sport. The words of the athletes themselves shed new light on how college athletes perceive, experience, and cope with their dual roles.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to use the information gained through in-depth interviews with former male Division I football and basketball players to better understand how big-time intercollegiate athletes experience and perceive college.

Before proceeding with the methodology section of the dissertation, I will briefly explain the qualitative research process (to be expanded in the following section). Unlike its quantitative counterpart, qualitative research is not predicated on hypotheses and/or theoretical frameworks. Rather, data are collected and **then** matched to the theoretical perspective which best "fits" or explains the results. This process allows the researcher to enter into the study with minimal theoretical biases, inviting the data to "speak" and in a sense choose the perspective which fits best.

## CHAPTER II

### Methodology

As I stated earlier, the purpose of this study was to better understand the perceptions, experiences, and perceived counseling needs of intercollegiate athletes who attended a large, midwest, Division I institution [hereafter referred to as BDU]. In an effort to obtain such information I interviewed 26 men, all former letter-winners who participated in revenue-producing sports.

#### Rationale for Interview Method

As indicated in the previous chapter, research in the area of intercollegiate athletics has been primarily of an archival or quantitative/experimental nature, with researchers using quantitative assessments such as grade point averages, graduation rates, and scores on educational and career maturity scales to assess educational and occupational success. While the findings and resultant program decisions based upon them are important to both athletic departments and athletic counseling programs, the time has come to utilize all of our data collection options. As mentioned previously, the continued public relations problems associated with intercollegiate athletics, as well as the continued mediocrity in the academic and career achievement of some student-athletes shows that the programs currently in existence may not provide adequate guidance (Blann, 1985; Kennedy & Dimmick,

1987; Sowa & Gressard, 1983). It is possible that such programmatic inadequacy results from an incomplete picture of the experiences, perceptions, and perceived counseling needs of college student-athletes based on a narrow range of research methodologies.

Quantitative data may provide researchers with an incomplete picture of intercollegiate sport for several reasons. First, the operational definitions utilized in quantitative research reduce everything to variables; if something cannot be measured, it is not included. Consequently, important concepts or ideas may be ignored. Second, quantitative research techniques tend to promote the idea of a homogeneous sample or group, thus losing sight of the individual and his or her own responses. Finally, quantitative techniques may lead to the researchers overlooking the perceptions, emotions, and feelings behind the actions of participants; these researchers are more interested in what happened, rather than perceptions, emotions, and feelings. Therefore, researchers are not obtaining the complete picture. As a result of these weaknesses, a methodology which also allows the voices of athletes to be heard is needed.

Similarly, other problems arise when archival, survey, and experimental data is used (Borg & Gall, 1983). One can never be completely certain about the genuineness and accuracy of historical sources; there is always the possibility that a source has been forged or that the information has been intentionally falsified (Borg & Gall, 1983).

The use of graduation rates and grade point averages to make program decisions is made difficult by such confounding variables as course difficulty, major area of study, and differences in computation techniques (Coakley, 1990). The use of tests to gather relevant information is also problematic, since such instruments tend to make assumptions about and highlight biases against particular groups. For example, quantitative information does not tell us how student-athletes cope with the pressures they face nor why they make particular decisions. Such information can be acquired, however, through the use of alternate methodologies.

Information can also be obtained, however, through the use of qualitative methodology. Data of a more qualitative nature, such as semistructured interviews, can be used to examine the decision-making process of athletes, as well as their thoughts and perceptions regarding support services. Use of this method enables the researcher to develop rapport with the interviewee which often leads to greater self-disclosure by the participants (Bogdan & Biklen 1982; Backstrom & Hursch-Cesar, 1981). Other strengths of using qualitative methodology related more specifically to the current topic include giving each athlete a voice through which s/he can explain what interventions and strategies may have made the college experience more educationally and occupationally rewarding.

Consequently, qualitative data collection techniques have gained popularity and have been used successfully by sport scientists in recent years. Adler and Adler (1985) combined participant observation and interviews to trace the experiences of male basketball players through their college careers. Blinde and Stratta (1990) recently incorporated interview techniques into their research on athletic retirement and disengagement. Meyer (1990) utilized semistructured interviews to examine the attitudes and subjective feelings of female collegiate athletes concerning their experiences as student-athletes. The results of these studies should permit readers to receive a clear picture of what the athlete was experiencing during the time period in question. This sense of empathy or understanding can rarely be achieved through the use of quantitative techniques such as that which requires the subjects merely to check "yes/no" or "strongly agree/somewhat agree." Therefore, since the purpose of this study was to better understand the perceptions, experiences, and perceived counseling needs of intercollegiate athletes, I chose to utilize a qualitative research technique (i.e., semi-structured interviews) in hopes of learning more about the experiences of male intercollegiate athletes.

#### Conditions for Conducting Effective Interviews

Weaknesses exist with any method of data collection and the interviews in this study are no exception. Unlike other methods of data collection, the appearance and demeanor of the researcher is extremely

important in the interview situation (Babbie, 1973). Physical cues can provide the subjects with clues about the researcher's attitudes and orientation, thus care must be taken to limit threatening or disapproving nonverbal indicators. Likewise, interviewers must guard against making value judgments about participant opinion and any resulting invalid judgement interpretation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

The failure of the interviewer to devote time to relationship building may also impede the data gathering process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). By developing a rapport with each participant and establishing some common ground, the researcher may be able to elicit more detailed and valuable information than if s/he were to jump immediately into the interview process. In addition, the interviewer needs to emit genuine interest in and respect for each respondent (Babbie, 1972). Hopefully the participants will detect this concern and thus be more likely to cooperate and give careful thought to each question.

Another possible limitation of the interview process involves the actual questioning process and researcher control (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). If the interviewer is too controlling, the respondent may not have a chance to express his/her opinions and perceptions. Too little interviewer control and the interviewee may embark on seemingly irrelevant and time consuming tangents. Thus, a semistructured situation, in which both the participant and researcher are free to explore new areas within a specific framework, may be the optimal compromise

in an interview situation. This being the case, the researcher must be familiar with the topics s/he wishes to cover and ready to ask for clarification and further explanation if the need arises.

Memory can also play a role in this type of retrospective data collection. Questions may go unanswered, or be answered incorrectly, because a respondent does not remember his/her exact experiences or perceptions. Temporal distance can be advantageous, however, as it allows individuals to put events and attitudes into perspective, making the previous events, personal; perhaps an athlete did not like something that his/her coach did, but looking back on it five years later, can understand why it was done.

The final limitation that may occur involves interviewee bias. For example, rather than reporting true feelings the respondents may give responses to please the interviewer or provide socially desirable answers. By asking the same question several ways, however, the researcher may decrease the chances of such errors and may provide a way to triangulate interview data.

While I could not control or plan for all possible problems in the data collection process, I had an adequate understanding of possible errors and their implications as a prerequisite for conducting a meaningful and well designed study.

### Participants

Because BDU is a large [approximately 42,000 students] Division I institution employing a business model of athletics, I felt that it was a particularly good place to study the perceptions, experiences, and perceived counseling needs of student-athletes. Similarly, athletes at this university represent individuals from a variety of geographic locations, ethnic origins, and socioeconomic backgrounds, which make it easier to generalize the results of this study to other similar institutions. The participants in this study consisted of 26 former male letter-winning athletes, who graduated from BDU between 1980 and 1990. Twenty of the men had been members of the BDU football team, while six of the men had been members of the BDU basketball team. Nineteen percent of the participants were African-American, while the remaining 81% were white. The sample was comprised of both scholarship and nonscholarship athletes, including one nonscholarship basketball player and four nonscholarship football players. Approximately 27% of the men in the sample had participated in professional athletics. The distribution of graduation years was very equal across the decade, with only two years yielding no graduates.

I chose to include only male athletes from revenue-producing sports for several reasons. First, the visibility of big-time revenue-producing intercollegiate sport makes male football and basketball players primary targets of concern and/or controversy, thus increasing



the relevance of the results of this study. The fact that both Underwood (1980) and Telander (1989) focus on athletes from these sports (i.e., football and basketball) suggests a need to study the intercollegiate athletic experience of such individuals. Second, the recent major reform efforts in intercollegiate sport are primarily directed at men's football and basketball programs, making this an extremely topical sample.

The sample was limited to men who had graduated for one main reason... success; by graduating from college, the student-athletes had exhibited some degree of academic success. There are currently an abundance of books, exposes, and stories written by and about college athletes who have "gone bad" (see for example, Golenbock, 1989; Whitney & Kourtakis, 1990; Wolff & Keteyian, 1990). On the contrary, we hear very little about those college athletes who have overcome obstacles to "make it," and even less about those men who survived regular, ordinary childhoods and have gone on to be successful. We know what coaches, athletes, and administrators should **not** do, but we know little about the forces behind the college career of successful student-athletes. Therefore, I felt that it was time that we--sport scientists--study athletes who **have** graduated, in hopes of uncovering ways to help those who are struggling.

Most of the data that have been collected to date in sport sociology/psychology and counseling have been concerned primarily with current athletes (i.e., individuals who were athletes at the time of

data collection). There is a need, however, to collect data on former athletes. By sampling former athletes, we may benefit from their temporal and physical distance from intercollegiate sport, as well as their retrospective reflections.

The world of intercollegiate athletics is dynamic and constantly changing. The big business atmosphere of college sport, the passage of Title IX, and the many recent rule changes may all contribute to a diversity of perceptions and experiences by college athletes graduating across different time periods. Therefore, as a result of these recent changes I decided to interview only those men who graduated from 1980 to 1990. While the men in the sample entered BDU from 1975 to 1985, I believe that the last decade in college athletics has been close enough to the current decade to permit their--athletes who entered BDU from 1975 to 1985--inclusion, yet at the same time allows the sample to include athletes who played under several head coaches and university administrations.

#### Selection of the Sample

The list of 7000 letter-winning alumni athletes was obtained from the BDU men's Varsity Alumni Club. Due to the size of this group and the fact that use of the interview method of data collection necessitated physical proximity (i.e., driving distance) to the participants, I limited my sample to alumni who currently reside in three states that are near BDU.



Incidentally, these areas tend to have the largest concentration of BDU alumni.

Once I had acquired the lists of alumni in this area, I highlighted the names of those men who had earned letters in either basketball or football and who had graduated between 1980 and 1990. I narrowed that list even more by highlighting in a different color those individuals who lived within two hours (approximately 120 miles) driving distance from the BDU campus. The individuals who survived these two cuts (n=59) were potential participants in the study.

After obtaining permission to conduct the study from the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (Appendix A), I began contacting potential participants. I telephoned each athlete on the final list, explained my study, and asked for his cooperation. Before agreeing to participate, several of the men asked if I was interested in discussing steroids and/or rule violations. I explained that those issues would not be part of my study, but that they might come up. I assured them that they could refuse to discuss and/or answer questions at any time. Similarly, another former athlete asked me several times if I were a reporter. Again, I assured him that I was not, and offered to send him proof of my identity and the purpose of the interview. He declined the offer and agreed to be interviewed. Other athletes were eager to discuss their experiences and perceptions, so much so that some began to tell me about their collegiate days as we spoke on the phone.

When individual men agreed to participate, we set up an appointment for an interview. I asked each individual if he would like to be called and reminded about the interview, and also asked that he contact me if he were unable to keep our appointment. Several men did call and say that something had come up that prevented our meeting; we promptly rescheduled. Two men, on the other hand, repeatedly missed out of town appointments. Specifically, one man missed three appointments and another cancelled three appointments. I felt that I had done my best to try and talk to these former athletes, and finally gave up.

Those individuals who declined ( $n=3$ ) were thanked for their time, and sent a follow-up letter (Appendix B) two weeks later that re-explained the study and asked them to contact me if they had reconsidered. One participant was obtained through this method. Lack of time and lack of interest were the reasons cited by the other two men for refusing to participate in the study. Letters (Appendix C) that explained the study were also sent to individuals who had unlisted phone numbers ( $n=4$ ). Again, one participant was obtained through this procedure. Overall then, 44% of the former athletes who fit the criteria were interviewed for the current study. The most common reason for eliminating potential participants was that they no longer lived in the area surrounding BDU.

### Confidentiality

Before each interview began the participant was given a written explanation of the study (Appendix D) and then asked to sign a consent form (Appendix E). The participants were then asked if they had any other questions or concerns. The men were aware that the interviews were being tape recorded; therefore I took time to reassure them that the results of their interview would be confidential and that I would rigidly adhere to this. I was the only one who had access to information regarding which participants provided particular information. The responses of particular participants were made available to no one nor were responses linked to participants' names in the dissertation. The only identifiers used were sport, race, and if the men had played professional athletics. These identifiers were not used in situations where their use might identify a respondent. In those cases anonymous identifiers (i.e., "an athlete") were used. Data that may have identified a particular participant were not used. It was my hope that an absolute assurance of confidentiality would increase the former athlete's willingness to cooperate in the research as well as their ability to answer all questions honestly and protect their anonymity.

During the discussion of confidentiality, the fate of the tape recorded interviews and transcripts were discussed with the participants. I informed the men that I was employing another individual to help me transcribe the tapes. The tapes given to the other transcriber were

coded with numbers corresponding to the names of the participants, and I was the only one who had access to this list. I explained the purpose of the study to the second transcriber, and stressed the need for absolute confidentiality. While no names were written on the outside of the tapes, I could not guarantee that a participant's name or other identifying characteristics would not be discussed during the interview. The second transcriber assured me that she would discuss the content of the interviews with no one. Immediately after transcription, I erased the tapes.

### The Interview

#### Site

After obtaining the athlete's consent to participate, I set up an appointment to conduct the interview. Each interview site was carefully chosen, as it needed to be convenient, semi-private, and safe. Interviews were conducted in some of the following locations: hotel lobbies and swimming pool rooms, restaurants (breakfast, lunch, and dinner), offices, and participants' homes.

#### Rapport

As the interviewer, I attempted to develop a positive rapport with each participant by explaining the purpose of the interview, why he was selected as a participant, and by giving further assurance about confidentiality (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). I also tried to identify with each subject by relating my own undergraduate athletic experiences

whenever appropriate. It was my hope that the development of this rapport would lead to cooperative, revealing, and insightful participants.

Good rapport was developed with the majority of the student-athletes in the sample. Examples of these relationships which are provided below, serve as evidence to the development of this camaraderie. I was shown countless pictures of children and spouses, and even asked to stop by a man's house to look at his wedding photographs. Another man who warned me that he was shy and had a difficult time opening-up, talked continuously. He shared with me what had to be painful and embarrassing experiences, and did so with little questioning on my part. Similarly, upon arrival at the interview site, another participant expressed concern about the length of the interview; he was running short on time and hoped it would not take the entire two hours. Later, when reminded about the time he said not to worry about it; he was enjoying himself, and I should take as much time as I needed.

I was shown plays and blocking stances by one former athlete. This individual got down on the floor of my office, describing and demonstrating his play in a particular game, as well as muttering "I can't believe I'm doing this!" Likewise, many participants said "I can't believe I'm telling you/anybody this" when they revealed damaging and/or embarrassing information. Another man was visibly emotional as he described his love of football, and what it meant to him to be a BDU athlete. I also took their grammar and their use of profanity as an



indicator of how comfortable the participants were with me and the interview situation. I noticed in many cases that as the interviews progressed the athletes became less concerned about their use of profanity and proper grammar. They had become comfortable with me, increasing the likelihood of open and honest responses.

A final indicator of the high degree of rapport came in the form of a "thank you" note from one of the participants--Cary (Appendix F). In addition to appreciating the chance to express his views, Cary helped me to set up an interview with a former athlete--Bruce--who I had been unable to locate. When I phoned Bruce, I did not have to explain the study and ask for his participation; his friend had already explained what participation in the study would entail, and Bruce simply said "Cary told me you'd be calling, when would you like to get together?" Incidents such as those described above, as well as the fact that the majority of the participants were interested in the results of the study, indicate that they felt comfortable with me and the interview situation.

### Length

I had expected that each interview would last approximately two hours, a fact of which the participants were made aware as we arranged the interview appointment. This estimation proved fairly accurate, as the average interview lasted approximately two hours and thirty minutes. If neither the participants nor I had any time constrictions, I allowed the men to discuss their perceptions and experiences at length.

This laissez faire attitude explains the duration of the longest interview, four hours!

I attempted to conduct each interview session in the same, but flexible, manner. Inconsistencies inevitably arose as some participants offered answers more freely than others. Similarly, some men jumped ahead and discussed topics out of order. The variation in interview format should not have affected the results, however, since it is the information, not the order in which it was obtained that is most important. Although not necessary, I was prepared to conduct follow-up interviews with the same men to collect additional data.

#### Design and Instrumentation

The questions discussed during each interview focused on five areas in an attempt to permit the interviewer to understand the experiences, perceptions, and perceived counseling needs of the former student-athletes. Since I used a semi-structured interview schedule, the questions asked varied from interview to interview. I attempted to ask questions which would help elicit the experiences, perceptions, and needs of each athlete. Below are the five areas of interest and a sample question from each.

1. **Pre-College Expectations.** How did you imagine the dual role of student-athlete ?
2. **Freshman Year.** Describe the process you went through to make out your schedule the first term. Was this the same every term/year?



3. **Remaining Years.** Did sport-related activities enhance or inhibit the development of your career and educational planning skills?
4. **Retirement and Disengagement.** Describe the feelings you had about leaving college and finding a job.
5. **Support Service.** What types of support services, if any, would have helped you in terms of educational and occupational planning?

### Analysis

The interviews were transcribed, and the data examined according to the topics and subtopics listed in the interview script. I then examined the data in each topic to look for common themes or assertions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). After establishing these assertions, I examined the data for evidence which supported each assertion as well as disconfirming evidence which failed to support each assertion.

Note cards were used to simplify the process described above. For each topic and subtopic I made a note card which contained the general trends in regard to that interview question, as well as examples of confirming and/or disconfirming evidence. This process allowed me to physically move and arrange the note cards by topic and assertion which aided in visualizing and understanding the development of the major themes that guided the results and discussion.

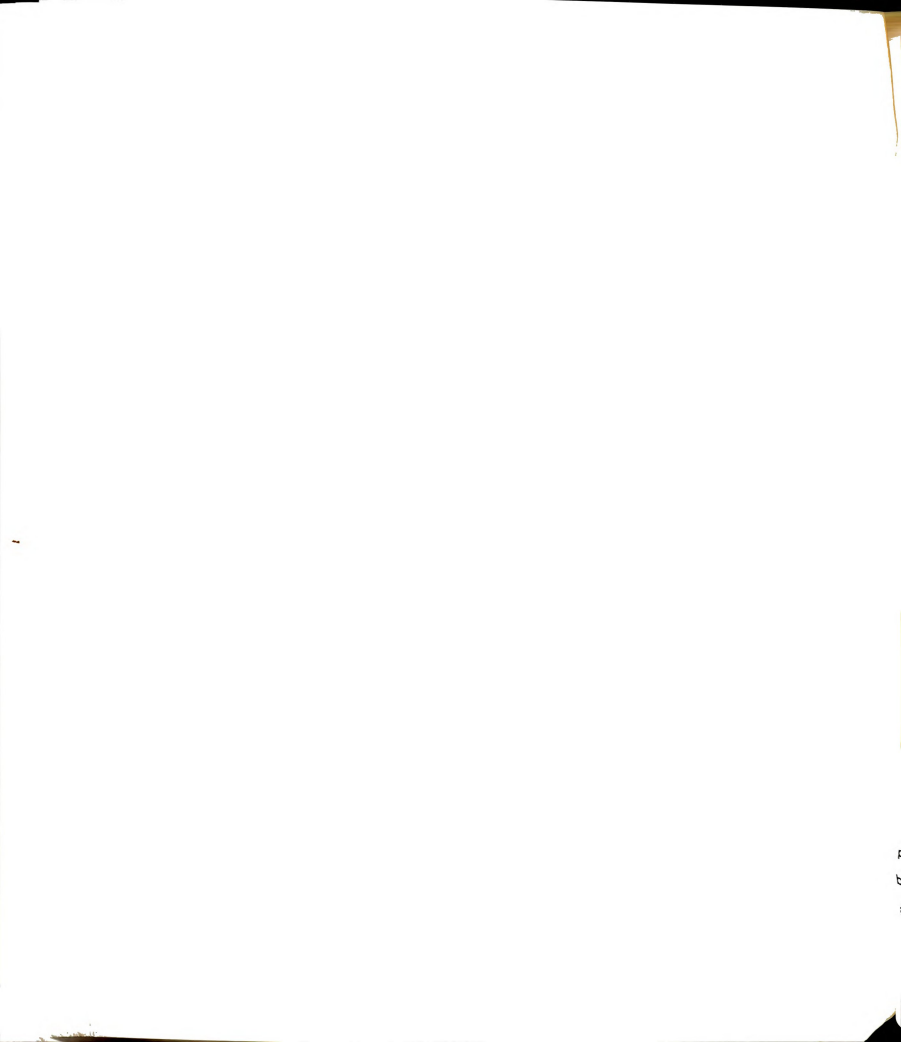
It should be noted that the results and discussion section of this dissertation are not divided into the five subsections described above. This was done as the result of virtually indiscernible boundaries in the data. For example, it was difficult to differentiate between the data on

coach-player relationships during the freshman year, and this same relationship during later years. Thus, I discussed coach-player relationships as a whole. Similar assimilations were necessary in other areas.

Differences between the proposed and actual study, such as those described above, are common in qualitative research. Remember that qualitative research is not controlled by the researcher to the same extent as quantitative research. A major principle in qualitative research is that the researcher does not impose a framework or structure a priori; instead, allowing the data to guide the entire process.

### Background

Before continuing with the results and discussion section of the current study, I think that it is important to briefly discuss the history of the BDU basketball and football teams. These sections are intentionally vague, for I feel that it is important to protect the anonymity of the university, coaches, and athletes in question, while at the same time providing readers of the study with background information that may enable them to better understand the experiences and perceptions of the student-athletes in the sample. This discussion will be followed by a short "autobiography," aimed at making readers aware of my--the author's--own athletic experiences as well as my views and potential biases with regard to intercollegiate sport. It is my hope that this insight



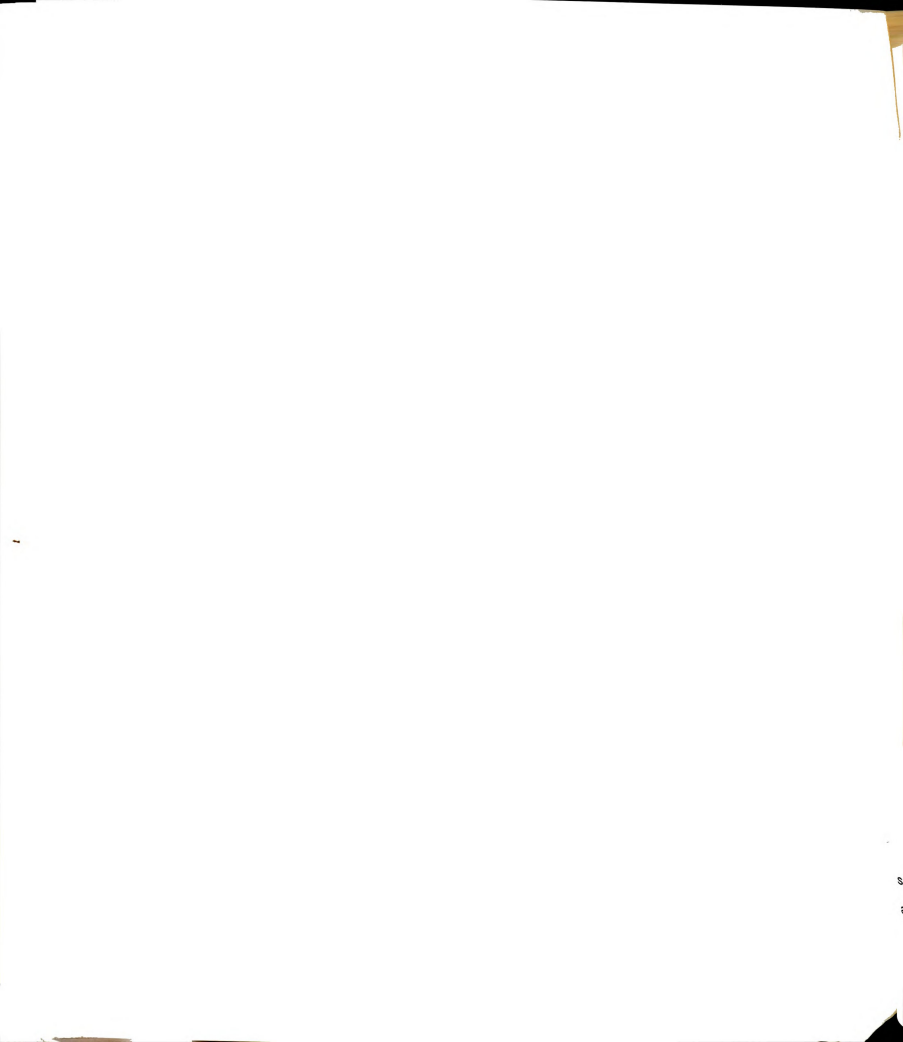
may help to explain the particular perspectives I take in interpreting the results of this study.

### Basketball

The BDU basketball program has had the same head coach since 1976, meaning that all of the basketball players in the sample played for only one head coach (Frank) during their college careers. Frank has served on several national coaching staffs during his coaching career, and is well-respected in his field. BDU basketball teams have provided fans with great success during the years in question, including several conference championships, numerous NCAA tournament bids, at least one national championship, and several men going on to play in professional leagues. The BDU basketball program has also seen rough times, as most programs have, including losing seasons with no tournament bids, and periods of racial discord.

### Football

Unlike the BDU basketball program, the football program has seen three head coaches since 1976; in fact, several of the men in the sample had played for all three individuals and their various assistants. Two out of these three coaches enjoyed symbiotic relationships with professional football leagues; it should come as no surprise, then, that both former assistant coaches and players enjoyed successful careers at that level. As was the case with the basketball program, the BDU football program also experienced prosperity during the time period in





question. Specifically, the football team won several conference championships, participated in and won several bowl games, and sent numerous players to the professional ranks. The program also experienced its share of adversity including losing seasons, negative media publicity, and an NCAA-sanctioned probation.

### The Author

As mentioned above, I feel that readers of this dissertation may better understand the presentation and discussion of the results if they know about my own athletic background as well as my views regarding big-time intercollegiate athletics.

The youngest of four daughters, I became involved in competitive athletics at age six, first swimming and then tennis. This involvement continued at the college level, where I played tennis for two years at a midwestern NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics) institution. In the middle of my sophomore year I realized that I was not achieving the grades necessary to get into graduate school, and thus chose give up my position on the college team. Although I continue to teach both tennis and swimming, my own participation is purely for recreational and physical fitness purposes.

In addition to participating in athletics, I was, and still am an avid sports fan. As a child my parents took me to various sporting events at all competitive levels, including professional basketball and baseball games as well as tennis tournaments. I vividly remember sitting in front



of the fireplace on Sunday afternoons as my father explained the details of the Green Bay Packers latest offensive possession. In college my poor roommate was deprived of watching the usual sitcoms as I was known to commandeer the television to watch sports on cable. Even now I will arrange my daily or even weekly schedule to accommodate certain sporting events. Not only do I enjoy the actual games themselves, but I am fascinated by the "behind the scenes" action and that which takes place away from the field/court. When attending live events I often spend more time watching the coaches, the players on the bench, and the other fans than I do watching the actual game.

While it is obvious that I enjoy athletics, I have not always understood nor agreed with all of the principles and practices surrounding sport. Theoretically I had few, if any, complaints about athletics through the high school level. Although men's football, basketball, and baseball games drew greater crowds, tennis was a popular sport in my hometown and enjoyed great support from the entire community. Tennis at the college level, however, was an entirely different story. The lack of fan support did not surprise me as much as the differential treatment of teams by the athletic department. For example, the football team always received priority when it came to the inclement weather practice schedule; the women's tennis team was lucky to get 60 minutes of gym time, sandwiched between the football team and intramural leagues. I was even more surprised by the rumors



of preferential treatment given to football and basketball players in the classroom; those things happened at big-time NCAA schools, not in the smaller and less profitable NAIA.

As the result of these experiences, I became cynical about college football and basketball in general, and their participants in particular; in other words, I blamed the athletes for these improprieties and inequities. This attitude continued until early in my graduate school career when I began to read scholarly books and articles about intercollegiate sport. Since most of the literature at that time was written from a conflict perspective, it is not surprising that my attitude changed. I now blamed the institutions, the NCAA, and society in general for the problems in intercollegiate sport; the athletes were merely innocent victims.

Although I tried to put my personal feelings about college sport aside as I devised the interview script for this study, I continued to view sport from a conflict perspective. After approximately three or four interviews, however, my attitude began to change. I realized that the student-athletes in my study--and perhaps student-athletes everywhere--were not inanimate beings who were only **acted upon** by outside forces. Rather, they were aware of what was going on around them and **interacted** with the environment/outside forces as they saw fit.

It is natural for researchers to bring their own perceptions and experiences to the research process, and I am no exception. I was aware of the potential bias my attitudes might bring to the study, and thus



consciously tried to maintain both a "value neutral" position and an open mind throughout the duration of this project. I feel that I was successful on both counts, as the theoretical perspective eventually used to explain the results of the study is different from the perspective I endorsed prior to the start of data collection. While I truly believe that I was objective in the reporting and discussing of the results of this study, I hope that this history of my own athletic experiences and my attitudes toward intercollegiate sport in general, will give you a deeper understanding of the direction of the qualitative process and a stronger "feel" for my treatment of the data in this dissertation.





## CHAPTER III

### Results and Discussion

Throughout the data collection and analysis processes I became aware of the fact that natural breaks or divisions existed in the information I had acquired. Consequently, the results and discussion chapter of this dissertation is separated into the following four sections: pre-college expectations and experiences, the life of the intercollegiate student-athlete, retirement and disengagement, and support services.

#### Pre-College Expectations and Experiences

As research (for a summary of the research see Coakley, 1990) has shown, individuals who participate in high school athletics tend to attend college at higher rates than individuals who do not participate in interscholastic sport. Although this higher aspiration rate for athletes has been attributed by some to the socializing effect of athletics, it has also been inferred that these individuals want to attend college for the sole purpose of continuing their athletic careers. The latter explanation was not the case for two-thirds of the participants (i.e., the "studiers") in this study; only one-third of the participants (i.e., the "jocks") in this study came to college to further their athletic careers.

For one group of "studiers," there was no choice of whether or not they would attend college; familial expectations dictated that path. In the words of one football player:



I don't know, I guess it's just one of those things your parents... for me in my family there wasn't any doubt about it. There wasn't a choice of whether you wanted to go or not, or if I get a scholarship. I mean I was gonna go no matter what. With some people it's not that way, some families just... I can never recall thinking about not... you just expected to. That's the plan, get out of high school and go to college.

Another participant, a basketball player, felt that family concern and a prep school background had influenced his decision to attend college.

Well I was pretty fortunate. My mom stressed education early. I had attended a parochial school all of my life and I went to a college prep school where 97% of the guys that attend that school go on to college. And it was almost, it was never thought that I wouldn't go to college. I was fortunate that I excelled in athletics, and it probably accelerated and made my choices a lot wider. But it was never any doubt that I would go to college. It was more of a doubt of how I would get there and what school I would go to.

The other group of "studiers" who attended college for nonathletic reasons claimed that they were influenced by the value society placed on a college degree, as well as the upward mobility that a college education could provide. Most of these individuals came from families who had not attended college, and who saw a college degree as a means of improving the life situations of both themselves and their families. As one participant explained:

I um, I grew up in a family of laborers. My father never went beyond the seventh grade and worked until his heart attack when he was 59 years old. I was a freshman in high school at that time and I just looked at the way he worked to support his family and I said "there's gotta be an easier way."

Several "studiers" had been pushed toward college by parents who wanted them to have an easier life than they themselves had experienced. A football player expanded on this idea:

Well, I think it was always like a known fact in the family that you were gonna go to college. You know, just as an example, my father didn't go to college and his job was really--I wouldn't call it a bad job--but it wasn't... I don't think he really fulfilled his dreams, and he wanted to make sure that we had a chance to do that kind of thing. To do better in our lives.

As indicated above, one-third of the participants chose to attend BDU primarily for athletic reasons. The following comments best summarize the attitudes of all of the "jocks" with regard to attending college.

My main reason was to play football. It was kinda a life time dream playing at BDU; that's what I always wanted to do. And that was my main thing, to go to college and play football. That was the number one thing. I really didn't think that much about studying or anything like that.

Since the majority of the participants had not attended BDU to further their athletic careers, I was not surprised to learn how little they

knew about the school's athletic department. Most of the men had been fans of BDU's cross-state rival, and had followed its teams instead. All of the men were familiar, however, with the conference with which the BDU's athletic teams were affiliated, and many had seen the basketball and football teams play on television. The following comments illustrate the interest and knowledge the majority of the subjects had about their future teams.:

They brought me up to a couple games; met some of the players, bought some programs, and read about their program and who was at the position that I was gonna play. So I did a little bit of research on my own, but I didn't really know a lot about the university as a whole. Just for what I was concerned with at the time was "who am I gonna be competing against when I go and play?" That was all I wanted to know.

Those individuals who had been familiar with the athletic programs at BDU had either grown up in the area, or had relatives who had attended the school.

While the majority of the men in the study had not attended college as a way of furthering or continuing their athletic careers, they had entertained--at one point or another--the idea of playing their respective sports at the professional level. As one individual explained:

Sure, I think everybody does [dream about a professional athletic career] coming out of high school. Just the process of being recruited and all the major colleges wanting

you and they're saying you're the greatest thing since pockets. They make you feel like you can play anywhere.

Another athlete mentioned that the strength of the athletic conference in which BDU participated had influenced his thoughts about playing professionally. The Northern Lights Conference had a good reputation in basketball; many players from that conference had gone to the pros, so maybe he too had a chance.

Although the men admitted to aspiring to play their respective sports professionally, they appeared to think realistically and keep their dreams in perspective. The following comment--by someone who eventually played professionally--was typical of how most of the participants viewed professional athletics and their chances of success.

When I say I thought about that [playing professionally], I don't want to put a whole lot of emphasis on that term. It wasn't something that occupied my entire day. I think it's just any kids dream to make it to the pro level. But I fully understood that my chances were limited, so therefore my thing was "try to get the education so you can get a good job."

It became evident early in the interview process that the athletes in the sample were concerned with more than athletic performance; they wanted to obtain solid educations, and eventually to receive their degrees. Of the sample, 75% were optimistic about their chances of graduating. These athletes fell into one of two groups. For one group, obtaining a college degree was the next step in the educational process;

they graduated from high school, attended college, and graduated from college. As one athlete explained:

There was no optimism about it, that was the way it was going to be. My father... academics was stressed in my family. Although my mother didn't have a college degree it was just assumed that you go to college to get a degree.

The other group of athletes consisted of individuals for whom the athletic scholarship was the primary reason for attending college. Although their parents and siblings may not have attended college, education was still viewed as important--yet unaffordable. Now that these players had found a way to attend college, they were going to make the most of the opportunity, and come out with a degree. As a football player articulated:

Oh yeah, yeah, no question... that's why I came here. Football is great and sports are great, but my main goal was to get a degree. I was always... academics was always the first thing in my life and that's something that came from my parents. My folks, neither one of them got a chance to grow up and even graduate from high school. And I have six brothers and sisters and I think the closest was two years in college and all the rest of them, none of them ever graduated. So it was kind of a goal to really get out and get that degree.

As indicated above, not all the athletes had been optimistic about graduating. Popular societal opinion tends to reinforce this tenet. Specifically, the general public asserts that high school athletes attend

college with no real intention of obtaining degrees, thinking only about the material inducements often associated with athletic scholarships and professional athletic careers. While these claims may certainly be valid in some instances, they were not mentioned by the "pessimistic" men in this study. For example, one participant indicated that he tried not to think too far ahead to graduation; he realized that college was going to be difficult, and had planned on taking it one term at a time. Athletics were the priority of the other man in the study who was not optimistic or concerned about graduating. He recalled:

Um, I just... I wanted to do was make it through the playing, the four years of football, and if I got a degree... My degree really didn't mean that much to me, 'cuz it wasn't the focus at all.

These "pessimists" were neither necessarily anti-education nor self-serving, they merely had other priorities coming out of high school.

During the interviews we also discussed the importance that academic reputation had played when these men selected a college. For three-fourths of the athletes, the academic reputation of BDU had entered into their decision. One athlete backed-up his claim that academic reputation was important by explaining the type of schools he had visited.

But, um, I was always... I don't know if you want to call it success oriented, or I always wanted to be... I never wanted to be a professional athlete, I wanted to be an owner of a professional team. So the schools that I



chose kinda reflected that. I visited Duke, I visited Davidson, I visited Princeton, I visited Michigan. So the schools that I looked at initially, all mostly because of the academic programs. I visited Tulane. I didn't visit the so called "basketball college." I visited the schools where I liked the coach and they had a good academic reputation.

Although so many of the participants stressed the importance of a university's academic reputation, they actually knew little about the specifics of BDU's academic programs. The most frequently mentioned academic attraction to BDU was its conference affiliation. The athletes clearly saw the Northern Lights Conference as not only strong athletically, but solid academically as well. As one athlete remembered:

[I knew about BDU's academic reputation] only to the point that they were a Northern Lights school, and I knew that they had standards in departments.

Four athletes were also attracted to the school because of the prestige of a particular academic department or major. The following remarks were made by a participant who enrolled in BDU for precisely that reason.

Well, they're very well known in the \_\_\_\_\_ field, and where I work now we have--I don't know--maybe 20 to 30% are BDU graduates. So they're regarded very highly in that area.

Finally, athletes were drawn to BDU because of the broad range of academic majors offered. Several of the participants had had no particular major in mind during recruitment, and thus liked the fact that

they would have many academic areas from which to choose when the time came.

Those student-athletes who were very familiar with BDU's academic programs attributed familiarity to family and/or friends who had previously attended the school. This knowledge appeared to alleviate some of the stress involved with choosing a school based only on recruiting brochures and the words and/or opinions of recruiters. As one athlete reported:

I had a lot of friends here--both adults and friends my age--so I chose BDU because I was comfortable here, and that's basically the reason. My \_\_\_\_\_'s [relative] a faculty member and I'd always been working out at the IM [intramural] facilities. I guess that I figured I had kind of an edge on anybody else because I knew about BDU. So that's why I came here.

Another area explored during the discussion of pre-college experiences and expectations, dealt with the career maturity (which has been defined as "the critical levels of attitudinal maturity and competency that exists in career decision-making" [Kennedy & Dimick, 1987, p. 294]) of the student-athletes. Educational planning, attitudinal maturity, and decision-making skills are all positively related to career maturity, and thus indicate an ability to develop realistic yet challenging career goals. Previous studies (Blann, 1985; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Sowa & Gressard, 1983) of intercollegiate athletes and career maturity found that college athletes--particularly males--had a more difficult time than

nonathletes in developing realistic and mature career goals. Often these individuals may focus on sport at the expense of all else, and may wind up with few viable career options when a professional athletic career fails to materialize. The findings in the current study were not consistent with these previous reports. Specifically, approximately half of the participants in this study entered BDU with career goals in mind, indicating perhaps, higher levels of career maturity than athletes in the above mentioned studies. As I will show later, however, in many cases these aspirations and/or goals were not permanent.

There appeared to be little relationship between career goals and exposure to career guidance in high school, as the majority of the respondents reported receiving little or no direction from high school counselors. Several athletes mentioned that the guidance counselors at their schools dealt mostly with the problem students, thus they received very little attention. As one basketball player related:

It was set up, but pretty much the counseling was geared toward negative students. I was an honor student. I was one of the better students; one of the self-sufficient. I would just go through the term... They would have to pretty much come and get me. It was very rarely that would happen. The counselors would come pull me in and say "what are you gonna do?" It didn't happen often enough, but the few times it did it was really helpful.

Others, like the following athlete, received very rudimentary career guidance.

I think they gave you a couple standard tests where, you know, designated the kinds of areas that you'd be best in. But really not any counseling per se.

A football player from a different high school reported receiving similar "help."

Not real broad, it was basic; "here's a bunch of books, take a look at this stuff if you want to."

The respondents who appeared most satisfied with the career guidance they received prior to entering college, were those who relied on family, friends, and significant others for advice. In the words of one such individual:

There was a counselor available to us, but I never really did take advantage of that. Like my career advice or career planning or whatever centered around my family. Didn't go to external sources at that point in time.

It was clear that sport had been a part of many of the participants' lives since early childhood. Like many boys, they were socialized to accept the athletic role, which often includes athletic participation dictating other decisions. In grade school or high school this may have entailed missing a family camping trip to play baseball or sacrificing the Homecoming dance to compete in the state tournament. As these athletes approached college, however, their involvement in sport imposed on much more important areas of their lives. For example, a good portion of the participants had dreamed of one day playing their

sport at the college level; few realized, however, what it would be like to face the daily reality of being collegiate student-athletes. One theme which emerged was that the men expected the experiences of a collegiate student-athlete to be similar to the experiences of a high school student-athlete. One football player admitted:

I didn't realize how much time football, and how important football actually was at a major university like that. I thought it would be kind of like high school; show up and play, and go home, and go to bed.

While the preceding player had not been worried about combining sport and athletics, the following player--who also thought college would mirror high school--was a bit more apprehensive.

I figured it would be hard because in high school it was hard. I'd come home every night and eat dinner by myself at 7:00 and think about doing some studying. I knew it would be hard, but I just figured I would just see how it goes and take it as it is. I really didn't know.

Another participant made the following reflective comment when asked how he had planned to handle the dual roles:

I couldn't have been prepared for that, even if you would've told 'em, I wouldn't have believed that it would be so stressful; that it would be so much expected of an 18-year old.

Conversely, several athletes claimed that they had known what the future would hold for them as intercollegiate student-athletes. They credited family and/or friends who had participated in big-time athletic

programs for such insight. In the case of one individual:

... my brother was here. The advice that I got was "budget your time, be careful about how you use your time." Like the way he said it to me is "knowing when you can let things slide and when you can't, especially in the classroom." Knowing when you can skip the reading and so forth. ...I guess I was conditioned by the fact that I knew somebody intimately who had done it and was doing it. Not experiencing it myself, but watching. I didn't come up here thinking this was gonna be cake-walk, but I also knew it could be done. I had seen him pull through it, so I figured "if he can do it, I can do it."

Although the athletes had few ideas what it would actually be like to be college student-athletes, they were adamant about the fact that they had not expected to receive special breaks or perks as the result of their athletic status. The fact that BDU was just coming off an NCAA sanctioned probation for rules violations was one reason why some of the men had not expected to receive any perks. Three other men credited their up-bringsings and their families for this attitude; they weren't looking for any breaks, and were focused on getting an education. Yet others mentioned the reputation of the institution and the Northern Lights Conference, as well as the attitude of the head coach when explaining why they had not expected differential treatment. As one football player explained:

It's kind of funny 'cuz some colleges I went to for recruiting trips, yeah, they may have nothing like a car or anything... I never got anything, but more or less everybody in the

Northern Lights was just more or less straight lace. They did everything by the book and they said "I can't promise you anything, you are gonna get what you deserve and if you show us what you got, then you'll play." You know it's... you know I appreciated it and I respected it. And they had to be honest and straight forward; you can't promise anything like you're gonna play or whatever you want... a car.

A final reason cited by several of the men for not expecting breaks was that they had come from small high schools and had not been "blue chip" recruits. In the words of one such athlete:

... I wasn't that heralded out of high school and I didn't have a big ego. And I was just happy to be part of the program. I didn't look for any kind of greatness--even coming off the championship. I figured, you know, that we would get sponsored by Coke, Keds, Converse. And you know, you might get a pair of tennis shoes that was legal or something, but that was enough for me. Converse would put your name on your shoes; holy cow!

While the majority of the participants had not expected to receive any perks as a result of their athletic abilities, a handful of the men admitted to thinking they **might** receive some type of special treatment. As the following quotes illustrate, these expectations ranged from the legal to the illegal. One football player made the following remarks as we discussed whether or not he had expected extra benefits:

No, not all. I expected, just from things that I heard... I expected maybe alumni to be more, to help you out a lot more... try to get you a

job in the summer and this kind of thing. And that's basically what happened. I got some jobs over the summer through the alumni, but I didn't expect any perks.

Several of the men in this group expressed concern over the difficulty that athletes may have scheduling their classes, and thus thought they would receive "assistance" in that area.

Oh, I probably figured that that would take place, but I wasn't asking for anything unreasonable; just that... a little help or cooperation with the scheduling because our schedules were so different and maybe it would be a little helpful to get in some classes because our schedule is so... you know afternoons are gone. It might eliminate you to get into certain classes or something. And the football team helped me get into college with my grade point average. It wasn't bad, it was about average according to standards, but it helped me get into BDU and in high school I got turned down just from a regular application from BDU. I got accepted to other good universities, but BDU turned me down.

Another athlete who thought he would receive preferential treatment in college defended his belief by describing incidents where he had been singled out in the past. For example:

I mean when you're an athlete it's a feeling like you know that you're gonna get breaks. You know you can get away with more than the average person. Because when you walk to a restaurant and people ask you for your autograph. That used to boggle my mind you know, because all right, why do these guys want my name on a piece of paper?



The idealistic expectation of these male athletes echoes those of athletes in other studies. The men comprising Adler and Adler's (1985) sample entered college feeling idealistic about their imminent academic experiences. They also wanted to graduate and were optimistic about their chances. Similarly, the female basketball and volleyball players in Meyer's (1990) sample also began college with an optimistic view of education.

There are several factors that may have accounted for the idealistic expectations of male athletes about their impending college experiences. First, several researchers (for a summary of the research see Coakley, 1990; Spreitzer & Pugh, 1973) have found that high school athletes tend to have higher academic aspirations than nonathletes. Coakley (1990) attributed these college aspirations to prestige, increased academic support, encouragement, and preferential treatment. The optimism of the present sample may have been partly based on "successful" academic careers in high school (Adler & Adler, 1991). The men had graduated from high school, so there was no doubt in their minds that they could graduate from college. This may have been particularly true for those men who thought that their experiences as high school student-athletes would be repeated at the college level. Second, while the athletes were in the recruiting process, coaches and others may have emphasized the attainment of an education and stressed the availability of academic supports such as tutors and study

halls. Thus these athletes may have assumed that graduation was inevitable.

While proximity to home and family were the most common reasons for choosing to attend BDU, three-fourths of the men in the sample claimed that the academic reputation of the school had also been important. Studies of both male Division I athletes (Adler & Adler, 1991) and nonathletes (Stewart, Johnson, & Eberly, 1987) have produced similar results. Several factors may have contributed to the consistency of findings of the current study with those studies cited above. First, athletes may have drawn their strength from their families; for many it would be their first time away from home, so it was important that they be close enough to allow their parents to travel to games, and they--the athletes--to travel home if necessary. The comments of a football player provided evidence for this speculation:

... plus it was close enough to home where my  
parents could come down to every game.

Second, the purported higher academic aspirations of high school athletes (for a summary of the research see Coakley, 1990; Spreitzer & Pugh, 1973) may have led the men to place particular emphasis on the academic reputations of the universities they were considering. Finally, the nature of the sample may have contributed to the importance placed on the academic reputation of the institution. The sample consisted only of athletes who had graduated, which may



indicate that the participants were academically motivated prior to their arrival at BDU.

The fact that the athletes in this sample had not attended college for the sole purpose of continuing their sport involvement was inconsistent with the conclusions of other researchers (Coakley, 1990; Edwards, 1984; Kennedy & Dimmick, 1987), who suggested that young people often sacrifice both academic and career exploration in order to concentrate on their athletic skills. There are several reasons why the men in the current study may not have conformed to the patterns found by these researchers. Perhaps the BDU athletes were more realistic about their actual athletic abilities, thus they knew that their chances of making professional athletic teams were slim. The claims of a basketball player, and then a football player, supported this idea.

I was able to recognize levels of talent. I'm a good athlete, but I'm not a fancy athlete. I can jump just as high as a lot of fellows with different styles than I do, but I'm not at a level at which the NBA players are... and I knew that after playing with them in the summer time.

In the words of the football player:

... I was not a "blue chip" high school player. I wasn't like... I was 6'2, 225; didn't run that well. So I wasn't like the guy everybody thought would come in and start right away, or save a program or anything. I wasn't a franchise player.

Several of the respondents had family or friends who had participated at the intercollegiate level, and thus these athletes knew people to whom they could compare skills and experiences. Similarly, they may have been aware of the eventual long-term success--both athletically and financially--of individuals who are drafted by professional teams (Edwards, 1984; Eitzen & Sage, 1989). The men had been unwilling to risk future success and financial stability for the unlikely longshot of a lengthy, lucrative professional career. Finally, the nature of the sample may have contributed to the current findings. The participants were volunteers, or self-selected; those who elected not to participate or who were excluded from the population as the result of the "graduation requirement" may have cited athletic, or other noneducational motivations for attending college.

As stated earlier, all the athletes in the study had dreamed--at one time or another--of playing their respective sports professionally. These findings are consistent with those of other researchers, (Edwards, 1984; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987). However, the men in this study did not need much time to come to view their chances realistically. By the end of their freshman year, most of the men had abandoned their professional sport aspirations; the size and speed of the athletes in the Northern Lights Conference, as well as early exposure to injuries and subsequent operations prompted the athletes to stop dreaming and devote more

time to academics. Seven of the participants did, however, go on to play professionally.

There seems to be a common perception in our society that many college athletes--particularly football and basketball players--go on to play their sports at the professional level. The fact that most professional football and basketball players come from the college ranks may in part explain this belief. Although only a small percentage of college athletes ever play professionally, research (Edwards, 1984; Lapchick, 1986) suggests that African-American athletes invest more time concentrating on professional sport careers than their white counterparts. The current study yielded no evidence to support or refute such claims; I did find, however, that considering the subjects involved in this study, proportionately more African-American participants played professionally than white participants. Specifically, 40% of the African-Americans and 24 % of the whites interviewed for this study went on to play at the professional level. This does not indicate, however, that the African-American athletes devoted less time to their studies than the white athletes. On the contrary, these African-American athletes came from families that stressed academics, and whose lives did not revolve around sport. In fact one of these men mentioned never wanting to be a professional athlete; instead, he had always wanted to be the owner of a professional team.

The financial support of an athletic scholarship played a large part in the continued athletic participation at the college level for approximately half of the men interviewed in the present study. Similarly, Sack (1989) reported that 45% of Division I athletes play primarily to pay their way through school. Both of these reports should serve as evidence that not all athletes attend college as a route to professional sport; they played instead, to receive a "free" college education.

The fact that approximately half of the participants in this sample arrived at college with career goals in mind is in direct opposition to the results of other studies. Specifically, other researchers (Blann, 1985; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987) have found that male college athletes--particularly Division I football and basketball players--had lower levels of career maturity than both their athletic and nonathletic counterparts. As the data show, family emphasis on academics, realistic awareness of athletic ability, and knowledge of the risk of injury may all have contributed to the occupational maturity of the men in this sample. The fact that the men were remembering back to earlier years when discussing this issue may also have influenced their career maturity; Blann (1985) suggested that younger athletes--college freshmen and sophomores--formulate more mature educational and occupational plans than older athletes. That the men in this study had not yet entered





college when they made these career decisions may explain why such a high percentage of them had career goals in mind.

Throughout this portion of the interviews I also learned that the majority of the men had not expected to receive special breaks or perks as a result of their impending athletic status. I have learned, through teaching undergraduate sociology of sport classes and speaking at seminars and conferences that this is a view inconsistent with the particular view of many people. A common assumption is that big-time college athletes expect to receive material compensation for their athletic abilities, and often attend the institution that offers them the best "package." One reason why the men in the current study may not have expected preferential treatment was because they had received none in high school. Similarly, the self-perceptions of the participants may have accounted for this nonexpectant demeanor; in the mens' minds only stars or "blue chippers" received breaks, and that was not how they perceived themselves. As one participant articulated:

I didn't really count on it [special breaks or perks] or think that it would be there. Mostly because I wasn't... I was recruited by a few other schools--quite a few and that--but I wasn't one of the super athletes. You know I think those are the guys that get their heads pumped full of all these big expectations of everyone bowing down to them coming in. And I was more of a hard worker. It was all gonna be on my shoulders where I went from there. It wasn't gonna be handed to me.

The definition of a perk may also explain why the men did not expect to be singled out. They may have been thinking along the lines of cars and money, and thus did not see tutors or early registration as an advantage, but rather a regular aspect of college life. Finally, the fact that the BDU was just coming off an NCAA sanctioned probation when many of the participants were recruited and enrolled may have forced the athletes to abandon any hopes they had of special treatment.

In summary, as their first year of college approached, the men in the study had not focused their thoughts solely on athletics. They had realized the importance of a college education, and thus were concerned about the overall academic reputation of the institution they decided to attend. The participants were also optimistic about eventually graduating from college, and approximately half of the men had possible career goals in mind before they arrived on campus. If the athletes were naive at all, it was about what the life of a collegiate student-athlete would entail. Many expected the experience to be a repeat of high school, while others--who knew someone that had been involved in athletics at the collegiate level--had much more realistic ideas of what it would be like to cope with the dual role on a daily basis. Finally, it should be noted that the participants were not completely education oriented; the majority of the men had at one time or another entertained the idea of a professional sport career. Such goals, however, did not appear to influence their expectations regarding preferential treatment.

The majority had not expected to receive preferential treatment as a result of their athletic abilities.

### The Life of the Intercollegiate Student-Athlete

In the second section of the interviews I examined the experiences and perceptions of the student-athletes during their tenure at BDU. This topic will be discussed in terms of the following ten subareas: their introduction to college, their athletic-related time demands, their relationships with coaches, the perceived relationship between coaches and professors, their relationships with professors, their relationships with other athletes, their relationships with other students, their ability to cope with the role of student-athlete, their ability to combine the roles of student and athlete, and their attentiveness to educational and occupational planning.

#### An Introduction to College

The first year of college tends to be a difficult one for many students; separation from home and family, adjustment to communal living, and acclimation to new academic policies may make the transition from high school difficult for even the most hardy individuals. For student-athletes the transition can be even more arduous, as they must also learn to deal with athletics as a job and a revenue-producing venture (Meyer, 1988). The arrival of the basketball players on campus resembled that of the nonathletic students; five out of the six men moved onto campus during the traditional "Welcome Week." The one man who

arrived early did so in order to acclimate himself to the university. Overall, there was nothing out of the ordinary in their first week experiences.

For the football players in this sample however, freshman year began five weeks before that of first year nonathletic students, and one week before the veteran athletes reported to "training camp." The rookies spent most of their time that first week adjusting to a new football system. As one participant recalled:

... the first week I remember freshmen coming in three days ahead of the upperclassmen, and we ran a lot and we went through blocking schemes. And we got our play books and we did our studying and a lot [of] position meetings and getting to know the guys.

With the arrival of the veterans came the start of "two-a-days;" during this time the players had a three hour practice in the morning, another three hour session in the afternoon, and meetings in the evening. One athlete described the schedule in this way:

We had two-a-days; it was the worst time in my life!

The men also admitted to being both scared and excited by what they were experiencing those first few weeks. Athletic ability--or lack of same--was in the forefront of the following athlete's mind:

Well the first week on campus would have been for just football so school would not have been in season yet, and yeah, I can remember some of the thoughts I had... I was

scared to death! They brought you in just as freshmen to start with, so we practiced with each other. They had physical testing and lift weights, and see how much you could lift and all that. How fast we could run and so forth. I remember thinking I was never gonna... after we ran a 40 yard dash I thought "Oh gosh, I'm gonna be in big trouble here if they're gonna judge us on this" cuz I didn't run a particularly good time; I don't remember the time, but I remember the guy I ran against and he beat me by... it was like I was staring at his rear end and his elbow and this was only 40 yards. So yeah, I guess I remember being pretty scared, excited; a lot of mixed emotions.

Another athlete, who appeared equally apprehensive, compared his first few weeks on campus to being away at summer camp. In his words:

It reminded me of camp or something. Being in a dormitory, it was exciting, it was really exciting. Eighteen years old and I didn't know where I was going; I had no idea where I was going on campus. I had a little map. Within in a week to two weeks I knew just about wherever I need to go. It was exciting on campus freshman year, first week.

While the other men were not so direct, they agreed that these days devoted completely to football were long and busy.

When discussing their first week on campus, many of the athletes-- football and basketball players alike--mentioned the size of the campus. Although they had all been to BDU before, it seemed much more enormous now that they were there "permanently." As one football player admitted:

I was lost, totally lost. I had so many things to do, so many places to be, and it was just a big place. I just felt lost and I did for quite a while.

Another participant, a basketball player, remembered the feelings he had that first week and how he dealt with them.

I was fumbling around, and I was lost... It was an experience. I made sure that I had all day to experiment and get it right 'cuz I don't want to be lost everyday... So I made sure that first week if I have to make mistakes and get lost and learn how to use stuff--facilities and everything. I would try to get all that done in the first week so I could relax and go to classes. I remember not knowing how to ride the bus and not knowing which buses to catch. It was confusing and scary because here you are and you know, it's getting dark and you're not where you're supposed to be and I'm lost; I don't know how to get back to my place... It's an experience.

While the football players devoted most of their time to athletics those first few weeks, they did take time out to secure their academic schedules for the fall semester. The basketball players were also allowed to register before the nonathletic student body. In addition to ensuring seats in popular, required, and often full classes, early registration prevented the athletes from having to stand in lines and endure tedious procedures; thus, they were able to spend more time on their respective sports. As one athlete reported:

... you're there a month before anybody else and they pretty much want your classes to be situated because by the time football season



starts you've got enough to think about without trying to add on to it.

The regular registration process at BDU was time-consuming and much maligned. The non-computerized process involved intense competition among students for classes as they travelled from room to room in a huge building in order to drop and add classes, have fees assessed, pay fees, and so forth. The athletes, however, conducted all of their registration business in one room. A football player remembered:

They brought us in--all the freshmen--I think like a day or so early ahead of the rest of the athletes, and they... you know, we had a little tour of campus and they kind of put us through a little testing so you tested into certain levels in each course. And then the guy that was there was Joe Martin [athletic academic advisor], he sort of got together with each student and tried to figure out what direction they were heading and whether or not they were science or communications or whatever, and sort of directed 'em from there. He told us some of the things we had to take as far as the basic sciences, english type courses. I guess there was no math requirements, but I knew that I wanted to start out into some sort of math, so that's what... I knew some of the things but he also told us what I had to take.

As alluded to above, the athletic department's academic advisor was extremely instrumental in the registration process. Through the interviews I learned that the athletes were often counseled to enroll in "manageable" courses until they--the athletes--became accustomed to



their lives as student-athletes. For some of the participants this was welcome advice.

There were two people I had to talk with; talked to my regular advisor and I talked to the sports guy. And the sports advisor, I guess they wanted like a first term... take a light load; take one or two core classes and then take an HPE [physical education] or whatever just so you could get used to things. And I did that my first term, and then after that I pretty much just got right on time. I mean I didn't take a lot of HPE classes. They pretty much said "well this is what you should do because you're on the road... you're not there so when ya gonna be able to study and keep up?" I think that's when I finally got the routine. It worked out pretty well.

Other athletes, however, recalled having little if any voice in what courses they took. As one participant articulated:

There was no **process**, my schedule was made out for me by the athletic department; probably by Abby or one of her associates. And they said first term was gonna be a tough one for ya with football, with adjustment, so take a light load.

A similar scheduling experience was reported by another athlete:

I think they gave me one... athletic department... they had an academic advisor who oversaw the student-athletes. I remember that we went to the Administration Building, we all signed a bunch of cards and they said "here's your schedule" [laughs]. I had no idea what was going on so I just said "OK, fine."

The athletes above seemed to accept and perhaps appreciate such direction. This was not the case, however, for all of the student-athletes. Several of the men entered into the world of intercollegiate athletics with their eyes wide open, and refused to be denied an education regardless of influence. For one athlete, this meant utilizing the registration procedures designed for the general student body.

I went to the normal student... They have a special orientation for athletes... I just went to the normal student orientation--some time in July or August or something like that--and I just did it myself. I took a nat. sci. [natural science], I took a math--I took Math 108--and I took ATL [English]. Eleven credits, and then I took one other class to give me twelve credits... So that's all I did. Oh yeah, oh yeah [made out his own schedule every term]. I wasn't gonna take the chance of letting someone in the athletic department screw me up. There was no way.

Another participant was obviously still irritated years later by what had occurred as he attempted to register for classes that first term. In his words:

I told 'em to kiss my ass, literally. And Frank called me in and told me, and he send me to where all the black athletes go. He said "Jim, I'm gonna get you a good grade point." And I said "fuck the grade point, I want an education." And he said this was important. I said "you got me in a class that I don't want to take." I said "I don't need to take basketball, I'm pretty good at it." I said "I don't need to take two criminal justice courses because you know the prof." And unfortunately instead of

them saying "damn, this is a pretty good guy"... and it made me look bad. And I was the villain. They didn't care where I went to high school; they didn't care about that stuff.

### Time Demands of Athletics

As the interviews progressed and I learned how much time the men devoted to their respective sports, it became clear why so much attention was paid to getting them "manageable" schedules. On average, the basketball players reported that they spent five hours per day on basketball during the season. Although the practices lasted only two hours, the men were often required to arrive early and stay late; pre- and post-practice treatments, films, and meetings occupied a great deal of their time each day. After practice it was time to go to training table and then on to study hall. One participant gave the following account:

Realistically probably about... practice was probably about... you don't practice that much in basketball, probably about five or six hours. But the thing is it's even worse than that because really if you're good, your whole day is consumed by it. I mean it's all consuming; it's not like you just went to practice and you go home. You woke up in the morning and you're wondering how your day was gonna be. And my God, if it was in-season and you got [UCC] and [North Tech] coming up and you wake up in the morning and you know you got class and... but you got [GSU] in a little while. Those guys are on your campus. So it's really, even though you say four or five hours, it's really all-consuming. Because that's all you think about. It's all you care about, because that's what your focal point is.

The off-season schedule, while less demanding, still occupied two to three hours of the men's time each day. Running, weight lifting, and playing unsupervised pick-up games were the norms during this time. The men agreed that the amount of time they devoted to their sport--both in and out of season--remained consistent over the years.

The football players' schedules were more rigorous, as they devoted an average of 6.6 hours per day to their sport during the season.

The comments of the following man best summarized their routine:

If I remember correctly, the normal routine was... You would get out of class, quickly go over to the football building, go in for treatment if necessary or taping. Sit around and relax for a few minutes, get dressed. You had a meeting. Get stretched, out to practice probably around 3:00 and then practice from 3 to 6. Six-thirty you're inside; post-practice treatments for if you have a sore shoulder or something. Or you go right in to lift; linemen I think would lift Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and backs would lift on alternate days. And then hit the showers. You might have a post-practice film session, then it was off to training table. And then you would go to study hall at 8:00.

When the football season ended so did the demanding schedule. The men still devoted 3 hours a day to football, but all agreed that the running, weight lifting, and ballet classes--which were required for flexibility during one coach's tenure--were easy compared to the physical practices they endured in the fall. This reprieve did not last long, however, as the arrival of spring signalled a return to long and

physical practices. The five hours devoted to football every day for five weeks in the spring often seemed longer because the athletes knew their friends were relaxing and enjoying the warm weather and any available sunshine.

The time required of the football players had not remained constant over the years. Several men mentioned that the time demands fluctuated with the change in coaches. As one athlete remarked:

It got worse. Once Roger left and Tracy came in it got worse. It was more intense, you know, [until] 8:30, 9:00. 'Cuz my offensive line coach was really hard core. We had meetings on top of meetings and it'd be dark and we'd be out there. That was just his way. So it was that way or the highway. But it got worse as it went along.

Others attributed the increased demands on their time to an improvement in athletic abilities. The comments of the following participant illustrate this point:

In fact it [the amount of time devoted to football] intensified. Junior and senior years it was probably more. Plus the fact that I didn't start until my junior year. And if you started or if you played a lot, then more time was spent in meetings than if you were third or fourth string.

Another football player, while agreeing that the demands on his time varied, claimed that it had become easier for him to deal with these demands as he progressed through the program.

The first year, like I said, I had to work; I studied quite a bit. And then you find tricks on how to study and how to learn without putting in all that time. Then you find you don't have to be in such a hurry. Being a freshman you're always new at something and so you're always in a rush... rush... and you didn't have to do it in later years.

Similarly, the early registration and advanced scheduling processes recounted by the men in this sample have been found nationwide; unlike the time demands described above, these perks do not discriminate across gender and/or sport lines (Adler & Adler, 1991; Meyer, 1988). Coaches and university officials may actually think they are helping the athletes by providing them with simplified registration procedures and enrolling them in manageable albeit meaningless courses. Others, however, may simply be controlling their investments (Adler & Adler, 1991; Meyer, 1988). If everything is taken care of for them, the student-athletes have no excuse for devoting too little time to athletics.

Overall, the early experiences described by the student-athletes in this sample appeared to be consistent with those reported by other researchers. Specifically, it is not unusual for men involved in revenue-producing sports to devote 40 to 60 hours a week to their respective sports (Adler & Adler, 1991; Coakley, 1990; Leonard, 1985; Meggysey, 1989; Sack, 1985). Pre- and post-conference games increase travel and practice time, and thus the time spent on sport-related activities. In

addition, the need for programs to remain competitive may help explain, in part, this "keep up with the Joneses" mentality (Weistart, 1987).

### Relationships with Coaches

When discussing their treatment by coaches, 81% of the athletes in the sample had been satisfied; they were either treated well or with indifference, both of which were tolerable. In the words of one athlete:

[I was treated] like a rookie, like a rookie. I remember the coaching staff at the time telling me that they were glad to have me. They were very enthusiastic that I signed, but that now that I'm on the team I've got to start at player #16; and player #15 was the manager. So in other words, I had to work my way up. And that's the way they did it. But they gave me a lot of encouragement. They worked with me, they were very patient with me. They realized that I had some ability and they pushed me to realize that ability.

Similarly, the players were very positive about their relationships with assistant and/or position coaches. It was these coaches who took a more personal interest in the athletes, looking out for them on as well as off the field. One participant made the following remarks as he talked about his position coach:

... he was a good coach and he kinda almost just took me by the hand and said "look, you're gonna get your degree." You know he would... had a little pride in his players you know, which I don't... Which I feel it should be anyways. You know you try to be a head coach and take care of 124 players; you're gonna leave someone out. But if you're individual coaching, you have 20 to 30

players to look at. I mean they're your kids for four years. You better take care of 'em. Not only do you want to make an All-American, but you should...

Several of the other athletes I talked to had been recruited by Assistant Coach Smith, and had played for Position Coach Jones. I listened to many stories of how these two individuals interacted with **their** players in both athletic and nonathletic environments. The following remarks best summarized these stories:

... he would take everybody that he recruited and he'd have us over to dinner. I think that spring he had each one of us over to his house, or a couple of us at a time. Like there was another guy from Indiana that came in at the same time I did, so we went there and had dinner. And the guy I played for directly--I respected him quite a bit--and he did things... I don't know if you ever heard stories about \_\_\_\_\_ [assistant coach], and he would try and teach the offensive linemen... He was real big on manners and learning to become a gentleman and all those kinds of things. So we'd sit down before a meal--dinner before games and that kind of thing, or the night before the game... He gave us a handout at one point in time; which spoon and fork, all this stuff to use.

Yet another athlete thought of his position coach as a friend.

Your position coaches are hard-asses on the field, but normally you're close to them and they can relate to you a little bit, and it's a little personal. My personal position coach I had a very good relationship with I think. I stayed close to him the whole time. No one thought





of him as a coach, but a friend when I left. That was nice cuz I feel like I could turn back to him.

Conversely, other athletes did not appear to receive such unconditional support. Several claimed that the coaches treated people differently, based on how much they--the coaches--thought an individual could contribute to the team. The following are comments from an athlete who was a projected first-year starter.

I was treated very well because of my reputation here in the state. And it was [like] they almost thought of me as the second coming, you know, because I was treated very well by the coaches.

Likewise those who were not going to achieve immediate superstar status, including many walk-on and nonscholarship athletes, were often ignored or overlooked. When asked about his relationship with the coaching staff, a participant from a small Class C high school remarked:

Not [treated] very well. Um, it was different for individual people. I came in here, they projected me, that I wouldn't play for two years. And that became obvious to me because like you know "you're here but we're not really gonna mess with ya for two years because you're not gonna be ready to play." It was like you're not gonna get the benefit until two years. So the other freshmen that I came in with, they were projected as immediate players.

Ironically, once this man was able to play, he contributed so much that he was drafted by a professional team.

A final issue discussed during the examination of the student-athletes' relationships with their coaches concerned the attentiveness of the coaches to the educational and occupational plans of the athletes. The majority of the participants did not think their coaches were very interested in either their academic or career plans. Rather, eligibility and graduation rates appeared to be the main concern of the coaches. As one athlete explained:

I think their intention was to make sure that you had enough credits and grades to be eligible. They weren't so interested in what you were doing as a career move.

Another participant agreed with the above statement, and offered several explanations for this opinion.

I really don't think that they cared. As long as you stayed eligible and you increased your playing, that was basically all that they had to worry about. ... basically you're looking at a coach in the Northern Lights, he's gonna take a job to produce. He's gonna use you to produce and if you do that for him, that's fine... Keeps his job. But if you don't, well he loses his job so that's... It's just hard to get used to, very impersonal here compared to high school. I'm sure every kid goes through that. And then all of a sudden money enters that picture and it's a different way to look at the game. It's no longer we're playing for the thrill of competition, you know?

When coaches **were** concerned about the future of their players, it almost seemed more self-serving than genuine interest and concern for the athlete. The comments of the following athlete illustrate this point:



Let me say this, I know that Frank was very much so [concerned] because after I left BDU I was 26 credits short of graduating, and I had signed a pro contract and I was making very good money. But Frank was still on my case [about] getting back up and graduating. I felt like I would've done it, but I would've done it in my own time. And I would've probably taken my time; I would've procrastinated. But Frank and Joe Martin [academic advisor], they were constantly on me to get back and finish. Frank's point was "Okay, we're recruiting someone and we're sitting down and we're telling their parents 'hey, we have Mitch who was an Academic All-American, and that is sort of indicative of the way we stress academics.' 'Okay, did Mitch graduate?' 'No, he hasn't graduated yet'. You know, it's almost a contradiction." So he stayed on me to get back. Finally I got tired of him bugging, I got tired of my parents bugging me so I went back. And I'm glad they did.

While the majority of the athletes did not think that their coaches in general had been very concerned about their academic and career plans, they felt that their position coaches had been more attentive than their head coach. As one football player recalled:

I had a [position coach]... and he was really attuned to academics and was really into people's progress and how they were doing and if they were going to graduate. [From the head coach you got] your basic stuff; "go to class, keep your mouth shut and good things will happen." Our position coach really took an emphasis in it and was concerned about what we were doing. He'd actually come in and instead of talking about football he'd talk about what you were gonna do when you

graduated and stuff like that. He was good. I think it was kind of uncommon. I think he was more concerned about that. He was really concerned about the total person rather than just the football player. He was more concerned about manners and trying to educate people from a social standpoint as well as football.

Similarly, a basketball player remembered how one of his assistant coaches discussed more than offense and defense with the players.

We had one coach... and he was probably, out of all the coaches that we've had, was more interested in developing how would you say it, getting goals in your life. And he actually made all the players write down goals and what they expected to get accomplished through the year. Not only in sports, but academics too, which I thought was really good.

Throughout the discussion of the attentiveness of the coaches to the players' educational and occupational plans, the athletes seemed to be apologizing for their coaches lack of interest. One athlete, the son of a coach [not at BDU], offered:

They're just coaching. They're not academic advisors. That's the roughest, what a lousy job it is. I mean travel around the country, four months are on the road and then you want 'em to babysit kids too. I mean that's why they have to have strictly an academic advisor or two or whatever it takes. The coach shouldn't... I don't think it should be his job to be tracking down the grades. They only pay a coach 35, 40 grand at BDU, and that's not being paid that much to be working a full-time job plus be an academic advisor.

Similarly, another athlete commented:

[Coaches were] not too concerned. More concerned about here and now; here and now and maybe next year. As far as career plans and life goals, they've got enough things to think about. Is it something they should think about? ... I think they now presently have more people on staff for that type of thing. Coaches kind of take care of their things.

There are several factors which may have accounted for the nature of the relationship patterns between the athletes and their coaches. The number of individuals on a team, particularly in football, may have prevented the head coach from interacting with each member on a personal level; those athletes the head coaches had the most contact with were the starters. The fact that the starters were generally on scholarship may also have influenced the communication between head coach and athlete. To the coach, a grant-in-aid may have represented a right to involve himself in the lives of his athletes; the student-athletes' off the field activities and personal lives may have influenced their performance on the field, thus the coach was interested. Finally, it is logical that assistant coaches may have more personal relationships with the athletes on their respective teams. It is not uncommon for head coaches in all sports to delegate responsibilities related to athletes to their assistants (Meyer, 1988); one assistant may be concerned with the academic performance of the team, another may be in charge of conditioning, still others may be responsible for

individuals who play certain positions on the team. This gives assistant coaches the opportunity to work with smaller groups of people, facilitating their ability to get to know and understand **their** athletes.

Overall then, most of the basketball and football players were satisfied with the way they were treated by their respective coaches during their college tenure. There appeared to be some differential treatment based on ability, yet a majority of the men reported being treated with reserved warmth and impartiality. If any special attention was showered on the athletes, it appeared to come from their assistant or position coaches.

#### Perceived Relationship Between Coaches and Professors

As part of my discussion of the relationship between players and coaches, I focused on whether or not the athletes thought their coaches could influence BDU professors and/or administrators. Most of the participants in the study claimed that their coaches had little or no influence, but thought it could be done; such information had simply not been necessary in their cases. As one athlete explained:

... I really don't think the coaches really had much influence; at least none that I was aware of personally. Just for my coaches. I don't really know if they intervened. I know that they got a weekly or at least a monthly report of grades, but I don't know if one of my coaches would go to one of my professors and say "hey, give him a break," or anything like that. And I don't know of it happening with any of the other athletes.



Another athlete [who I later learned failed two classes at BDU and also went on to play professional ball for many years] expressed gratitude that he had not been not "helped" by the influence of his coach. In his words:

Well I imagine in any collegiate setting that if a coach wanted to exert pressure on a professor to pass a student that shouldn't be passing, it probably can be done... it probably can be done. I'm glad in my case it wasn't done. I'm glad in my case it wasn't necessary. But I imagine that's something that can be done, especially at a major university and the success of sports sometimes can be so important to revenue.

One athlete who thought that coaches could exert some pressure claimed that this would be easier to accomplish when the athletes were underclassmen. In his view:

I'm sure as freshmen and sophomores they could have all the influence in the world because when you're at BDU, no matter what you're into. You have to take your ATL's [English], your nat. scis., your social sciences. There's 50 different teachers that teach every one of 'em, and one or two of 'em are pipelined right into the athletic department. You wouldn't see a lot of freshmen and sophomores in trouble. I think you'll see a lot more juniors in trouble because you don't have to declare [a major] until the end of your sophomore year. So you can skate through. Now if I'm majoring in business and I have to take Marketing 301, well rather than 40 teachers there's two teachers and both of 'em are gay and hate football. Hey I'm sorry, but the coaching staff and the athletic department's out of the picture.

It should be noted that the basketball players in the sample were particularly adamant about the fact that their coaches had no influence on professors and/or administrators. As one basketball player reported:

If one of the players went to Frank and say "Frank, I'm not handling this class; will you go in and talk to the professor?" Frank would probably say "You get your ass back to class and you study! And do your best and get to class." But Frank's not gonna... Frank could never... 'Cuz Frank's kinda a scholar himself, he's a very intelligent man. He's not gonna try to get someone through school.

While there appeared to be little if any overt pressure exerted by the coaches, the student-athletes mentioned many subtle ways in which their coaches may have been influential. For instance, many players found themselves enrolled in courses taught by professors who were sympathetic to the demands placed on student-athletes. As one athlete recounted:

All I remember is that for some reason you kind of signed up for certain teachers. And I don't know... I'm pretty sure that the coaches weren't spending lots of time trying to get guys grades or something; going out of their way to butter these guys up. Or if it was more of a subtle thing that over time they found guys that were kind of supportive of athletics.

Other forms of subtle influence surfaced as the athletes mentioned that their professors were often present at study table, and occasionally

accompanied the football team on road trips. One participant shared his recollections about such activities:

One of the things that the second coach [Tracy], he did was... he always brought a couple of professors from different areas on each travelling trip. I thought that was cool, so all the faculty would get a chance to go. But I never knew if it was helping anyone.

Another athlete reported an experience he had with a professor who had attended the athletic study hall.

I had professors who were at my study table. I can remember an occasion where a nat. sci. professor--who I had his class the next day, we had a test--and he's asking some question and there were a couple of my other... this was at study hall... And finally he just goes "God dammit," and he open up his brief case and he takes out the actual exam and he starts reading the questions on it.

Inconsistencies emerged between the results of this study and those of other researchers concerning the influence of coaches on professors and/or university administrators. Specifically, the men in this sample thought that their coaches had little influence, while the men studied by the Adlers (1991) believed their coaches had a great deal of clout. Several factors may have contributed to the difference in these findings. First, university and conference standards may have influenced the quality of student-athletes recruited to participate in athletics at the two schools. Northern Lights Conference academic standards are more stringent than those required by the NCAA, thus the



athletes recruited to play for the schools in that conference may not have needed their coaches to intervene on their behalf. Second, the men in the current sample did not enter college expecting to receive special breaks or perks, and therefore may not have been looking for them. Conversely, the men in Adler and Adler's (1991) study did expect to receive assistance, and may have been more persistent in seeking these perks. Third, the subtle nature of the breaks and/or influence described in the current study may not have been perceived by the student-athletes as significant; receiving grades for classes not attended and being provided with test answers may have been considered signs of a coach's power, as opposed to merely taking classes from professors with allegiance to the athletic department and having professors present at study table. Finally, the recent NCAA probation imposed on BDU may have limited the amount of power the coaches could exert on professors and administrators.

#### Personal Relationships with Professors

Another group of people with whom the athletes had frequent interactions were professors. There were no real extremes as the student-athletes discussed their relationships with professors; some reported positive interactions, others reported negative interactions, but the majority reported cordial relationships with their instructors. Several men mentioned "schmoozing" or "kissing up" to professors in hopes of

getting the benefit of the doubt if they--an athlete--had a borderline grade. As one athlete admitted:

... I felt if you went to office hours that the professors at least felt like you were trying and you wanted help. That they didn't shaft ya because "well you were never in class, you never came to office hours; why should I do anything for you?" So I went to office hours. It might be butt kissing or whatever you want to call it, but if it helps, it helps.

Similarly, another athlete voiced:

... if you go to your professor and you talk to him, even if you're not even the least bit interested, you go over there and tell them you're interested. These are just simple things, you know what I mean, 'cuz they're gonna know who you are automatically 'cuz your name, and they'll be watching you and in fact they'll be looking at you and monitoring you just because you're an athlete. ... If you don't come to class you're sending the signal that "hey, your class stinks," and you don't care, and that's one of the most important things, to go into class. Especially to athletes because they know when you are not there. If you don't show up they don't think that you care, so they don't care. I always made a point when I was in trouble in anything, go in and talk to my professor or tell 'em "jeez, I really found that interesting."

Student-athletes who thought they had poor relationships with professors mentioned feeling uncomfortable and intimidated interacting with them. A football player elaborated:

Most of the time I was kinda intimidated to do that [talk to them outside of class] because I thought that most of them would just, they



were kinda negative towards football players, and um I was just intimidated to go. I don't know, I kinda felt we wouldn't get a break. I think that he would kinda try to isolate my paper more or something like that if I tried to go talk to him. They would say "oh, that's Sam, I remember that guy" and try to pick on my paper. So I would kinda try to stay away from them. I was a little threatened by them.

Conversely, other student-athletes in the study reported having good relationships with their instructors. These men felt that their teachers respected their drive and commitment, and would go out of their way to help them--the student-athletes--in any legal way they could. As a basketball player reported:

I had a good relationship with my professors, especially in the \_\_\_\_\_ department. I mean it was a situation where I always had to take a make-up test or seek an independent study to fulfill one credit or what have you, and if I disturbed them I would be biting my nose off to spite my face. So it had to have been good.

Popular opinion suggests that instructors are often in awe of athletes, and thus "spoon feed" them through their courses. When discussing differential treatment from professors, most of the men in the study immediately thought I was referring to positive or lenient treatment. More than half of the participants said they had been treated differently than the nonathletic students in their classes; few, however, mentioned preferential treatment in terms of grades. There were instances when





professors **helped** them with papers or gave them exam study sheets, but not automatic grades. As one athlete recalled:

... you'd walk in and they're like "Hey Keith, why don't you come back for the mid-term and I'll give you a study sheet." And it's the whole test, but not in test form.

Another form of differential treatment described by the student-athletes was that professors often recognized them and promptly singled them out in class. The fact that the basketball team had recently won a national championship may help explain why half of the basketball players in the sample reported such incidents. In two cases, the professors involved appeared interested in particular games or performances. As one participant recounted:

... I remember a couple times I had some professors, that if I walked in late or something and I would sit in the back, they'd say "I just wanted to take this time to say I think Paul played a real good game," and that kind of stuff right in front of everybody and embarrass you. "And I think the team played well; you're lucky to get out of there alive." I went "oh jeez!"

Another example of such treatment was reported by this basketball player:

You were sometimes recognized if you had performed well on behalf of the university in a game the night before or the week before. Or if the team was doing well. I mean I was tall and professors wanted to break up the monotony in class.



While the athletes characterized these incidents as fairly harmless, the actions of another professor were--at the very least--embarrassing. In the words of yet another basketball player:

... my econ class was about 200 people. I would sing the fight song. And I will never forget, the professor would call me up to sing the fight song. Football players know the fight song. I did not know the fight song. I spotted a football player in the class and I said "How about getting so-and-so up and we're gonna sing it together?" And he came up and he knew I didn't know the fight song because he was a friend of mine, you know, and we took the mic and we were singing in front of the class... the fight song.

As stated earlier, a majority of the men in the sample had been treated differently by their professors. While the thoughts of most of the athletes immediately turned to preferential treatment, 15% of the sample mentioned that they had been judged or treated more harshly than their nonathletic counterparts. One man talked about being constantly called on in class, asked to give summaries of the assigned class readings or answer questions. Similarly, another participant felt that his professors had preconceived notions about college athletes. He elaborated:

I think if anything they were... given more of a harder time than anybody else because they thought most athletes would come in and expect to get something. To get special favors and this kind of thing.

A final point I would like to raise while discussing the treatment of student-athletes by professors centers on a view many of the participants



had that they--and all athletes--deserved special consideration or breaks at one point or another during their college careers.. In other words, they felt that professors were often unsympathetic to the demands placed on student-athletes. A basketball player who went of out of his way to blend into the nonathletic student body stated:

To be honest with ya I think there's some profs out there that didn't like athletes. And that kinda pissed me off [laughter]. 'Cuz this isn't right. Sometimes you gotta give the guy a break. I'm on the road and [they] expect me to come in the next day and take the test, especially if you go [to class] every day.

Another athlete admitted that he gravitated toward classes taught by professors who were sensitive to the demands placed on student-athletes. He explained:

And they wouldn't give you a break for nothing. They would say "hey, you're gonna do everything everybody else had to do. And you're gonna have to have good papers and all that." But most of the time I kinda steered towards where I would get a break, because I knew all the time that I would have to spend and I felt like I deserved a kind of a break.

As stated above, few of the athletes in the current study had personal relationships with professors during their college years. These findings are consistent with those of two other studies of college athletes (Adler & Adler, 1991; Meyer, 1988). Several factors may have influenced the results of this study. The athletes may have been enrolled in large, lecture classes, where they were identified by student

number rather than name (Meyer, 1988). Such classes allow little opportunity for students--athletes and nonathletes alike--to interact with their instructors. As the student-athletes began to take more classes in their academic majors, the class sizes decreased, affording greater opportunity for interaction. The lack of contact between athletes and their professors may not have been a function of athletic participation. In a comparison of female athletes and nonathletes, Meyer (1988) found that few of the women in her study--athletes and nonathletes alike--reported having close relationships with their teachers. Also, the athletes were often shielded from the tedious and time-consuming "administrative" tasks with which college students are so familiar (i.e., dropping and adding classes, finding out the reason behind a failing grade, etc.). Because there were assistant coaches or athletic department personnel to take care of these matters for the athletes, they may not have interacted with their instructors in the ways they might have if they did not have someone to look out for them. Finally, the lower levels of educational maturity and planning attributed to college athletes (Blann, 1985; Sowa & Gressard, 1983) may in part explain why they did not have frequent interactions with their professors; they may have been too focused on individual college games and possible professional athletic careers to take an interest in their studies and thus expose themselves to their professors.

Like the athletes in other studies (Adler & Adler, 1991; Meyer, 1988), the men in this sample had been treated differently than nonathletes by their professors. Unlike the men studied by the Adlers (1991), the men in the current study did not feel that this differential treatment extended to grades. Perhaps the men in this sample did not perceive the study sheets provided by their instructors and the help they--the professors--provided with writing papers as affecting their grades. These differences demonstrate how individuals give meaning to particular events, as well as how these meanings are subject to individual as well as interpersonal interpretation (Fine, 1986).

Another way in which the student-athletes in the current study were similar to those in other studies (Adler & Adler, 1991; Meyer, 1988) is that they all reported a variety of different reactions by the teachers to the athletes. One professor may be sensitive to the pressures an athlete faces, while another goes out of his/her way to make things difficult. Several reasons may exist for this finding. First, professors may treat current student-athletes based on their previous experiences with athletes; a string of athletes perceived to be lazy, arrogant, and incompetent may cause a professor to treat future athletes more harshly, while experiences with conscientious and capable student-athletes may prompt a professor to go out of his/her way to help. In other words, professors may generalize from one student-athlete to all student-athletes. Second, professors may treat student-athletes in accordance





with departmental norms. Specifically, some academic departments--such as physical education, criminal justice, and communications--may have closer informal ties to the athletic department, and thus be more sensitive to the sometimes special needs of the student-athlete; the opposite may be true of other, and perhaps superficially similar academic departments.

One of the specific ways that the men in the sample--particularly the basketball players--had been treated differently by professors was that they were singled out in class. The physical size of the athletes may have made them more visible, and thus contributed to their being called on frequently (Adler & Adler, 1991). The importance placed on sport at BDU may also have caused professors to react in a deferential manner when such "celebrities" enrolled in their classes. The basketball players have have been singled out more than the football players because there were fewer of them, and they were not hidden behind protective and often cumbersome clothing when they played; as one basketball player suggested, it is easier to recognize one of fifteen men who does not wear a helmet/mask than one of 100 who is a long way away and wearing a concealing uniform. Also, since the basketball team had won a national championship within the last decade, the team may have had a larger fan following than football, making basketball players very visible.

A final topic explored in this section on the relationship between student-athletes and their professors concerned the fact that the men in the study felt there were times when their sport-related activities had earned them a break from instructors. This was contrary to what the participants thought prior to arriving at college, as they had neither expected nor wanted to receive any special consideration. This change may be explained by two factors. First, the student-athletes may not have been aware of the hectic schedules they were going to have to endure; after a semester of trying to juggle athletics, academics, and social life they may have changed their minds about receiving preferential treatment in the classroom. Second, the athletic subculture in which the men predominately operated may have prompted them to change their minds (Adler & Adler, 1991); while the participants alone may not have expected any breaks, the group of men together may have collectively decided that they were well-deserved.

Overall, few of the athletes reported having close relationships with their professors. In addition, the student-athletes perceived that they had been treated differently than nonathletes by their professors. While these differences rarely manifested themselves in grading procedures, the athletes were often singled out in class, and occasionally held to higher standards than their nonathletic peers. Finally, the participants admitted that as a result of their sport-related

time demands, they occasionally felt like they deserved a break from their instructors.

### Relationships with Other Athletes

Another group of people with whom the athletes had a great deal of contact was other players. My own college athletic experiences taught me that relationships between teammates were often influential in determining the happiness and eventual success of student-athletes. Thus, I was particularly interested in the relationships between the participants of this study and their teammates. Few of the student-athletes described their relationships with teammates as very positive or very negative. Again, it appeared that they were treated with indifference.

Several of the athletes reported having an older player take them "under their wing," while others described having good relationships with others in their same position. One athlete offered:

There was no animosity, no jealousies directed toward me, even though I might be coming in stealing some of their playing time. It was obvious that these guys had a very mature attitude and they were only worried about winning, and felt that maybe my development could help the team win. I will always be grateful for that. I will always be grateful for that because they could have made that a tough period for me.

Similarly, another participant shared his perceptions about the relationship he had with his teammates.



Well, pretty good, especially probably a little more with the people in your position group than say with the rest of the team... so when I was a freshman a lot of the seniors helped me out. They really, they really didn't look at me and compare me. And that was kinda nice. And that was something I tried to do as I got older; especially with the walk-ons, 'cuz I'd been through it.

Only two of the participants in the study mentioned that upperclassmen had been threatened by freshmen, and thus did not go out of their way to make the rookies feel welcome. One football player recalled:

They were helpful somewhat, but not so much that you'd take over their position or something.

Another participant, a basketball player, remembered a much more competitive atmosphere.

Well, it's so competitive, you know, that you hear that shit in the papers... "well yeah, this guy's, he's my best friend and stuff, and I just took his job and he loves me." And upperclassmen, I remember guys punching at me and stuff, you know, because I was a threat. I came in and took their job. We had... it was almost unfortunate that we won a national championship because we had two starting guards that wasn't graduating and wasn't going to the pros; they were still there. And here's this little skinny guy coming in and they were gonna have to make room. So instead of Frank benching one of 'em, he said "OK, we're gonna have three starting guards." So one of 'em was real mild mannered so he didn't say anything; but I knew he didn't like it.

But the other one was very aggressive and he would take a punch at me every week. You know we would almost be going at it in practice, you know, and this was a teammate.

The football and basketball players had many experiences in common as they dealt with teammates. One distinct difference, however, was the "hazing or "initiations" experienced by the freshman football players under two of their head coaches. These rituals occurred for three weeks during the pre-season camp, and included verbal abuse, deferment to upperclassmen, and public embarrassment. One football player voiced the following opinions about the experience:

First year it was like a fraternity. We had a rookie show, they treat you bad at dinner time. We were up on the tables singing and all this kind of stuff. It wasn't really a negative type of thing, like I said, it was just like pledging a fraternity. They laughed at you and made you do silly things like just singing or do whatever. Luckily I got up and \_\_\_\_\_ [particular talent] and got out of it. Down toward the end of the two-a-day practices we had a big rookie show, which even the coaches who were rookies had to be involved. They had to come up with a skit or sing or do something, so it was really kind of fun. When Tracy came in he cut it out I think; Tracy cut it out the second year, they don't do that any more. I thought it was kind of neat. Some of the guys of course took it a little bit to the extreme, but I thought it was kind of neat because there were a lot of freshmen who came who were All-Americans and stuff in high school who thought they were going to be "Mr. Great" on campus and it really kind of took them down a notch; made them put them in perspective, like everybody here was an All-American in high school, you





wouldn't be at a Northern Lights school if you weren't an All-American. So I thought it was kind of good, but he cut it out.

Another participant elaborated on the occurrences during freshman year initiation, and shared his perceptions.

I saw it as a way to bring the freshmen closer to the sophomores because this is what everyone prior to me had gone through. So I didn't feel bad about it; I felt more like one of them after it was done. It only happened for three weeks during early camp. There were a couple of rules that were... some people strictly enforced 'em, some didn't. Like freshmen don't ride the elevator with upperclassmen. If for some reason you don't have your play book, and you're supposed to have it with you, it's 20 push-ups. That sort of thing. Some verbal hazing like "What's your name, rookie so-and-so?"; "rookie snot so-and-so." Because we were rookies we were called "snots." And I don't think it was meant derogatorily, it was meant... it was sort of a name of endearment.

As the comments above suggest, none of the men were openly upset by the treatment they experienced those first few weeks. The following observation was the closest thing to a complaint that I heard:

That year was tough 'cuz we had hazing during two-a-days, and that kind of made you feel apart from everybody. Between the singing, the talent show, they called you "snot," "rookie snot," and "booger." Stuff like that. But after that, after two-a-days, it really come together and everything was fine. It was amazing. I thought "if this is the way this is gonna be, this is gonna really stink." But after that it was alright.



The relationships the men in this study had with their teammates were similar to those reported by athletes in other studies (Adler & Adler, 1991; Meyer, 1988). The older athletes in both of these studies helped the younger players "learn the ropes," both on and off the court. A strong desire to win as well as memories of what it was like to be a freshman may explain why the older players went out of their way to help the freshmen adapt.

As you will recall, the basketball players in the current study reported more conflict between team members than did the football players. There may be several explanations for such differences. First, the football players may have vented their feelings of superiority and jealousy during the three-week freshman initiation period; when the season finally began, they were all business, focusing on a common goal (i.e., winning). Second, differences in coaches and coaching philosophy may have been partly responsible for these behaviors. As I will show later, the football coaches appeared to create a family atmosphere around their teams, in which the members helped each other battle all outside forces. No such efforts were reported by members of the basketball team. Third, the basketball team had more individuals competing for starting roles than did the football team; the football players entered college expecting to red-shirt or not start for a few years, while the basketball players may have expected to start immediately, perhaps taking away a teammate's spot in the process. It

appears then, that the organizational structure of football at BDU prevented conflict among team members.

### Relationships with Other Students

Results from this and other studies (Adler & Adler, 1991; Blann, 1985; Meyer, 1990; Petitpas, Finley, & Vottero, 1989) indicate that athletes in revenue-producing programs devote much time to their athletic related activities. As a result, athletes spend much of their time surrounded by other athletes. Research on the friendship patterns of college athletes has shown that when male athletes leave practice, and presumably have a choice of associates, they continue to fraternize with teammates and/or athletes from other teams (Adler & Adler, 1991). When friendship patterns were discussed with the current sample, I obtained mixed results; the majority of the football players associated with other athletes, while the basketball players chose nonathletes as their friends.

As alluded to above, five out of the six basketball players claimed that they associated mainly with nonathletes during their college tenure. These men did not want to be idolized or treated differently as a result of their athletic abilities. They simply wanted to blend in and enjoy the college experience. As one participant explained:

... they [friends] were dorm floor, the people who are in the same boat you are. [I] felt more like a normal student.

Although the man who had associated primarily with other athletes later regretted his decision, it had been the easy thing to do at the time. In his words:

Probably 100% [athletes]. 'Cuz you're almost forced to, you know. That's who you live with, that's who you're with. A guy you wake up and inevitably you probably have a class with, the guy you know because you gotta take the same classes. You even got the same time constraints, and um, especially at the beginning. And then afterwards you go to eat and then study and then training table. And afterwards you go home together and you're rooming with an athlete. You know, it's funny; sometimes I think that I missed something.

I would later learn that the friendship patterns of the basketball players remained consistent over the years. Their living arrangements also remained stable. To abide by an unwritten athletic department policy, most of the participants roomed with other athletes their freshman year. Similar schedules and mutual concerns were reasons cited by the men for continuing to live with athletes through the years.

As mentioned earlier, the football players associated primarily with other student-athletes, usually other football players. This appeared to be more true for those athletes who were on scholarship; nonscholarship participants and walk-ons were more likely to have had friends who were not on BDU teams. The scholarship athletes spent 40 to 60 hours a week with their teammates, thus it was only natural that they would feel a bond with these individuals. As one athlete explained:

... you spend so much time with 'em, they're like family. I mean black, white, Mexican, whatever. One gets in a fight on the street, you know, no question why or anything you jump in. And if one is having a problem and he needs a ride or something, you don't ask questions, you just do it.

This "team as family" idea was prevalent among the football players in the sample. Several of the athletes perceived that the coaches had tried to create a family atmosphere among the team members both on and off the field. One such participant shared:

You spend all day at practice with 'em and then you spend dinner time with 'em. And then you spend study hall time with 'em, and then you go home and go to bed. And then you get up and go to class. And in most of the classes a lot of 'em are in there, in class with ya. So you see 'em. So you spend a great deal of time with 'em. But that's what they try to do as freshmen; they want you to have somebody that you can relate to so you don't feel and go through a lot of the hard times that other students do because you're like... It's kind of strange, but you're like a family in a way; a big family, but... Even people that you aren't close to, if you're out and something were to happen, all of the sudden they're like your best friend. You're over there doing whatever you think you need to do. It develops a real camaraderie.

Both the basketball players, and most of the football players had lived with another athlete at one time during their college careers. Similar schedules and common interests/concerns were cited as reasons for wanting to live with other athletes. When given a choice,



other men in the study decided **not** to live with their athletic peers; the "animal house" reputation of athletes living together, the need to get away from sport, and the similar life ambitions of nonathletes were cited as reasons for not living with other athletes. One man elaborated:

... I didn't want to come home and talk about football. I want to come home and say "What'd you guys do? What's up?" Get a taste of the real world outside BDU sports. I liked it; I chose to do it that way.

A common criticism of big-time intercollegiate athletics is that it often isolates student-athletes from the rest of the university population (Adler & Adler, 1991; Petitpas et al., 1989). The responses of the student-athletes in this sample were divided as we discussed their isolation or segregation. The athletes who felt isolated from their nonathletic peers and university activities fell into two groups; those who enjoyed the uniqueness athletics afforded them, and those who complained about missing out on dorm and university functions as a result of their athletic-related time demands. An athlete from the former group commented:

I think you might say segregated, but I don't know if that's bad. I think you feel segregated in a good way; "there's a football player," things like that. Everybody knows that there's a football player living on this floor and that kind of stuff. I don't think that's bad. You got a lot of special attention for it.

Another athlete who did not mind the separateness explained:

I guess because most of your friends are football players you don't really feel isolated because you're with the people you want to



be with. It's like if you weren't friends with people you wouldn't want to hang around with 'em. If you don't know a normal group of students or whatever that lived on your dorm, then you probably wouldn't want to hang around them anyway. You were with your friends, so that was fine.

Conversely, other student-athletes were not pleased with the fact that they rarely interacted with nonathletic students. One participant lamented:

You gotta be certain places at certain times that a lot of my fellow students didn't need to be or weren't required to be in those places at those times. Attending those particular social events [floor parties] that would be it. That would be just the kind of thing. There were too many times when there was something else I was supposed to be doing that I didn't get to enjoy the normal college life. Once I completed my eligibility, that was the time of my life so to speak.

Another athlete recounted:

Maybe some of the guys got around and mingled and mixed all that, but I spent a lot of time with my roommate going down to dinner all by ourselves and back, and not knowing all that many people... You also have dinner that first term away. You don't eat with them, so you show up in December like you're a new student. By that time everybody's got their friends...

On the other hand, the other half of the participants did not feel that their athletic status had served to isolate them from the remainder of the university. Several of the men in this group claimed that athletes at

BDU were segregated only by choice. One such individual explained:

How could you be? You're only isolated if you want to be isolated. There's a bond there that you're not gonna get anywhere else, and you're only isolated if you don't go out and do things. I mean I had lots of friends on the team, but I had **more** friends that were nonathletic, and I never felt isolated or anything like that.

Likewise, another student-athlete articulated:

Playing football was like having a magic key. I could go to any party, I could go into any bar. I could go into any place and instant credibility, so uh... I had friends who were athletic and I had friends who didn't play football at all. Aw, heck no. Quite the opposite. You could go anywhere and be accepted in any clique.

While these two athletes were comfortable with the fact that they had not been segregated from their nonathletic cohorts, the following student-athlete wished he had been more isolated from the nonathletic university population.

I wish I were isolated more. Somewhat, 'cuz I lived in \_\_\_\_\_ Hall and I couldn't walk down the hall without someone stopping me and wanting to talk about something. You know, where I was on the go and had to be somewhere. Didn't want to be bothered. That's why I moved off campus, pretty much so I could do my own thing when I want and it could be quiet time. I just wanted to be a little more isolated.

Since the majority of the student-athletes had associated with nonathletes during their college years, I wondered how they were

treated by these individuals; were others in awe of them and their abilities, or did they resent the "free ride" the athletes were getting?

Overall, the participants agreed that they had been treated differently by nonathletes. As one football player related:

... it was a trip 'cuz you come into a setting like this, a Northern Lights university, and I realize just how quickly people make impressions. And if you have a pair of [black and white] turf shoes on, you were automatically labeled as being on the football team because nobody else wore 'em. And yeah, you get treated differently. I can't really say how, but you were definitely noticed more.

Although the athlete quoted above could not pinpoint exactly what was different about how he had been treated by nonathletes, most of the participants claimed that the treatment they received was positive; friendlier treatment, numerous party invitations, and frequent inquiries about their respective teams were just a few of the ways in which the men had been singled out. The comments of a basketball player illustrated how he, and athletes in revenue-producing sports in general, were often treated by the nonathletic student body.

Sure, they always would speak to you and smile. And being a black athlete... When you're tall... I'd say people assumed that I was an athlete, so automatically you're greeted with smiles' of gestures of friendliness. You know, just for the fact that they know... You've got that look or what have you. And then if they **knew** you were an athlete they were always treating you different.



And I know some of my black friends that were nonathletes, I mean they wouldn't speak to them and they weren't concerned with them. They wouldn't invite them to parties. It's like "you guys over there..." There was that welcoming. More of a welcoming as far as the major student body if you're an athlete and if you're a minority. You're welcome to a lot more functions.

Such attention and adulation can be disturbing, however, particularly if it stops suddenly. One participant shared such an experience:

There comes a point, especially in your older years or your later years when people don't know who you are and it's like "you should know who I am!"

Several of the men in the sample mentioned that they enjoyed the attention they received as a result of their athletic status. As one football player articulated:

I kind of enjoyed it too. Not to my advantage, but it made me more comfortable.

Similarly, another athlete admitted using his status to his advantage. In his words:

I just used it and enjoyed it. I think I didn't really dwell on the ramifications of it, or the people who were being left out or being belittled. I guess I was at that age and wanted to have fun, and I was away from basketball and class; I didn't have time to be a civil rights representative. I was having fun and if they wanted to invite me to a party and take care of me I'd say "hey wow, go for it!" I didn't deal with feelings part of that as far as me being given some types of favors. I just used it to my advantage.

While most of the participants felt they had been given preferential treatment from nonathletes, two men claimed that they had received more harsh treatment or negative reactions from their nonathletic peers. In one case, nonathletes resented the fact that athletes received special privileges, including items covered under the athletic scholarship (i.e., tuition, room, board, etc.). This athlete offered the following recollections:

... I think if anything they [student-athletes] were given more of a harder time than anybody else because they [nonathletes] thought most athletes would come in and expect to get something, to get special favors and this kind of thing. The student's basic attitudes were like "you guys got it so easy; you got free scholarships and you don't have to pay for this and you don't have to pay for that and it's so easy for you."

Contrary to the comments made earlier, one football player asserted that athletes were discriminated against when party invitations were issued. Athletes had reputations as rabble-rousers, and few people wanted these instigators at their parties. As he explained:

A lot of times you're excluded from like your normal college activities because a lot of people don't want the football players coming to their parties because they're afraid they'll get out of hand. And I mean not that they don't have good reason 'cuz there's been instances that have caused them to feel that way. But then there's been just other students that have caused the same problems and no one makes a big deal about it.

Finally, athletes were occasionally ridiculed and/or hassled by nonathletes when they spoke in class; brilliant comment or inane blunder, it appeared that they were in a no-win situation. One football player recalled the following incident:

... and if you answered a question it was kinda a big joke, and it was kinda embarrassing really. And even if you answered a good question or made a good point or something, you know somebody behind you was snickering or something; "Oh no, a football player," or some kind of remark.

An interesting trend emerged as the participants discussed their relationships with nonathletic students. After the first few interviews, I noticed that many of the men in the study often referred to nonathletes as "normal students" or "regular students." When questioned about their use of the term(s), the men were surprised as they had not been cognizant of its use. Half of the participants who used the term, including the former athlete quoted below, meant it as a negative connotation.

I wouldn't have wanted to be a normal student. I mean I had to do it for two terms 'cuz I had to finish up to get my degree. And actually I did great in school; I had a 3.98 the one term and I had a 3.25 the last term with 21 credits. But it just wasn't the same! School wasn't fun; football just added that extra dimension that added the thrill to being there.

The other half of the men who used the term were envious of their nonathletic peers. As one basketball player explained:

I guess when I say "normal" I just mean student that... that's kinda weird... just somebody that goes to class. They're there for their education, can play some board out in the IM [intramural building] whenever they want. That's just what I wanted to do. I probably woulda been playing basketball, but not at this intensity. There were a lot of times when normal students didn't have to--as far as I'm concerned--I thought they didn't have to deal with those kinds of pressures.

An active social life and large circle of friends are some of the things that made a football player in the sample jealous of nonathletic students. He offered:

Um, I would see some guys on my floor, some of these guys I wouldn't see more than twice a week. And there were some guys that were down at the end just around the corner that were hilarious; the most interesting group of guys that I had ever met, and I was truly envious of them because they could spend a lot of time together. And there were girls on my sister floor that I didn't meet until winter term because the time that I spent in my room was so valuable to me that I needed it and I wasn't very social. And matter of fact a close friend of mine now, she said, "I thought you were the most stuck-up individual that I had ever come across" because we ate in the... I never ate dinner in the cafeteria because we were always at training table...

As discussed above, differences existed in the friendship patterns of the football and basketball players in the current study. Specifically, the football players associated primarily with other student-athletes, while the basketball players preferred to fraternize with nonathletic



students. The fact that the football players spent five weeks together prior to the start of classes may explain, in part, their decisions to "hang out" with other football players; they had no one else with whom to socialize, and thus learned early to rely on each other. The "team as family" attitude espoused by the football coaches may also have influenced the student-athletes' choices. These men knew that their teammates would offer unconditional and unquestioned support, making all other potential friends pale by comparison. Conversely, the basketball players experienced stormy relationships with their teammates, and thus may not have chosen them as friends outside of practice. There may also have been fewer negative stereotypes associated with the basketball players (i.e., dumb jocks, big maniacs, etc.), making their acceptance by nonathletic students easier. Remember that the basketball players were called on more often than other students in class, perhaps as a result of their visibility; this fact may have increased their likability with other students. Similarly, the football player to basketball player ratio increased the likelihood of nonathletes "running into" a football player as opposed to a basketball player, perhaps confirming the negative stereotypes mentioned by several of the men in the study. Finally, the basketball players were proportionally more interested than the football players in getting an education and graduating and thus may have rejected their athletic affiliations; they

may have bought into the "dumb jock" stereotype, and tried to disassociate themselves from it by associating with nonathletes.

Although the student-athletes in the current sample were different in terms of the individuals they chose as friends, they were similar in their choice of roommates. Like the athletes studied by other researchers (Adler & Adler, 1991; Meyer, 1988), the men in this study chose to share rooms with other athletes. Several reasons may account for these patterns. First, many schools have athletic dorms or policies regarding the living arrangements of student-athletes; at BDU, the athletic department **recommended** that athletes live with other athletes during their freshman year. These men may have continued to live with each other out of habit and adaptation to lifestyle. Second, it may have been convenient to share living quarters with another athlete; similar schedules and mutual understanding may have contributed to these decisions.

The use of the word "normal" by athletes to describe nonathletic students appears to be gender-related; other qualitative studies of male athletes (Adler & Adler, 1991) have shown this to be common, while in studies of female athletes it was nonexistent (Meyer, 1988). Several reasons may exist for these differences. The experiences and perceptions of the female athletes and nonathletes in Meyer's (1988) study were quite similar to each other, and may be partly responsible for this trend; the demand of athletics may not have detracted from the

women's college experiences as it did for their male counterparts, and thus they did not view themselves as set apart from the overall student body. Similarly, the negative stereotypes and isolation often experienced by the male athletes may have bred insecurities, thus their perceived above normal status may merely have been a defense and/or coping mechanism.

#### Coping with the Role of Student-Athlete

Individuals must often divide their time and energy between two or more interdependent functions. Intercollegiate student-athletes are no exception, as research (for a summary see Coakley, 1990) has shown that they often struggle to combine athletics and academics. Therefore, I set out to discover how the men in the current sample coped with this dual role. I found that 75% of the participants agreed that their athletic involvement influenced their academic performance. For most of these men, the impact had been negative. As one man described:

... academics have suffered because of sports. If you had a project, shit, you know you might be on the road. You see with basketball it's even worse than in football in that respect 'cuz you're on the road every Tuesday and Thursday and you getting back on Friday. Let's face it, you taking all your classes in the morning, you know. You had a 8:00, and 10:00, a 1:00, you know, because you had to be out by 3:30. You're not gonna take any night classes because you might have night practices. No one ever took night classes unless it was a professor that you knew. You never took night classes. And um, hell, you know at Indiana I'm playing against

Isiah [Thomas], you know. I was sleeping in because I got [NDU], you know, and the coaches encourage you gotta get your rest. You know, make sure you get your rest. And so it's hard to go to a 8:00 class.

Similarly, another group of participants admitted that nothing--not even school--interfered with their athletic endeavors. As one of the men shared:

... football in the fall is always a priority and you almost had to make it a priority if you wanted to continue playing and if you wanted to be a starter.

Specifically, the athletes had several complaints about trying to combine these two roles. As the comments made by this athlete illustrate, "too tired to study" was a common gripe.

... sometimes you were just too tired to do anything. Or you have situations where um, say you had a paper due on Monday and you played on the road that weekend. And you're gone Friday, play Saturday, go to bed late Saturday, and Sunday you're in meetings and everything else for football. By the time you get around for school work it's like "the hell with it; do it in the morning." Or you make a half-hearted effort to do it. So many hours a day.

Having little or no time to socialize was another grievance the athletes had about their lives. In the words of one participant:

... we can't after school go in and study, so in the evenings where, and you want to also... and after a while it really cuts your social life

so you don't really have one. And that's hard to do too, especially athletes; they are really social butterflies anyway, myself included.

From talking to the men who thought their athletic participation interfered with their academic performance, I learned that travelling, practicing, and watching films were just a few of the athletes' responsibilities that detracted from the time and energy they devoted to academics. I also discovered that the participants sometimes used their athletic-related time demands to rationalize poor and/or average academic achievements. In the opinion of one such participant:

Sometimes just getting a 2.0 was okay. If I wasn't an athlete and I would get a 2.0 it wouldn't be okay. But I felt like with all the work that I put out--athletic--and I get a 2.0 grade or a 2.5, I felt well that was okay because I have a reason to say why I couldn't get my 3.0s or my 4.0s. 'Cuz I was too busy and sometimes I liked that excuse; "I'm an athlete or we just don't have the time." It's not like I was just making it up; it does happen that you just don't have the time and energy. Sometimes even if you got the time, sometimes that course is so demanding, the running, the hours, the pounding... sometimes you just need time to really recover and you'd be trying to study. I mean it was really hard to do all that.

Of those student-athletes who thought their athletic participation **had** influenced their academic performance, six respondents believed this influence to be positive. According to these men, sport instilled in them a sense of discipline, and kept them busy and out of trouble. In the

words of one participant:

... I wonder in my own mind if I hadn't been doing that [playing football], what else might have influenced my academic career. I think there was an awful lot of that that was positive, even the strict regimentation. If I had to give seven hours a day to football, then I'd better find some time to do a little reading or a little something else. I think it may have helped me keep a little bit of a focus 'cuz I know... As a matter of fact, people that are good friends of mine now, they had no focus when they got here. That's not a judgement at all, it's just they had no focus and I had a little bit of one even if it was boring at times. And I think it may have helped me, believe it or not.

Similarly, another athlete added:

It did. It [athletics] really made me a better student! The main reason was that I knew that I had... I knew that I was gonna spend seven to eight hours a day at football, so I knew that I would have this much time to study and I knew that I had to get my work done. And really the one thing that football taught me was how to budget my time, and that time was really important. A lot of people worked when they were in school and that type of thing, and I think that if you don't work or you don't play sports or you don't have something like that, it would be easier to get bad grades because there's always something else to do besides study.

Although most of the participants thought their academic performance had been influenced in some way by their athletic participation, no consensus could be reached when discussing the impact that academic demands had on sport. Several of the men

admitted there had been times when papers, projects, and exams took priority over athletic practices. One player remembered:

Well a few times it happened because of... I think in \_\_\_\_\_ [major] you had to do projects where you went out and worked with students and did a few things, and that you know a couple times I just... It did I would say after my junior year where I had to take classes where at that point in time I said "Hey, I want to get something out of this besides football," and I decided that you know I have to do that. Some classes would run into weight lifting or whatever in the winter and I just said "Hey, I'm gonna get this done," and usually I think they frowned a little bit in the beginning and then after you said "Hey I'm gonna do this and that's the way it's gonna be." And they would say "okay."

Another participant, a nonscholarship starter, was also known to put his studies ahead of sport. He explained how he handled the situation.

There was a couple times I had to miss practice because of it [academics], but not... I don't know, it's hard to say 'cuz when I'm in a total different boat when you're paying for your school. A lot of people, a lot of black players, are football, football hungry. NFL star and they let a lot of classes slide, you know, they always... football came first before anything else. ... I told 'em "academics come first you know; I'm paying for it and I'm going and I'm the one that if I fail this class, you know, you guys aren't paying me back."

The reactions of the coaching staff to academics taking precedence over athletics were recalled by this former student-athlete:

And they frowned upon academics taking away from football. So if you had a night class that started at 6:00 and practice was getting over at 6, it was like "don't schedule this anymore." They let you do it if was a core class in your major, it was only offered that term, and you were a senior and you needed it and you were graduating. Other than that they were like "sorry, reschedule it."

Final comments regarding the balance between athletic- and academic-related time demands were made by a football player who suggested that neither activity had to suffer if student-athletes planned ahead and managed their time wisely. In his words:

I mean there's certain projects that you have to put a lot of time into, but you actually have a lot of time in the day. And if you don't procrastinate then you can get it done. And really when the major projects come, then you just plan a little more ahead. At least for me that's what I did, so I always... I mean yeah, I had to put some extra in at times, but I don't think it ever pulled away from athletics. It was just time that I would be... instead of watching all the t.v. or whatever, it was given up for studying 'cuz I knew it had to be done.

The idea that athletic performance interfered with academic and occupational planning is not unique to this study, since the majority of the results of research in this field--including that done on women and athletes in various sports--confirms these results (Blann, 1985; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Sowa & Gressard, 1983). The responsibilities associated with the athletic scholarship, in addition to the power coaches have over individuals who receive scholarships may be



partially responsible for this trend; walk-ons, non-starters, and nonscholarship athletes were not as likely to report such interference (Blann, 1985). As a matter of fact, I found that in the current study these men--nonscholarship athletes--were more likely to allow their academic commitments to interfere with their sport-related demands. Similarly, the scholarship athletes who were committed to receiving an education rarely allowed their sport participation to hinder their academic performance. The reward structure for coaches (i.e., being hired/fired based primarily on win/loss record) may also contribute to the way in which athletes juggled their athletic and academic obligation. These coaches may stress winning, over all else, to keep their own job. Athletes who want to remain on scholarship in such situations have little choice but to conform, and often put sport ahead of studies.

Because the majority of the student-athletes felt that their athletic roles took precedence over their academic roles, I wondered why this priority existed. Although most of the men did not start or see much playing time their freshman years, they still received greater reinforcement for their athletic roles. As one athlete explained:

Overall, I'd say being a scholarship athlete of a Northern Lights university, people would, from my background would recognize that. Because I was a Northern Lights player from a small town. I'd have to say the focus was football. Not "how are your classes and your mother?" I don't think that they cared. You know, I would definitely have to say that it was football.

Even a student-athlete who had received awards and recognition for outstanding academic achievement was applauded more for his sport-related performances. He recalled:

... people look at you in the spotlight. They see you out there on the field every Saturday and they say "Oh yeah, that's Will." They never think about... I won \_\_\_\_\_ [academic honor], but nobody remembers me for that. They just remember me for playing football; they don't say anything about academics whatsoever.

Another athlete who had experienced similar treatment appeared to hold society in general responsible for such mixed-up priorities. He offered:

Definitely athletics. You know 'cuz... I don't know, I can't blame the family... Say you have a boy some day and he's playing football and you got the whole dang neighborhood, every day knocking on your door everyday telling you how great your kid is doing. How are you gonna feel? You know what I'm saying? And it goes both ways; they are proud of the academics as well, but at first it's strictly athletics.

It should be noted that the reinforcement patterns described above were not permanent. As some of the men progressed through school, the reinforcement pattern imbalance often became even more skewed. Older student-athletes generally received more playing time, which was accompanied by greater athletic-related time demands and more public recognition; for some it seemed like being a student was taking a back seat to being an athlete. One such athlete reported:

No, it [reinforcement for athletics] increased actually, 'cuz by the time I started playing that was more of the main focus.

For other athletes, however, the academic-athletic balance was restored as they realized the importance of a college education; once they changed priorities, significant others in their lives appeared to follow suit. One catalyst for such a realization was realistic assessments of their athletic talents and chances of professional success, while the second catalyst was first hand experiences with injuries and rehabilitation. One participant described the change that occurred in him after an injury and subsequent operation.

... it was after I blew my knee out. They told me I'd never play again--I'd torn three ligaments--I was like "Oh man, what am I gonna do now?" And I said "Shit, I'm not gonna just lie down." And then I just started taking academics more seriously.

Similarly, another student-athlete was influenced by what he perceived as his chances of making it in professional sport. [I would later learn that his assessment had been incorrect, and that he had played professionally for several years.] He recounted:

... but going into my third year some other guy was playing. I wasn't playing much and I just said "it doesn't look like I'm gonna be an NFL player, I better hit the books." So I got my own place off campus all by myself and started reading my assignments; I read 'em all instead of where before I didn't always read

that stuff, and didn't make myself do it. I just got 2.0s. So I read everything and I got all 3.0s or higher most of that year.

The student-athletes in this study, like those studied by Adler and Adler (1991) received greater overall reinforcement for athletic rather than academic achievements. The women studied by Meyer (1988) however, reported mixed patterns of reinforcement; parents were more worried about academics, while coaches and friends were concerned with athletics. The women's families may have stressed the academic role for several reasons; the lack of post-college sport careers for women, as well as the negative stereotypes sometimes associated with female athletes may have led the parents to de-emphasize the importance of athletics (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Meyer, 1988).

Conversely, athletics were reinforced to a greater degree by the support systems of the men. The relative scarcity and celebrity status of student-athletes on college campuses may be one reason why friends were more concerned about athletic accomplishments; after all, they were all students, but few of them were also athletes. Similarly, the visibility and corresponding importance of sport in society in general, and in the BDU community in particular, may also have contributed to these reinforcement patterns. It should be noted that BDU athletics receive a great deal of media attention from daily city and school newspapers, as well as three local television stations, perhaps prompting the athletes to bask in reflected glory. Finally, sport as a

vehicle to upward mobility may have prompted family members and others in the student-athletes' life to stress athletics (Coakley, 1990; Edwards, 1984).

As the interviews progressed, it became obvious to me that participating in a big-time intercollegiate athletic program had not been easy for the men in the sample. The good news, however, was that the athletes had been aware of what was expected of them as student-athletes. The bad news, a great deal was expected. Specifically, 83% of the basketball players claimed that they had been made aware--during their first year--what was expected of them as a BDU student-athlete. The BDU athletic director and an NCAA representative discussed conference and national guidelines, while the coach addressed team policies. The following comments best summarize how the basketball players remembered and perceived these policies:

That was always something Frank stressed; it wasn't the university or anybody representing the university as a whole, that was just something that our coach expected of us. What it did was, it just helped us conduct ourselves properly when we were out on the court. Especially when we were away on the road and then on television. We didn't get into scrapes with the referees, we let him handle that. We didn't get into fisticuffs or fights with the other teams. We played fair, we played clean. And somehow or another we were always able to avoid any altercations. We tried to carry ourselves... Frank didn't like facial hair, although he allowed us to have moustaches. We tried to project a positive image. We didn't wear

beards, we didn't wear extremely long hair and stuff like that. So there was a code of ethics that we were expected to adhere to, but it was Frank's.

The majority of the football players had also been made aware of their responsibilities as student-athletes. For them, however, the discussions appeared to center on grade requirements. The coach's words as reported by one participant:

"Stay out of trouble and pass your classes. Go to class, do what's expected of ya! Study and pass your classes."

Several of the football players mentioned a class that all freshman student-athletes were required to attend. Although the focus of this class was purported to be study habits, time management, and the like, little time had apparently been devoted to these academic-related topics. As one football player recalled:

Yeah, we had a class that we had to take our freshman year of, um, being a student-athlete, I think, and what was expected of us and study habits. Supposed to be something about your study habits, but it ended up being "you're representing us, and..."

In addition to meeting certain academic requirements, the football players were also expected to be positive role models and represent BDU with dignity. One participant reported:

... they didn't really say anything as far as "we expect you to do this and expect you to do that." But to a certain extent you could kind of feel that if there was a need to go to a

children's hospital per se, or do something voluntary or whatever, you were expected to do that, yeah. But that wasn't something that they just came out and said to you; you could pick-up on that real easy.

Another football player thought the coach had been much more explicit about what he expected from his players.

Tracy often says "you're a role model, make sure you don't mess up when you're in public or in social life. Don't be a goon, don't stand out in a crowd, don't be an asshole." Or something like that. He was always like "you always have to be looking out."

Although the majority of the athletes in the sample agreed that they had been told what was expected of them as a BDU scholarship athlete, several claimed that nothing had been mentioned about their responsibilities. In their opinions the university could have: put more emphasis on academics, given student-athletes more responsibility in their own lives, and forced coaches to provide more than "lip service" to academics. In the words of a basketball player:

You had a freshman orientation course and they would mention a few things. Maybe I didn't pay attention, but I didn't hear what you could probably say to young guys or females--women--coming to this school. "Sports is one thing, academics are another thing, and the little things that you do can cause a national scandal." That wasn't stressed as much, it was stressed a little, but it probably could be stressed a little bit more. Maybe in letter form, even if it was a form letter from the president

of the university or the athletic director or something like that. Something formal would make more of an impression.

Differences in perception existed among the teams as to what was expected of them as student-athletes. Specifically, the basketball players were reminded to stay clear of public controversy, while the football players were notified that they were expected to keep their grades up and then stay out of trouble. The basketball coach may have been particularly concerned about media attention because his team had recently won a national championship, and the team was sure to receive a fair amount of publicity, good or bad. Similarly, the quality of the student-athletes he recruited may have already been academically motivated, and thus did not need further reminders.

The football players, on the other hand, had been at BDU for five weeks without having to worry about academics. Subsequently, the coaches may have needed to remind the young men from time to time why they were in college in the first place. Also, a series of losing seasons during the tenure of many of the participants may have forced the coaches to recruit academically marginal players, who may have needed the constant reminders to study. Finally, recent scrapes with the law which were reported by the media may have prompted the football coaches to be ultra-sensitive to the off-field behavior of their players, and the kind of scrutiny and embarrassment that such conduct could bring to both the football program and the athletic department.



As mentioned earlier, the athletes often devoted 30 to 40 hours a week during the season to their respective sports. But like all individuals, these men could not be expected to spend all their time working; they too needed some recreation. When not practicing or preparing for games, the student-athletes spent their time much the same way nonathletes probably spent their spare time. Frequenting parties and/or bars, studying, and playing games were just a few of the things the athletes did on their own time. Socializing and partying were by far the most commonly mentioned pastime. As one participant admitted:

... so I was out socializing a lot. I mean we had one of these guys that was president of the Varsity Club--quite a scammer--he had VIP passes to get into any bar that we wanted to get into. I was hooked into this fraternity group and I went to their parties. And of course all the wild football parties. And I had my share of football parties as well. We had a good reputation from the parties we had... just socializing and having a good time.

Another former athlete recalled:

Probably drank... alcohol would be involved in about anything else I was doing; socializing, that type of deal.

Studying appeared to be the second priority for the men in the sample, with playing games (i.e., cards, golf, frisbee, etc.) capturing a close third. When discussing what he did with his free time, a football player said:

Mostly study, and when I got my studying done I would go out and play some wiffleball. That was one of my favorites.

Similarly, a basketball player in the sample gave the following account of how he occupied his free time:

Clown around in the dorm with some very nice people. We used to play a lot of cards, so after we'd get the studying done we used to play a lot of cards. And that was a great pastime for like three years. Then backgammon caught on and became real popular, and so we started playing a lot of that.

Finally, several of the student-athletes mentioned spending free weekends at home, visiting girlfriends who had had been left behind.

#### Combining the Roles of Student and Athlete

Results of this study and others (Lanning, 1982; Remer, Tongate, & Watson, 1978) have shown that student-athletes often face more responsibilities and pressures than their nonathletic peers. For example, student-athletes must abide by the twelve credit eligibility rule which means they must be enrolled in twelve credit hours each term/semester in order to be eligible for athletic competition. Athletes have been described as "majoring in eligibility" (Brede & Camp, 1987), but this was not the case with most of the athletes in this study. Realistic perceptions about their own athletic abilities and the resulting chances of making a professional team appeared to be key reasons why the men had not taken courses simply to remain eligible for competition. As one

athlete remarked:

I was a business major and I knew I wanted to graduate from the college of business. You can tell after you've been here a couple terms that pro football's a long ways off, and you better get a degree.

Similarly, another participant explained:

I took academics a little bit more serious than that. And I'm sure there are some guys who did [major in eligibility]; like guys that were going pro or whatever. You know, they were just like "phew," blow off the whole last term, flunk all their classes and just play ball. And they did it and they ended up playing pro ball.

Conversely, other participants felt that they **had** focused on eligibility at the expense of an education during their college careers. As one athlete recalled:

Oh yeah, yeah... There were many times I did that [focused on eligibility], 'cuz it was so easy just to do what I had to get by. To compensate for being tired I could just do what I wanted to just get by... I didn't really feel like I had to have the higher grades, you know. I wanted to get my 2.0s, 2.5s, and I was satisfied. I really didn't go the distance as far as that went, and I said it was a lot easier that way because if I was tired I could study just enough to do that... I didn't have to stay up later to....

Another athlete blamed the entire intercollegiate athletic system for forcing students to prioritize athletics. He offered his opinion and recalled how he had been led to concentrate on eligibility.

Especially through the first couple of years... It's all structured to keep you eligible. It's no long term plan; the immediate, "let's get this term so you don't screw up next term." I never recall sitting down with anyone and saying "Okay, what would you like to do when you leave here." You know that never was a focus, it was always what classes are you good in, what classes are you not good in? You know, that sort of thing; "are you good in math, can you handle math, how good are you in math?" Stuff like that.

While reflecting on the "majoring in eligibility" idea, some of the men began to discuss their own ineligibility experiences. The majority of the student-athletes in the sample claimed that there had never been the possibility that they would be academically ineligible, thus they felt that athletic department personnel must have been doing their jobs. However, the eligibility of 38% of the participants had been in jeopardy at one time or another during their college careers, an experience which each man could describe in great detail. One former athlete recalled his brush with ineligibility.

Yeah, the third term I was real close. I got down to a 1.8 or something like that. I was pretty close; I was worried. I just totally got lazy spring term, freshman year. I didn't do anything. Blew off one class and I had a lot of football guys that blew off psych. And it was way on the other side of campus and we kinda did our own scheduling and we really didn't know where the building was and we tried to talk to the professor. We tried to do some extra credit or something and we just flunked that class. And then I had a bad grade in another class; just got lazy. I wasn't

that worried 'cuz I knew that I could go to summer school if I needed to pick up some credits.

While the man quoted above enrolled in summer school to ensure his eligibility, a teammate went so far as to change academic majors so that he would be allowed to continue his athletic participation.

I think I had one... after my spring term of my sophomore year, I think--if I remember right--I failed a math class; and I had enough credits but yet I think that I had declared \_\_\_\_\_ [major] at that point, so I had to... I wasn't to a point where I had to stay in \_\_\_\_\_ [major], so I had to switch out of that to become eligible because I guess one of the... You had to be making progress, and because I didn't pass that math course I wasn't making progress for that term. So I think I had to switch out of that academic area into something else just for a term. So it was just kind of a loop-hole I guess.

Although a good portion of the participants claimed their eligibility had been in jeopardy at one time or another, only two of the men in the sample--one basketball player and one football player--had ever been academically ineligible during their college careers. In both instances the men failed to meet the twelve credit per term minimum. Both of them refused to accept full responsibility for their misfortunes; one of the men blamed his coaches for not double-checking his credit load, while the other athlete partially blamed a professor:

I had a major mistake about it... taking twelve credits and I think I flunked social science--that was one of the university requirements. I

took a social science course with an instructor that I just didn't get along with and I avoided him like the plague and I wound up getting a 0.0 in his class. So that caused me to only have eight or nine eligibility credits. So I could dress with the team on the at home [games], but I couldn't travel with 'em.

The discussion of eligibility evolved into a reflection by the athletes on if and how their athletic participation affected their education. Most of the participants thought their athletic involvement had helped them to get an education. Several of the men in the study had not considered going to college until they realized there was a possibility that they would be able to continue their athletic participation at a higher level. As one athlete explained:

... I don't know if I would've attended college if I didn't play sports. It wasn't the situation where it was harped on me to go to college. It wasn't discussed within my family, not until I became good in football. When all of a sudden it's like "wow, you're gonna play from here; you're gonna go from high school and play in college." It's like all of the sudden "yeah, you're gonna go to college." So that way if I didn't play sports then I wouldn't have gone to college.

Three other student-athletes emphasized the financial aspects of an athletic scholarship, claiming that they may not have had the opportunity to attend college without such assistance. One man admitted:

I don't know if I would've gotten this education had I not had the athletic ability. I would've gone to college, but it would have been



somewhere else. It wouldn't have been BDU. It probably would've been \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_, maybe \_\_\_\_\_; 'cuz those were in-state schools and my folks would've been able to help with tuition. But I think a Northern Lights university like BDU, especially because of the size and the programs offered, allowed me to get a little bit better [education].

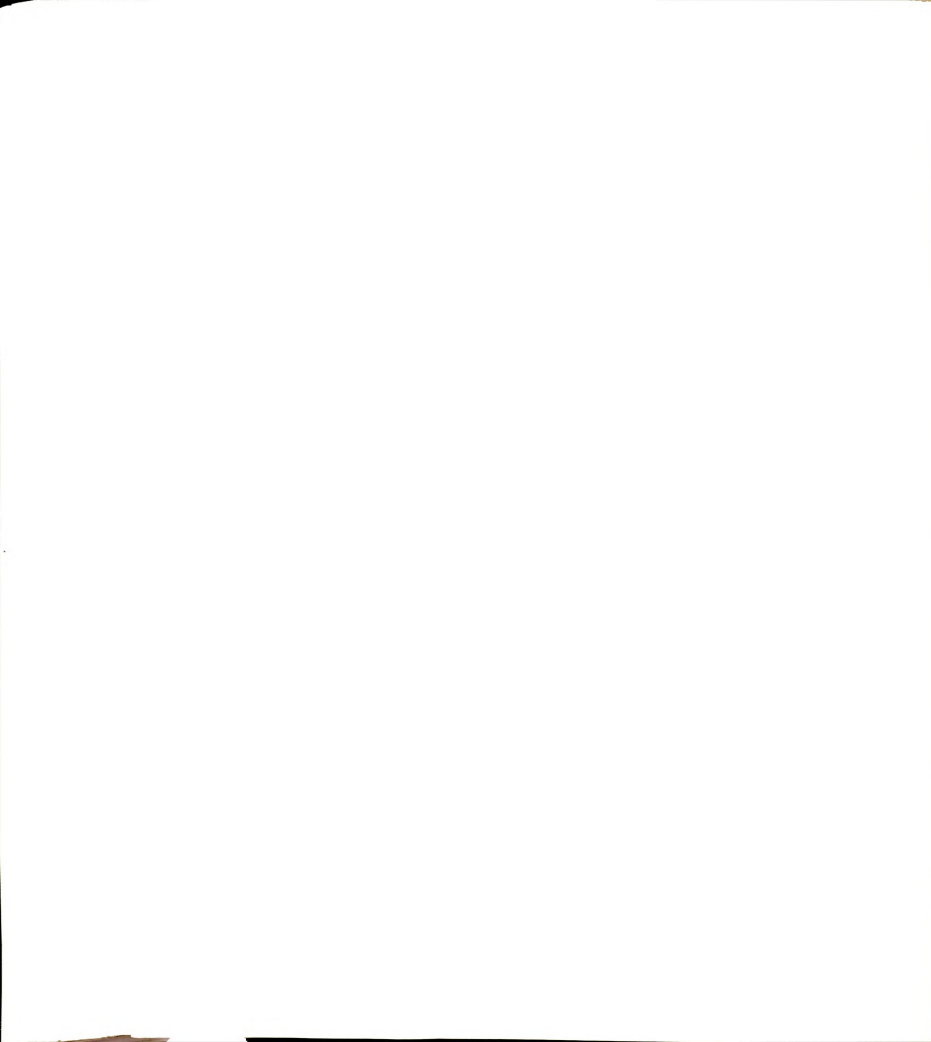
Twenty percent of the men mentioned that their athletic participation had enhanced their overall college experience. A former football player elaborated on this concept:

I think it [athletic participation] broadened my education; the whole idea of where education occurs. A lot of it does not occur in the classroom. So in that case, yeah; [in terms of] a degree, maybe not. ... I think I learned as much if not more having been involved in the football program about business operating, interpersonal relationships, and how I'd manage those wrong and get in snags and trying to understand other people's motives, being able to respond to those, and that kind of thing. So education-wise it was a wonderful education...

Similarly, a basketball player also felt that athletics had enhanced his college experience. In his words:

... it helped create a balance for me at the major university because--as I said--I just can't imagine being 100% student. Basketball for me was an excellent, an excellent sideline... I imagine I still would have graduated, but you probably wouldn't hear me speaking so highly of the experience as I do now.





Most of the men in the study thought their athletic participation had had a positive influence on their educations; a few of the participants, however, claimed that their participation hindered their educations. They cited the time devoted to sport-related activities as well as the psychological pressures faced by student-athletes as the two disadvantages of intercollegiate athletic participation.

Since the majority of the men agreed that their athletic participation had helped them to get an education, I wondered if they felt at all indebted to their coaches or BDU for providing such assistance. Specifically, twenty of the student-athletes did not feel like they owed the coaches or the university anything because they were on scholarship. A football player stated:

I didn't really feel like I owed it to anyone. I did the best... I mean anybody who's anybody is gonna do the best they can because they wanna play. And there's so much competition that you have to. So I owed it to myself, I didn't owe it to anybody. The coaches that were there didn't give me what I have, I got what I have 'cuz I earned it. So I didn't feel like I owed anybody anything.

The majority of the men in the study also disagreed with the perception voiced in other research, the idea that athletes are often forced to play when injured and/or sick (Messner, 1985).

... I mean there's days when I came in and was tired and didn't feel like playing, of course, but [I] never really felt like they were putting any pressure on me or anything like that.

While the basketball and football players reacted similarly to the question of playing while injured, the comments of two athletes stood out from all the rest. One basketball player [who went on to play in a professional league] viewed his athletic scholarship and college sport participation as helping him to receive nationwide recognition, thus increasing his chance of a professional career. He explained:

I didn't say "go win for the [black and white]" you know, it was "I wanna play, I wanna win, I, I, I." ... And then there was a self-serving aspect as well. There was the possibility of furthering your career; recognition, notoriety, and getting a job in the future with a company like I have now. Yes, there was definitely an allegiance to the university--performing well--but most of them probably from a self-serving aspect.

The comments of a football player also differed from the rest of the participants, as he felt that BDU owed him--and other athletes--for what they were bringing to the university in terms of revenue, notoriety, and the like. As he saw it:

... I mean they're doing this for the university and the university is making all this money and everything like that. And I think that we had the opinion that they owed us more than we owed them.

Six athletes, unlike those cited above, described a sense of obligation to their coaches and/or the university as a result of their athletic scholarship. The fear of scholarship revocation contributed to these feelings. One student-athlete articulated:

Yeah, I kinda felt like they were paying for something for me, and I felt like I kinda owed them something. Yeah, I kinda felt like I owed it to 'em. Yeah, your scholarship would be taken away if you didn't do it.

In contrast to the majority of the participants, another athlete--a football player--described how he had been forced to play with an injury and then pressured to give up his scholarship.

It was required of me. Threats. They insisted that I play with a muscle pull and deal with it at the end of the season. It calcified and I couldn't do anything. It was pretty bad. At the end of four years they were trying to get me out. They were going to discontinue my scholarship to make room for someone else. I panicked! [Joe] Martin [athletic academic advisor] helped me get a medical excuse and continue on scholarship.

Finally, a basketball player explained how years of sports participation indirectly taught him to feel obligated to his coaches and teammates. He elaborated:

As an athlete early on you're conditioned to "no pain, no gain" and all that b.s., you know. You don't even think about not going to practice. I mean I've missed days of a job that pays me whatever because I've been under the weather, and I didn't miss a practice in my life. I was never late for a practice, I never missed a practice and I've been late to work, you know. You just didn't do it. And it was an obligation because it was the coaches. It's just the mentality of the athletes. You knew you had to be there and I guess if you didn't want to let the team down...

This quote appears to support the popular opinion that sport prepares athletes for life in the "real world."

Overall, there were both similarities and differences between the results of this study and the results of other studies examining the experiences of college athletes. Specifically, both the men in this sample and the women studied by Meyer (1988) felt that being student-athletes helped them to obtain educations. The quality of the institutions attended by these athletes, as well as the costs of attending such schools may have been responsible for these findings; many of the athletes in both studies claimed that they would have attended local or community colleges had they not received athletic scholarships.

While the men in this study were paying for their educations through athletic grants-in-aid, they did not feel indebted to BDU or to their respective coaches for recruiting them. As a matter of fact, several of the men realized that BDU was making an enormous amount of money from football and basketball, and thus felt like they deserved **more** compensation than merely tuition, room, and board. Such was not the case with the women studied by Meyer (1988), as they often felt like they owed something to their coaches for recruiting them and giving them a scholarship. Several explanations may exist for the differences that emerged between the male and female athletes. The revenue-producing nature of men's football and basketball, as well as its commodification and commercialization (Coakley, 1990; Sage, 1990)

may be partially responsible for the men's feelings that they owed nothing to their coaches or the university; the revenue generated from their sports supported the athletic department and all of the nonrevenue sports, thus, the athletic department was more than making up for their scholarship investments. Similarly, the knowledge that their coaches were earning money from speaking engagements, radio and/or television shows, and shoe contracts may have contributed to the men's "I don't owe them anything" attitudes. Conversely, the female athletes in Meyer's (1988) study may have realized that they were being supported by the university and/or athletic department, and thus may have felt obligated to give something in return. Or, as female athletes in a male dominated sports world, they may have felt grateful for the chance to compete!

The win/loss records of the various teams in questions may also help explain the different levels of obligation experienced by the athletes. The men's basketball teams examined in the current study and by the Adlers (1991) were quite successful, perhaps contributing to the men's feelings that they were earning their scholarships. The football teams examined in the current study had also experienced success over the years. The women's basketball and volleyball teams studied by Meyer (1988), however, had been experiencing slumps and losing seasons. Consequently, the female athletes may have felt like they were not

pulling their weight or earning their scholarships, and thus the coaches deserved something more in return for their investment.

The fact that few of the student-athletes in the current sample felt they were majoring in eligibility is in direct opposition to the results reported by the Adlers (1991) who studied male basketball players, and by Brede and Camp (1987) who studied Division I football and basketball players. Several reasons may exist for the differences in these studies. First, the definition of "majoring in eligibility" may vary from study to study; Researcher Smith may think that enrolling in summer school classes to make up deficiencies constitutes majoring in eligibility, while Researcher Jones may believe enrolling in meaningless albeit easy classes constitutes majoring in eligibility. This is another example of how the construction of meaning may influence individual interpretations. Second, differences in coaches may be partly responsible for the differences across studies. As Coakley (1990) has suggested, coaches are often unconcerned about the quality of education that their athletes receive, focusing more on eligibility and graduation. This appeared to be the case in the Adler's (1991) study, and may indeed have been true in the Brede and Camp (1987) study as well. While this may be incongruent with statements made by athletes earlier in this study, in comparison to the coaches in the other two studies the coaches in this sample may have been extremely concerned. Also, the athletes in the current study may have had less athletic talent

than those in the other two studies and may therefore have decided to concentrate on academics. Similarly, the athletes may have realized at an earlier age that their chances of making it to the professional ranks were slim (Edwards, 1984; Lapchick, 1987); watching other, more talented teammates struggle in the professional ranks may have convinced them to get their degrees. Finally, the responses to the idea of majoring in eligibility may have been influenced by the nature of the sample. The perceptions and experiences of the men in this study--all of whom were college graduates and volunteered to participate in the study--may not be representative of the perceptions and experiences of all former intercollegiate student-athletes.

As reported above, few of the athletes in the current sample ever felt they were majoring in eligibility; similarly, few of the men faced the possibility of academic ineligibility. Specifically, 38% of the participants had ever had their eligibility in jeopardy while 7%--or two athletes--had ever been declared academically ineligible. These results are similar to those obtained by Brede and Camp (1987) who reported that one-third of the Division I basketball and football players in their sample experienced difficulty in meeting eligibility requirements. Coaches interested primarily in graduation rather than the quality of the education, who pushed their athletes into manageable yet uninteresting classes, may explain the results obtained in these three studies (Adler & Adler, 1991; Brede & Camp, 1987; Eitzen & Sage, 1989). Perhaps the student-



athletes in these three studies were simply intelligent and/or hard working, and thus did not have to worry about academic ineligibility.

The fact that the African-American athletes in the study were intent on obtaining their degrees, and the fact that few had ever encountered eligibility difficulties is contrary to the reports of many researchers (Edwards, 1984; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Lapchick, 1989), who claim that African-American athletes tend to sacrifice an education for the possibility of a professional athletic career. The importance the families of the men in this study placed on education, positive nonsport role models, and the realization that a professional athletic career would not last forever may have contributed the pro-academic stance exhibited by these men.

#### Attentiveness to Educational and Occupational Planning

Research has shown that men participating in Division I revenue-producing sports tend to be less concerned with educational and occupational planning than their nonathletic peers (Blann, 1985; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Nelson, 1982; Sowa & Gressard, 1983). Thus, I was determined to discover how attentive to academic and career plans the student-athletes in the current sample had been. Overall, I found that most of the men had been moderately attentive to academic and/or career planning. One of these athletes attributed his lackadaisical attitude to his athletic participation.

Not as much as I could have been. I think it was just the whole atmosphere of being in college and playing football; everything's kind of done for you. You just think that everybody's gonna take care of you when you're done. You don't realize that until you graduate and the door's slammed in your... Your whole career is almost planned as far as where you're gonna be, what you're gonna do, what time the bus leaves. All this stuff is all handled. And the alumni are always giving you jobs in the summer and doing all that kind of stuff. And you think that when you graduate someone is gonna hook you up and take care of you. So, I don't think you put as much emphasis on that as you should.

The student-athletes who had been moderately concerned about their academic and career plans cited a variety of reasons to help explain their level of interest; those who admitted they had not been at all attentive, however, mentioned only one reason... the possibility of professional athletic careers. As one man admitted:

Not as attentive as I would have liked to have been. I feel like I kind of sidetracked. I kind of saw somewhat of a professional career in football starting to develop and that kind of sidetracked me a little bit and I kind of said "well I think I can play professional football and you can make a lot of money and do this and do that." And that took my mind off my studies as far as I was concerned.

Similarly, a basketball player in the sample was ready to start interviewing for jobs when he received his chance to play professionally.

He recalled:

Towards the end of my career they [academic and career plans] were becoming very focused. I was going to do my interviewing and such in the spring until I was given the notion that I might be drafted and then I thought "well I'll just hold off; I'll put that off." I couldn't think about anything but playing basketball at that time.

Conversely, another athlete realized that his own lack of direction had contributed to his indifferent attitude toward educational and occupational planning.

My goals were not detailed enough; very broad and general. You just need to talk to somebody about it. A counselor or whoever, and try to identify it a little bit more. Someone who'd ask those needling questions, those tough questions. Those questions sometimes you don't wanna have to answer. They're real life questions, that's what they are.

Overall, the participants had been more concerned about education than a career. They assumed that as college graduates plenty of jobs would be waiting for them when they finished. Comments made by a basketball player illustrate this mindset:

I felt like it was important that I graduate... but I always felt like that job situation would probably take care of itself as long as I graduated. I never really worried about getting a real good job or anything like that. I was lulled into thinking that this was something that just came with having a degree.

These feelings, and consequent perceptions, indicate a need for career counseling for--at the very least--intercollegiate football and basketball players.

Since the men had not been very attentive to educational and/or career planning, I was surprised to learn that they had been unsatisfied with their academic performance (i.e., grades and overall grade point averages). Surprisingly, few of the participants mentioned the time demands associated with their athletic participation as reasons for their poor academic performance. The student-athletes did cite, however, a lack of motivation and/or determination, as well as a lack of emphasis placed on academics as reasons for their mediocre grades. The following comments made by a football player supports this contention:

... that's nobody's fault but my own. In the ideal I would have gotten a much higher grade point by giving a darn, applying myself.

Not all of the men had been dissatisfied with their grades. In fact, several appeared quite satisfied by their academic accomplishments. One athlete who had been pleased with his grades described the routine he used to obtain those grades.

I graduated with a 2.5, and that's what I tried to get. I didn't work harder and I didn't do a lot of studying. I always went to class, and I always took notes, and I always paid attention. After that I closed the book and went to practice, and went home and watched t.v. or went and did something.

Another student-athlete who had been satisfied with his academic performance was particularly pleased considering the time constraints he had been under. As he explained:

I graduated with almost a 3.5. Yeah, I was satisfied with that. In fact, I guess I was proud of that because you did devote most of your time to athletics and I guess that's an accomplishment.

Although few of the participants had been satisfied with their academic accomplishments through the years, most of the student-athletes reported that their attitude toward academics had changed for the better over the years. The realization that their chances of making a professional team were slim as well as their knowledge of the short-lived nature of such careers prompted many student-athletes to take their studies more seriously. In the words of one participant:

I got more serious actually, 'cuz I realized... I didn't think my chances of playing in the NBA were great. And even if they were, I wouldn't last long.

Similarly, another athlete [who went on to play his sport professionally] described how his attitude toward academics had changed during his college tenure.

... very much more serious by my senior year. I'm a realist, you know. I knew that I was gonna try and play after college, but I knew that the odds were not good. So my senior year I was like very serious about getting my degree and what the job market was, and where I was gonna get a job and everything else. You know it changed 180 degrees from

freshman and senior year. Freshman year you're looking at football and senior... of course everything is going well if you're playing and you're getting recognized, and all of a sudden you gotta think about "when I'm all done where's it lead then?"

For other athletes, the change in attitude had been due to a realization of the importance of a college education. As one participant explained:

When I was a freshman I just went through classes because I knew I had to. Then when I started to get into my junior and senior years it wasn't so much that I had to, I knew what I needed and then I knew that it was gonna benefit me--that I wasn't just gonna be eligible--but it was gonna be based on me getting out of there and going on. So it got a lot more important than just passing the classes.

Similarly, another athlete recounted:

I think I got a little more serious towards the end because of the fact that I saw the people around me interviewing and trying to get better grades for a resume, and that kind of thing. Football was done after the fall of my senior year, and I spent more time trying to graduate.

The attitudes of most of the participants toward academics had changed for the better over the years; several of the student-athletes, however, claimed that their attitudes had not been altered. For approximately one-third of the men in the latter group, academics had always been important, while another one-third reported that education had never been important. Still another student-athlete knew that his athletic participation would help him in the working world, and thus saw

little reason to put a great amount of emphasis on academics. He explained:

I always found myself saying "what good is this gonna do me in the real world?" I knew that football was going to open a lot of doors, and once the door is open having my degree and being able to articulate what's on my mind... not put my foot in my mouth once the door was open. So I knew that football would lend... it lends instant credibility...

As illustrated above, most of the student-athletes in the study became more interested in the quality of their education as they progressed through college. I later learned that for most of the men this concern with educational and/or occupational plans began around their junior years. It was during this time that many of the student-athletes looked realistically at their chances of playing professional sport; the reality of this situation convinced many of the men [even those who would go on to play professionally] to become more involved in their academic and career plans. As one student-athlete reported:

That third year. We had a disastrous football season--we were 3 and 8--and I didn't play much. I was a bench warmer on a shitty team. That was Roger's first year. So I said "jeez," and I'm glad I did. I just hit the books. I had like a 3.5 grade point average. I had 16 credits, I read every book, and I kick[ed] butt. And I said "this is great!"

Similarly, another athlete stated:





I think that it happened my junior year. ... I played and started three years and everything, and you hear all these "you're not gonna play professional," and I didn't have that much confidence. And some of the guys before me got cut and stuff and I didn't want to worry. And I wanted something to fall back on. And that's where my mom and dad started really saying "hey, start thinking about something else just besides this."

There were many other reasons offered as to why the men became concerned about academics and/or a career. For one man the constant threat of academic ineligibility served as a motivator. As he recalled:

[It happened] about mid-sophomore year. That was it; from then on it was "hey, you've got a choice." ... [I was] fed up with always being on the line [academically], that wore on me. ... the humiliation of being on the fence.

For another student-athlete a change in coaches prompted him to become more concerned about his school work and an eventual career.

[It was] junior year when there was a change in coaches. [I was] supposed to be starting, but then with the new coach [I] was 5th flanker. Thought that was unfair; played as hard as I could. [I] was busting ass, but what was I getting in return?

Yet another athlete became focused on academics as the result of an injury. He recounted:

... it happened as I was laying in the hospital bed right after my second operation--which ended my career. I said "it's time to buckle down now," and I still had time. And it was the

term right after that when I picked up a second major because I knew... My surgeon said "we put ya back together, you'll be fine; you'll be able to walk and run and play with your kids when you're 40, but I strongly advise you against ever playing football again." Because if something happens to one of your knees"--and I've had surgery on both--"I can't guarantee that..." So I thought about it and I talked it over with my family and we decided the best thing for me to do was to go for the education. So the very next term I went in and I said "um, what can I pick up?" So I added another major.

Not all of the student-athletes in the sample experienced attitude changes in college; for some the change had occurred earlier. Several of the men claimed that the value of education was something that their family had instilled in them at a very early age; they had always been concerned about receiving a solid education. In addition, one athlete had seen the struggles endured by his brothers who had not gone on to college, and thus became convinced of the importance of a college education. He elaborated:

That was before I went to college. I knew because my two older brothers had dropped out of high school and I was finding out how hard it was for them. Just because every time I'd see them they'd be doing some different odd job, whereas all my friends' parents and brothers had gone through high school and into college and gotten a job where they had their own house and a car, and could live what I thought would be a normal life, being able to pay all their bills. So in that respect I



guess I was almost lucky because my brothers didn't have the bonus of graduating from high school.

Another topic that came up during this discussion of educational and occupational planning was the academic majors of the men involved in the study. The academic majors of the participants ranged from engineering to education, with the two most popular majors of the student-athletes being communications and business. The popularity of the communications major may have been due in part to the fact that students enrolled in that degree program needed only 28 credits in communication courses; this allowed them to fill the rest of their schedules with electives. Similarly, several of the men in the study had hoped to pursue careers in business upon graduation, but could not meet the requirements for admission into the business college. Therefore, the liberal credit guidelines in the communications department allowed them to take their electives in the more interesting and less demanding of the business courses.

All of the men declared majors in either their sophomore or junior years, often switching from no preference majors to their intended degree programs. Few of the participants reported pressure to postpone declaring a major in order to avoid "progress toward a degree" requirements. You may remember that during their first few semesters on campus, the student-athletes received considerable help from athletic academic advisors in choosing their courses. Once the men declared



majors, however, they became primarily responsible for course selection, relying on advisors in their academic major for advice and guidance.

It was during this discussion of academic majors and course selection that I learned that the participants thought very few of their courses helped them in their careers. Specifically, most of the student-athletes thought only a handful of the courses they had taken actually had practical implications in their subsequent careers. As one athlete reported:

... ever popular humanities, I didn't have a lot of use for them. And I don't think that that really helped me out a lot. Natural science; I think that it's great to get a well-rounded education, but unless you're gonna be a scientist it's not gonna help you. Um, social sciences; some did, some didn't. I mean "The Plight of the Eskimo," and that kind of stuff is not gonna help you a lot. But it gets you to understand some other cultures. So, I would say that the required classes probably would prepare you better than your elective classes.

Another athlete who did not think that any of his classes helped him in his life after college expressed a pragmatic view of education.

None! I don't believe anything I took did anything to prepare me for a career afterwards. I took classes to graduate. I wanted a business degree. I knew I'd probably end up in sales or management or doing something like that. I think it's tough correlating what you learn in a book to what's actually happening in the real world.



While the athletes did not feel that many of their classes had value for the future, they--the basketball players in particular--did think that the entire college experience had proved valuable to their post-college careers. As one man explained:

... but I think what college does is show that you have the ability to learn. You know what I mean? And that's really what corporations are looking for. ... if you have the ability to learn, pick up things. That's what they're looking for. But you don't learn that until you're out.

Similarly, another participant justified his opinion with the following comments.

Probably none of 'em [the classes], to be honest. Let me explain why I say that. The experience has helped immensely, has got me whatever success that I've been able to attain. But the classes themselves, and what I perhaps learned in the classes probably has not made one difference one way or the other. But just the experience... having to achieve a certain level, having to put forth an effort, having been disciplined enough to do whatever I was able to do in the classroom certainly has helped me now that I'm out in the working world.

Finally, a football player asserted:

I think in my particular case what it amounts to [is] that football gave me mental toughness and my degree just lending credibility that I'm serious and I'm not illiterate. And if nothing else, it showed that I am disciplined enough to... I guess when it's all said and done a lot of times when you get a degree what it shows



is that you have discipline and a lot of people, people who don't have a degree haven't necessarily proved that.

Overall then, the student-athletes did not think that their specific courses had helped them in their post-college careers. Psychology classes, however, were mentioned by many of the participants as being useful after college in terms of their value for interacting and dealing with people. Several of the men also commented that they had never thought about their college courses in terms of value for the future; they thought it was a good question.

As discussed earlier, most of the student-athletes in the study thought that their athletic participation had influenced their academic performance. Conversely, a slight majority of the participants did not think that their career goals had been influenced by their athletic participation; they would have pursued the same careers if they had not been involved in sports. In fact, several student-athletes claimed that their sport participation assisted them in their occupational planning. In the words of one such individual:

I learned probably the biggest thing I learned, that I liked people and that I got along with people well. I work well with others. I was captain of the scout team a couple of years, of all the younger guys. And that did it, kinda pushed me towards public relations, sales, something of that...

Of those men whose career goals had been affected by their athletic participation, lack of time, focus on eligibility requirements, and



the search for manageable academic majors were frequently mentioned as reasons for such interference. As a basketball player--who appeared to major in eligibility--recalled:

I didn't have the time [to be a physiology major], and I didn't want to run the risk of not being eligible. So here's your eligibility coming into the picture once again. Yeah, 'cuz I could have flunked physiology and calculus.

Similarly, a football player reported:

... I had the same thing where my credit limitations dictated what I could do and what I couldn't do. You know I could only carry... "It's a fall and it's a busy fall and I'm a freshman, you know," this is some kid saying this: "I could only take 'X' number of credits but the class I need for next year is only given in... and I gotta take these other classes so I can't take that one or..." You fall behind in credits and you gotta transfer majors because they give you more credit points for what you got. That's what it is, that's what influences most athletes.

Finally, another football player described the educational and eventual career sacrifices he had made to continue his athletic participation.

I had to do that somewhat to my education degree. They had different programs--multiple perspectives--and I had to go to a standard program where I had control of where my classes are and when they gonna be and the times. With the other programs you had no control; you joined a program, you'd participate in classes and stay with the same bond of people throughout the whole program. And you got to know people and interact with 'em. Then I think that you would



learn more because you are more comfortable and you're with people a long time. Course I had to stick with the standard, but I think that I would've learned a little bit more, but that's the way it goes. Sacrifice I guess.

A final topic examined in this section on the attentiveness of the student-athletes to their educational and occupational plans, was their perceived strengths and weaknesses as students. The most frequent strength cited by the participants was their discipline and/or motivation.

As one athlete articulated:

Probably just determination to get through the classes. I think that all went back to athletics because you had to do it. You didn't really have a choice, and I think athletics, a lot of it was the same way. You don't really have the choice. You have to have an education. You have to have a degree if you want to go on 'cuz if you don't have it you're not gonna go on. It's one of those things where some people love it and some don't. And I really didn't, but I knew it was a necessity, so it just gave me the determination to get through it.

Other educational strengths mentioned by the student-athletes were: class attendance, retention of material, good test-cramming abilities, time management skills, and the ability to bounce back. A basketball player elaborated on this last point:

Being able to bounce back. If you bomb a test or a paper it's easier to buckle and not be able to get back from it. But I think being able to bounce back and just being able to keep on going. It's really hard sometimes. I think about it now, there were times when I just



wanted to quit. Something inside you just keeps going, you get through because I guess in the end it pays off.

In addition to discussing their strengths as students, the men were also asked to address their weaknesses. Some of the same things mentioned when examining strengths were also reported when exploring weaknesses. These included motivation, dedication, procrastination, and time management. Test-taking abilities, organization, and confidence were also cited as weaknesses. One man claimed that football had been his primary weakness as a student. He explained:

Football. Football's my greatest weakness. I blew too much off on football. You know every time I would have something bad go wrong or I didn't want to study, "you know I'm a football player, I don't have to do that." That was my biggest... I never wanted to be quoted or stereotyped as a football player, but as soon as I had a weakness, soon as I had anything... "ah, blame it on football," you know, that's the way it worked.

Yet another student-athlete reported that socializing and spending time with friends had been his major weakness as a student.

Oh gosh, coming home from practice and breaking down and just wanting to do something with your friends. A lot easier just to sit down after a long day and sit there and talk about nothing with your friends.

Overall then, the men in the current study were moderately attentive to their academic and career plans. These findings are





consistent with those of other researchers who claim male intercollegiate athletes involved in revenue-producing sports often lack a future orientation seen in nonrevenue-producing athletes and nonathletes (Adler & Adler, 1991; Blann, 1985; Messner, 1985). Hopes and dreams of professional athletic careers appeared to be the main reason why the men in this study and others (Blann, 1985) chose to focus on athletics rather than academics. These dreams may have been reinforced by an athletic system that does not want, allow, or encourage athletes to be attentive to anything but sport.

This focus was not permanent, however, as the majority of the men in the current sample experienced a change in attitude as they became older; academics became increasingly more important each year. Blann (1985) and Meyer (1988) both reported similar shifts of attitudes in the men and women sampled in their respective studies. The men in the Adler's (1991) study, however, became progressively more detached from academics as they aged. Several factors may be responsible for the different attitudes displayed by the athletes in these various studies. First, the focused attitudes of the athletes in Meyer's 1988 and current study may have been a function of the institutions and/or conferences of which the student-athletes were a part; institutions and athletic conferences whose athletes' attitudes changed for the better over the years may have utilized more pro-education perspectives. Second, chances for professional sport careers may have been fewer for

the athletes in the Meyer (1988) and Blann (1985) studies, forcing them to concentrate on academic rather than athletic careers. That explanation ends here, however, as 27% of the men in the current study and 25% of the men in the Adler's (1991) study went on to play in professional leagues. If the chances of playing professional sport truly influenced attitude toward academics, the men in the Adler's (1991) sample would have become more serious about academics as fewer of them went on to enjoy post-collegiate athletic careers. Third, the composition of the current sample may help explain the different attitudes toward academics held by these men and those studied by other researchers. I sampled only men who had graduated from BDU, which may have contributed, in part, to their increased interest in academics. Adler and Adler (1991) on the other hand, studied both graduates and nongraduates, the latter of which may not have had such favorable attitudes toward school. Finally, the socioeconomic backgrounds of the groups of student-athletes in the various studies may explain the different attitudes toward academics held by the participants. The majority of the men in the current sample came from middle- to upper-middle class backgrounds, where college educations are held in high regard (Coakley, 1990). This explains the increasing importance their children--the student-athletes in the current study--placed on academics. Only 38% of the men in Adler and Adler's (1991) sample



came from middle-class backgrounds, contributing perhaps to the decreased interest in academics by the men in their study.

You will remember that the most common academic majors chosen by the student-athletes in the current study were communications and business, not physical education or recreation as is often the case with many college athletes (Adler & Adler, 1991; Lapchick, 1989). Aside from varying interests and aptitudes, several factors may be involved in the selecting of academic majors. Departmental requirements across universities may explain, in part, the different academic majors selected by the male athletes; while criminal justice may be seen as a manageable major at one university, it may be viewed as quite demanding at yet another school. Similarly, each university may differ in terms of departmental allegiance to the athletic department. Student-athletes at University Z may be encouraged to enroll in sociology classes because several of the sociology professors sympathize with athletes. At College X, however, journalism may be the department with informal ties to the athletic department. Finally, peer counseling, or the advice of current team members, may encourage athletes to pick one major over another. Regardless of the reason for choosing particular majors, the men in the current sample claimed these majors later, and switched them less often than did the basketball players studied by the Adlers (1991).



Overall, the BDU football and basketball players led very full and often complicated lives. The men were different than their nonathletic peers from the very beginning, as they were often required--the football players in particular--to arrive on campus weeks before the school year officially started. There was little if any time for orientation or acclimation, as the men were immediately inundated with athletic-related time demands. In addition to the normal pressures faced by all college students, the participants were forced to cope with and combine the roles of student and athlete. This included dealing with coaches, professors, teammates, and nonathletic students. While the men admitted that it was often difficult to be student-athletes in a big-time college program, the majority had benefited from the experience one way or another.

### Retirement and Disengagement

In the past two decades a great deal of research has focused on the process of retirement from intercollegiate and/or professional sport (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Hallinan & Snyder, 1987; Thomas & Ermler, 1988). This research has been motivated by the idea that athletes have spent the better part of their lives involved in organized athletics, and thus may have a difficult time leaving that athletic role or persona behind. In fact, retirement from elite sport is often compared to death and/or loss experiences, and studied from such perspectives (see for example, Hallinan & Snyder, 1987; Werthner & Orlick, 1982; Wolff &



Lester, 1989). In light of this recent interest in the retirement processes of elite athletes, I set out to examine how the men in the current study felt about their retirement from sport and how they dealt with the possible loss.

### Leaving Sport

As the research on sport retirement illustrates, there are several ways in which an individual can come to leave sport (Greendorfer, 1983; Hallinan & Snyder, 1987; Kleiber, Greendorfer, Blinde, & Samdahl, 1987). Common examples include injury, completion of eligibility, coach/team initiated termination, and athlete initiated withdrawal. The athletes in the current sample left college sport for one of four reasons. The majority of the men left college sport because their four years of eligibility had been completed; these men knew the end of their college athletic career was coming, and could not have continued if they had wanted to. The college careers of three student-athletes ended when they decided not to take advantage of a fifth year of eligibility. Another individual terminated his career as the result of an injury, while yet another quit after his second year of participation.

As discussed earlier, most of the men's athletic careers ended with college sport. Just over one-third of the men, however, went on to be drafted by or asked to try out for professional teams. Some of these men quit or were cut by the teams they tried out for before they could make it onto the final rosters. Those men who eventually made it onto





professional teams ended up retiring when their contracts were not picked-up or renegotiated.

I asked the men about satisfaction, and the other feelings and reactions they had about their retirement. While the majority of the men in the study had been satisfied with their intercollegiate sport careers, there were many qualifications. For example, several were happy with the way they had performed, but wished that their team had compiled a better win/loss record or that they had been surrounded by better players. Similarly, the desire for more knowledgeable coaches was a common qualifier. Most of the student-athletes who had not been satisfied with their college careers attributed their dissatisfaction to problems associated with coaching changes; the athletes would no sooner be used to one system and the head coach or a key assistant coach would leave. The student-athletes would then have to adjust all over again. In addition, the negative impact of physical injuries and the desire to compete "just one more year" were reasons cited by the participants for being less than happy with their careers.

Since the majority of the men in the sample had been satisfied with their intercollegiate sport careers, I was not surprised to learn that they were sad when their careers ended. These individuals mentioned missing particular things associated with their athletic participation. These things included the people they had met and in particular the friends they had made through sport and corresponding bonding

experiences, the routine associated with their athletic participation, the identity they formed as a result of their athletic participation, their status in the community, and the peak experience of performing in front of large crowds. As many of the participants suggested, there is no other experience like it. As a basketball player explained:

You know you can never, never--unless you've lived that life--understand how much you need it. It's almost like being an alcoholic, 'cuz you crave for that. That's why you got guys like Sugar Ray Leonard talking about coming and always returning, coming back. And professional athletes like John Matuzsak had successful comebacks... and see successful athletes killing themselves because once you lose that, you're so used to that, you need it. Because you feel like you're not a good person. I mean almost like that gave you your life. I mean you're representing that. You're **an athlete**. You get most of your substance from being an athlete and you miss it. And I miss it now.

Conversely, several of the student-athletes were happy to be finished with their college athletic careers. The comment made by the following football player best summarizes the feelings of this group of athletes:

I had my fill. [I] was sick of the politics. [I] wanted to be a normal person, not in the spotlight.

As was pointed out earlier, the student-athletes in this study devoted a great deal of time and energy to their respective sports in pursuit of athletic excellence. It was not unusual for them to become so involved in sport that their entire identity and status was defined by their

athletic participation and/or achievements. Although the men had invested so much of themselves in sport, nothing was done to "desocialize" them from the role of student-athlete. As one participant recalled:

When you're done with that last bowl game that last year, that's it. You're weaned right there. I mean that's it. You very seldom have anything to do with--I don't know--it's like a long lost relative. You walk in one day after that last bowl game, you walk in, you're like that's it, you're not part of the family any more. You're just kinda kicked out of the nest.

Similarly, another athlete offered:

I'll say this, once my eligibility is up there was no more contact with the coaching staff; hardly any. I mean it was just in the fall you were done. It was wierd, you just dropped into nothing. I was still around the office and stuff, and still working out and whatever. But we used to joke about it and say "we're no more good to them, we're just excess baggage." 'Cuz they're focusing on next year already and they're worrying about who's gonna play the year after.

Several football players attributed the lack of concern on the part of the athletic department to a constantly changing coaching staff. In the words of one of these individuals:

What may have influenced it was coaching staff change. ... I went three years with Larry and that was more or less who brought me in; there were some ties there. Then all the sudden here comes Roger. The guy didn't know who I was, which personally offended me.



On the other hand, another athlete thought his nonscholarship status contributed to his treatment by the coaches.

... like everything else, they were less concerned about me. I wasn't in a starting role and so right there...

Although the athletes received little if anything from the athletic department in terms of role termination assistance, several of the men felt that something should have been done. As one former football player articulated:

There was no deprogramming. It was just "you're done, have a nice life." I wish there was [something offered], it would have been a lot easier. 'Cuz that's just like somebody who's an alcoholic and you just cut 'em off cold. It's just the harsh reality. You know you see guys that you play with, they're like "hey, what's up?" But it's not like, you're not one of the boys anymore.

Another athlete shared the following comments as well as a suggestion for future services:

There was no psychological guidance in the way of "hey, you're gonna feel a desire to play in front of a lot of people; the stimulation you receive there is like no other you'll receive again." You live with that feeling. It's just that you learn to cope with it and other than that... That wouldn't be a bad idea, to be honest with you. To sit down in an individual session and say "don't be surprised if you feel this way." That sort of thing. At least you'd know that it was common.

Finally, a basketball player thought that the money generated by student-athletes entitled them--the athletes--to some sort of assistance in making the transition from athlete to nonathlete.

... and I think that they have something like that now for professional athletes. And, um, because you can go literally crazy because you have these esteem problems and you need a deprogrammer because everything's been taken care for ya. And they need something like, but you get none of it and it's a tremendous need for it. Let's face it, it's more than just being a student-athlete. We're talking about huge revenues. Athletes generate a lot of money for the universities. Right now if I wanted to go get 20 degrees from BDU they should allow me. They should allow my kids to get degrees. That's how much they make. And when it's over, it's over.

While I learned that nothing specific had been done to ease the men's transition from athlete to nonathlete, it also became evident that nothing had been done by the athletic department to prepare them for a life after college in general. One football player claimed that there were too many athletes involved for the athletic department to take a personal interest in the post-college plans of the student-athletes. He explained:

I think it's a numbers game. The numbers are becoming so great that it's too difficult and too time consuming to continue that correspondence or relationship.

Another athlete believed that an over-emphasis on winning was responsible for his coaches' narrow focus. He elaborated:

It was all up to you. Basically it was choose your own path and do whatever. Um, it's never "oh God, what are you gonna do now?" It's "catch ya later." ... everything revolves around football. It's football, football, football... is the main focus. That's your relationship with your coaches... is football. It's a one-sided deal because you're all there for one purpose--to win. ... there's no concern except for winning and keeping your job.

Although it appeared that nothing explicit had been done to prepare the student-athletes for life after college, implicit values and lessons learned from sport were transferable to the men's post-college lives. A basketball player reported:

... working hard and knowing the value of hard work. I'm sure that carried over to what I'm doing today.

As mentioned above, the majority of the men in the sample left sport because their eligibility had expired. According to other researchers (Adler & Adler, 1991; Hallinan & Snyder, 1987), this expected departure may have contributed to the relative ease with which the men in the current study disengaged from their respective sports. While the student-athletes were powerless in the situation, they were in control in that they were aware that their careers would be ending, leading to a decreased sense of stress and an easier departure (Adler & Adler, 1991; Hallinan & Snyder, 1987). The fact that the majority of the men in the current study were satisfied with how their intercollegiate careers ended may also have contributed to the ease with which they



accepted their retirement. Incidentally, this finding is similar to those of others studies. In a study of Big Ten football and basketball players, Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) found that 57% of their male subjects were quite or extremely satisfied with how their intercollegiate careers ended.

While the majority of the participants were sad when their intercollegiate athletic careers were over, they had been ready to get on with their lives. These findings are consistent with those of other researchers (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985) who suggest that college athletes often do not experience strong feelings of loss or disruption upon leaving sport. As with several of the athletes in this study, these men may be relieved that their careers are over, and may actually look forward to leaving sport (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). Several reasons may explain the feelings reported by these men. First, Rosenberg (1984) claims that post-athletic career options may contribute to more positive feelings about leaving the athletic role. Second, these athletes may have enough positive things going on in their lives (i.e., education or marketable skills, health, positive self-esteem, significant others that care about nonsport life) that they do not have to cling to the athletic role (Thomas & Ermler, 1988).

The fact that little had been done to desocialize the men from their roles as student-athletes or prepare them for a life after college is not unusual, as others also report an ambivalence toward athletes who are

no longer useful to the program, and an underutilization of pre-retirement planning (Rosenberg, 1984; Thomas & Ermler, 1988). Thomas and Ermler (1988) suggest that we should not be surprised by this attitude since institutions, athletic departments, and coaches seem to care only about athletes as commodities, not as human beings; they see athletes as a means to an end.

### Graduation

The men in the study reported feeling a variety of emotions when it was time for them to graduate and find employment. The most common sentiment was one of excitement, as the student-athletes were tired of school and a lack of money; they were ready to enter the real world and receive a steady paycheck. The next most common feeling experienced by the participants was that of "mixed emotions;" they were ready to leave college, but they were frightened of the unknown. As one man admitted:

It was scary. 'Cuz everything had always been taken care of. It was kinda like "I really gotta go out and do something; I gotta do this on my own!" I've been taken care of for five years. More than that, you know, my mom and dad have taken care of me all my life and then BDU took care of me. And all of a sudden I gotta go out in the real world and do something.

Similarly, another athlete recalled:

It was hard 'cuz I was secure there 'cuz I knew a lot of people, and a lot of people knew me. And I had VIP at every bar in town, and I knew

all the bartenders and I knew people that worked here, that worked there. So it was kind of like "you're in." And then you lose that and it's like starting from ground zero. And that was the hardest thing.

So while the majority of the student-athletes were at least partially looking forward to life after college, there was one man in the study who dreaded the thought of leaving BDU. He explained:

... I loved school. I enjoyed being here. I remember the day that I left. The day that I pulled away from the school I was just crying my heart out. I didn't want to leave. I didn't want to leave my friends. ... I remember driving down the road and saying "it's never gonna be the same."

No common themes or trends emerged as the men discussed their transition from school to the "real world;" for some of the men the progression had been smooth and easy, yet others travelled a rockier road. The comments made by the following participant were typical of athletes who had experienced easy transitions:

As most people that were in this major at that point in time, I had multiple job offers. In fact I quit interviewing and quit going to second interviews 'cuz I had six offers. So I had a job, I didn't want to really be playing football anymore, so I was ready to move on. So it was a fairly easy transition.

Conversely, the experiences and perceptions of the athletes who struggled with the transition from college to the work world varied. For

one man the difficulty came in adjusting to his new-found nonathletic status.

It's a bitch, it's a real bitch the first year. It's bad; all of a sudden you feel like, well, people don't know you anymore. I found myself with a lot of time on my hands or like "what am I supposed to be doing?" Seemed like every... It's not easy. It gets easier as time goes on. Now there's no problem at all. I think plus your friends and everybody else, they don't help because they're always "well don't you miss it, don't you wish you were playing?" They always keep bringing it up and it's, I guess it gets to the point where it's like "is that the only thing that I'm known for is football?" There is another side to me, or other side, but that's how people can relate to you is football. 'Cuz that's all you've done for so many years. But it's tough, it's not easy.

The inability to find a job made the transition problematic for another individual. He recounted:

I went from having three jobs lined up to nothing. Luckily my brother had a sheet metal business here in town and I worked for him. And I would take off days here and there to interview, you know. I don't know, for me it was very frustrating 'cuz I thought, you know, I'm not, I wasn't and I'm not a football player. And I did play football but I don't think like it and I'm not that way. Um, it was very frustrating for me to walk into these interviews and you could just see in their eyes, you're not... ... this Northern Lights playing in here and I didn't even want to write it on my interview that I had anything to do with sports. But as soon as you walk in it's like you're a dumb jock.

Overall, it appeared that the student-athletes who had associated primarily with nonathletes had a much smoother transition from school to the work world than those participants who had affiliated mainly with other athletes.

While the athlete above thought his athletic status had hindered his post-college employment search, several other individuals claimed their athletic participation had helped them to get jobs. As one football player explained:

Does being a student-athlete help me to market myself or prepare myself for a job afterwards? I think so. You've gone through more experiences they [employers] can identify right away. You've been able to juggle some things some place along the lines to deal with pressures or people or goals or that type of thing. So I think that's one thing many interviewers I talked to liked. You kinda identify that you're a worker; you're not a slouch that's not gonna last. A few slide by but not many. For the most part they'll weed themselves out over the course of time; either they won't graduate or they won't make it playing four years of football. That says something for itself.

The one theme that did emerge as the men discussed their transitions to the "real world" was that those individuals who had been involved in professional athletics had experienced more trouble making the transition than those athletes who went directly from college to nonathletic work. One former athlete described his experience:

I didn't prepare myself... I went 9th round in the draft and I didn't go as well as people expected and I didn't make the NBA. But I was fortunate, very fortunate, and I probably only survived only because the CBA [Continental Basketball Association]. And if it wasn't for that team, God knows what would've happened to me. I played the first year; we won the championship. I started, led the league in assists and steals, and thinking I'm God's gift, and thinking I'm getting in the NBA next year; "the Lakers gonna come get me." And they ended up taking somebody else. It was between me and a veteran that had been in the league for two years. And they took him. so that made me fed up and that's when it hit me; "Jesus Mark, you gotta do something about your life." And I had one class to take to get my degree. ... I took that class and passed it.

An inability to let go of his athletic role, along with a desire for the glamorous lifestyle and the lucrative contracts associated with professional sport prompted another participant into therapy in an attempt to help ease the difficult transition. He shared the following insights:

First year I didn't know what I wanted to do. I thought I wanted to do some kind of coaching, you know that's what I needed the most. ... there's no doubt I would've had the qualifications and the knowledge to be a coach, but not until starting at the bottom. I said "I'm not gonna do that." My ego probably said "you're such a hot shot you deserve to start a little higher because you've been in sports" and all that, "and your dad's been a coach." It took a long time; for a couple years I'd write letters and look into coaching and thought still that's what I wanted to do and

didn't know what... I had a couple of jobs. One job I had for ten months and then I had another one for eight months. You know neither one I liked. I started to get kinda depressed. And then I think I got kinda depressed no matter if the job, I liked or not, I wouldn't have liked it 'cuz I was out of it. You know I had to go to a doctor to feel better 'cuz I was depressed. I was on this job for a year and I was still... I'd gotten so low that I couldn't... I was bad off. I still thought I want to be a coach. ...got back up, and the past eight, ten months I've been kicking ass on this job. So I ended up happy where I'm at. It took a strange route to get there, up and down.

He went on to say:

No way [other jobs aren't as exciting as pro sports]. The salaries are, it's peanuts compared to it. Well you're starting at the bottom, so it's, you get the dirty work. The pain in the ass jobs to do, run all the errands. But if you maybe didn't have any shot at the NFL... maybe it wouldn't be too much. That's why it's such, just one year or two you get used to that level and then to start over at \$20,000 or \$25,000 it's like... Coming out of college now and some kid gets a job for \$18,000 and goes "this is great!" He spends two years in the NFL making 60, 70, 80, 100 grand--that's a big drop. You're going in the opposite direction. It feels like a mountain you gotta climb to get back where you were in order to, where you'd like to be.

Other transitional complaints voiced by the former professional athletes included lack of access to BDU placement services and the disadvantages of entry into the nonathletic work place at age twenty-eight.

One former professional athlete was different from his peers in that he was surprised by the ease with which he handled the transition from sport to the real world. He had been told how difficult it could be, and had prepared himself for the worst. As he recalled:

It wasn't hard to walk away from the sport, well not as much as I expected. But getting used to going in with that certain group of guys and getting ready for that next season was really hard to get used to. [I thought the transition would be more difficult] only because I've heard so many other players before me talk about how difficult it was to walk away from the game. I thought it might be difficult, and maybe it was only to the degree when October came, you know, I just felt like I should be in training camp because for the past 17 years I had been preparing for basketball seasons.

This gentleman was clearly the exception, for overall, those men who had participated in professional athletics had a more difficult transition from sport to the real world.

A final topic addressed in this section involved the student-athletes' ideas about what could have been done to make their transition from college to the work world easier. Many of the men claimed that nothing could have been done, they simply had to experience it themselves. As one man with this view stated:

I don't think you can do anything. You could provide counseling or whatever, but football players that I know are real... "I don't need any counseling, I'm a man." It's a macho thing. I got that from my family and so forth,



but I think the only way to cope with it is to go through it and deal with it in your own way. And if people support you along the way--your family and your friends--that 's what you need. Anything other than that, anything structured from the university or from anybody else, I think would just turn you off even more to it. I think if you get it from your family and your friends and you deal with it your way. It takes time. It's just like breaking off a relationship. Time heals all wounds. It took me a long time to get over it.

These comments are important because they show educators how to think about and eventually administer such support programs for student-athletes. Specifically, services initiated by the university may not be as well received and attended as those instituted by the athletic department.

Several other athletes thought it would have been nice if they had known what to expect when they retired as well as to have received affirmation of and empathy for what they were experiencing. As one athlete admitted:

Them telling me at the end of school what to expect. That certainly would have at least told me later on when I was in remorse "that's not the first time I've heard that, I was told I was supposed to expect that; maybe they are right." At least you've heard it before. Maybe that would have helped a little bit.

Career counseling was another service the former athletes thought would have helped ease their transition to the working world. In the words of one of these men:

BDU or the Northern Lights could institute some type of program for ex-varsity athletes. You go through BDU last spring or maybe ten or fifteen springs ago, [you should still receive] some type of counseling service. Just in terms of counseling, career counseling. You're talking big money athletics. You're talking millions and millions of dollars that come into the university. Maybe somebody graduates BDU; they really don't know what they want to do. They move back to Stone Mountain, Georgia and they get a job working some place for 5 years and they say "wait a minute, I've changed a little bit." They're lost but still in the background. He comes back and says "I don't have anywhere to turn; I played here and I did well here." There's gotta be somebody out there that'll give a guy a chance.

Finally, another athlete believed continued involvement in the athletic department may have made life easier for him when his intercollegiate career ended.

I think it would've been nice to try to still stay a little involved 'cuz there's things you could probably do. Look at these people as an asset. These people are an asset to ya if ya wanna treat 'em that way. They have student aides, young girls what do they know? All they can do is... Come on, they're glorified cheerleaders and are they gonna tell them something a former student-athlete couldn't tell 'em? So that's where I think... You talk about weaning 'em off. Finding out wouldn't matter to me, you know, I can go my own way too. But they should think "here, here's still an asset; how can they help us and make us better one way or the other?" Some guys would wanna do it and some wouldn't but still make it an offer or an opportunity...



While the men in the current study had been sad about leaving sport, they were excited about leaving college and finding jobs. These findings are similar to those of other researchers studying Division I football and basketball players, who report that 90% of the men in their samples looked forward to life after college (Greendorfer, 1983; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985) . The fact that the men looked forward to their lives after college, along with the relative ease with which they made the transition from school/professional sport to the real world may be explained in several ways. First, the men in the current study were well on their way to meeting the graduation requirements, and thus may have been confident about finding nonsport employment (Haerle, 1975; Rosenberg, 1984). Second, the majority of them appeared to have a realistic view of their chances of playing in professional leagues, which may have decreased their retirement adjustment problems (Rosenberg, 1984). Finally, by their final year of eligibility many of the student-athletes had already begun to psychologically disengage themselves from the role of athlete; thus, their degree of sport involvement may have contributed to the ease with which they retired from sport (Rosenberg, 1984).

#### Physical Activity after Retirement

As was pointed out earlier, the football and basketball players in this study devoted six to eight hours a day in season and two to three hours a day out of season to their respective sports. Prior to their arrival



U the men also spent many hours practicing, attending camps, and anything possible to improve their athletic performance. From previous intercollegiate athletic experience, I am aware that athletes with their new found inactivity in several ways; some discontinue physical activity all together, some continue to compete in competitive leagues, and still others continue their involvement at a recreational level.

Through talking with the former student-athletes in this sample, I found that the majority were still active in some type of physical activity. Some activities were popular among the men, with many of them playing golf, golfing and playing tennis. Several of the participants--the former football players in particular--mentioned that it had been difficult for them to get into "healthy" shape once their college careers were over; they had gained so much weight and eaten so many steak dinners that they had become muscle-bound. Since their retirement from sport these men had been trying to lose weight and eat a more healthy diet. I must mention that I was surprised when I actually met the men, as many of them did not look like I had expected Northern Lights football and basketball players to look--which was bigger and bulkier than they actually were. Many of the men had obviously been successful in their attempts to lose weight and become more cardiovascularly fit.

As mentioned above, the majority of the former student-athletes were still staying physically active; in fact, quite a few were still involved in some type of organized sport. As one man admitted:



I golf a lot and I play softball. I'm in two golf leagues. My wife hates it! And I play softball once every week. Before it was more, but now I have two children and time's pressing, so....

individual who remained active in competitive leagues was  
softball tournaments the first four times I tried to contact him.

asked about his current level of involvement he reported:

Still a jock. I play softball. I'd probably play more, [but] my wife won't let me. I played Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, tonight's off. I play tomorrow. Friday's off. I play Saturday and Sunday. I golf probably once or twice a week. In the winter time I lift weights and I play racquetball. Yeah, I'm still pretty active.

entities of these men were still tied to athletics. Even though they  
y had families and successful careers, it appeared that they were  
to construct yet another athletic identity.

While the majority of the participants remained active in some  
f physical activity, a handful of the former athletes were  
ingly sedentary. One man had tried to remain active in  
itive leagues, but soon became turned-off by the cut-throat nature  
activity. He recalled:

I played in some touch football things and that was... had a couple fiascos with that so I think I'll retire from that for good now. They get really into it and they start to criticize and I don't need the... It's funny, these guys have never played before. Quarterback, that's where it all happens in touch football; what





else is there? And they always... Here's these guys that have never played and they'll start to give suggestions and criticize and this and that. I'm used to professional; nobody says a thing. So it wasn't even fun for me, and I don't need that.

athlete had similarly rejected these structured leagues:

... I lift with a bunch of football players and we just lift and I do a lot of fishing and hunting and biking. Nothing regulated. I hate regulated right now. I don't know if I'll ever get back into something. I just like pick-up basketball games or something.

one former student-athlete put his family and career first, leaving

little time to participate in sports. In his words:

... I run once in a while, but I don't know... play golf. I don't know, it's strange, 'cuz ten years ago I wouldn't have pictured myself like this today. I guess priorities just change; you just change. And we have a family now and that takes a lot of time.

then, the men who remained physically active were involved in  
itive sports, as opposed to solitary and/or recreational activities  
s jogging, biking, and the like.

In addition to staying physically active, most of the former student-  
s had remained involved in BDU athletics to some degree. For  
ost part this involvement entailed attending BDU athletic  
itions and joining the Varsity Alumni Club. Others, however,  
nvolved with their former athletic programs on a much more  
al level. As a football player described:



I'm close friends with Coach Tracy and his family and all the coaches. I have season tickets; I haven't missed a home game since 1975. I went on an away game with the team on the team plane two years ago. I spend a lot of time still involved in it.

y, a basketball player reported:

I keep in touch. I will stop by the office to see how they're doing. I'm one of the few that have even stayed in \_\_\_\_\_ [the city]. And if there happens to be a recruit there--I don't go there for that purpose 'cuz I'd hate to step on Coach Frank's or anybody's foot--but if there's somebody there and they introduce me I'll recognize the situation and put in a couple of plugs.

nse, then, these men had not **retired**! They remained active in athletics as well as in their own physical fitness regimens. sely, 20% of the participants claimed that continued involvement athletics was not a priority for them; the coaching changes since aying days made it difficult to remain involved.

The responses of the men in the sample were equally divided as scussed whether or not they missed the level of competition they perienced as intercollegiate athletes. Those men who did not e competition had channelled their energies in other directions, ork or recreational physical activities. As one football player

This job that I'm in, it's very similar. What I'm doing now is replacing easily in that it's just as much, I mean it takes more so. I'd say this



has replaced it just fine now. That's all I think about day and night. I can't relax. I'm always thinking how to get an edge and how to... thinking ahead. thinking. Just like I would do in football. You're always trying to think of what the competition is doing.

er group of athletes admitted that they still missed the competitiveness and excitement that surrounded their big-time athletic s. In one man's opinion, nothing could replace the feelings he en he was an athlete. He revealed:

I miss the excitement. The level of involvement or whatever. I have that in the business world, but you don't have 80,000 people cheering, and you don't go to the bar after and everybody pats you on the... You don't know, maybe I made a quarter million dollar sale today. Now if I was on the [Minnesota] Vikings and we had a big game today and we won... you know what I'm saying? There in lies the difference. But I find myself driving down the road sometimes--the stereo playing--dreaming about knocking a guy on his rear end in an 80,000 seat stadium, or making the winning block in the Super... things like that.

men missed sport so much that they could not bring themselves to watch their former college teams play. The comments of the ng participant summarize the feelings of these individuals:

I listen to 'em on radio. Believe it or not, it's kind of hard to watch a game. It's just, I don't know why. I can listen to it on the radio, but I can't... My wife always goes to Homecomings and I tell her I won't go. I can't go. I don't like sitting up in the stands; I kind of wish it would be me down there. Yeah I did [miss it]. I



didn't go to the games. I didn't go to a game.  
 I couldn't. I don't think I could have beared...  
 it took me two years to go to a game. And I've  
 only been to one game since I graduated.  
 That's no lie. I just can't go watch it.

As discussed above, the men's official retirement from the role of collegiate athlete did not mark the end of their involvement with sport. On the contrary, sport remained an important element in the lives of the majority of the athletes in the current study. These findings are consistent with those of other researchers, who claim that 75% of the former college athletes in their studies were still involved in athletics after graduation from college sport (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Greendorfer, 1987). Similarly, Adler and Adler (1991) reported three levels of involvement exhibited by the retired players in their study: immersion in sport through professional or coaching careers, continued recreational involvement, and complete withdrawal from sport. Again, similarities existed between the athletes in their study and the athletes in the current study who also fit into one of those three categories. Research conducted by Messner (1985) concurred in substance with the findings of these studies, since the former male athletes he studied also transformed their relationship to sports. This transformation was slightly different than those reported by athletes in other studies, however, as sport played a progressively less important role in their lives.

You will remember that responses of the participants in the current study were divided as they discussed whether or not they missed





involvement in intercollegiate athletics. The results of other studies support these findings. Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) found that only 10% of the football and basketball players in their study missed their involvement very much, while Coakley (1990) reports athletes may experience a "rebirth" after being released from the heavy burden of intercollegiate athletic participation. The fact that the athletes in these studies rarely made abrupt exits from sport may explain the ease with which they handled the transition (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). Rather than withdrawing completely from the role of athlete, the men chose to modify their involvement, modifying it in three ways: decreasing the amount of time spent on athletics, decreasing the level of competition, or switching to other sports (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). Individuals who work with college and professional athletes may want to suggest gradual withdrawal methods in an attempt to ease the transition from athlete to nonathlete. Also, they may want to raise consciousness about the effects of traditional male socialization, and suggest ways to change the traditional male identity.

Overall, the majority of the men's intercollegiate sport careers ended when their eligibility expired. For the most part the participants were satisfied with their college careers, excited about graduating, and eager to find jobs. Although the men were saddened by the fact that their sport careers were over, few of them reported extreme difficulty in the transition from college to the working world; the men who had played

ional sport experienced the most difficulty. Through the  
 ws I also learned that little had been done by the BDU athletic  
 ment or university officials to desocialize the men from the role of  
 -athlete or to prepare them for a life after sport. It was "out with  
 and in with the new;" the men were no longer valuable to the  
 department, so they were no longer taken care of and/or  
 d over. Finally, the participants discussed their current level of  
 ment with BDU sport programs and athletics in general. The  
 y of the former student-athletes continued to be involved in, or at  
 llow BDU athletics. Similarly, the majority of the men remained  
 d in some type of physical activity, ranging from the loosely  
 ed (i.e., golf and tennis) to the highly structured (i.e., softball and  
 ball leagues). Approximately half of the men admitted to staying  
 d in competitive leagues to fill the void left by their intercollegiate

### Support Services

As a part of their athletic status, intercollegiate athletes are often  
 a variety of support services to help them during their college  
 Researchers from various fields, ranging from counseling to  
 psychology, have recently begun studying the need for and effects  
 n services (see for example, Blann, 1985; Kennedy & Dimick,  
 Nelson, 1982; Sowa & Gressard, 1983; Sherman, Weber, &  
 o, 1986; Whitner & Myers, 1986) Therefore, the final topic

ed in the interviews focused on the support services provided to  
 perceived needs of the student-athletes in the current sample.  
 ally, this section will address the following issues: information  
 nation, academic support, and miscellaneous support.

### Information Dissemination

information about support services was given to the athletes in a  
 of ways. The majority of the men in the sample learned about the  
 t services available to BDU athletes while they were being  
 d. As one participant recounted:

Oh yeah, they said that I would have all the  
 help that I would ever need. If I ever got in  
 any kind of trouble or they have people that  
 would help you. And there's a study table that  
 was a mandatory thing your freshman year,  
 and they would take care of you that way. So  
 that really eased me a lot. And my parents  
 too.

athletes who had been told during recruitment that they would be  
 ed with support services wondered if these services were  
 ned merely to please their parents. In the words of one such

I remember it being said that we were  
 counseled and tutored and, um, you would be  
 helped in any way possible. Naturally your  
 parents would be concerned, your mother's  
 concerned.

ly, a football player stated:

Oh they always, when you're getting recruited they always say that. And I think that sometimes it's more harp to your parents than anything else...

According to several student-athletes the mention of support services was not the only reference made to education during their recruitment. In fact several of the men in the study claimed that education and academics had been stressed quite heavily by their coaches. As one participant recalled:

Yeah, actually they did a real thorough job of-- I don't know if it was necessarily to try and impress me or my parents--but they really emphasized education.

### Academic Support

Three primary academic support services--grade monitoring, study hall, and tutoring--were available to the BDU student-athletes, and are discussed at length in the following section.

Grade monitoring. Once the men arrived on campus they were required to receive information about support services. They were told--by coaches, athletic academic advisors, or in the mandatory freshman orientation class--about the support services provided to student-athletes. While freshman athletes were required to attend study hall, the monitoring of grades by the athletic department focused primarily on freshmen--particularly those on scholarship--who were in need of academic support. The majority of the basketball players in the sample reported that their academic performance had been monitored while they

BDU, claiming that their coach was very concerned about their  
 ment in the classroom. As one basketball player offered:

Frank would always... actually it was every  
 five weeks, you'd know where you're at. ... To  
 be honest with ya, I think Frank spent more  
 time with the academic part than actual  
 basketball.

player was motivated to perform well academically as the result  
 monitoring. He explained:

They knew. They knew. See Frank was  
 different. Here's a guy at the end of every  
 term he would post on the board everybody's  
 performance for that term. Then he'd post  
 everybody's cumulative average. So if you're  
 Curtis and you're sitting up top with a 3.9 you  
 don't care. But if you're Chuck who's at the  
 bottom with a 1.96 or something, that's a little  
 embarrassing. So that too was a little  
 motivation.

Like their basketball playing peers, the football players also  
 d having their academic performance monitored by coaches  
 athletic department personnel. One football player recalled:

It was monitored the whole four years. I mean  
 every time grades come out my coaches  
 knew before my parents, you know, and that's  
 another reason why you're... I mean if you, I  
 guess if you have any inhibitions or actually if  
 you have any respect for yourself... Your  
 coaches have to see your grades and they  
 don't keep that quiet. If you screw up they let  
 everybody around you know. If you have a  
 little bit of pride, you don't let that happen. So  
 it's, you try to keep it up or you'll have to hear  
 them [coaches and athletic department  
 personnel].

football player felt a sense of security knowing that his academic  
 ment was being tracked.

Did I mind that I was being monitored? No, I  
 mean [it] made me feel kind of good that  
 people were watching out after me.

ully, the following football player thought it was ironic that he was  
 at grade point average he needed to remain eligible, but not what  
 oint average would earn him academic honors. In his words:

Oh yeah, everybody was [monitored]. They  
 told ya when they sat you down. It's funny  
 'cuz they never tell ya you need a 3.5 to make  
 the Dean's list, but you need a 1.9 to stay  
 eligible.

Study hall. Study hall was mandatory for all first term freshman  
 rship athletes, and for student-athletes whose grade point  
 es fell below a 2.0. The study hall was held Monday through  
 ay, for two hours each evening. Athletes from all of the BDU  
 attended the same study hall, located in classrooms or large  
 with dividers built in the dorms. In the mid-1980s the football  
 dissociated itself from the large heterogeneous study hall and  
 its own study hall in the football complex. The football coaches  
 ir players that convenience was the reason for this move.

While the athletes were required to sign in and out of study hall,  
 rs were present to make sure that everyone was there and that no  
 d skipped out in the middle. Similarly, it was not uncommon for

it coaches to show up at study hall to make sure that the required were present. If the required athletes were not in attendance, the athletes--could count on receiving some sort of discipline; jogging running, or the "breakfast club" as it was referred to by the players, was a common a punishment.

**Tutoring.** Besides the monitoring of grades plus study hall, the major component in the BDU academic support system was tutoring. Tutors were available at study hall on a "first come first serve" basis and were present primarily to help the athletes with their general education classes (i.e., English Composition, Introduction to Psychology, Chemistry, etc.) Tutors for specialized and upper-level courses (i.e., Differential Geometry, Immunobiology, etc.) were available at the discretion of the student-athlete and the approval of the athletic academic advisor. Student-athletes who lived off-campus and/or who were not required to attend study hall were also allowed to take advantage of the tutoring services present at the study hall.

Throughout the discussion of support services, the football and basketball players expressed a variety of attitudes toward study hall and tutoring. One complaint the athletes had about study hall was that they were required to attend. A football player elaborated on this criticism :

I just thought that it was... I was old enough to make my own choices and I didn't appreciate being told to be here at this time and told to study. Actually I thought that it was ridiculous because you were told to go to this room and



you were told to study for two hours and they had tutors there. And if you were having problems they would... You know it was right after training table and so you're here having lifted weights, watching films, training table, and then you're told to go to this room and study. Well hell, you know. Study hall was not a very productive time. Turn into a b.s. session all the time. With three guys at a table, start talking about something else or what they are gonna do after they get out of study hall. It was not a lot of one-on-one with your tutor. Basically they'd have a few tutors there and you had problems that you couldn't understand or you had a problem with an assignment, then you'd go find them and supposedly they were gonna help you.

participants felt that the mandatory nature of the study hall was related to the confidence the athletic department had in the students' motivation to study; specifically, the student-athletes insinuated the athletic department did not believe athletes were responsible to study on their own. A basketball player with this opinion stated:

The reason I didn't like the study hall... because I would have a hectic day trying to get to my classes and you would [go] to your classes, then you have to go to practice, then you have a meeting, then you have to go to training table, and then they say "let's go study!" I need an hour to unwind. I can't open a book, so let me study at 10:00 if I want to. I know what I gotta do 'cuz I know if I go to this study hall I know I'm just gonna sit there. I thought it was too Gestapo-like. Make it accessible and available, but don't make it mandatory. And that's what I used to tell 'em. And they said "okay" because I would have a

rational explanation, and then they said "well okay, if you need it you know." At first it was like "no, no, no, no, you've gotta be there; it's mandatory to everyone, you've got to do this." Jesus Christ, I don't need to know remedial reading in this study hall. If I want to go write a paper I'll go whip one up, you know? And that's not how it's structured. It's structured to be Gestapo-like, and so they can say "we're giving you a study table." Because if it was truly for the athletes they would make a tutor accessible when you need it, not when they wanted you to have 'em.

Although several athletes voiced complaints about the mandatory nature of study hall, the commonalities stopped there, as each participant appeared to have his own grievance about the study hall and/or tutoring systems. One athlete found it particularly difficult to attend study hall when he knew that his friends were having fun. He lamented:

It's a bitch when you got kids that you're rooming with, and in your dorm, they're having parties and they're going out. And hey, I gotta go to study table. And this is my eighth week doing this stuff, you know. It's tough.

Yet another athlete was dissatisfied with the tutoring he received.

You had the tutor who legitimately tutored you. Especially for the guys that were business and they were taking Math 108 and Math 109, who were guys that were having a lot of problems, you know. 'Cuz I understand that was a pretty tough class. But then there's guys getting tutored for ATL [English]. I'm like "I need help with this paper." Well basically the tutor would come in and write the paper

and say "write this out." You know, give 'em all the ideas and "here you go," and then he'd write it.

While the majority of the student-athletes in the sample did not like attending study hall, several men claimed study hall pushed them to study and helped them develop a sense of discipline. One athlete with this viewpoint made the following remarks:

Well as a freshman you don't have a choice. You're stuck with two hours of study time no matter what. But I think that was good for me because as a freshman I don't think if I wasn't pushed into studying those two hours I may have had a lot harder time than what I did. By being there [at study hall] there isn't anything else to do for two hours, so you may as well study. So that helped me. Plus being able to take advantage of the tutors the **whole** four years I was there really helped me because there were a couple classes that were rough classes.

Another athlete made the following comments as we discussed his study hall experiences:

Fine, didn't bother me at all. Forced me to be disciplined as a freshman. And the tutors, it just made things easy for me because when I took my accounting classes or statistic classes--classes that I knew were gonna be rough--rather than spend two hours worrying how to figure out problem one, I would go the day that I started and get a tutor and I would go through and do whatever questions I could and if I had trouble with I'd leave it and that way when I got to the tutor I'd say "I need help on number one, number three, number seven, number nine" and boom, it was taken care of. So it worked out perfect.

As is evident from the remarks above, the student-athletes had mixed feelings regarding the effectiveness of the athletic study hall. Similarly, the participants were divided about why they attended the study hall; was it to get some work done or to avoid the punishment inherent in skipping? Most of the men admitted that they went to study hall to avoid being disciplined. The comments made by the following football player best summarized the thoughts of these individuals:

I think it was more [to] avoid the punishment, I would think, and that would be entirely consistent with my point of view. As a freshman or however old I was it was "oh I have to be here and if I'm not I'll have to run or I'll have to do some punitive or I'll have to deal with something." So I'm sure that's what I did.

It was not uncommon for the student-athletes to plot methods of sneaking out of study hall or avoiding it all together. One participant confessed:

The first couple times I went I thought "great, I'll study Monday through Thursday for two hours. That's eight hours a week. I gotta be a good student after that." And then I lost it as far as the social thing. The only reason you really did go is so that your name would get checked off. I remember people always trying to figure out a way to get their name on the list and go to the bathroom and then go somewhere. And they'd say "hey, I was checked in." There'd come a time when you'd say "hey, I really want to go to this concert," and you couldn't because you were supposed to be in study hall. You'd figure out anything you could to cheat right out of it.

Conversely, other athletes attended study hall in hopes of completing their homework and/or taking advantage of the available tutors. As one man reported:

I went to get my work done 'cuz I knew I wouldn't do it at home. So I was kind of fortunate. It was kind of like forced on me because I did my work. I had two hours, I had to be there from 8 to 10, so I did what I had to do.

Although the athletic department often monitored and sought out athletes who they felt needed assistance, the athletes themselves also initiated this contact. When the men had questions or concerns regarding school they usually went to see their major advisors. As one participant reported:

Academic I would go to my advisor... I didn't feel at that point in time particular confidence in the athletic academic advisors. I'm willing to say that that could have been a misperception on my part--I don't know--but I didn't feel like talking to those associated with Mr. Hardy's office--there were too many vicious rumors and stories about misdirection and being told one thing and another thing happening. That was the last place I was gonna go. If that was wrong or whatever, it didn't matter to me at that point in time. "So steer clear of those hobos, I'll talk to someone else before I'll go there."

Another athlete claimed he would rather suffer the consequences than seek assistance for his academic concerns.

It was hard for me to go see people about my academic concerns, so a lot of times I would take the risk of coming up short a lot of times. If there was a deadline to be met and I was confused, a lot of times I would just--rather than ask--I would just learn from my mistakes. It was hard for me to go out and look for those resources. Graduating from high school I was an 'A' student, and 'A' students know enough that they shouldn't go around and ask questions all the time. So I would always rather just go with the mistake and say "well, better luck next time."

The study hall, grade monitoring, and tutoring programs described by the BDU athletes are very similar to the academic support services provided at other universities (Harney et al., 1986; Roper & McKenzie, 1988). These services are based on the premise that "student-athletes will perform better academically if their study time is structured and prearranged for them" (Harney et al., 1986, p. 454). The reason for the popularity of these particular services may be that they allow athletic departments to easily serve large quantities of athletes, enabling universities to fulfill their obligation to provide academic support (Harney et al., 1986; Roper & McKenzie, 1988; Whitner & Myers, 1986).

Little if any research has been done to examine the opinions of college student-athletes toward academic support services, making it difficult to confirm or disconfirm the mixed feelings of the athletes in this study. Counseling center directors at 104 universities, however, estimated that 9% of their clientele were athletes, inferring perhaps, that

student-athletes did not think highly of these services (Bergandi & Wittig, 1984. note: the data were adjusted to eliminate those few schools that designated required study table arrangements as counseling services).

Overall, three different academic support services were provided to BDU athletes. While all athletes were subject to grade monitoring, only freshman student athletes and those individuals who had grade point averages below a 2.0, were required to attend a mandatory, two hour study hall, four nights per week. General tutors were available at this time, and could be utilized by athletes who were at study hall as well as older athletes who merely needed extra help. While the student-athletes had mixed feelings about having their grades monitored, the majority of the men in the study did not like attending study hall, citing the mandatory nature of the program and the nonconducive study atmosphere as their major complaints. Although many of the men went to study hall merely to avoid the punishment inherent in skipping, others went to use the tutors and/or get some work done.

#### Miscellaneous Support

The men in the study appeared to consult academic advisors and to some degree coaches for assistance with academic questions/concerns, but relied primarily on friends, and to some extent on coaches and family, to help them with their personal concerns. A basketball player related his experiences with a coach:

If I ever had a problem when I was playing, one guy I went to was associate coach \_\_\_\_\_. We were pretty close about that. I always went to him to talk about things. We came in together and he's probably one of my best friends up here. If I ever had a problem, he was there.

A football player also discussed an instance when he found comfort talking to one of his coaches.

Personal problems... I remember at one point when I was real depressed about not getting a chance to play at BDU; I went to my position coach. And I remember breaking down crying in front of him one time, and feeling "how stupid." Feeling really stupid about crying in front of my football coach 'cuz football's supposed to be such a manly sport. And two days later he came back, he came back and talked to me on the field one day and he goes "you know it really took a lot of guts to cry in front of me the other day." And then I felt a lot better about it. And so I kinda got a nice little personal relationship going with a couple of the coaches.

Another athlete mentioned going to nonathletic friends with his concerns. He said:

A lot of that stuff I talked to my RA [resident assistant] on my floor. Sometimes if you have a problem, that seems, 'um that might make you seem weak emotionally in... Anyway, it's very difficult to talk to someone on the football team about this because then you're viewed as weak. You realize where to go if you have something to talk about.

While the majority of the student-athletes were comfortable admitting their weaknesses and seeking out the appropriate resources,



two basketball players held their feelings inside, admitting that it had been difficult for them to ask for help. One man made the following comments as we discussed the divorce his parents were going through while he was at BDU:

I would just hold 'em inside, and that was my biggest problem. ... because of my problem that was happening with my family at the time, that I had to take with that burden, make sure everything went right at home. And I'm the oldest of five and I have to make sure that I'm a good role model. So I had to internalize my feelings.

It became evident from talking to the student-athletes that little was denied them in terms of support services. The prevailing notion was if you asked for something, it was provided; thus, it was your own fault if you didn't ask. As one athlete recalled:

Most of the times things were done as soon as you asked for it. I recall a couple of times when she [Abby, an advisor provided by the athletic department] got on the phone right when I'm there, when I don't want her to talk to anybody. I wanted to get out of there, just tell her "take care of that." I remember her taking care of everything really well.

Similarly, a basketball player reported:

I was never refused academic help at all. As far as Frank was concerned, if it meant missing practice, you could miss practice for that. But that's just how he is.

The following remarks best summarized the opinion of the athletes:

... anything you asked for, needed, was there. If you didn't ask for it, then that's your own fault.

Although the student-athletes at BDU had access to a variety of support services, other services which might have been helpful--such as career counseling--were not available. As one participant recounted:

... not really, not that I can remember. Like "what do you want do ...?", no, not at all. When I got my degree I didn't know what the hell to do. I had no idea. I was looking for a job. I got out and started working at a restaurant I used to work at in high school.

Similarly, another athlete stated:

I don't recall attending any [career counseling]. I had communications business which teaches you to write a resume, but I don't remember going to any job fairs, other than my senior year when I was going to interviewing, which is just an absolute atrocity.

Of those student-athletes who reported receiving some type of career guidance, a great number obtained direction from sources outside the athletic department. Athletes who wanted career guidance sought counsel in the same places their nonathletic peers went for advice, namely advisors, professors, and university placement services.

As one participant recollected:

The regular board, the job board. I was exposed to that, but as far as sitting down and doing some soul searching with some counselor and finding out what I'm cut out for, I never did that. Well the closest thing I got

was when I would go talk to my advisor. He would keep me posted on job openings in different fields of criminal justice; "are you interested in that, do you want me to put in a word for you?"

An athlete who relied on instructors for career advice shared:

Yeah, oh yeah. I got a lot of that [aptitude tests] from--there's a prof in my marketing class--he did a lot of stuff like that. One of the profs, she really liked me a lot... I was really able to go in there and talk to her about my career. And we talked a lot about like school. We didn't talk much about classes, but about school.

And finally, another student-athlete described where he went for career information and guidance.

... not that weren't available to anybody. As far as using the placement services office and that type of thing, and the College of Business and the School of \_\_\_\_\_ has the \_\_\_\_\_ association. The student organization and all that kind of stuff--so that was all there--but that was available to anyone. But as far as I know, nothing athletic specific or athletic related.

Overall, the student-athletes in the sample provided me with a great deal of information about BDU athletic support services. The men had been made aware of the available services during their recruitment, by coaches once they had arrived on campus, and at a mandatory orientation class for first year athletes. The athletes had mixed feelings about the services provided by the athletic department, which included grade monitoring, tutoring, and eight hour a week study hall. Although

academic support was available through the athletic department, the men in the sample often chose to consult major advisors with concerns or questions regarding their education, rather than athletic academic advisors. Similarly, friends and family were favored over athletic department personnel as confidants and advisors for personal problems. Career guidance appeared to be the only area where athletes received little support, and the majority of the athletes claimed that they would have liked more information about what certain academic majors entailed and about trends in the job market. The prevailing theme regarding support services was that almost anything was available; you need only ask.

## CHAPTER IV

### Implications and Future Directions

The purpose of this study was to explore the college experiences of 26 former football and basketball players, all of whom graduated from BDU during the 1980s. While the men decided to attend college for a variety of reasons, and entered college with a variety of opinions regarding the importance of education, they all graduated. This educational success did not come easy, as the men were forced to endure coaching changes, injuries, family hardships, and an average of 40 to 60 hours per week of physical activity.

The purpose of this final chapter, then, is to try to explain the experiences of these intercollegiate athletes using sociological perspectives. You will remember that the qualitative research process does not begin with hypotheses and a theoretical framework. Instead the researcher waits until the data are collected and nature of the results determined before incorporating a particular framework. The question is then asked: Which perspective, if any, best helps to understand these results? This process allows the researcher to enter into the study with minimal theoretical biases, inviting the data to "speak" and in a sense, choose the perspective which fits best.

To date the two most common frameworks used for explaining sport experiences have been the structural functionalist and conflict perspectives. In this final section of the dissertation I plan to illustrate the inadequacy of these perspectives in explaining the results of the current study. I will then go on to show how the findings of the current study may best be explained by a relatively new perspective in sport sociology, the critical perspective. Following this discussion, I will address implications for researchers and athletic personnel based on my findings.

### Use a Functional Perspective?

As you may remember from an earlier chapter, functionalists focus on the individual, and the manner in which institutions (i.e., sport) mold individuals to benefit society. From this viewpoint sport is seen as building character, facilitating upward mobility, and providing cathartic experiences.

The functional perspective is inappropriate for explaining the results of this study, for several reasons. First, an examination of the data in the current study indicate that the experiences and perceptions of the participants were often influenced by economic and/or historical factors. For example, several of the athletes felt they were "forced" to participate in athletics because they perceived that an athletic grant-in-aid was the only means they had for affording a college education. Consequently, these men had to endure a variety of experiences which were not always in their best interest. For example, many of them

indicated that often their athletic activities were so time consuming or so tiring, that they were able to do little academic work. These athletes could not resist and/or defy the athletic department as could their more affluent teammates. A functional perspective tends to ignore the economic constraints that may influence how individuals and groups may view their places in sport, and assumes that these men participated in athletics primarily because it was such a positive and rewarding experience (Coakley, 1990).

Second, the functional perspective cannot adequately explain the results of this study because the framework fails to explain **why** individuals behave in certain ways. For example, the results of this study might seem to support structural functionalism because the sport experience seemed positive since all the men achieved success (i.e., they graduated). What this assumption obscures, however, is **why** the athletes graduated. As I will show later, many of these men graduated in spite of the system rather than because of it. Functionalists simply see that sport is good, and let it rest at that.

A third commonly cited problem with the functionalist approach is that it is based on the assumption that the needs of individuals and groups within a society are the same as the needs of society as a whole, and that all athletes benefit similarly from the sport experience (Coakley, 1990). What these functionalists may fail to consider, however, is that not all college sports provide similar experiences and results; the

different experiences of the football and basketball players in the current study prove this point. Unlike their football playing peers, the basketball players in the current study had many nonathlete friends, were part of a much smaller and more racially diverse team, and played for the same coach throughout their college tenure. These differences may be partially responsible for the differences in experiences and perceptions reported by the participants. The functional perspective fails to take these variables and others into account when explaining the intercollegiate sport experience.

A fourth criticism of the functional approach is that it is monolithic, assuming that all society is similar and that everyone in that society shares similar values and belief systems. The fact that all the men in the current study graduated may be seen to fit this idea. This framework ignores the idea that sport is the creation of people interacting with one another, and that the meaning of sport could change depending on the group of individuals involved. For the football players in the current study, for example, the importance of academics versus athletics fluctuated with changes in the head coach. The professional sport atmosphere created by head coaches Larry and Tracy encouraged the athletes who played under them to stress athletics over academics. Conversely, athletes who played for the other head coach--Roger--tended to put more emphasis on academics than athletics. Specifically,



functionalism overlooks the historical and economic conditions that may influence how individuals and groups experience sport (Coakley, 1990).

A final problem with functional analysis is that it typically portrays an extremely positive view of sport (Coakley, 1990; Frey, 1986). Since institutional existence depends on making positive contributions to society, functional theorists assume that intercollegiate sport must be good because it has survived for over 100 years; intercollegiate sport would not enjoy such tremendous popularity if it did not serve the needs of society. The fact that men in the current study often put athletics ahead of academics, had their identities tied into their athletic participation/performance, and incurred life-long injuries as a result of their athletic participation serve as evidence that the sport experience may not always be a positive one.

Although the use of the structural functional perspective may partially explain the results of this study, the examples and arguments cited above confirm that this framework seems inadequate in explaining other results.

### Use a Conflict Perspective?

As stated earlier, the conflict perspective views human behavior as the result of environmental conditions, with social order resulting from coercion of "the common people" by capitalist owners and managers. Conflict theorists view sport as a creator of false consciousness and a facilitator of racism, sexism, elitism, and so on.



The conflict perspective is inadequate for explaining the results of this study for several reasons. First, the conflict framework uses historical and economic factors to explain intercollegiate sport experiences, yet the data from this study showed that a number of other factors besides economic considerations may have influenced the experiences and perceptions of the participants. For example, the African-American athletes in the sample appeared to be more concerned about acquiring an education and a degree than their white teammates; these men had heard the stories of African-American athletes who attended college on athletic scholarships, but never graduated. The men in my study wanted to succeed and be positive role models for younger African-American athletes. Their determination had little if anything to do with economics, as the African-American men in the study represented a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds.

Second, the conflict perspective cannot be used to explain the results of this study because it tends to assume that the world of intercollegiate athletics is homogeneous (Coakley, 1990), which was not the case in this study. Even though all the men in this study played basketball or football for BDU from 1975 to 1985, they were very dissimilar in many respects. For example, some men had entered BDU with a dedication to education, while others had entered BDU with a dedication to athletics and developed a devotion to academics later in their college tenure. Similarly, some of the participants viewed their

athletic scholarship as a springboard to possible professional careers, while other participants viewed their athletic scholarship as a way for them to attend college. Conflict theorists would tend to ignore these differences, and use economic factors and power imbalances to explain the experiences and perceptions of the participants.

A third and final reason why conflict theory cannot be used to explain the results of this study is because it overlooks the idea of agency, that is, the powerless are able to think critically and act upon those thoughts. Most of the athletes in this study did not have a false consciousness and at times resisted certain practices, such as enrolling in "easy" courses.

### A Look at BDU Athletics Through the Lens of Critical Theory

After reviewing the results of this study, it became obvious to me that I could not explain the findings with either the conflict or functional theories; the intercollegiate sport experience appeared to have both positive and negative effects on the student-athletes, as well as serving the needs of both the overall social system and the capitalistic economy. Since the results of this study did not "fit" either of the two preceding frameworks, a critical perspective was used to explain them. You will remember that the critical framework combines the major ideas of both the functional and conflict perspectives, focusing on the interaction between people and their environment. As I look at my findings through the lens of critical theory, I will focus on the student-athletes' critical

thoughts about their situation (i.e., awareness), how the men acted on their awareness (i.e., agency), the circumscription of their efforts by the athletic department (i.e., structural constraints), and the dynamic nature of the student-athletes' experiences and perceptions.

### Awareness

According to critical theorists, societal power imbalances are inevitable, but powerlessness does not hinder the ability of individuals to think critically about their life circumstances (Coakley, 1990; Messner & Sabo, 1990). Intercollegiate athletics are no exception; while power imbalances definitely exist, this does not mean that the powerless--the athletes in this case--have lost their ability to recognize this situation and view it critically (Messner & Sabo, 1990). The content of the interviews indicated that the student-athletes were aware of what was going on around them. The oppression (i.e., inability to make ideas dominant) and exploitation (i.e., utilization for profit) by the athletic department and the NCAA that some of the men described had not impaired their ability to look at their experiences reflectively. Specifically, this portion of the chapter will illustrate how the men in the study were aware of: the focus of the BDU athletic department on eligibility, the chances they had of professional athletic careers, and the commodification they experienced at the hands of the BDU athletic department.

Eligibility. It was evident that the men were aware that the athletic department focused on eligibility rather than education. This

focus, and subsequent awareness, began for most of the men when they arrived at BDU their freshman year. The men had "assistance" in choosing manageable classes and finalizing their class schedules; in some cases, the men had class schedules waiting for them when they arrived at BDU. The men said they were often enrolled in meaningless and uninteresting classes. Most of the participants felt that the athletic department was doing this so that they--the athletes--did not have to spend every waking minute studying and could devote more time and energy to athletics.

The awareness of the athletes concerning this focus on eligibility was also evident as they described the relationship between the BDU athletic department and certain professors. The uninteresting and meaningless classes in which the athletes were enrolled were often taught by professors with informal ties to the athletic department. While the participants were careful not to say that they were "given" grades in these classes, they knew that certain teachers would be more sympathetic than others to the time and travel demands they faced as student-athletes. Similarly, it was not unusual for the men to have their professors present at athletic study halls and on athletic road trips. Several of the men described incidents where professors had quizzed them or given them study guides to prepare them for upcoming exams, only to find out that the review was the same as the content of the test. While the men were occasionally grateful for such "assistance," they

knew this was being done so that they could pass the class and be eligible for athletic competition.

For some of the men in the study, the focus of the athletic department on eligibility rather than academic excellence became evident when they became aware that they knew the necessary grade point average for athletic eligibility, but had no idea what grade point average was necessary to receive academic honors. Similarly, several of the men in the study had received academic honors of some sort during their tenure, yet claimed that coaches still reinforced athletic achievement more than academic achievement. As several of the participants suggested, the coaches talked about the importance of education to players and the media, and occasionally publicized the stories of athletes who were excellent students just to show that education was a priority. Once the coaches were behind closed doors, however, the focus was all athletics.

The nature of the tutoring process also served as evidence to the men that the athletic department was primarily concerned about athletics. As the men mentioned, the job of the tutor was to make sure that the academic work of the athletes got done one way or another. Completing problems and making very detailed outlines of papers were just a few ways that the athletic tutors "helped" the athletes. Since the athletic department hired the tutors and managed the study hall, the athletes

assumed that those in charge were aware of what was going on and by doing nothing condoned these practices.

Similarly, the fact that they--the student-athletes--were only **required** to study two hours, four days a week, could very easily have led them to believe that college students needed to study only eight hours a week. Instead, the men in the study realized that the athletic department may have been using the athletic study hall as more of a public relations maneuver than a service for student-athletes; if the athletes were to get educations, the motivation and desire to do so was going to have to come from within. It did, and the men eventually began to take academics seriously.

Professional chances. All of the men in the study admitted that they had dreamed of one day playing their sports at the professional level. Research (Edwards, 1984; Lapchick, 1991) suggests that this is a common dream. For many of the participants, this dream was reinforced by coaches while the student-athletes were being recruited to play at BDU, and then again later during their college playing days. While some of the men--not surprisingly--believed this, there came a time when most of them eventually realized that the coaches were just "feeding them a line." The athletes' perceived this dream to be in the best interest of the coaches, who wanted to win games and build their players' egos as far as athletic prowess was concerned; a player who thought he might have a chance at a professional contract might devote



more time and energy to furthering his athletic abilities than anything else. While he might not get that shot at the pros, he had served his coaches and the athletic department well.

The majority of the student-athletes in the study realized early in their college careers, that they did not have the talent to play professionally. Watching more talented teammates get cut by professional teams, or assessing their size and ability against that of others were just two of the ways the men came to the realization that they would not be professional athletes. Still, the men felt that their coaches continued to reinforce their athletic abilities and encourage them to work harder so that they--the student-athletes--might have a chance at a professional career. The men admitted that it was good for their egos to hear such things, but that those words did not deter them from concentrating on education and nonathletic careers. The athletes knew that their coaches were there to win games, and if a coach could convince his players to practice harder and devote more time to athletics, the team would have a greater chance of winning games. As stated above, the athletes knew the coaches were "feeding them a line" when talking about professional sport careers.

Commodification. In addition to being aware of their professional sport chances and the athletic department focus on eligibility, the student-athletes in the study were also aware that the athletic department benefited economically from football and basketball and that they as

athletes were often being commodified in the process. In other words, the men perceived that they were valued not so much as individuals, but more as products or objects to be used to win games and make money. One clue to this commodification came in the form of differential treatment based on athletic ability. The nonstarters and nonscholarship athletes in particular were aware that they were not given preferential treatment to the same extent as were the star athletes. However, similar things were required of them in terms of hours devoted to athletics, academic requirements, and so on. Many "nonstars" had been instrumental in winning games and ultimately making money for the athletic department as "scout team" members, but were not rewarded to the same degree as the starters.

The numerous coaching changes endured by some of the football players in the study also illustrated that the athletes were not seen as individuals, but rather as a means of winning games. Experiences described by the men indicated that they were aware of this attitude. The fact that coaches were not honest with their athletes about accepting other jobs, served as indicators to the men that their coaches did not care about them. Some of the football players had played under three head coaches and numerous as assistant coaches during their college tenure. These players had to contend with changes in coaching styles and philosophies, and ideas about the student-athlete role. As the men themselves suggested, continuity of coaches would have made them

more productive as both students and athletes. But again, they felt that their wishes had very little influence on the staffing of head coach positions.

Their treatment during the retirement process was another indicator to the athletes that they were seen only as a means of winning games and making money. The athletes admitted that assistance would have been helpful, reporting that little if anything had been done by the athletic department to ease their transition from athlete to nonathlete. In the opinions of the men in the study, they received no "deprogramming" because their coaches were already concentrating on the freshmen and other players who would be taking their places, helping the team to win games and generating revenue for years to come. As the men suggested, it was out with the old and in with the new; the men perceived they were no longer valuable to the program, and were treated as such.

Overall, the student-athletes in this study were very aware of the contradictions that existed around them. According to them, the athletic department overtly stressed academics and getting a solid education, but their covert actions suggested otherwise. In theory, study hall, grade monitoring, and schedule assistance were developed to help athletes who were devoting 40 or more hours a week to athletics, as well as those individuals who may have come from overcrowded and underfunded high schools; it seemed as if the athletic department was

doing these men a favor. In reality, the athletes perceived that the athletic department had developed a method for controlling the athletes, making certain that they did not neglect their athletic-related responsibilities. By enrolling the men in manageable albeit useless courses, providing them with tutors to "help" with tough assignments and/or papers, keeping tabs on their grades, and reinforcing them for their athletic achievements, the athletic department seemed to be encouraging the men to put athletics ahead of academics. In other words, the athletic department was seen as protecting its own interests.

A consistent theme throughout the study was that coaches and the athletic department were perceived as being more interested in the men as athletes than as students or human beings. The athletes were being exploited, and they knew it.

The scenario described above is a perfect example of the hegemonic process, whereby the group in charge uses their power and resources to make their ideas and perceptions the dominant ones. This hegemony was incomplete, however, as the athletes did not go through college with a false consciousness. They retained their ability to think reflectively, and looked at their situations objectively. By doing so, the student-athletes realized what was going on around them and could then decide if and how to act.

### Agency

As stated earlier, critical theory stresses individuals' abilities to think critically, and to reshape and redefine oppressive and/or exploitive situations. Or, as Messner and Sabo (1990) stated, "... people retain the ability to act as historical agents, thinking critically and acting transformatively" (p. 8). The student-athletes in this study were no exception. As illustrated above, the men were aware of what was going on around them. And as I will show in this section on agency, the majority of the participants chose in one way or another to act on this knowledge.

The primary way in which the men acted on the environment created by the athletic department was to defy the athletic personnel and the training in dependency that seemed to be promoted. Dependency training, or doing things for others instead of teaching them the skills which enable them to be independent, is unhealthy because it develops in the less powerful individuals a learned helplessness. Making out schedules for players, hiring tutors to "assist" the men with homework, and steering athletes toward manageable majors are just a few examples of dependency training used by the BDU athletic department. As stated above, these tactics did not always work, as the participants often resisted and/or defied these attempts. For example, several of the athletes exercised agency by attending the "normal" freshman orientation, rather than that offered by the athletic department. Similarly,

other participants made out their own schedules and consulted regular academic advisors rather than those employed by the athletic department. You may remember the basketball player who told the coach that he was not going to take particular classes just because the coach knew the professor; and why should he take a basketball class when he was "already pretty good at it?" As these men stated during their interviews, they had heard too many stories of the athletic department "screwing things up," and being concerned only with keeping the athletes eligible for competition. Thus, many of the student-athletes refused to trust these individuals with their college educations. This was their way of acting on their awareness and coping with the situation.

A good number of the student-athletes in the study also acted on what was going on around them by trying to "mainstream" themselves back into the typical college environment. Instead of associating primarily with teammates and other athletes, as so many intercollegiate athletes tend to do (Adler & Adler, 1991; Meyer, 1990), the majority of the men in this study were part of a nonathletic subculture. Despite the dependency training, special privileges, and family atmosphere created by the coaches, the men chose to be more like "normal" students. Many of the participants despised the special treatment and notoriety they received as student-athletes; they felt like they were missing out on the true college experience. Joining fraternities and rooming with

nonathletes were just two of the ways the men tried to "normalize" themselves. The men's inclusion into a nonathletic subculture also prompted them to take educational and occupational planning cues from nonathletic students, as opposed to the athletic department.

For example, when the academic advisor of a nonathletic roommate mentioned to him--the nonathletic roommate--that it was time to declare a major, the athlete also decided it must be time for him to declare a major. Job fairs, resume and interview workshops, and various other career guidance services were also discovered via nonathletic friends and roommates. As several of the men mentioned, they tried to keep on track academically and occupationally by taking cues from their nonathletic friends. While the coaches seemed to spend quite a bit of time trying to insulate their athletes from the "evils" of the real world, the participants realized that they may not have been getting the real story from their coaches, and thus decided to go their own ways.

The men developed a "we don't owe you anything" attitude toward the university and the athletic department as a result of the money generated from their--the athletes'--efforts. The athletes felt that their coaches may have tried to make them--the athletes-- feel indebted to them for recruiting, educating, and providing them with possible professional sport opportunities, but the student-athletes in the study did not buy into this coercion. They realized that they were working hard for their money, and often thought that they deserved more than their

scholarship provided; perhaps this is part of the reason why several of the men held outside jobs during their college tenure. Similarly, the men in the sample admitted to skipping practice to attend labs or review sessions, refusing to play while injured, and bypassing final years of eligibility for "selfish" reasons; they wanted to be able to play with their children and get good jobs after college. The men were aware of what was going on around them, and chose to act in their own best interests.

Finally, all of the men took responsibility for themselves. They seemed to realize that their chances of signing professional contracts were slim, that their athletic careers were only one injury away from ending, and that the athletic department did not care about them as students. If they were to graduate and have successful post-college careers, they would need to take responsibility for their own lives... and they did. The men accomplished this goal by among other things, aligning themselves with nonathletes and rejecting the dependency training seemingly advocated by athletic department personnel.

While the examples of the student-athletes as agents are overt, it should be understood that the manner in which individuals were able to put their awareness into action depended on several factors. First, resources are important in defying the status quo (Sage, 1990). Specifically, not all of the athletes in this study had the power to question the athletic department. Athlete A--who came from an underprivileged background--may have been less likely than Athlete B--a man from an





affluent background--to openly question or react to the actions of the athletic department; Athlete A behaves in a way that is least threatening, allowing him to keep his scholarship and ultimately get a college education. In this case knowledge of the athletic system, rather than overt actions, are viewed by critical theorists--and ultimately by athletes--as empowering.

A second consideration athletes need to make when moving from awareness to agency are the circumstances surrounding the situation. As I noted earlier, not all of the athletes in the study began focusing on academics at the same point during their college careers. Some, particularly those who were not highly recruited "blue chippers," had to wait until they had secured a spot on the team--and a long-term athletic scholarship--before they rebelled against the wishes of the athletic department. By then these men were such valuable assets to the team that to take away a scholarship for joining a fraternity or missing an occasional practice would have only hurt the team. Therefore, when and how the athletes decided to act often depended on the circumstances in which they found themselves, that is, on structural constraints.

Overall, the men in the study were quite adept at acting on their awareness of the BDU athletic environment. Specifically, the participants chose to focus on education as they became older, defied the dependency training espoused by athletic department personnel, and associated with nonathletes. The resistance of the athletes was

intermittent; possession of power, access to resources, and differences in circumstances played an important role in which athletes acted and when the action occurred. Even when the athletes obeyed all of the established rules, they did not necessarily believe them. The participants may have been prevented from acting on their awareness by factors out of their control, but that did not strip them of the capacity to think critically.

### Structural Constraints

According to critical theorists, the power struggles that exist in society are greatly influenced by the ideological and structural constraints built into that particular society. (Coakley, 1990; Messner & Sabo, 1990). This appeared to be the case with the athletes in this sample, whose actions were often circumscribed by structural forces present in their environment. The structure of the teams and/or sports of which the men were a part may have played an important role in their college experiences in general, and their ability to get a solid education in particular. The fact that the participants were all members of revenue-producing teams meant that they probably devoted more time and energy to their respective sports than did participants in nonrevenue-producing sports. The time spent in practice and related sessions, coupled with the amount of travelling done by these teams--the basketball team in particular--may also have prevented the men from placing education ahead of all else.

In addition, coaches may served as a constraint. The basketball players in this study were fortunate enough to have the same coach throughout their college careers. Such continuity may have led to less pressure and more confident athletes; the men were aware of what was expected of them, and did not have to go out of their way to learn a new system and impress a new coach, focusing instead on the tasks at hand. A few of the football players, however, had three different head coaches and various key assistant coaches during their college careers. These men were admittedly frustrated by this situation, as they never knew from one year to another where they stood. It was difficult for them to let their guard down athletically so that they could concentrate on academics and a future career.

The college experiences of the athletes may also have been influenced by their teammates and friends. Choosing friends with similar values, interests, and dedication to education may have served to empower the men in this study. Since they had little choice in selecting teammates, the participants often looked outside of sport--or associated only with particular teammates--to find friends with similar goals.

Finally, the ability of the student-athletes to focus on an education and to express agency may have been limited by the structure of BDU academic athletic support services. The time when study hall was held--from 8:00 to 10:00 p.m.--may often have made it difficult for the student-athletes to concentrate and actually accomplish anything. Remember



that the football and basketball players had late afternoon practices, followed by training table. As several of the participants admitted, all they wanted to do after a strenuous physical practice and big dinner was go home and sleep or watch television. It was difficult for these men to get any work done during this time. The study hall atmosphere as described by the men seemed not to have helped at all.

It appeared then, that the actions of the athletes in the study were often constrained by several structural forces that existed in their environment. The men could have had the best intentions, yet the intentions were often undermined by forces outside of their control.

#### Situation Specificity

Another theme central to critical theory is that social practices are dynamic, varying across time, place, and even within a group of people (Coakley, 1990). This idea of dynamic situational complexity was characteristic of the men in the study, as well as the experiences and perceptions that they discussed with me. I will show how personnel changes, sport played, critical incidents, choice of friends, and personal background may have influenced the intercollegiate sport experiences and perceptions of the men in the study.

Personnel Changes. In most universities, the formal nature of the sport experience is defined primarily through the head coach--and ultimately the athletic director and president of the university; the mission of the university and philosophy of each president eventually trickles

down into athletics (Bicknell, 1989; Single, 1989). For example, a presidential focus on the arts or research may mean a disinterest of sorts in athletics, and less power for head coaches. A presidential focus on athletic supremacy, however, may mean that a head coach has power and authority on campus, and people--administrators, trustees, faculty--may tolerate a more professional atmosphere among these teams. These changes were reflected in the experiences of BDU football players, who saw several university presidents and three head coaches during the time period under study. The first and last coaches--Larry and Tracy-- ran their teams with a professionalism often seen in the NFL. Winning games was the focus of these teams, with education taking a decided backseat to eligibility. Comments made by the athletes regarding the coaches lack of attention to the educational and career plans of the athletes served as evidence of this focus. For the middle coach--Roger--however, winning was not as important as the development of responsible, decent citizens. The success of his players off the field appeared to be just as important--if not more so--than their football accomplishments. Football players who had a great deal of athletic talent were often upset by this focus, feeling like they had been overlooked by the coaching staff. Due to the differences in coaching staffs and coaching philosophies, it was not surprising that the athletes in the study often reported dissimilar athletic experiences and perceptions.

Sport. The particular sport in which the men participated may also have influenced the college experiences of the participants. For example, the sheer number of men on the football team may have affected how the men felt about their role as student-athletes. The fact that the football coaches had more individuals to monitor may explain why the football players often complained about the superficial relationships they had with athletic department personnel. The type and amount of travelling done by the two teams may also have been responsible for some of the different experiences reported; the greater number of away games, and the fact that they were often played during the week, may have been partially responsible for the feelings of the basketball players that they occasionally deserved breaks in the classroom. Similarly, the win/loss records of the two teams may explain some of the changes that occurred in the programs during the men's tenure. A string of winning teams may have changed the focus of the coaches to athletics, while a few losing years may have led the men to focus more on academic success. In the end, the different characteristics of these two teams may have influenced the experiences and perceptions of the participants.

Critical Incidents. Another factor which varied from person to person in the study, was the importance that each placed on education, and the critical incidents that brought them to that end. As alluded to earlier, the majority of the men began to take academics more seriously





as they progressed through college. The men had entered college with a variety of interest levels in education and a college degree. For some the dedication to education was already in place, while others were concerned primarily with continued involvement in athletics. In time these latter individuals also evolved into more serious students. It appears that no one support service program nor coach was responsible for this change in attitude in all of the men; rather it was a critical incident in their individual lives. For some of the men a physical injury caused the sport experience to have a different meaning for them. The athletes realized just how close they were to the end of their careers, and decided that they should have something--a college degree--to fall back on.

The honesty in their assessment of their professional sport prospects also led the men to acquire a different perception of athletics. Some time during their athletic careers--usually during the sophomore year-- these men realized that they did not have what it took to make it in the NBA or NFL. They had seen better teammates try and fail, or had seen them jump from one semi-pro league to another in an effort to prolong their athletic careers. The men realized that they wanted to have something more concrete waiting for them when they finished college, and thus decided to focus on a degree.

Sport changed for another participant before he even arrived at BDU. He had seen his brothers--who were high school dropouts--



struggle to find employment and pay the bills. This man decided early to make education a priority, and viewed football as more of a hobby.

Coaching changes also prompted the men in the study--the football players in particular--to take education more seriously. To them, these changes were a signal that neither the athletic department nor the university cared much about them as individuals, so why should they--the athletes--devote 40 to 60 hours a week solely to athletics and promoting the university? As a result, the men became a bit more independent and worked more toward bettering their own lives. Similarly, the big business nature of the college football and basketball programs influenced the men's decision to become more education-oriented. They began to "see" that the athletic department and their coaches were primarily interested in how they could benefit from winning seasons and superstar athletes, rather than how student-athletes evolved as human beings. The fact that coaches took little interest in the post-playing days and occupational plans of the athletes served to reinforce this idea of commodification.

This discussion illustrates the idea that the nature of the sport experience of athletes may change as the result of shifts in organizational power and resources. Specifically, for the men in this study critical incidents (i.e., injury, coaching changes, big-business atmosphere) prompted them to view sport, and the importance that participation played in their lives, in a new light. While they may have

been constrained by the system and surrounding circumstance, this did not prevent them from thinking critically and exploring how to use the system to their advantage.

Friends. Choice of friends also appeared to affect the college experience of the participants. The men who associated primarily with nonathletes tended to be more education-oriented than those men who had mainly friends who were athletes. As the quotes in the study illustrated, those men who were very concerned about academics were the same men who wanted to be like "normal" students; they were not comfortable with all the hype surrounding student-athletes, and longed to go through college like all the rest of the BDU students. These men used their nonathletic friends as barometers to help guide their academic decisions and careers. Conversely, the men who associated primarily with other athletes were more caught up in the athletic subculture, using their status as BDU football/basketball players to get preferential treatment. The identities of this latter group were tied more to their athletic participation than that of the other men. Again, the organizational and philosophical differences of these two groups may explain the different college and athletic experiences they reported.

Background. The variations in the backgrounds of the men in the study may also help to explain the diversity and changes they experienced in college. Although I did not fully explore the men's high school athletic experiences, it seemed that they had participated at that

level because it had been fun, and they enjoyed many of the things associated with their participation (i.e., popularity, status, etc.). Similarly, the men participated in college athletics for a variety of reasons. For some, college athletics was the only way they could get to the pros. For others it was just expected that they would attend college, athletic scholarship or not. And for still others, an athletic scholarship was the only way to go to college; these individuals may not have even thought about going to college because of economic reasons, but an athletic scholarship allowed them to attend.

Just as some of the men cited various reasons for their athletic participation, they also had different ideas regarding the importance of a college education. Some men were concerned prior to their arrival at BDU about acquiring a degree. For the remainder of the participants, the focus of their college life changed and narrowed as they aged; education became a more salient concern for them as the result of a critical incident. They realized they were in college, and they might as well get something out of it. The student role started to take precedence over the athlete role. As retirement from sport loomed near, sport itself took on yet another meaning for the participants. Some of the men disassociated from the athletic role completely, wanting no part of a physically active lifestyle. Others decreased their level of competition and the amount of time they devoted to sport, participating primarily in life-time sports. And finally, another group was still trying to find an

identity through sport at the time of these interviews; these men remained quite active in competitive leagues.

All of these examples illustrate how the various coaches for which the men played, the sport in which the men participated, the critical incidents in their lives, the friends they chose, and their backgrounds influenced the meanings that they gave to the intercollegiate sport experience. The heterogeneous nature of this sample--and of most intercollegiate athletic groups--proves once again the value of using qualitative research techniques to study the experiences of an athletic sample.

### Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to better understand the perceptions, experiences, and perceived counseling needs of intercollegiate athletes. Because the sample consisted only of men who had graduated, I was particularly interested in discovering what factors had contributed to the academic success of these student-athletes.

Overall, I was not able to select one tangible circumstance or event and say "yes, this is why the men in this study graduated." Rather, it appeared that there were several contributing factors. While not every man in the sample entered college with the goal of graduating, the majority of them were self-reliant. This independence served the participants well, as it facilitated in them an awareness of what was going on around them. They realized that they were sometimes being





constrained and exploited, and that those around them--the athletic department--viewed them primarily as commodities or money makers. They acquired this perception through, among other things, the emphasis by the athletic department on eligibility rather than high achievement in education. Similarly, the men in the sample were aware--regardless of what their coaches told them--that their chances of playing professional athletics were slim; even those men who did have the talent to play professionally knew that their athletic prowess would not last forever.

This awareness did not appear to be the lone factor in the men's success, however, as most of them mentioned critical incidents that solidified their dedication to education. Coaching changes, injuries, and self-assessment of professional sport careers were just a few of the events that caused the men to take a greater interest and a more active role in educational and occupational planning. The combination of awareness and critical incidents enabled the men's ability to look critically at their life situations and experiences, and consequently to do something about it.

For most of the men, "doing something about it" meant devoting more time and energy to their studies; they realized that their athletic participation and resulting status would not sustain them forever. While some of the men were less vocal about their decision to take education seriously, others openly defied coaches and athletic department



personnel who seemed to be only interested in eligibility. Taking advantage of "normal" student services and abiding by "normal" student calendars of events, missing practice to attend labs and/or review sessions, and associating primarily with nonathletes were just a few of the ways in which the student-athletes resisted. It should be stressed, however, that those individuals who were less active in their resistance were not necessarily any less dedicated to getting an education; circumstances may have prevented them from speaking or acting out at that time, but circumstances never prevented them from looking at situations objectively and thinking about them critically. They had merely developed their own safe methods for coping.

In the end, it appears as though the men were successful in spite of the system. While services to advance their educations were available, they were often seen by the athletes as more detrimental than beneficial. Therefore, the men took matters into their own hands, and succeeded anyway. The fact that the men in the sample graduated does not necessarily mean that the institutional and national athletic systems in which they operated were effective; many outside factors could have influenced the athletes, and thus been the primary forces behind their academic achievements.

### Limitations

The limitations of this study fall into two distinct categories: limitations of using the critical perspective to explain the results of this

study, and the general limitations of this study. These two restrictions are discussed in detail below.

### Limitations of the Critical Perspective

Although the findings of this study are best explained by the critical perspective, the use of this framework to explain intercollegiate sport has several weaknesses. First, the critical perspective does not provide a tight, clearly understood framework for studying sport (Coakley, 1990). For example, some critical theorists may choose to explain sport by examining racial relations, others may explain sport by examining gender relations, and yet others may explain sport by examining social class relations. I used the idea of structural constraints and the resulting awareness and agency of the athletes to explain the results of this study; another researcher focusing on other factors (i.e., race, religion, gender, etc.) may arrive at a somewhat different conclusions. Such differences are said to be the result of the relative infancy of using a critical perspective to study sport.

Second, critical theory has no operational definition of the status quo (Coakley, 1990). Disagreements have arisen among sport scientists, who have argued about whether a particular incident reinforced or opposed the status quo, making the explanation of results somewhat problematic. For example, it may be argued that the critical incidents which influenced the athletes' attitudes toward academics support or oppose the intercollegiate athletic status quo. Thus, results



based on a critical perspective are open to a variety of interpretations. This can be avoided or minimized, as was the case in the current study, by rigorous data analysis as well as the testing and retesting of assertions.

While the use of a critical framework to study intercollegiate sport is not without its criticisms, it was the perspective that best "fit" the results of this study. With time, the critical perspective should become an even stronger and more popular method for explaining the sport experience.

#### General Limitations of the Current Study

In addition to the limitations which accompany the use of the critical perspective, there are several overall limitations of the current study. The fact that the participants were self-selected, that is they were volunteers, may have influenced my findings. Research (Borg & Gall, 1983) has shown that individuals who volunteer to participate in studies/surveys tend to have strong opinions one way or another about the subject matter. Thus, the men who agreed to be interviewed for the current study may have had either very positive or very negative experiences and/or perceptions that they wanted to report.

The fact that all the men in the current sample had graduated from college may also have affected the results of the study. While the men did not all arrive at college stressing academics, they all left BDU thinking that an education was important. The events leading up to this change in values may be specific to athletes who graduate, contributing



to their particular experiences and perceptions. Athletes who did not graduate may have a whole different set of college experiences to report.

### Implications for Athletic Personnel

The research on academic support services for intercollegiate athletes has increased greatly in recent years. Educators, counselors, and sport scientists alike have examined the services provided to intercollegiate student-athletes, and some have even tested the effectiveness of new programs (Nelson, 1982; Weber, Sherman, & Tegano, 1987). While these studies have been helpful in increasing awareness about the types of programs available to student-athletes and the resulting effectiveness of these programs, few if any researchers have talked to the athletes themselves in an attempt to understand and improve athletic counseling. Therefore, one of the goals of this study was to examine the actual support services experiences of the BDU athletes, as well as explore their perceived counseling needs. It was my hope that this information would assist athletic department personnel in planning future programs for student-athletes. Based on the participants' experiences with athletic counselors and tutors, I now offer my own suggestions and thoughts on the implications of this study for athletic personnel.

First, do the current support services provided by a particular athletic department help or hinder the athletes? In the current study,





these programs served to facilitate dependency training and an internalization of ideas. While the majority of the participants emerged from the intercollegiate athletic experience as independent individuals, a few of the men emerged from the experience believing the myth that someone would always be there to take care of them. Mandatory programs, along with training table, seem to further alienate the athletes from the nonathletic student body, admittedly causing them to miss out on "normal" college life. It was the associations with nonathletes that kept most of the student-athletes on track for graduation. Therefore, athletic departments should take care not to isolate student-athletes from the overall university atmosphere in general, and nonathletic students in particular.

Athletic department personnel should also examine the contradictory messages they are sending to student-athletes. In this particular case, BDU coaches and athletic counselors stressed the importance of education, yet their actions often spoke louder than their words. For example, the athletes in this study were often advised to take manageable albeit meaningless classes, they were directed to professors who were sympathetic toward athletes, and they were provided with tutors who were instructed to "get the work done one way or another." The athletes picked up on this focus on eligibility. This behavior seems contrary to that discussed in living rooms on recruiting visits, when coaches promised to "treat your son like one of my own

children;" I find it difficult to believe that these coaches would sacrifice the educations of their children in order to win a few games. Consequently, efforts must be made to bring "practices" in line with promises.

The requirement that athletes attend study hall must also be viewed as a mixed message. Specifically, the athletes were required to study for eight hours a week, suggesting perhaps that college students needed to study only eight hours per week. The participants had managed to get away with studying less than ten hours a week in high school, but college courses generally require significantly more work. The fact that 62.5% of BDU's basketball and football players were "special admits" in 1989 (Lederman, 1991) indicates that these individuals may need to devote even more time to academics than the average student-athlete. If universities are going to admit these individuals into their institutions, as well as allow them to participate in athletics, they need to consider the time demands and intellectual challenges faced by "special admits," and design support services accordingly.

Overall then, athletic department personnel need to be aware of the fact that they are perceived as not giving equal value to the roles of student and athlete. Although athletics was only going to be a part of these men's lives for a short time--and few of them would make careers out of it--the participants believed that coaches and athletic counselors--

consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly--stressed athletics more than academics. While the football and basketball players in the study were only required to study eight hours a week, there is no way that they would have gotten away with practicing only eight hours a week; their coaches would not have allowed it.

Ideally, I would like to see a decrease in emphasis placed on sport by universities and society in general. This would hopefully put the entire intercollegiate student-athlete experience into perspective; football and basketball are only games, but a college education is real life. Such a change in societal values would hopefully help to convince skeptical student-athletes of the importance of an education, encouraging them to devote more time to their studies than to sport.

Another suggestion for athletic department personnel would be to put the needs or the best interests of the athletes first, perhaps teaching student-athletes to take more responsibility for their own academic decisions and actions. Athletes must learn that they are ultimately responsible for their own lives, rather than someone taking care of their lives for them. While the athletic department may benefit by bailing out athletes who are in trouble (i.e., keeping them eligible and thus using them to win games), the athletes are eventually the ones who suffer because better and younger athletes are always waiting on the sidelines. The athletic department must then devote their time to these new superstars, and the old athletes are left with nothing. A "tough love"



approach whereby the athletic department forces athletes to be independent from their freshman to senior years could help in developing self-reliant and successful individuals.

An attempt to do this has already taken place at the University of Florida, where the Counselor Education Department has developed a semester-long 3/4 credit, nongraded, voluntary course designed to facilitate the overall growth and development of the student-athlete (Wittmer et al., 1981). This course is open to all male and female scholarship athletes, and explores interpersonal skills, communal living, university support services, leadership skills, career interest, decision-making strategies, academic planning, social skills, time management, and skills in meeting the press. In addition to classroom and diagnostic work, the course relies heavily on outside assignments, role playing, guest lectures, and group projects to increase understanding. At the time the article was published 62 athletes had completed the voluntary course. Due to increasing interest, the course is now offered twice each year instead of once, as originally planned.

The foregoing are long-term recommendations which require institutional change. There are also, however, short-term recommendations which could be implemented within the current system, enabling student-athletes to have more meaningful and successful college experiences. First, athletic support personnel should show a genuine interest in the athletes with whom they work.

Counselors, tutors, and other support personnel would do well to learn as much about these athletes as possible. By taking an interest in the athletes' backgrounds, strengths and weaknesses, interests, and goals, athletic support personnel would be showing the student-athletes that they care about them as human beings. This may increase the athletes' trust in these personnel both on and off the field.

An attempt to do this has already taken place at the University of Toledo, where the Counseling Center has devised just such a personalized program to help freshman athletes adjust to the academic demands of the college environment (Whitner & Myers, 1986). In this program each athlete is given an individual curriculum based upon his or her own needs (i.e., ACT/SAT scores, high school grade point average, etc.), with progress monitored by coaches, assistant athletic directors, and counseling center personnel. Therefore, the services extended and the process by which these services are delivered, vary according to each individual student-athlete's needs. While no formal evaluation has been made of this program, self-report measures indicate that this individualized approach has a positive effect on the student-athletes involved.

Second, universities should implement more extensive career counseling programs for all students. While at most universities student services and/or placement services provide such assistance, these are typically reserved for seniors who are about to enter the work world. All

students, and athletes in particular as a result of their low levels of career maturity (Blann, 1985; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Sowa & Gressard, 1983), may need guidance before their fourth or fifth years of college. As the athletes in this study suggested, it would have been nice to talk to someone about the shape of certain majors and jobs, the state of the job market in the years ahead, and the transfer of skills they learned through their athletic participation to the work world. I think that such guidance would be a valuable asset for nonathletes as well as athletes.

An example of such a program is located at the University of California at Los Angeles, where they have developed exactly that, a long-term career guidance program designed to help athletes explore and plan for careers outside athletics (McCurdy, 1983). The goal of this four-year program--which is operated by the university's placement and career center--is to make student-athletes aware that few of them will play professional sports, and that they need to develop realistic plans for the future. Included in this program are such activities as: the administration and interpretation of interest inventories and aptitude tests, an introduction to job-function models, participation in internships with a business or industry of interest, and resume writing and interview practice. Although UCLA's program has not been formally evaluated, there has been a significant increase in the grades of the participants.

Third, a gradual disengagement from intercollegiate athletics would have helped many of the men in the current study ease into their



lives as nonathletes. Both alumni and current student-athletes would benefit if the former athletes remained involved as mentors or "big brothers" in their alma mater's athletic programs. The men in the current study suggested such involvement would have helped them to gradually disengage from their role as big-time student-athletes; they would still be involved to some degree in the athletic program as opposed to quitting college athletics "cold turkey." Other studies (Adler & Adler, 1991; Meyer, 1988) have shown how current athletes can learn from the successes and mistakes of former athletes. In fact, the men in the current sample mentioned how much they had been educated and motivated by the former athletes they had had as guest speakers in various classes. This proved to be such a valuable experience for the participants that they admitted that they would like to do that very thing some day. Thus, both former and current athletes could benefit from such a mentoring program.

While many universities invite former athletes to come back and share their wisdom with current athletes (Wittmer et al., 1981), I have been unable to locate any literature which describes and/or documents in great detail the extent to which former athletes are utilized in educational and occupational planning programs for student-athletes. Consequently, further research needs to be done which explores the development and feasibility of such mentoring programs.

Finally, athletic departments should examine the practice of mandatory study hall. As the comments made by the men in the current sample illustrate, the athletes did not get a whole lot out of the study hall experience. The men were tired after practice, the atmosphere was not conducive to studying, and they often resented being told that they had to study at a particular time. As a result, most of the men attended only to avoid the punishment inherent in skipping. Athletes should be trusted and encouraged to study when they need to, and if they do not, they should pay the consequences--be it loss of eligibility or academic probation. The men in the sample who actually accomplished something at study hall would have studied on their own anyway. They may have accomplished more in a quiet environment after they had had a little nap. If the athletes are expected to act like responsible adults, they must be treated as such. Forcing them to study for eight hours a week is only reinforcing the dependency training and focus on eligibility as discussed earlier. Therefore, a drop-in study center--as suggested by several of the men in the study--may be an ideal way for athletic departments to encourage educational achievement, while at the same time promoting independence.

#### Implications for Researchers

The results of this study have methodological implications for researchers interested in examining practices in intercollegiate athletics, administration, and counseling. First, the results demonstrate the

benefit of using interview techniques for exploring experiences and/or perceptions. The quotes, the actual words of the participants, can often be more meaningful than the mere presence of an "X" in a researcher-determined category. Interviews allow participants to answer on their own terms, without limiting their responses. The researcher then "sees" the experiences through the eyes of the participants, and has the freedom and flexibility to explore key concepts. The data in this study actually "speaks for itself," explaining to the readers what it was like to be student-athletes at BDU. Therefore, I hope this study will help to further convince researchers of the depth and richness that data collected through a qualitative approach can possess. This "more relaxed" approach, and the collection of information inherent in this methodology is greatly needed in the study of sport, where quantitative studies have clearly prevailed.

Second, the requirement of the qualitative research process that it begin without the guidance of an exactly defined theoretical framework was also advantageous in this study. A particular theoretical perspective and resulting hypotheses may prompt the researcher to focus only on particular areas or themes, while ignoring other variables or ideas that may be of equal importance. If I would have begun the study using a functional lens my conclusions might have been quite different and incomplete. By reviewing a variety of theories and developing interview scripts that touch on all of them, researchers can minimize potential bias.

A researcher discussing issues from a variety of perspectives may have a better chance of eliciting the true feelings of the participants, than a researcher asking questions which fit into only one framework. Therefore, researchers wishing to explore the experiences and perceptions of intercollegiate athletes may benefit from utilizing a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis.

The third recommendation that I would make to researchers involves the importance of developing a good rapport with interviewees. At the risk of sounding arrogant, I think that a great deal of the richness and depth of my data can be attributed to the comfortableness that the men felt comfortable talking to me. I wanted the men to know that the information I was being given was important; I tried to conduct each interview as if it was my first, making each participant feel as if he was telling me something that I had never heard before. The men in the study came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and races, and I tried to adjust my interview style and overall demeanor accordingly, taking cues from the men themselves as far as language usage, posture, and disclosure of personal experiences were concerned. On the basis of my experience, I recommend that qualitative researchers need to be sensitive to the differences that may exist between and among participants. While the "sterile" and impersonal nature of quantitative data collection techniques may permit researchers to be less concerned with individual differences, the personal

interactions inherent in interviewing necessitate consideration of individual differences. Taking the time to make participants feel important and comfortable definitely pays off in the end.

Fourth, the less formal nature of qualitative research can contribute to a less rigid distinction between "researcher" and "subject." This relaxed atmosphere may lead to more trust and disclosure on the part of participants, and ultimately more detailed and vivid data. I never felt like I had to be in control of the interview situation and act in an empirically impersonal manner toward the participants. The distinction between "researcher" and "subject" was often somewhat blurred, and I almost felt as if I was just sitting down and catching up with old friends. I was always conscious of my role as researcher, however, and listened in ways which allowed me to think critically about the responses of each athlete.

I can honestly say that I genuinely and personally liked the majority of the participants. After all, they were sharing with me some very personal, private, and often times painful memories. The men were honest and funny; it was difficult not to like them. Each one of them was "my favorite participant" at one time or another during the data collection process. I have literally "run into" several of the men since the interviews, and they have always been friendly as well as interested in how my study was progressing. I feel that the flexible nature of our roles as interviewer and interviewee contributed to the rapport that developed,

and ultimately to the richness of the data presented. Consequently, I think that researchers employing qualitative techniques should be prepared to spend time getting to know the respondents as human beings, rather than as "subjects" in a study. Researchers should not hesitate to engage in an exchange of information with participants, disclosing relevant details about themselves and their experiences when appropriate. This may relax the participants, as they are not the only ones revealing potentially painful and embarrassing information.

Finally, it would be beneficial for researchers interested in studying intercollegiate sport to establish collegiality with athletic department personnel. A certain mystique or sense of secrecy surrounds many athletic departments, making it difficult for outsiders to be accepted into the subculture; in earlier phases of this study--and in other studies--I have been refused access to particular athletes and certain information. Similarly, Peter and Patty Adler (1991) were eventually asked to cease studying the basketball players in their study. Developing contacts and gaining trust will help researchers interested in studying intercollegiate sport. The development of such relationships may help researchers gain access to potential participants as well as information necessary to complete their studies.

#### Suggestions for Further Study

Although the current study provides readers with an inside look at the perceptions and experiences of men who played football or

basketball at, and graduated from, a Division I university, more research is necessary in order to better understand the life of the intercollegiate student-athlete.

Three variables emerged which appeared to influence the experiences and perceptions of the student-athletes in the study, and thus deserve more attention in future studies. Since several of the participants mentioned the importance of athletic-related injuries in their experiences as student-athletes, researchers need to explore how injuries impact the college days of an athlete. Specifically, how might an injury alter the college experience of the student-athlete? Second, since the possibility of professional sport careers also appeared to have had a life-long influence on the men in the study, researchers should devote attention to the professional sport socialization encountered by male athletes, and how these experiences impacted their gender identity as male athletes. Finally, since the racial and socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants appeared to have some influence on their perceptions and/or experiences, future research should explore the exact impact of these variables.

The experiences and perceptions of nongraduates and dropouts may be quite different from those of the men in the current sample, and thus may provide sport scientists and athletic personnel with a more complete picture of how all male football and basketball players experience college. Similarly, an examination of the attitudes of athletes

in other sports and in other athletic divisions may provide researchers and practitioners with information on the generalizability of their findings. A comparison of teams from various institutions, the men's basketball teams at Duke and the University of Nevada-Las Vegas for example, may help us to understand how much of an influence, if any, the context and atmosphere of specific schools have on the experiences and perceptions of athletes.

By studying interscholastic student-athletes we may learn how their high school experiences provide a framework for their attitudes toward and lives as college student-athletes. For example, preferential treatment from high school teachers may lead the athletes to expect preferential treatment from college professors.

Future research should also focus on the support network of athletes; the insight of coaches, athletic directors, athletic counselors, and tutors may assist sport scientists in obtaining the "big picture." Their encounters and experiences with student-athletes, as well as insight into the pressures they themselves face, can only help us to understand student-athletes and the athletic system more clearly.

Sport scientists should also focus on specific social relations within the sport context. For example, there is a tendency for researchers--myself included--to blur gender with the sport identity, thus losing the saliency of how gender or gender identity influences or is influenced by athletic experiences. Similarly, more information is



needed on how race frames the sport experience.

More studies of a longitudinal nature--like that conducted by Adler and Adler (1991)--may be beneficial as they would help sport scientists and athletic department personnel to experience first hand the changes and dilemmas the athletes endure. The use of such a methodology may enable researchers to gain more of an insider's perspective, than they might with a cross-sectional or reflective memory approach.

The coping behaviors, perceptions, and experiences of different groups should be examined in order to better understand how the demands and sacrifices involved in other scholarships compare to those of athletic scholarships. A study of other university scholarship recipients (i.e., academic, art, music, theater, etc.) would permit researchers to compare and contrast the perceptions/experiences of these individuals with those of scholarship athletes.

While we could study the intercollegiate sport experience forever and still not understand it completely, I think that by taking into account the suggestions for further study mentioned above, we would be well on our way.

## APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A**  
**UCRIHS Approval**

## MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH INVOLVING  
HUMAN SUBJECTS (UCRIHS)  
206 BERKEY HALL  
(517) 353-9738

EAST LANSING • MICHIGAN • 48824-1111

May 4, 1990

**IRB# 90-181**

Barbara Bedker Meyer  
138 IM Sports Circle

Dear Ms. Meyer:

RE: "AN EXAMINATION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED TO AND THE  
PERCEIVED COUNSELING NEEDS OF COLLEGIATE STUDENT-ATHLETES  
**IRB# 90-181**"

The above project is exempt from full UCRIHS review. I have reviewed the proposed research protocol and find that the rights and welfare of human subjects appear to be protected. You have approval to conduct the research.

You are reminded that UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year. If you plan to continue this project beyond one year, please make provisions for obtaining appropriate UCRIHS approval one month prior to May 4, 1991.

Any changes in procedures involving human subjects must be reviewed by UCRIHS prior to initiation of the change. UCRIHS must also be notified promptly of any problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects during the course of the work.

Thank you for bringing this project to our attention. If we can be of any future help, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Sincerely,



John K. Hudzik, Ph.D.  
Chair, UCRIHS

JKH/sar

cc: J. Schuiteman

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Reluctant Participant Follow-Up**

August 13,1990

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_:

It has been several weeks since I first contacted you about participating in a study I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation. Although I realize that you are very busy and that summer is typically a time for vacations and other pleasures, I hope that a further explanation of my study and an overview of the findings thus far will persuade you to reconsider your decision.

As you are probably aware, much has been written recently regarding the problems and scandals in college sport. Unfortunately the voices of those who have successfully combined athletics and academics often go unheard. Thus, I am interested in understanding more about the experiences and/or perceptions of males who participated in and graduated from revenue-producing athletic programs. I am also interested in what types of support services (i.e. tutors, study table, career counseling, etc.) were provided to you as a student-athlete, and looking back, what you think helped you the most and what additional services you think would have been beneficial. With the information I gather from this study I hope to provide future student-athletes with a recipe for successfully combining athletics and academics, as well as revising and improving the support services currently in use.

After conducting 20 interviews many themes have begun to emerge. Among them are the ideas that:

1. The support services were there for you, all you had to do was take advantage of them and/or ask for help.
2. Those individuals who played some type of professional ball found it difficult to get leads or contacts about jobs after their playing days were over.
3. Various types or levels of counseling are needed; athletes who graduate may benefit from one type of assistance while athletes who leave college without a degree may benefit from something totally different.
4. Coaching changes influence every aspect of a student-athlete's existence.

The fact that you may have had experiences similar to or different from those outlined above could certainly influence the final results of the study, and ultimately the types of services provided to student-athletes in the future.

I wish to stress again that if you agree to participate in the study you may decline to answer particular questions or discontinue your participation completely without penalty. I also assure you that the results of your interview will be confidential. Your responses will not be made available to anyone--including the Michigan State University athletic department--nor will I indicate to anyone who has participated in the study. The only identifiers that will be used in my dissertation will be your sport, and when not too revealing, the year you graduated. I am the only one who will have access to your name, and such an identifier will only be used when absolutely necessary (i.e. contacting you for clarification).

After receiving this additional information I hope that you will agree--as 20 of your former teammates and friends already have--that this study is worthy of your participation. I would like to complete the study by October or when 10 more individuals agree to participate, whichever ever comes first. I am more than willing to travel to meet you and can be available at almost any time. I hope that your anticipated schedule over the next 6 weeks will afford you the time to participate. Remember, the educations--and ultimately the futures--of student-athletes to come may definitely be improved when the results of studies such as this are implemented and used for reform.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and please do not hesitate to call collect should you decide to participate in the study!

Barbara B. Meyer  
(517-355-4731)

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Unlisted Phone Numbers: Research Explanation**



August 13, 1990

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a graduate student at Michigan State University in Sport Psychology and Sport Sociology. I am contacting former MSU football and basketball letterwinners who are still in the Lansing and Detroit areas to see if they would be interested in participating in the research I am doing for my doctoral dissertation.

I typically contact potential participants by phone and at that time explain the study and answer any questions people may have. I was unable to obtain your phone number through either the Varsity "S" Club or Directory assistance, and thus I hope you will take a few minutes to read a description of my study.

Much has been written recently regarding the problems and scandals in college sport. Unfortunately the voices of those who have successfully combined athletics and academics often go unheard. Thus, I am interested in understanding more about the experiences and /or perceptions of males who participated in and graduated from revenue-producing athletic programs. I am also interested in what types of support services (i.e. tutors, study table, career counseling, etc.) were provided to you as a student-athlete, and looking back, what you think helped you the most and what additional services you think would have been beneficial. With the information I gather from this study I hope to provide future student-athletes with a **recipe** for successfully combining athletics and academics, as well as revising and improving the support services currently in use.

After reading this explanation of my research I hope you think this might be something worthy of your participation. If you have further questions about what your participation would involve or already know that you would like to participate in the study, please call me collect at the phone number provided on the bottom of the page.

Thank you for your time and please do not hesitate to call. I hope to hear from you soon.

Barbara B. Meyer  
(517-355-4731)

## APPENDIX D

### Research Explanation

### **Research Explanation**

I am engaged in a research project which I hope will help people better understand the academic and/or career counseling needs of collegiate student-athletes. Many Studies have been done on this topic and resultant counseling programs developed. These studies have failed, however, to obtain the opinions and perceptions of the athletes themselves. Similarly, previous studies have been conducted using individuals who were student-athletes at the time of data collection. By interviewing former student-athletes, however, we may benefit from their distance from the experience as well as their retrospective reflections. The information discovered may ultimately lead to the development of more structured and comprehensive academic/career counseling programs for collegiate student-athletes.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decline to answer particular questions or discontinue your participation completely without penalty. I assure you that the results of your interview will be confidential. Your responses will not be made available to the Michigan State University athletic department nor will I indicate to anyone in the athletic department who participated in the study. The only identifiers used by the researcher will be your sport and the year that you left Michigan State University. I am the only one who will have access to your name, and such an identifier will only be used when absolutely necessary (i.e. contacting you for follow-up questions). If you agree to be tape recorded, your tape will be destroyed after it is transcribed by the researcher (one week).

**APPENDIX E**

**Consent Form**

**Consent Form**

1. I understand the explanation of the study that has been given and what my participation will involve.
2. I understand that the interview will take approximately two hours to complete.
3. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary.
4. I understand that I am free to discontinue my participation in the study or decline to answer specific questions at any time without penalty from the researcher or any individual from the Michigan State University athletic department.
5. I understand that no one in the Michigan State University athletic department will have knowledge of who participated in the study.
6. I understand that no information is sought regarding alcohol and drug use, illegal recruiting, involvement with agents, and that these topics are not to be discussed as they do not pertain to the researchers questions.
7. I understand that with my permission the interview will be tape recorded. I also understand that the researcher is the only one who will have access to the tape and that she will destroy it immediately after transcription (approximately two weeks).
8. I understand that the results of they study will be treated in strict confidence and that my name will not be revealed. Within these restrictions, results of the study will be made available to me at my request.
9. I understand that, at my request, I can receive additional explanation of the study after my participation is completed.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F

Cary's Thank You

July 9, 1990

Ms. Barbara Meyer  
138 I M Sports Circle  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI 48824

Dear Barbara,

I would like to take time out to thank you for allowing me to participate in your reserch project. You certainly project a very professional demeanor.

If I can be of any further assistance to you in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,

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