

TAKING OFF THE MASK: SEEING THE PERSON BEHIND THE STUDENT-ATHLETE

BY

CECILIA AKUNNA MARIZU

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Educational Policy Studies
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012

Urbana, Illinois

Master Thesis Committee:

Christopher M. Span, Chair
James D. Anderson
Adrienne Denise Dixon

ABSTRACT

This thesis offers an inside look at college athletics and dissects what it truly means to understand what it takes to compete as a student-athlete at a high level. It also makes suggestions on what athletics departments can do to better aid student-athletes and produce the all-around person/citizen in life. Collegiate athletics are more than the competition on the field, court, track, or pool. Collegiate athletics encompass the chance to give people an opportunity to excel in life. Looking deeply into the whole realm of athletics comes the chance to create a family atmosphere where a student-athlete can grow and develop. Using the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign division of intercollegiate athletics department as the foci of study, the thesis aims to look at college athletics through the eyes of the student-athlete. This thesis relies on the use of surveys to illustrate the overall experiences of student-athletes at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Student-athletes from eight of the nineteen team sports were surveyed. Hopefully, this thesis will demonstrate that the personal relationships athletics departments develop with student-athletes have a vital impact on the future success of the students themselves and the athletics program-at-large.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: PERSONAL ACCOUNT	13
CHAPTER 3: CHECKLIST	20
CHAPTER 4: EDUCATION VS. ENTERTAINMENT FACTOR	37
CHAPTER 5: JERRY MAGUIRE MOMENT: PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	53
BIBLIOGRAPHY	83

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Love. Many people want it, but only some will ever truly have it. Heartbreak. Many people will try to avoid it, but some will never recover from it. There's that moment when a person realizes how much they actually care. They realize how far they are willing to go, how much time they are willing to spend, what they are willing to give, and how much pain is worth it in the end.

Introduction

African American novelist and poet James Baldwin once said, "Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within" (Baldwin, 2011, thinkexist.com). A student-athlete should have an immense amount of love to get to the division I level in collegiate athletics. The love may not be there for all, but there is a sense of devotion or passion to one's sport that is felt at the highest level of collegiate athletics. If the love or dedication is not there, the success a student-athlete will achieve in college (and beyond) may be lower than expected.

For the student-athlete, love in their sport comes from devoting their life to their athletic career. Their sport can become their tool for success, their escape from the real world, and in some cases, even their sole identity. Athletics can become a "mask" for the student athlete. The mask cannot be left on forever, but while it is worn, it can give some student-athletes a stronger sense of purpose. In regards to that purpose, the mask can be a way a high school athlete has a chance to attend a highly ranked institution. The mask can present a student-athlete with accolades and support that may never come in other areas of their life. The mask can be an escape from a world of hopelessness and anxiety of the life one may leave behind. The mask

can add comfort and prestige when all else does not seem to weigh the same importance.

However, the mask can also bring about pain and sorrow from unexpected disappoint or the loss of one's identity.

Student-athletes who wear a mask have a chance to feel a sense of pride, but once the masquerade ball is over and the mask must be removed, it affords many student athletes a sense of incompleteness. There is a moment in every student-athlete's life when it feels that they cannot live without their sport, or mask, and at the end of his or her career it becomes equally evident that they also can no longer live within the mask they have created. However, the part of the athletic career that a student-athlete cannot live without should be the lesson that it taught them. Student-athletes learn the lessons of hard work, dedication, and time management in different ways than most. They learn what it means to sacrifice different aspects of their collegiate years in order to wear their school colors when they compete and wear them with pride.

With pride comes an important question when thinking about the student-athlete and their devotion. Who is the person underneath the mask that has been shaped by their respective sport? The question cannot (and should not) be asked at the end of a student-athlete's career; it should be asked during the collegiate experience and, if possible, even before. Arguably no place is more fit to aid student-athletes in gaining a better understanding of themselves and their potential than an intercollegiate athletics department. An athletics department has an opportunity to discover the person underneath the mask while concurrently learning about the dedication it took to create the mask in the first place.

The mask gives student-athletes their chance to shine at a masquerade ball while also giving society their own perceived perceptions of the people who exist behind the mask. There

also exists a relationship that is full of unexplainable highs and the relationship that can endure the worst possible physical and emotional pain. It is the relationship between the sport and the athlete. In this relationship the athlete becomes consumed by the sport and the wins and losses that come along with competing. For instance, children in youth sports can feel this relationship between their sport from the anxiety that comes from the pressures to win (Lapchick, 1986, 208). Athletes deal with true undying passion, hard work, success and failure from the relationship that connects the athlete to their goals within sport participation. In turn, collegiate athletics have the ability to magnify the relationship that is complicated, confusing, and heart breaking at times.

For some collegiate athletes, ending an athletic career can feel as if losing a big part of their life. It's the end of the part of life that a student-athlete works so hard to maintain and continually improve. It almost doesn't make sense on how such a relationship could ever end, and despite the attempt to make the relationship last until one's dying day, even this relationship cannot last forever no matter how hard one works at it.

The NCAA and the Big Ten

The NCAA has set a tone for the way collegiate athletics operate, and in some ways, even with regard to how student-athletes develop and wear their masks in intercollegiate sports. For instance, one sport takes over the country during one month, the month of March. March Madness transforms offices employees into sports bookies and even the uninterested fan into a basketball critic. During the month (a month long holiday to some), the NCAA plays a commercial that tries to exemplify what the purpose of the relationship between student-athletes, their sport, their institution, and the NCAA actually means. The commercial varies, but will allow the viewer to acknowledge the talents that exist within student-athletes beyond their sport

and ends with, "Most of us will go pro in something other than sports." The message? Most student-athletes are going to take off the masks that may be seen by the outside world and reveal all that the mask has taught them. The NCAA has set a standard for student-athletes and fans alike to maintain and develop.

The Big Ten, one of the five major conferences in the NCAA, has also set their own standard and takes pride in unique conference characteristics. Each conference has set standards to set themselves apart from the rest of the field and the Big Ten has done it in such a way that they want to be known for "honoring legends and building leaders." The Big Ten was created in 1896 with the first goal being the "pursuit and attainment of academic excellence" (bigten.com). Academic success and athletic competitiveness and excellence quickly came to define the conference and its overall success. A lot has changed since the conference started with seven institutions and now has expanded to twelve schools, but the academic standards and commitment to the academic success of the student-athlete still remains an important component of their national success.

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign was a founding member institution of higher education when the Big Ten was formed in 1896. Today the University of Illinois still boasts high academic standards and national success, particularly in the Olympic sports such as soccer, gymnastics, and volleyball. For instance, the women's soccer and men's gymnastics teams in 2011 were Big Ten champions, and the women's volleyball team were runners-up in the national championship game. The success can be seen in a wide array of sports teams on the campus.

The purpose of the research done in this master thesis was to more fully understand the growth, transformation and values of the student-athlete that can come from an athletics

department. The research helped to gain a better understanding of the concept of the mask that a student-athlete symbolically wears during their collegiate career. In a true sense, the survey analyzed the progression of the student-athlete and their educational and athletic experience starting with the simple question of what made them think their elementary school experience was good or bad. The survey progressed to understanding their ability to handle the pressure and ability to handle the load that comes with being a collegiate athlete. The student-athletes were asked the questions in order to grasp the way they personally felt about their experience and their ability to succeed with sport and school. They were asked to identify with being a student or an athlete. In addition, they were asked more personal questions that showed the progression of their personal experiences. The survey was designed to draw more intimate responses from their own personal relationships with a mentor leader to their opinions about their athletics department values and advice they will give to current and future student-athletes. The survey asked 68 student-athletes from eight different sports teams about their experience as student-athletes at the University of Illinois.

For a number of reasons, athletics departments are consistently attempting to improve their all-around practices and composition when it comes to the recruitment of student-athletes. The ultimate goal for athletics departments is to have the best of the best student-athletes attend their institution. Notwithstanding, the key focus in recruiting “the best of the best” implies recruiting an athlete first and a student second. They want good students, but a student-athlete is recruited on their athletic ability first, not their GPA or scholastic aptitude. An outstanding GPA of the future quarterback is an added bonus to the athletic program, but it is the athletic abilities and on-field successes of this future quarterback (and all other student-athletes that are recruited) that will ultimately define the success of the athletics department.

In this scenario, success is almost strictly measured in brief four to five year periods, or within the tenure and career of the student-athlete in their respective sport, but what about the success in a lifetime of the student-athlete? What about the success that can come from the legends of the past and the future leaders that will walk on the fields or swim in the pools? How do universities and athletics departments prepare them for a successful life after collegiate sports? ESPN analyst and former men's basketball coach for Notre Dame, Digger Phelps, on College Game Day made note of how so many of the young athletes will go bankrupt soon after their athletic career is over. Within two years 78% of former NFL players will go bankrupt (Torre sportsillustrated.cnn.com). Phelps comments beseechs the question: How can athletics departments and universities across the nation aid collegiate athletes in better managing their time, resources, and overall well-being to safeguard them and ideally ensure that they are prepared to have a lifetime of and success after college?

One prime example is that student-athletes, in general, are not aware of the full range of opportunities they can have upon graduation within their respective sport. Many student-athletes assume that the only way they can be part of the sport is to be the star athlete in the game. This assumption with regard to this narrow band of opportunity in one's sport limits a student-athletes understanding of what they can truly be a part of or accomplish. No one is asking an athlete to give up on his or her biggest dreams of being a professional athlete or making an Olympic team. One should dream as much and as big as they want. The famed African American poet Langston Hughes was correct when he wrote, "hold fast to dreams..."; dreams are the first step toward achieving a goal, and they build determination to assist one to succeed, but a dream that is not well-defined or flexible can also hinder one's advancement in life. The dream shouldn't stop at the professional athlete level. The dream should continue on for the next step. General

managers, athletic directors, accountants, sports agents, doctors, and more are all future professional options after an athletic career. The dreams are endless with the right focus.

The Division of Intercollegiate Athletics at the University of Illinois

The University of Illinois athletics department's mission statement, states "To have the highest quality athletic program in all sports that allows the University of Illinois teams to compete for championships in the Big Ten Conference and the National Collegiate Athletic Association" (fightingillini.com). The criterion for excellence includes integrity and academic performance to the overall welfare of the student-athlete.

The athletic department is smaller than other division I universities such as The Ohio State University or Stanford University who have more than double the number of team sports at Illinois. Illinois has 19 sports (9 male and 10 female teams) and approximately 500 student-athletes depending on the year. The University of Illinois athletics department has nine academic counselors with three specifically for football. They also have two learning specialists and a nutritionist available for the student-athletes. The athletics department is committed to developing the athletic and academic abilities of the student-athlete. All these resources enhance the student-athlete experience. How they are used effectively is up to the student-athlete. The resources are only as great as the student-athlete wants their resource to be. All these resources are made available to enhance the student-athlete's overall experience.

Student-athletes have amazing opportunities that don't just begin in their respective sport, but in so many other ways when they enter the world of higher education. They take on the role of student and athlete while also adding a piece of who they are to this role. The role is a field unique to only so many. In the article, "How College Affect Student Athletes," possibly the most

important point articulated was how crucial the support at all levels of the institution are for the success of student-athletes in and out of their respective sport (Howard-Hamilton, 2001, 43).

The role of the student and athlete is not completely fulfilled, however, without the buy-in of the student-athlete working in conjunction with the personnel that manage the resources available to ensure the all-around success of youth in athletics.

Still there is a fine balance to the equation of academic and athletic excellence. Athletics departments set goals for themselves every year from the number of wins they want alongside the number of student-athletes they want to succeed in the classroom and walk across the stage on graduation day. The latter goal may not be spelled out on paper and simply cannot be measured with a score, but it should still maintain the same level of importance as the number of championship rings and records broken. This interconnected expectation and relationship establishes the strongest personal relationship with the student-athletes when student-athletes have a strong bond with a teacher, mentor, or confidant. The stronger the relationship in these areas, the better prepared the student-athlete, and by default, the easier it is for the student-athlete to live with or without the mask they have created for themselves.

Thesis Statement and Methodology

This thesis will illustrate the interconnectedness that establishes this personal relationship. For instance, some survey results articulate why some student-athletes felt they became the person they are today. A reoccurring answer that stood out to many who were surveyed was that teachers cared and took time. One responder summarized this well when she stated, “The teachers were very devoted and did what they could for their students. However, the school lacked some education resources due to lack of funds” (Women’s volleyball player,

2012). Despite, the lack of funding she believed existed in her educational preparedness and experience, she firmly believed that she was the person she was today because of the people who guided and believed in her.

Athletics departments play this role of the extended family. Just as many student-athletes see their team as their family, an athletics department is the center of a strong working family. For example, in the *Educated Parent* (2004), Joseph Sclafani describes what makes a family strong. "The strength of families lies in having the capacity to grow and change to meet new challenges and face adversity" (65). The stronger the relationships with one another are, the stronger the family. Every student-athlete brings something different to an athletics department and an athletics department has the chance to cultivate a person into a successful person in the world. The student-athlete also has a chance to improve an athletics department. The student-athlete and the athletics department work in ways to complement each other; in the end they are constantly working on each other's strength and weaknesses. No family is perfect, but the family that takes the necessary time to understand the needs of one another flourishes in regards to athletics. The family takes off the masks and sees the person that walks in the door at the end of the day with all that they have seen through the eyes of the mask.

Again, this thesis is an articulation of this relationship. It is hoped that the chapters that follow serve as insight for student-athletes looking at their future from an educational and athletic perspective. However, the main purpose is to address the whole person rather than focusing on one specific aspect—the student or the athlete—of the process. Along with a personal account as a student-athlete, this thesis is a checklist for student-athletes to use when choosing a school or while in school. In addition, the following pages examine the transformation of athletics into a moneymaking industry to the meaning of personal relationships

built within athletic departments. In addition, the perception versus reality of student-athletes in intercollegiate athletics will be addressed and what athletics departments can do to ensure they have sustainable success for their program(s).

This thesis relies on surveys as its mode of inquiry to obtain data and information to best relay this narrative. The purpose of the research as stated previously is to draw a deeper understanding of the growth, transformation and values within collegiate athletics between student athletes and the athletics department. The survey methods were important in gaining an in-depth understanding of some of the student-athletes perspectives from personal relationships to the way their athletics department perceived their educational and athletics purpose. It was important to ask questions that followed up with asking them why they felt certain ways. The survey was able to pull more meaning by retrieving responses that dealt with why they felt pressure to succeed and how failure dictated their work/life balance. The survey consisted of 41 questions and asked student-athletes from eight different sports teams about their experience as student-athletes at the University of Illinois. A total of 80 surveys were given out, and 68 student-athletes from all eight teams returned the survey. Of the 68 student-athletes surveyed 33.8% were freshmen, 23.5% were sophomores, 23.5% were juniors, and 17.6% were seniors. 69.1% of the student-athletes who responded to the survey were white, 26.5% were black/African-American and the remaining 4.4% were Latino/Hispanic, Asian, and other. There were 9 baseball (male) players, 16 football (male) players, 5 (male) gymnast, and 2 men's basketball players. There were 11 volleyball (female) players, 10 (female) swimmers, 8 soccer (female) players, and 7 women's basketball players. The male to female ratio for the survey was 47.1% of responders were male and 52.9% were female. The demographics of those surveyed allow for a rich and diverse understanding of the student-athlete at Illinois. It also affords the

researcher an opportunity to provide to the reader a unique insight as to how student-athletes view their life beyond the masks they have developed and in some ways required to wear in their respective sport.

The demographics of those surveyed allow for a rich and diverse understanding of the student-athlete at Illinois. It also affords the researcher an opportunity to provide to the reader a unique insight as to how student-athletes view their life beyond the masks they have developed and in some ways required to wear in their respective sport.

Conclusion

Even at the top people can get caught up in what they are trying to do and forget who they are. Everyday people put on masks in some sort of way. For people who love their mask, it can become them. For others who find a sense of relief under the mask, it offers an escape. Whatever the meaning in the mask, it gives someone a story. It is a person's personal story, their dreams, their failures, and their future or past. Although it would be impossible to know everyone's personal story, it is not impossible to know certain stories. An athletics department has a chance to understand the person behind the mask because of its close relationships with its people. Every student-athlete has a story that lies under their mask that will shape their future. Their future and stay at the university allows the athletic to thrive. Without a student-athlete's personal story the athletic department misses an important piece to their puzzle for success. They miss the piece that matters...the personal connection that makes a student-athlete want to work harder in their sport and in the classroom. Discovering the story gives motivation to work for the athletics department. Athletics departments need to invest in the personal relationship

with its student-athletes to have a more successful all around athletics department from the grades and graduation rates to the wins and championship playoffs.

CHAPTER 2

PERSONAL ACCOUNT

There are some moments in life that simply stick with you. They make you stronger. They don't necessarily define you; instead they develop you as a person. They are the moments that can break you down or build you up depending on how you use them. As a student-athlete they can be the moments of the fear of failure or the realizations of how you are truly blessed.

I always dreamed of being a successful swimmer. Once you start racing at the age of six you pretty much think the world operates in the water. When you're on land you wonder when you're going to be in the water next because land just seems to plain. Swimming became my escape, a part of my identity, and my reason for my academic success in a way. Without swimming I would have chosen a different path for my chance at higher education. I knew with swimming I could choose a school that had high academic standards while also having a legacy for athletic success. I was able to choose a top ten public institution at the time of my enrollment rather than an in-state school that I could afford. Swimming was the piece of the academic puzzle for success whether I realized it or not at the time.

I was privileged enough to accept an athletic scholarship to the University of Illinois. I would never go back and make a different decision because of the amazing opportunity that I was given to swim for a Big Ten school. With all the highs and lows swimming was one of the most important things in my life for four years in college. My schedule operated around my practice times and meet schedule. There were times where I felt like I wanted to be a so-called "normal" student, but then again I couldn't imagine functioning without swimming.

One day during the spring semester before the end of my swimming career my coach had our team sit on deck in four circles before practice. The circles were sorted by class rank. We

talked amongst one another for the time while our coach went from circle to circle talking to each class. Our class discussed everything from leadership to what we had to do to finish our career at Illinois strong and prideful.

When she arrived at the senior's circle she went around one by one saying something about each individual. For some the words were harsher and others the words felt meaningless. When she arrived to say what she had to me she said without hesitation, "CeCe you've lost the joy for the sport." I stopped in shock thinking WHAT? ME? You think I lost the joy for swimming? I was the only senior who had been captain the year before and I always put in extra time in the pool and outside of the pool. I did everything from cardio, abs, core, and yoga to make myself a better athlete. My team rated me one of the hardest workers on the team in an evaluation. Everything that I did seemed lost. I LOVED swimming. I felt that sometimes I loved it too much that I may be lost without it when I was done. It was the world I had come to love more than anything. Swimming was my mask of success and now she was saying my mask looked like it was without joy. I couldn't say anything to her. I felt my eyes wanting to feel up with tears, but I held them back. She kept asking, "Do you understand what I'm saying? Do you understand?" I couldn't think, I couldn't function... all I could get out was a wimpy "yeah."

She continued to go around and I knew everyone was in shock. I'm so thankful swimming is a sport done in the water with goggles on so I could hide my emotions for the workout. I dove in and thought about her comment for my warm-up and didn't cry, but was glad my face and eyes couldn't be seen. After I was done warming up there was no time to dwell on the comment.

I acted like nothing was wrong, because my focus was my practice. No one knew what my coach said except for the senior class. I didn't go around telling people I had a terrible encounter with my coach. I let it build me up.

Swimming has the ability to take your mind off the rest of the problems in your world for a moment. I got out of the water and walked home with my roommates and just cried. They wanted to cry with me. They were upset and frustrated and couldn't understand what my coach said. They thought she had to be insane for a moment. All I knew was I had to say something to her. I had to get it out before it built up inside me. I sat down and wrote her an email.

Below is the email:

I thought about what you said a lot. My first thought was shock, then my second was sadness, and my third was to focus on the moment and ignore it all and focus on what I does make me HAPPY and what I LOVE. I dove into the water and wanted to cry. All I felt was sadness, and I had to tell myself why I was there and do what I needed to do. When you told me I needed to find the joy in swimming again I was so confused, so lost, so thrown off. I didn't know what to say and my facial expression wasn't proving your statement was right, but rather throwing me so off guard I that I couldn't explain the rush of emotions going through my body. I didn't even know what to say to you, I lost my voice and could only get out a "yeah." I felt my teammate's faces on me and knew that they didn't agree with you either. I respect you as a coach. I have respected you when people have refused to see the good in you. And today I still respect you because of what you have done for me and what you have put into this program. I can only hope to have a passion that you have for coaching for my future career. The joy in swimming for me comes from my teammates who push me beyond my limits every day. My joy for swimming comes from the rush I feel when I dive into the water and know I control my fate and the outcome at the end of the practice. My joy in swimming comes from competing for the orange and blue and seeing the possibilities and opportunities that are in front of me. So for you to say I don't have the joy for swimming right now was hurtful, and more importantly wrong. I know myself better than anyone and I can tell you that I come into practice wanting to be there. I do enjoy myself when I swim, when I compete, and when I am around the team. I have JOY for this sport and this team above all. This year I have taken on a lot, but no more than what I can handle. I have managed to do everything I need to do. I can walk away from my college career knowing I got the most out of it. My college career would not be complete

without the extra activities I participate in and the friends that I have made along the way. Swimming is not my whole life, but it has definitely been one of my biggest life lessons. I don't and will not look back at my college career with "regrets" and "wishes" of what I thought I should have done.

I may have taken what you said to me completely wrong, and if that is the case I apologize for this email. If that is the case I would like to know what you did mean and am willing to listen. My professor this semester taught me more than I could ever imagine. Before you walked over I told the seniors that he told me to find something I couldn't imagine retiring from. He said with him he never saw obstacles, he only saw what he could do and accomplish in front of him. He goes to bed at night exhausted because he knows he has gotten everything he could out of his day. I told them that with swimming we should go to bed exhausted because we put everything we can into the practice and at night our bodies will recover. Then you came over and said I didn't have joy for the swimming. Which brings me to my final lesson that I learned from my class this semester: My professor interviewed Chris Gardner (the man the Pursuit of Happiness was based off). He had an abstract picture of a man with a mask on. My professor asked Gardner the meaning of the picture was, and Gardner responded that people don't really ever know the person behind the mask... I guess I walk away thinking maybe you don't know me... the person behind the swimmer.

CeCe (12/10/2009)

We met and talked the following day. She admitted her wording was wrong and that there should have been a different way to approach the situation. She told me her stories in life and in coaching and I explained to her my reasons for frustration. We listened, and for that moment it was the closest I ever felt to her. Why did it take a comment and an email to start a conversation? She said I did a good job hiding that the comment had even fazed me in the water. It did faze me, but I wouldn't let it control me. We talked about the mask and I ultimately said she didn't know us as people and she agreed. She agreed, and I wanted her to disagree more than anything. I wanted her to want to learn about the people. I realized our coach wore a mask too. I said we didn't know anything about her and she agreed again. I understood being private, but I still thought knowing the person and having an open door for her athletes was important.

We discussed my senior year and how I was so involved, or as she thought too involved with other activities. She didn't think I could balance my load, but I knew everything I was

involved in had a bigger purpose. That year I had my fastest times in season and the highest GPA for both semesters of my college career. I could balance it as long as I stayed focused. I refused to look back on my athletic career and say I was only a student-athlete. I wanted to leave a bigger legacy. A legacy that would allow student-athletes to realize the potential they had not only for success, but the potential they had to influence the world.

When I finished my athletic career there were so many mixed emotions. My last collegiate race I honestly couldn't feel any pain at all. I just remember jumping in for the 200 backstroke thinking, "I love this...swim like when you were eight." My theme of my senior year was just to have fun. Senior year was about enjoying the moments and taking in each race as a chance to get better. It was the biggest learning year of my life.

I started my last race and was so thankful the whole entire time. I heard my teammates cheering and when I turned I could see their hands pushing me forward with cheers and the sound of my body rushing through the water. I finished the race a little off my best time from the previous year, but perfectly content with where I was. I pushed myself out of the water exhausted and just laid on the deck looking up at the bright lights above. I was so tired that my chest just kept going up and down trying to take the air in. My legs felt like they were on fire, but I just laid there holding back the tears of joy from an amazing four years.

My coach came up to me at the end and put her arm around me and said, "Thank you, you've done a lot for this program." It was over, but I took more from the years of swimming than I did from any other events in my life. That's exactly how a lot of other student-athletes feel. The sport is the lesson for the playing field of life.

The big question came up right after that moment. What was I going to do now? What if nothing gave me the rush of swimming? What was I even good at besides swimming? I was

scared and nervous for my future. Then I realized I had so much more to do. Swimming was just the teacher that opened the door for the rest of my life.

I started to think about all the student-athletes who came before me, who came with me, and who would follow. What did they feel? What was the next step? Were they happy with life? Would they be happy with their future? Would there be regrets?

I started to realize every day we walk through life without paying attention to the smallest instances that could affect our lives. We neglect to look into the eyes of the person we pass on the street thinking they may have no importance to us at the moment or our agenda has more precedence. For some the focus is on their own agenda without the slightest reality check at what else is happening in the world. Looking at the bigger picture every single person has their own story to be told, but until people decide to open the book and uncover the whole story it's left untold. Student-athletes have the ability to develop into more than just the results at the end of a competition and more than the grades they post. There needs to be more time invested in putting the meaning into the collegiate athlete's existence at the university.

Every student-athlete has their own story of how their lives have been affected by the world of sport. On the collegiate level they have surpassed so many others to make their dreams a reality. Only one out of every 99 student-athletes at the high school level will get the opportunity to play division I athletics (Lapchick, 1989, 5). Competition takes on new meaning for the student-athlete when their schools pride is on the line. For some of the student-athletes their own pride is on the line with the headlines in papers and on the Internet that tell of the success and scream louder with the failures. Some fans fall into the world of worshiping the student-athlete who produces the wins and become the face of the university. The image of the student-athlete becomes the athlete, instead of the person who is the student-athlete.

The student-athlete has a story waiting to be told. Here is a chance to discover the story.
Here is a chance for an athletic department to reveal the future's they have chosen to invest in.
The story that comes from the lessons they have learned and the advice they would now give.

CHAPTER 3

CHECKLIST

Senior year is stressful enough for a high school senior who has to decide on the next step. The right school with the right resources and the right people all become a part of the “big decision.” A student-athlete is thinking of all those components on top of choosing the school that will give them a chance to excel in their respective sport for the next one to four years if they so choose.

What should a student-athlete be thinking about during the whole process? One thought that should pop into a student-athlete's mind should be what they really want out of the experience. There are many routes to take and many go through the process in different ways. Think of college as a double door process for student-athletes. One door has academics on it and the other has athletics. Which door to go through when given the option? Which door provides the most successful future? The NCAA made note in their survey of the student-athlete experience in college that “student-athletes value the athletic experience, its impact on the overall college experience, and the skills that translate over to the academic side” (Potuto, 2006, 23).

The important part is to realize a student-athlete can push open both doors. Both doors can provide successful futures if opened wide enough. Education will last a lot longer than an athletic career, but in moments it's easy to lose sight of that.

The student truly works with the athlete. Everything they've learned competing and through practice are reflected in the classroom and through preparation. Dedication and hard work are words to describe the person in regards to their academic and athletic success. Ervin “Magic” Johnson commented in *On the Mark* by noting that the student in the student-athlete

should always come first. He said, “Very few high school athletes go on to become college athletes, and even fewer become pros. But far more high school students can become college students. And a college degree is the key that unlocks the door to your future” (Lapchick, 1987, 11).

In this research, the student-athletes surveyed were asked to finish two sentences:

"Athletics are ____" and "Without education ____" The answers ranged from “Athletics are my life” to “Athletics are fun.” Athletics to most of the student-athletes surveyed are an important piece of who they are and bring about character building aspects that shape the whole process.

The next fill-in the blank was “Without education ____” and the answers revealed that the majority of the student-athletes finished the sentence with acknowledging that without education life would be much more difficult.

Here are some answers from the teams below with regards to the first question, “Athletics are...”.

Football

Athletics are:

- A better chance for me to get a better education
- My life and my education
- A lifestyle
- A great way to gain experience in communicating and networking with others.
- Worthwhile

Baseball

Athletics are:

- The most important thing in my life.
- A great way to build work-ethic and responsibility.
- An all year round commitment.
- Like a job

Men’s Basketball

Athletics are:

- Fun and hard

Men's Gymnastics:

Athletics are:

- Part of my identity
- A large component of my life
- Important, but do not decide my future

Soccer

Athletics are:

- Time consuming, but a learning experience
- Important in my life.
- An important part of my life.
- Essential to the growth of an athlete.

Women's Swimming & Diving

Athletics are:

- Foundation for development and discipline.
- Fun.
- A defining part of who I am.
- Inspiring.

Volleyball

Athletics are:

- My passion.
- Awesome!
- Great for building character.

Women's Basketball

Athletics are:

- Demanding
- Very competitive and my life
- Not easy
- Intense

Athletics are...an open-ended question with different responses, but also common themes. Athletics can mean everything to some people and for others it's more simplistic. The question helped to understand the mask itself that student-athletes put on. Overall, the survey question, "athletes are..." aimed to draw in on how important one aspect of the student-athletes life could define a part of themselves. The student-athletes revealed that at times athletics could be hard, fun, a part of their lives, and character building. With those answers it was clear that the

student-athletes at Illinois felt passionately about their athletic career and had a sense of how it developed them as people. The mask of athletics revealed the strength and power that came from the ability to feel connected to something in their lives.

The themes seen throughout the answers ranged. The student-athletes who answered that athletics were big parts of their lives or who they were proved that without their athletic capabilities and opportunities they would not be where they were. Throughout the majority of the sports there was always some sort of answer that referred back to that theme of a big part of their life or their identity and passion. On the other hand, another common theme from the answers was that athletics were a stepping tool to the other parts of their lives. Athletics represent a mask that would ultimately be hard to lose or simply the mask that helped them succeed. The interconnectedness between all the team's answers exemplified the influence of athletics in their lives.

Research that has been done on the student-athlete also conveys the power and role of athletics. For example, the NCAA conducted a survey in 2006 that asked student-athletes whether they would participate in college sports without a scholarship and the majority still said yes (Potuto, 2006, 8). On the survey 47.4% said that athletics contributed to their educational experiences as well (Potuto, 2006, 10). The student-athletes at Illinois related to the survey conducted to the survey in 2006 by connecting athletics back to education. The answers tied into other literature as well. Athletics becomes part of their identity or who they are or what they live for. Athletics can have positive effects, but also have negative outcomes. For some people they perceive some athletes as the "dumb jock" could potentially hold a student-athlete back because of the belief of the stereotype that allows them to feel less motivated academically (Simons,

2007, 252). Athletics can be seen as tool that leads to opportunity, but also one that holds people back if not used correctly.

The same pattern for answers that revealed more insight about the person behind the mask followed for the next question.

Here are some answers from the teams below with regards to the first question, “Without education...”

Football

Without education:

- It is hard for you to keep track with things in school.
- No sports or money.
- You can't understand the real world of money.
- Your life options are limited.
- The world wouldn't be where it is today.

Baseball

Without education:

- I would not be where I am today.
- We would never make strides forward or individually or as a society.
- It would be hard to succeed out of college.
- Life would be easier.

Men's Basketball

Without education:

- No future in life.

Men's Gymnastics

Without education:

- You cannot grow
- My aspirations
- I will not get the job I desire

Soccer

Without education:

- I wouldn't be able to get a good job.
- I will end up extremely unsuccessful.
- People wouldn't change the future.
- One could not get to where they want to be in life.

Women's Swimming & Diving

Without education:

- We are nothing? Education is the most valuable gift.
- I would not feel like I could fulfill my goals in life.
- I would be lost
- You can't go very far in life.

Volleyball

Without education:

- You wouldn't have many options in life.
- We have no way to ensure successful careers.
- Nothing would have advanced to where we are.

Women's Basketball

Without education:

- No future outside university
- I would not be able to participate in athletics
- I would not have opportunity that I have now
- One will least likely succeed in the world

As one may be able to assess, the athletic component is of great importance to the student-athletes surveyed. As previously mentioned, athletics are important to the student-athletes as people and has allowed them to do more with their lives. However, as powerful as athletics can be, the power of education stood above athletics in the survey answers. Sometimes it is easy to lose sight of the opportunity that is presented to student-athletes in regard to their education. In this case the question allowed for the student-athletes to grasp the importance of their education. Athletics represent the mask, but education symbolizes a part of the student-athlete under the mask. Without education the mask that some student-athletes take pride in would ultimately become worthless. The mask offers temporary success. Therefore education offers the sustainable success that comes for the opportunities provided by the mask.

The big connection that can be seen throughout all the sports is the reference to the future or the so-called life after sport. The answers portrayed how any chance at future success would be completely out of reach. One answer even drew back on the fact that without education she

would not be able to participate in athletics. The answers were so powerful on a bigger scale from the conclusions the student-athletes were able to draw to the importance of having a successful future from a career to their life outside of the university system.

A large amount of research that has been done on the student-athlete centers on how athletics has taken away from the educational experience. Contradictory to research done, student-athletes have not lost what they value within their college experience from the answers provided by the student-athletes at Illinois. They answered in a way that provided the value in education. For instance, an article about student-athletes address how playing a college sport can help some athletes focus and stay alert in regards to their academics (Watt, 2001, 11). The education factor is a much bigger component from the answers the student-athletes gave.

Another question examined has no right or wrong answer. Notwithstanding, the question serves as an identification process for the student-athlete. The question, "Does the student-athlete pride themselves on the mask as the athlete or the mask of the student at this stage in life? Or could they essentially play both roles?" The student-athletes at Illinois were split, however more than half, 54.4% said they considered themselves to be students before they were athletes. The 45.6% of responders that considered themselves athletes first had responses such as: "Because I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for my athleticism." "Because athletics is the reason why I'm in school." "The amount of time on sports is higher then academics." "Football coaches preach it." "More important to me/enjoy it more." "Yes, mostly because I think there is more pressure on athletic performance. Our coaches stress our athletic performance far more than our teachers care about our grades so we see to put more of ourselves to our sport to please our coaches, because there are no repercussions if we do not put a full effort to our classes. I also

think we learn a lot more through our sports than we do sitting in a classroom." "It takes more effort to be an athlete than a student."

The answers all make a valid point. The theme seen between the student-athletes who identified with being an athlete before a student were along the lines of the importance put into their athletic success. "Who Are Student Athletes?" (2001) pointed out that many student-athletes identified with being a student-athlete and that academics could become of less importance because of this identity belief (Watt, 13). With that it is critical to not lose sight of the student. The whole notion of the "athlete stigma" can be detrimental to overall success. The media and college faculty can also play into the negative expectations that student-athletes have (Simons, 2007, 258). The mask at this point acts as a powerful tool in the college experience.

Some student-athletes simply pointed out how they would not even be at Illinois if they were not athletes or the mere fact that athletics are more enjoyable than school. For some being an athlete had the power to change their life. For instance, one male student-athlete made a definite point about what athletics has done. He wrote, "Because athletics can change my family's life, not just mine" (Football player, 2011). The student-athlete took the importance of his athlete mask because it was no longer about him, but about his family. Athletics to him is not about his own success, but the ultimate success of providing for his family.

The 54.4% of student-athletes who identified with being a student first noted that their athletic careers wouldn't last forever or that they had a better chance at success from their education. Their answers follow: "At the end of the day, being a student is what matters in my life. I will not be an athlete forever." "Because making a living off baseball is a lot less likely than making one in business at this point." "Athletic are only going to last so long but I will always need my education to fall back on." "I used to sadly (think athlete first), because that's the

general sentiment of my sport, and because I didn't know what I wanted to do. That has since changed." "You can't play sports forever. Being able to a college degree while competing in a sport I love is an honor! I wouldn't be where I am today without swimming but I won't be anywhere tomorrow without my education."

Looking at each team individually one may be surprised that it wasn't necessarily just the football players or basketball players being the revenue sports who considered themselves athletes first. For instance, women's basketball had 57% of responders say they were athletes first, football only had 37.5%, women's soccer was split 50/50 as well as men's basketball, women's swimming had 40%, men's baseball had the highest percentage with 78% and women's volleyball had the lowest with only 27% of responders considering themselves athletes first.

To judge who comes first is hard without knowing the meaning behind the choice. The answers give a glimpse into understanding the purpose of the mask for some student-athletes while also unveiling the person behind the mask. For example, some people will wear the mask of their fraternity or sorority while others wear the mask of their particular club they belong to from theater to the ultimate Frisbee team. People define themselves from their experiences. A student-athlete is no different. They are noted and commended for their performance in their sport, but may face challenges when it comes to their own identity because of the athletic component (Howard-Hamilton, 2001, 37). Student-athletes must not forget that their identity and in this sense their mask is broadcast on a bigger scale than most. Their mask will be seen in the school paper and local player when they do well and when they mess up.

While making the next step a student-athlete should take time to know and understand their potential or current athletic department. The athletic director is a person that some student-athletes can go their whole career without even knowing who he or she is. Athletic directors

have a tremendous task in front of them based on what the athletics department is capable of doing. *The Successful Athletic Program* (1997), looked at a survey conducted by college presidents and listed the qualities they wanted in athletic directors. The list included: strategic thinking, strong public speaking abilities, ability to manage complex financial matters, knowledge about equality, and the list goes on (Gerdy, 1997, 94-95). The list however failed to mention academic standards as Gerdy points out (95). Overall, the athletic director has the ability to influence a student-athletes future in a number of ways from their sport to the emphasis they put on classroom performance that the coaches enforce.

The athletics department serves to bring success to a student-athlete in and out of their sport. They become a student-athletes' new family who values all aspects of growth. While trying to balance the athletic and academic load, a student-athlete should aim to leave that lasting legacy. Records will be broken and medals won't last forever, but a legacy will last longer if the legacy was meaningful.

As mentioned earlier student-athletes were asked about their schooling experience and what made them believe that they actually received a good educational experience. What made a student-athlete consider their experience good or bad? Focusing on the high school level he answers centered on having options in their classes for AP or honors courses, teachers taking extra time, resources, extracurricular activities, and the mere fact that it was a Catholic or private school. However, the student-athletes who said they had a bad school experience said they weren't prepared for the next level. For example, "because when I came off to school (college) I felt like I was behind." Student-athletes understand the importance of preparation from the time they put into practice in order to win competitions. School acts in the same fashion where these student-athletes did not feel prepared for the competition of the classroom at the collegiate level.

Also, teacher quality can be compared to an athletics department. An athletics departments showing that they care alone can make an impact on the way a student-athlete feels as if they are prepared for the next level. One student-athlete put that the reason why his high school was not a good school was because it was all about football. If an athletic department is solely about football, will he leave thinking he didn't go to a good college? Go back to a student-athletes schooling from grade school to high school upbringing and examine what impacted their experience and what can be done to prepare them for the next level.

Although it is difficult to judge what classifies a quality education, the responses from the student-athletes below offer some assessment of what student-athletes at Illinois think.

Volleyball

- There were a variety of groups and clubs that students could get involved in. We had very educated and experienced teachers.
- My high school was known for its academics. The school was always up to date with resources and technology.
- Different levels of education, as well as plenty of extra help was offered.
-

Football

- *Because when I came off to school (college) I felt behind.*
- I went to a Catholic high school that stressed academic perfection and having faith. They train their students for the world.
- I attended a private school (thanks to financial aid) that showed me the true benefits of the education system. Teachers were interactive and shared a common interest in our academic growth.
- No, *it was all about football.* That is why I transferred my senior year.
- Students were not felt as important in school it was more of a just to get by atmosphere.
-

Men's Gymnastics

- National Blue ribbon school.
- Small private high school, excellent teachers, good funding and support from alumni, extra help always available.
- I was able to take AP courses that helped my understanding when I got to college.

Baseball

- Catholic high school is small which means more time devoted to the student.
- There were a lot of opportunities to get help in any subject. The class options were numerous and the departments all took their job seriously.

- Classes weren't too packed and teachers had off hours for helping students.
- The teachers at my high school were really good to work with and school was a good learning environment.
- they wanted each student to do the best they could. They offered times to meet if help was needed.

Men's Basketball

- Went to a great Jesuit high school that taught all subjects and made me a well-rounded student.

Soccer

- Yes, it was a very large high school with exceptional facilities.
- Good teachers with good advice.
- Catholic School.
- My high school I attended was very competitive and pushed me to keep doing better.
-

Women's Swimming and Diving

- We had tons of different AP and honors classes. The teachers were awesome and won numerous awards (Golden Apple Award). We also had classes in many topics such as business, technology and engineering, and family/consumer sciences/art as well as normal classes.
- My high school did not offer as many AP classes as some neighboring schools, but I have not found that to be a great disadvantage in college. Our teachers, particularly those on the junior and senior level, worked to give us any opportunity we needed. There were many clubs and organizations to accommodate our interests.
- My high school offered many different classes and extracurricular activities so every type of person could be in at least one thing they like. There were also many different types of tutor programs to help struggling students.
- I was prepared for college and I was given not only great education, but important skills to help me succeed.

Women's Basketball

- Private school, many tutoring services, afterschool curricular, and it was a laptop school which was a good source to have in high school.
- *I don't feel they prepared me for college.*
- I attended a Catholic high school that was very good education wise. There were always available resources.
- Helped me with my struggles.

Understanding the problems that exists at the high school level for athletics and academics could help solve the problems that persist at the collegiate level. Many of the student-athletes answered that they went to a "good" high school, but for the 10.4% that said they didn't

it came from the mere responses that they weren't prepared for college or that there was too much emphasis on their sport and not on academics. The student-athletes recognized that there are necessary steps set in place for them to succeed.

In addition, more needs to be done to stop passing student-athletes along because of their athletic capabilities. "Academic underperformance in college has roots in high school academic performance, in the priority assigned by athletes to academics, and in the 'culture of sport.'" (Shulman, 1989, 262). Did a teacher at some point receive satisfaction from the star basketball player receive his diploma and make it to college even though he may read at a fourth grade level? Will the academic counselor who has to hold his hand throughout his college career receive satisfaction when he receives his diploma even though he still falls behind his peers academically? The problem in athletics starts far sooner than when a collegiate athlete steps foot onto a college campus.

The best advice can come from those who went through the process first. The student-athletes at Illinois were asked if they could give advice to an incoming student-athlete what would it be. Time management stood out above all the answers, but some of the answers follow below.

ADVICE:

Football

- Learn time management
- You just signed your life away to this school, get ready for something you've never experienced before
- Try to meet new people
- It's going to be tough but just stay focused remember why you're here and work hard
- Take advantage of every opportunity you have to be a positive role model and a great student
- That they will have fun, but being a student-athlete will be the hardest thing in their life
- Get off to a good start in school. Use your resources
- Time management will be key to your success
- Grades first, fun will never

- Study, get more involved
- Work hard in everything that you do and don't waste this wonderful opportunity to be a leader

Women's Volleyball

- Time management is a very important skill to have and become involved with the community
- Make sure they balance their school, sports, and life
- Spend time with friends building relationships
- Manage time well, enjoy the time you have with the team alone
- School is important, but don't let the stress of it all drive you crazy
- Enjoy every minute because it is a short few years. Take advantage of the academic services that are offered
- Make sure you have your priorities straight
- Work hard, figure out the ways you learn best in the classroom and in the gym, set goals, always keep an open mind.

Men's Basketball

- Get ready to work hard
- Stay organized and that time management is very important

Women's Soccer

- Do not be afraid of failure!
- Spend time with friends
- Time management is the most important
- Run so much before you come and practice independence
- Focus on school and sports and make them your agenda
- Learn how to manage your time well before coming here so you're not overwhelmed
- To enjoy every minute

Men's Baseball

- Spend more time studying and practicing
- Be ready for long hard days. And manage your time as best as possible
- Be punctual, respectful, and optimistic
- Work hard before you get here because you will not be the best once you get here
- Manage your time, have an outside life other than school and sports

Women's Basketball

- Time management is very important
- Make sure you do a good job balancing books, ball, and social life, Prioritize the important things
- Hang out with friends, study
- Time management is key and once you have that down pack college will be the best time of your life

- Be able to organize your life, stay ahead of your work and never settle and become complacent with where you are right now.

Men's Gymnastics

- Live in the moment. Don't get caught up in the future. Don't be afraid to try something new.
- Get to know other people other than your teammates
- Live every moment of it. Take everything in at grows as a person

Women's Swimming and Diving

- Learn to schedule your time, and stay on your schedule. If you fall behind, it is really easy to get lost in the mix of things
- Get involved in activities other than just your sport
- To understand that they are at Illinois to be students and not just athletes. It is important to get involved in activities outside of athletics and build yourself a positive reputation. For years goes by fast and you will need something to do after your athletic career is over!
- Don't take anything for granted. No regrets! Four years goes by fast
- Get involved! Everything you do outside of school and sport can be added to your resume and really set you apart from other applicants once it comes to applying for jobs after graduation. Not only is it something to add to your resume, but you can learn a lot from those experiences.

Advice from the student-athletes allowed for a moment of reflection on the survey. The question about advice was posed to recognize the chance to learn from those who are going through the process and what they have learned along the way. The advice can be given to current student-athletes or to future student-athletes that go on to compete at the collegiate level. Without this question there would be a gap left in the survey. The whole point of understanding the student-athlete and not the mask was to understand what they valued. The advice was the inside look at what they have done or in some cases would have done differently.

Time has no monetary value, but time is of the utmost importance to many people. The responders on the survey emphasized how time management is crucial for success or how time at the university goes quickly and in turn it is important to get the most out of the experience. Tying into how time goes quickly, other student-athletes surveyed gave advice on how important

it is to get involved and become a well-rounded person, not just a well-rounded athlete. The reoccurring themes that the student-athletes had on this question made it clear that they value their experience and acknowledge the challenge while also clearly stating what they have learned. The overall message and connection between all the teams, work hard, manage time wisely, have fun, and take advantage of the opportunities provided.

In the *Journal of College Student Development* (1989), Frank Ryan described how athletic involvement has positive outcomes that can be seen on many levels regardless of sex or sport (122). The student-athlete responders at Illinois used their athletic experience in a positive way and in turn offered valuable advice. Time management skills for student-athletes are “viewed as perhaps the most critical skills needed for effective study” (Jordan, 1990, 96). The survey results were reflective of how important time management is for incoming and current student-athletes.

The information provided by Illinois’s student-athletes mirrors the responses of student-athletes elsewhere. From the information gathered from both the responders to this research’s questions and published materials from the last twenty years, there are a number of questions student-athletes should ask prior to signing a letter of intent to college. Items on the “checklist” include living quarters, school tradition, safety, etc. (McKissic, 1998, 29-29), but there are other concerns to consider. Questions such as:

1. Do I feel comfortable here? Is this a place I can see myself for the next four to five years?
2. Does the coach value my education as much as my athletic success? Where is there proof of that besides what he or she has said?
3. What are my athletic goals that I aim to achieve? How will I reach them?
4. What do I see myself doing after my athletic career? What are my interests? Do I want to stay in the world of sports? Do I have a passion for science or research?
5. What don’t I enjoy doing?
6. What areas do I need to improve upon in regards to my academics?

7. Does the athletic department provide adequate resources that will enhance my educational experience? (study facilities, computer labs, academic staff for support, etc.)
8. How much does the athletic director show interests in my sport? Do I even know who the athletic director is and his or her role?
9. Do the current student-athletes enjoy their experience? How much do they support each other?
10. Does the university and athletic department provide the essential resources and more for me to develop as a person? (volunteer activities, career resources, etc.)
11. What do I plan on doing to get involved in my college experience?
12. Do I know how to manage my time?
13. What motivates me to do well? What will push me to that next level?
14. What is the daily schedule like for people in my sport at the university? How much time do you get to study or simply relax?
15. What am I willing to sacrifice?

The list of questions could go on and on, but knowing who you are as a student-athlete is probably the most important piece to finding out the answers to these questions, knowing the person beneath the mask. Know the person who succeeded in high school and know the person who struggled in high school. In some cases it may be difficult to admit where more help is needed, but it is important to focus on the weaknesses from the classroom to the sport to succeed at the collegiate level. John Gerdy author of *The Successful College Athletic Program* (1997) puts it into perspective, “higher education leaders must address the win-at-all cost philosophy that drives their athletic programs because this philosophy pervades not only college athletics but high school, and grade school athletics as well” (11). It starts early on in a student-athletes career in with what to consider as a main focus. The education and entertainment value cannot be compared.

CHAPTER 4

EDUCATION VS. ENTERTAINMENT FACTOR

America today breathes and lives for game day. That day where nothing else matters except for the smell of grilled hamburgers, the sound of marching bands and the array of team colors surrounding a stadium or arena. Collegiate athletics have risen to a completely different level with the pride of victory at stake. There are shows dedicated just to the particular day such as “College Game Day.” Fans show their pride from waiting hours for tickets to support their teams, to painting their whole bodies their school colors, to suffering depression for years to come from a missed field goal kick that could have sent a football team and a school to a championship. Yet, collegiate athletics come to signify more than the “game day” experience. Collegiate athletics embody a group much bigger than the television airtime and tailgates people plan every week. The following chapter provides a lit review of the transformation of collegiate athletics and development from an education and character building opportunity to an entertainment revolution.

Collegiate athletics represent the people who compete for their schools and who compete not only on game day, but game day in the classroom as well. However, some are left asking if collegiate athletics represent the student-athlete at all? Or is it all about the money and entertainment? Collegiate athletics in its truest form is supposed to stand for developing the whole person, but the other side to the story looks at collegiate athletics as a money making franchise. Society today has a battle between priorities when it comes to what the purpose of collegiate athletics represents. Does society value the educational opportunity or does society value entertainment pleasure and commercialism? Despite what many may choose to fixate on

the true purpose of collegiate athletics and its role in society should be to produce educated people that are well-rounded on all levels.

Education is an opportunity that many fight for in some parts of the world. The largest organization of children helping children, Free the Children has education as one of its core values. The foundation of Free the Children's international development is bringing quality education to all children (freethechildren.org). Organizations such as Free the Children see how much can be done if a child has an education for the future. Children finally believe they have a chance to be whatever they dream of from becoming future educators to doctors or engineers. Education opens the door up for many who believed they didn't stand a chance at making a difference in the world. Therefore, education intertwined with athletics should have the same foundation. The National Association of Collegiate Athletics, founded in 1906 has its true supporters by its side as well as harsh critics constantly knocking at its door. They state that they are "committed to the quality education of student-athletes" (NCAA.org). They are constantly calculating numbers on graduation rates to academic success of teams to show the positives of collegiate athletics. However, some still see through the holes that remain in their commitment to the educational experience. The conflict lies in the money the NCAA generates from its television contracts.

Although some see the value in educational experiences, there are others who take for granted the value of an education. They are the people constantly criticizing what education really provides. Instead of putting more money into education people look elsewhere to put funds. Peter Mortimore (1997) writes about how schools play a role in the development of individuals in society and how they have the ability to enhance a person's future or hinder their path along the way in "Can Effective Schools Compensate for Society?" Mortimore examines

individual schools rather than education in general and ultimately comes to the conclusion that schools can compensate for society, but to a certain extent. Take an individual athletic department and shift its focus and attitudes in a way to make sure that its student-athletes get their full chance to compete, compete academically that is. The university and athletic department offer a chance for student-athletes from all different economic backgrounds a better opportunity in life. Still, according to Mortimore, the level of success with the student, and in the case of the student-athlete will depend on “their talents, motivation, and luck” (483). The athletic department gives the student-athlete a chance to be in the race, but they have to make a choice on how well they want to finish. Bottom line, a student-athlete’s positive educational experience will have more of a profound impact on the university and society than the entertainment factor and revenue that a student-athlete can produce for the university for one to four years.

Now, close your eyes and picture stepping onto a college campus and thinking of the classroom as ticket to success. Realize that the libraries are your portals to an endless array of information. Visualize the university union as your chance to interact and bond with people of different backgrounds. College can be a magical experience for some. A university is a place to cultivate learning and develop young minds that will flourish onto the next step. For student-athletes they can step onto campus and feel their hearts start to race for the mere fact of excitement of wearing the school colors and representing their school with pride. The key is for every student-athlete to see the classroom as the portal to success, rather than a road blockage into their practice or nap time. *The Sociology of Education* (2007) by Jeanne Ballentine states from a functionalist perspective that “schools are expected to instill values related to social

control and individual development” (45). Student-athletes at their respective schools have a chance to develop as an individual and thrive in the environment set in front of them.

Collegiate athletics should be viewed through the perspective of the functionalist theory. The functionalist theory “views the educational system as an integral, interrelated part of the whole societal system, carrying out certain necessary functions for the survival of society” (Ballentine, 2007, 24). An athletics department should use the functionalist theory to focus on the individual student-athlete, taking the time to develop their talent. The talent however cannot be left upon athletic abilities alone. Each student-athlete carries some sort of skill that will help to propel them in life. The athletics department just has to make sure their focus is on the individual student-athlete and not focused on the student-athletes entertainment/revenue value.

The value of an athletics department is relative. Athletics departments are organizations that have transformed in the power they actually have. From a functionalist perspective the power rests in the values and interests that benefit all. Today, power in athletics departments is transforming constantly from big contracts with companies such as Nike and Under Armour to the television contracts designed to boost national attention to a school. Athletics departments know how to control not only the people it represents, but the millions of people buying the university athletic gear and watching the games on television. The power can be seen in the manipulation that takes place on game day.

In *40 Million Dollar Slaves* (2007), William C. Rhoden uses the analogy of a “Conveyer Belt” to illustrate how athletes become a spectacle of a bigger process. The “Conveyer Belt” is the power that athletics departments at universities use today. The “Belt” in some cases takes the individuals farther and farther away from where they’re from by taking control of young athletes (182). The Belt has a chance to manipulate those that are on it unless they know how to take

advantage of the Belt by taking away the operators control. For instance, C.A. Persell (1977) discusses theoretical synthesis and breaks it down into four levels of analysis: societal, institutional, interpersonal, and intrapsychic. The levels will influence the participants on the Conveyer Belt that Rhoden brings up. Using Persell's comparison of teachers, administrators and researchers and changing the language to coaches, athletic administrators, and academic counselors one can understand the power and influence in an athletics department. For example the expectations that they have upon a student-athlete "may have important consequences for the way the child is perceived, the expectations held for that child, how the child is taught, and what is learned" (Persell, 1977, 7). If a student-athlete were to come in with low academic expectations, but high athletic expectations the chance of success goes down. The expectations need to be on more than athletic, but on academics as well. The student-athlete may come in thinking that his or her role is to boost sales in the campus store and make headlines for the accomplishments in their sport. The problem with those expectations is what is learned turns into what is not learned in the classroom.

Rhoden brought up the example of Bernard Stephens, a young athlete recruited by the University of Illinois. Later on it was discovered that Stephens as well as other athletes had been given improper benefits from a "slush fund" (172). Rhoden writes, "I wondered why a big white school like Illinois felt it had to 'buy' a young black athlete- precisely the sort of teenage the university would otherwise ignore" (172). Taking a young adult and seizing the opportunity so that a university can gain public exposure has tainted the athletic and academic world by manipulating the young athlete. Stephens had opportunity for a better life, but did anyone really even think about his educational future? The university and athletic department simply saw him as their opportunity to broadcast their games on a bigger stage and do what was most important

in their eyes...winning. To this day universities and athletic departments forget their mission statements and forget about developing those personal relationships. They've lost the beauty in what education is all about.

In *150 Heroes: People in Sport who Make the World a Better Place* (2010), Brian Wright was a McDonald's High School Basketball All-American, hall of fame at his university, and currently the scouting coordinator of the Orlando Magic. "Too often, the goal of completing one's education while transitioning from amateur to professional athletes is sadly neglected," Wright wrote. "Those who promote the image of the student-athlete forget that the individual is, in fact, a student as well as an athlete" (Wright, 2010, 371). For collegiate athletics to fully succeed the student in the student-athlete has to be a priority along the way. However there is much more to uncover about the person. Some people fully believe that more needs to be done on all levels. It doesn't just start in the classroom, but on the field and with the people around. Peter French wrote in *Ethics and College Sports* (2004), "Despite whatever lip service the universities might give to 'educating the whole person' or to the character education, there is little evidence that they are serious about it or that, given their regular budget crises, they could accomplish it, even if there were more than general agreement among faculty of the various disciplines that it would be a good thing to do and how to do it (French, 2004, 59). He makes note that it's not just a problem for athletic departments in developing the "whole person," but the university as a whole. The whole person is an important step with success, but one of the important roles of success for collegiate programs lies in academic success.

The reality is some people don't see the full potential of the degree without realizing the full opportunities available. "Extrinsic rewards such as better career outcomes, personal security, parental exhortation, and so on can motivate school achievement" (Steele, 1997, 616). The focus

has to be on the end result that comes from the degree not just the athletic success. The end result can lead to a diploma with a brighter outlook on the future. For example, graduation rates are used to measure a student-athlete's success or failure for the institution and participating in sports can help some of those athletes to completing their degree in the first place (Watt, YEAR, 11). Academic life and athletic soon learn to play hand in hand when they are utilized in the way that they are meant to. In regards to collegiate athletics, the athletic component is meaningless without the academic piece holding it together.

Athletic competition encompasses a competitive nature that cannot truly be understood unless in the moment. Athletics to some can provide opportunities and give others second chances at moments missed. A sport can give certain people the chance to a higher degree or the chance to change the life they may have been destined to live. To others athletics takes away from certain aspects in life. For example, for some children their idols play on the court or on the field, and are not the people standing in operating rooms or in front of classrooms. The appeal of million dollar salaries entices young children to want to pursue a career in athletics. However, the reality that only one out of every 99 school kids will go on to play Division I sports does not come into the picture when the focus is on the money that will one day yield success supposedly (Lapchick, 1989, 5). The numbers for children who will end up playing professional sports is even lower.

Yet, athletics still has this aura surrounding them despite the low numbers of professional success in the field. For some student-athletes stereotype-threat comes into play during their collegiate careers. Some collegiate athletes find the education environment more difficult because of presumptions placed upon them by non-athletes, faculty, and administration from the university that focuses on their athletic ability and see their perceived academic ability

(Hamilton, 2001, 38). The headlines in newspapers or on ESPN don't read "Andrew Luck Gets A+ On Architecture Exam!" They read more along the lines of "Andrew Luck Will Enter NFL Draft 2012". Andrew Luck is an obvious example of the student-athlete who actually does embody academics as much as athletics as he proved when he chose to play his last year out at Stanford University instead of entering the draft in 2011. However, society has chosen to focus on his athletic ability over his academic success. Headlines in newspapers and headlines flashing across television sets are telling people what they should value.

That value comes in America's perspective of athletics role in society. Sports connect people all across the world, but not the same way it does in America. The rivalries seen between American universities dealing with athletics are a really an interesting American occurrence (Getz, 2010, 1). In theory athletics have the bigger goal at teaching discipline, hard work, and sportsmanship. However, as Rhoden (2007) puts it "the sport industry is not just a signature aspect of the American way of life, but has also become a major component of the American economy" (174). The American economy has transformed the way people think and operate to some degree. People now believe that the world runs on money alone and not the work and values that go into its people. The entertainment leads to the revenue for the university, but neglects that the sports industry can also be a vehicle to growth of the mind.

The NCAA as mentioned earlier had a goal of working towards academic and athletic excellence. Now, put in perspective how much money is involved in collegiate athletics on the NCAA level. Athletic departments use revenue-producing sports (basketball and football) to produce money that is distributed to support the other athletic teams (NCAA.org). Without the revenue-generating sports the athletic department would cease to exist the way it would need to

operate. The NCAA places the annual budget for intercollegiate programs at \$10.5 billion and says that only about two-dozen athletic departments are self-sustaining (NCAA.org).

Commercial dollars help thousands of student-athletes, such as swimmers and gymnasts get the full benefits of the collegiate experience as an athlete. Most of the NCAA revenue comes from a 14-year, \$10.8 billion agreement with Turner Broadcasting and CBS Sports for the rights to the men's basketball championship, that many know as March Madness (NCAA.org).

With all this money going around it leaves people demanding that some student-athletes get paid. The commitment of the NCAA is not to have student-athletes turned into professionals. "Participation in intercollegiate athletics is part of the higher education experience and teaches values that are difficult to learn in a classroom. Student-athletes must, therefore, be students first" (NCAA.org). There are people like sports marketing guru Sonny Vaccaro who have no problem calling out the NCAA. Vaccaro signed Michael Jordan to his Nike contract and also began introducing the Nike contracts to coaches. He is a true visionary of the power of collegiate athletics as a business and is all for paying collegiate athletes.

Some have even gone as far as to compare the collegiate experience to a form of slavery, neglecting the scholarship awarded to athletes that pays for housing, food, books, and much more. An example of this visual is painted when Rhoden describes a situation at a McDonald's All-American game. "A congregation of sixty-five coaches, scattered throughout the arena, legs crossed, arms folded, watched as player after player executed this maneuver or that. This was part beauty pageant, part meat market, and the players were willing participants" (Rhoden, 2007, 172). The world of athletics seems so glamorous from the outside, but when paused and framed the scene seems drastically different.

Vaccaro has argued a number of times about the exploitation of athletes and is now suing the NCAA. The trial is set for 2013 for use of player likeness. Vaccaro has put collegiate athletics right where society sees it... a business. Vaccaro said, "Corporations offer money so they can profit from the glory of college athletes, and the universities grab it" (Branch, 2011). People like Vaccaro make it hard not to see collegiate athletics as a business venture when in his eyes there are dollar signs attached to particular student-athletes such 2011 Heisman Trophy winner Cam Newton. At a discussion at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Law School, Vaccaro explained to the audience his opinion of the term student-athlete and how it was a term of coding. In the end, he deemed the term "student-athlete" to be a big joke by the NCAA. He stated no other student in the university comes in with that title. For instance, people don't enter their universities branded as engineer-students, communication-students. However, being a student-athlete shouldn't be deemed a negative coding system. In a sense the student-athlete should identify as a student first. The athlete part is an added bonus.

The bonus of the flashing lights, million dollar television contracts, and boosters has given a different perception of college athletics. Pulitzer prize winning journalist, Taylor Branch states in *The Atlantic* article, "The Shame of College Sports" (2011), "With so many people paying for tickets and watching on television, college sports has become Very Big Business" (Branch, 2011). He's right in the sense that major school such as Michigan and Texas earn between \$40 to \$80 million in profits a year and that is after coaches receive their million dollar salaries (theatlantic.com). Coaches themselves earn more money than anyone in the state in some cases. An article in the *USA Today* revealed a similar reality of how much coaches make even with the plummeting economy. "The sport industry is not just a signature aspect of the American way of life, but has also become a major component of the American economy"

(Rhoden, 2007, 174). The American way of life fixated on the materialistic side of the sporting world.

John Wooden said in an interview with *Esquire Magazine* that the most he made was \$32,500 coaching (Fussman, 2011, esquire.com). Compare \$32,500 to the \$4.8 million coach Nick Saban at Alabama makes after winning two national titles with two different teams (Brady, 2011, 2A). Yes, times are different, but the salary difference proves how much collegiate athletics has transformed into a money making entertainment industry. Today, the contracts of coaches represent what the public and the media are telling society to value. With all the money swirling around the world should hope that coaches teach their players the lessons coach Wooden taught his. Wooden said, "I always tried to make clear that basketball is not the ultimate. It is of small importance in comparison to the total life we live." The sport is just the lesson for how the student-athlete grows in life.

So what is the bigger picture here? Collegiate athletics are about the money? More money equals better facilities, better coaches, and better athletes. However, more money does not necessarily mean better students. Seven of the top 10 football programs and 16 of the top 25 in the 2010 BCS standings fell beneath the sport's four-year average graduation rate (Weiberg, 2010, usatoday.com). Schools like Oklahoma and Arizona graduated fewer than half of their players. The numbers were even worse for basketball with the one and done rule. In the 2008, 2009, and 2010 school year more than one in five programs had four-year graduation rates below 50% (Weiberg, 2010, usatoday.com). Low graduation rates make it hard to understand the huge push to get certain student-athletes admitted to universities. In addition, athletes generally have lower standardized test scores (Shulman, 2001, 4). The NCAA develops rules and policies to

work to ensure increase the chances of student-athletes earning degrees and working towards academic accountability.

When the player is on the field or court, the audience's first concern is not on whether their beloved athlete may graduate. The focus when the player is competing is bringing home a win for the school. That win should give the nation a little more to worry about considering the future of the world won't be determined on the win or loss of a basketball or football program. The power of the mind will dominate over the talent in one's athletic ability in the end. Furthermore, looking at the nation's economy may come down to much more. "The quality of a nation's education and training system is seen to hold the key to the future economic prosperity" (Brown, 1997, 172). In order for athletics departments to run and for professional organizations to maintain themselves there has to be a level of education maintained. The educational resources provided to student-athletes should give hope to a life that benefits the good of society based on higher education.

Going head to head in a boxing match with entertainment verse education, education should win in a knockout punch. However, sitting ringside at this boxing match one may see this fight going all twelve rounds. The emphasis and mission of collegiate athletics is supposed to be placed upon the people, the student-athletes. Athletics departments should be working on creating those personal relationships that create an everlasting bond that it will have with its student-athletes. On campus there has to be great social supports and a sense of self-efficacy that the student-athlete comes to acquire like the other students on the campus to value the university and strive to graduate.

Social supports help to add a level of "connectedness" with different groups while building up self and academic confidence ("The Role of Social Supports," 2). The social

supports involved in a student-athlete's development begin from the moment the student-athlete steps foot on campus. The athletic department has to foster that family atmosphere that proves that the priority is finishing the degree through academic success. In this case perception is even more important than in other situations. If the perception going in is on game day and not on Monday morning biology because the social support is on game day resulting in a gap. The inclusion on athletically dominant universities needs to maintain the level of an academically supportive environment.

In addition, self-efficacy is defined as "an individual's perceived capability in performing the necessary tasks to achieve personal goals" (Bandura, 1989, 1175). Athletic departments and coaches should be asking themselves before they recruit any athlete what their focus will be when arriving on campus. Does the athlete see the potential for academic success? Will they fall into the belief that athletes are academically inferior based off stereotype threat? What are athletic departments going to ensure that every student-athlete has confidence when entering the classroom? Is the student-athlete's main goal to be on national television or to represent its university with pride on all levels? There are so many questions to consider beyond the stats that an individual athlete produces. Therefore, self-efficacy should be built up by encouraging student-athletes to step up their game in the classroom, and by "celebrating their academic success stories" ("The Role of Social Supports," 4). Another way to build up academic self-efficacy would be to have student-athletes mentor one another. The help comes from knowing that someone before them went through the daily struggles of morning practices, weights, classes, examines, and treatment. Not every student will understand the life that a student-athlete lives.

Without a strong sense of academic self-efficacy and social supports the student-athlete will find it hard to thrive in the environment where others may believe their priorities are elsewhere. Another piece to the puzzle surrounding student-athlete success deals with the stereotype threat. Being classified as a student-athlete should not be classified as a threat, but results show the difference in various tests. For example, a group of black and white athletes were given a test about the game of golf. One time they were told that the test was based off athletic ability the African American athletes did better than the white subjects. However, when they were told it as based on “sport strategy” the white athletes did better than the African-Americans. The negative thoughts came to dominate the subject’s thoughts and proved to be self-fulfilling. Results from a stereotype threat experiment done by researchers found that the threat did contribute to the underperformance in academics for student-athletes (Dee, 2009, 22). The threat was more dominant in male athletes and in higher profile sports. The numbers were lower for female athletes. How is it that athletics associated with academics has become a negative stereotype? The focus needs to shift to make the athletic component a positive part of the academic model. Society just needs a reality check on what to value and build up the social supports in the athletic and academic world.

At the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign the social supports are there, but it is important for the student-athlete to take advantage of them. The Life Skills program that the division of intercollegiate athletics uses at the University of Illinois provides workshops from resume builders, meeting with academic counselors weekly, to proper dieting for student-athletes. Irwin Academic Center provides the student-athletes will one on one tutoring services in classes as well as computer access and learning specialists if needed. The atmosphere of the

student-athlete culture still has some work to build up the self-efficacy, but steps are taken daily to get the athletics working hand in hand with academics.

Taking a standpoint as a former student-athlete in a nonrevenue-producing sport it is still easy to see how values can be lost. Although the focus for a swimmer is not on the television airtime there is still of level of focus that is placed on the sport. One's sport separates them from every other student on campus. The one factor that brings comfort is the reality of dedication that is placed on perfecting that particular skill. I used to think if I had thought about school the way I had thought about swimming I would have been the next Albert Einstein. But the truth is that was the beauty of the sport... the passion and learning to balance all that life threw at you. Albert Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." The goal of all student-athletes should be to imagine what they are capable of becoming in and out of their sport. That imagination will be dangerous in the game that matters most, the game of life.

William Rhoden illustrated the picture of the Conveyor Belt analogy and expressed that young athletes who are on the belt "get twisted education in values, ethics, and character" (179). In order for education and athletics to be aligned, the structure in inequalities seen between entertainment and education has to be refocused. The level of expectations from the athletic department, coaches, and student-athlete peers has to play a role on the interpersonal level. The student-athlete will thrive in the environment full of challenges, support, and determination.

Push harder, last longer, win, fight, never give up! Combine that mindset with the will to succeed in the classroom a student-athlete should be unstoppable. Sports can change people's lives for the better. Student-athletes are the people who have learned the ups and downs, the criticisms of fans and coaches, and learned what it means to go through the ultimate test. Athletics mixed with an educational purpose is a recipe for success. Next time March Madness

comes along or the BCS championship game, take a step back and realize that the games being played brought people from all over the country together. The games, meets, and tournaments brought a group of students with extraordinary talents together to enhance their futures by starting in the classroom and challenging themselves in their sport. The court, field, pool, or track is just an added bonus in their educational experience. The sport is the class in the curriculum that teaches the student-athlete the mindset to excel. Vince Lombardi once said, “We didn't lose the game; we just ran out of time” (Citation). Collegiate athletics won't lose the game either, but hopefully society doesn't run out of time on the realization of what is the true purpose of collegiate athletics.

CHAPTER 5

JERRY MAGUIRE MOMENT: PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Some people have that profound realization where they wonder if what they are doing is what they are supposed to be doing. They think about the different ways to go about their daily tasks or their overall purpose. In the movie *Jerry Maguire*, Jerry a sport agent comes to that realization. He writes a whole mission statement to his office. He finally takes a step and says everything that everyone else is thinking. He finally realizes it's more about the personal relationships. Below is an excerpt from Jerry Maguire's movie mission statement:

*“How can we do something surprising and memorable with our lives? How can we turn this job, in small but important ways, into a better representation of ourselves? **Learn who these people are.** That is the stuff of your relationship. That is what will matter.... Let us start a revolution. Let us start a revolution that is not just about basketball shoes, or official licensed merchandise. I am prepared to die for something. I am prepared to live for our cause. The cause is caring about each other. **The secret to this job is personal relationships”***

(sportshollywood.com).

What if Jerry Maguire wasn't just talking about the field of sports agents, but the world of sports? What if every athletics department actually started to focus on the secret to the job... personal relationships? As mentioned in previous chapters there is the revenue aspect to consider that big time sports such as basketball and football bring in at division one schools, and there are the graduation rates of student-athletes to consider, but what about the actual person that comes with the athletic career and diploma? There is not enough emphasis on social the

social well-being of the student-athlete. The student-athlete is forced to realize their athletic success is more important than their academic or social experience when the athletic department is funding their scholarship (Gerdy, 1997, 60-61). Athletics departments need to balance out the person with support from inside and out the athletic department. Athletics cannot be the sole focus of a student-athlete.

The student-athletes at Illinois were told to rank the importance of certain aspects in their lives. 90% of student-athletes ranked time with family an eight and above. In regards to spending time with friends, 86.6% of student-athletes surveyed ranked it an eight and above. Competition was also ranked very highly and in some cases higher than family and friends. The overall trend from the student-athletes at Illinois was the true sense of how valuable personal relationships are to them. Although a survey cannot fully reveal the profile of the student-athlete, they do aid us in gaining a deeper understanding of what makes them tick. Penn State University coaches and student-athletes were interviewed about team building. Some of the coaches there made reference to “successful teams being like close-knit families” (Yukelson, 1987, 80). That family bond comes from the experience and time that student-athletes spend within their athletic family.

Every student-athlete is walking around with a different set of eyes taking in their experience. What makes each experience special is having their unique perspective. Not every athletic future will work for every student-athlete. This is why it is essential for the student-athlete to take time to know themselves and their athletics department’s functions. In the end, it would aid student-athletes, and those around him or her, in better understanding the mask they create and wear.

Healthy personal relationships are the ultimate key for sustainable success of student-athletes. The survey administered to student-athletes at Illinois asked participants about their most memorable mentor leader in their life and why this person was important to them. Of all the student-athletes surveyed, an astounding 86.8% said that a family member was their biggest mentor leader. In his book, *Mentor Leader* (2010), NFL coach Tony Dungy says, "mentor leadership is all about shaping, nurturing, empowering, and growing. It's all about relationships, integrity, and perpetual learning. Success is measured in changed lives, strong character, and eternal values rather than material gain, temporal achievement, or status" (xvii). Dungy wrote *Mentor Leader* as a leadership book that talks about what people can do for others instead of focusing on the leader alone. Leadership provides guidance to people in search of brighter futures. Athletics departments spend a lot of time trying to bring in money and find the athletes who will bring in wins, but the actual time invested in the person must be greater to shape, nurture, and grow into a sustainable and successful department. When an athletics department truly realizes what it can do for its student-athletes the favor will be returned many times over.

Student-athletes from the eight sports surveyed echoed how their mentor leader influenced them in such big ways. Some of their responses are listed below.

Who is your biggest mentor leader and why?

Volleyball

- My dad, he is always **pushing** me to be my best and gives me good **advice**.
- My mom and dad. They both set such good examples and **teach** me so much.
- My mom. She **knows me the best** and is the person who truly has my best interest at heart.
- Any coach I've had or my parents, cause they have been my **teachers**.
- My biggest mentor leader is my dad because he **pushes** me to succeed in sports and school.

Football

- Mother she has a faith that as rubbed on me, she works hard even when she has to **sacrifice**.
- My dad- he **taught me** to believe in God and family first and the rest would fall into place.
- My biggest mentor and leader is my mom. My mom is one of the most loving, hardworking, and determined people that I know. She has also always been there for me, and has **taught me** so much about life. Couldn't have picked a better mom.

Baseball

- My dad because he did everything for me and I hope I can be as good a dad as he is.
- My brother **pushes** me to do my best and encourages me to do well.
- My dad. He never had a father and has been an unbelievable figure in my life. We don't go a day without talking. He's also **never pushed me in sports**, which most dads do.
- My dad is my mentor, he is **disciplined and successful** and if I'm like him I know I've done well.

Men's Gymnastics

- My older brother, Anthony. I have always looked up to him and his gymnastics is amazing and I want to **follow him** in his athletic footsteps.
- My uncle because we are very similar and I **want to do a lot of the things he has**.
- My father because he **pushes me** above and beyond.

Soccer

- My mom because I try to **follow** what she does.
- Parents-give good **advice** and are good role models.
- My mom, strongest and more **influential leader**.
- My parents-they **want to see me succeed** and get far in life.

Women's Swimming and Diving

- My parents because I know that they always **want what's best for me**.
- My dad. He is so **supportive** and a good role model.
- I look up to my mom. She is my best friend and always **knows what to say** and what to do.
- My biggest mentor right now is my mother. In her lifetime, she has experienced many hardships and still emphasizes everyone's need for happiness and prosperity. She always gives back to people and **makes such a difference in people's lives**.

Men's Basketball

- My dad has always been my biggest mentor for numerous reasons. He **helps guide me** when I have tough decisions to make.

Women's Basketball

- My parents. They have always been there for me and **support me** in everything that I do.
- My mom and dad because they are **always there for me**, they will always have my back no matter what.

- My dad, he **sees what I don't see** and he was a college athlete himself.
- Mom, she knows me the best and she has always supported me in everything I do and she **gives the best advice**.

A mentor leader efficaciously guides a person along their path by giving them strength and faith in themselves to conquer their biggest dreams. A mentor leader has the ability to lead on a larger scale, but they also lead in subtle ways by being a force in the life of many who search for the ability to grow. The research in this thesis wanted to specifically look at the answers given in regards to who student-athletes chose as their mentor leader. The mentor leader offered the personal connection to the overall success that comes from developing strong personal relationships and understanding the person behind the mask.

The mask at this point in a student-athlete's life has its plusses and minuses. The mentor leader has the ability to navigate and pull out the strengths of the person behind the mask because they may push them, offer good advice, or possibly see what the student-athlete does not or cannot necessarily see. For the student-athletes their mentor leader ultimately wants the best for them. Moreover, the athletic career has given the student-athlete a great amount of success and although the mentor leader may not always be there they still act as a pushing force.

In turn, the athletics department can offer another set of eyes as a mentor leader for the student-athlete during their college experience. The athletics department has the task of picking up on any benefits that come from the mask and any consequences that may potentially be seen on the road ahead. If the mask is left on too long without gaining the lessons, there can be negative outcomes that leave a student-athlete behind their peers.

The answers the responders to the survey gave were powerful examples that provided their opinion on who empowered them throughout their lives. The student-athletes on all eight teams used words such as, push, taught, follow, advice, wants the best, and support to signify

why they thought a family member was their biggest mentor leader. The most common family member mentioned throughout was a parent. A mom or dad represented the teacher from the beginning. Regardless of a student-athlete's athletic ability their parents knew exactly who the person was and continues to be at the end of the day. They teach the person what the mask encompasses, but make sure they can help guide them and offer the support needed for success.

In turn, literature surrounding the topic of enhancing student-athlete focuses on discovering ways to help with success after sport, and in this case when the mask comes off. An athletics department has the chance to be the family. "Often families of origin have their own stories or heroes" (Scalfani, 2004, 64). The athletics department can provide the story of future success for the person behind the mask and it can even be the hero for some student-athletes. The athletics department has the role of learning how to focus in on the development of the student-athlete. There has to be a focus on the "strengths of the athlete" and escaping the "role conflict" (Chartrand, 1987, 166).

Imagine an athletics department as a supportive and influential unit that gives great advice, always wants the best for every student-athlete, has their back, sees what they don't see, gives them incentive to follow in their footsteps of giving people a chance to succeed, pushes them to unseen limits, and makes a difference in people's lives. Unrealistic? It doesn't have to be. These student-athletes have their family members as their mentor leaders because of those certain qualities. Their mentor leaders see the person behind the mask. An athletics department should serve the same purpose as a mentor leader. An athletics department has the role of creating the environment that the student-athlete will thrive in.

Student engagement does not just have to apply to the world of academia. Student engagement is transferable to department to department. For student-athlete engagement there

would be three critical features differing from student engagement. Student engagement has the key features dealing with their education and “educationally purposeful activities” (Harper, 2009, 3). Student-athlete engagement would hold education and “educationally purposeful activities and athletic focus all into one.

With that said, there is also a system that should be seen within teams. Not everyone knows what happens behind the locker room doors or inside the huddles that brings teams together in the highest-pressure situations. The truth is, people do not always get the chance to fully understand the team bringing in wins to the school or the team that struggles to win. However, the teams at Illinois range in success. The baseball team won the Big Ten championship last year, the soccer team won the Big Ten Championship this year, Illinois swimming and diving posted a top ten GPA in the country, the volleyball team took second place at the NCAA championship. With all the accolades the teams at Illinois boast, there is one dynamic aspect that stood out above the rest in regards to what they think people do not know about their team...Their sense of unity, togetherness, the family bond.

Volleyball

- Our culture and values that we created are very important to us.
- How well we communicate with each other and deal with confrontation.
- How close everyone is. We are like sisters, regardless of outcome, we are family forever.
- The trust/understanding we have.
- How our chemistry has shaped who we are.
- The work we put in to better our relationships off the court with each other and community.

Football

- Brotherhood.
- We are more than just athletes, we're people who come from different economic, social, and spiritual backgrounds that stand side-by-side one another day in and day out.
- Our sense of accountability and our family atmosphere. We care about each other and hold everyone accountable for their actions.
- The most important part about our team is that we are a family.
- How close and playful we are.

Men's Gymnastics

- Our unity and how close we are.
- The unity we share with one another. We are all brothers and stand by each other regardless of the sport.
- The commitments we've made to each other to make sure we are the best we can be.
- Just how close we all are to each other and the bonding/memories we share.

Men's Basketball

- We take care of each other.
- How close everyone is off the court.

Soccer

- The team chemistry.
- The relationship you with the team we have based off of going through pre-season, losses, travels, etc. together.
- The bond we have-traditions.
- The balance of competition, fun, and enjoying each other's company.
- Our love for each other and longing to make each other better.

Baseball

- We fight for each other no matter how bad it gets.
- The family- like bond, we are very comfortable and relaxed around each other.
- The friendship/bonding. Teammates work for one another.
- How close we grow together as the year goes on because we spend so much time together.
- How 30 something guys can also be close. And basically anything that goes on in the clubhouse.

Women's Swimming and Diving

- The chemistry we have together.
- That we all get along extremely well and are really good friends despite being different types of people.
- We really are our family. We fight, and we hate each other sometimes, but it's impossible not to know each other better than almost anyone when you practice, live, travel, study, and socialize together.
- The dynamics of our team. We are more like a family than just teammates or friends
- We are a family. We see each other at our absolute best and our absolute worst, which brings us together with an unspeakable bond.
- The most important part to me is that I have 30 some other people who I am not afraid to be myself around and I can open up to.

Women's Basketball

- 2nd family.
- We are like a close knit family.

- We all have each others back we just all are a family we have ups and downs but always love each other.
- Chemistry on and off the court b/c knowing each and every teammate is important once you compete b/c those are who you ride or die with.

The family atmosphere provides the support needed for success. An outsider may not understand the bond that connects a team, but an outsider can see from the answers the responders gave that the team has a bond that unites them in ways that lead them to succeed and go through extra steps for their teammates. The answers echoed the emotions that many college athletes feel after their experience is over. A teammate is a family member for life. In some cases, a teammate represents a bond stronger than a friendship. Think about a family. People may not always like everyone in their family, but they love them and would do anything for them. Families understand the struggles, the success, the joys and the disappointments that can come at the end of the day. A team offers that family dynamic. The time spent in practices, competition, and school together builds up the person underneath the mask that can have the support to navigate through the rest of their lives with the support from their team. The bond does not end after four years.

In this question it is easy to identify the interconnectedness between all the teams' answers. The team members wear the mask, but they also learn to understand one another's strengths and weakness from the work that is put into the sport and outside of it. The team symbolizes a place where the mask is on, but also off at the same time. In that regard, the sport of the team represents the mask, but through the work done together the team members learn to take off the masks. For example, two soccer players mentioned the balance that goes on with a team from practices, losses, and the time they spend with one another. The amount of time and skills develop help one another grow in the whole athletic and academic career process.

Although, one may never fully understand “team chemistry” there is something to be said about the bond that takes place in athletics. The studies and research that has been done to understand loyalty and team building in sports adds insight on how all eight teams agree upon what makes their teams strong and what outsiders never fully get to appreciate. The research supports the answers that the student-athlete responders gave at Illinois. One study revealed that for success there had to be a shared vision, positive team culture, and an effective mission statement that aligned the goals of the team (Yukelson, 1987, 82-84). Teams build this sense of unity through their work in their sport, but throughout various other ways of getting to know and understand one another. “College athletic teams generate an intense loyalty that surpasses more bland forms of organizational commitment commonly found in ordinary organizations” (Adler, 1988, 413). Regardless of the wins, losses, or failures, the success that comes from the family-like bond grown from the personal relationships developed often translates into a formula for many to follow.

The family dynamic and mentorship can be created in a number of ways. The National Survey of Student Engagement has five benchmarks for effective education practice and one is student-faculty interaction (Harper, 2009, 5). Student-athletes need that engagement with their professors and with their academic counselors, athletic directors and the rest of the athletics department staff. Ben Stein said, "Personal relationships are the fertile soil from which all advancement, all success, all achievement in real life grows." There should be discussions from the student-athletes success beyond their sport to their greatest accomplishment on an exam, their new findings in a reading, their voice in a particular student group, and so on.

Perception vs. Reality

John Lennon once said, "Reality leaves a lot to the imagination." Collegiate athletics can leave a lot to the imagination from the fans that watch on game day to the student-athlete themselves. For the college athlete the reality of practices, school work, and social life can seem overwhelming at times and therefore makes them feel more stressed out. On the other hand, some people may not understand all that comes with being a student-athlete from tutoring services to the strict schedule some student-athletes.

The perception verse reality argument can lead to a number of questions about the mask. When does the mask become too heavy to bear for some and when does it become too difficult to take off? When does the mask become the symbol of growth and when does it become too dangerous?

Every single student-athlete is different in their own way and to class or group all of them into the same category takes away from who they actually are. What happens at the University of Alabama may not happen at the University of Illinois and what happens at Illinois may not happen at the University of Nevada. What happens at one university does not necessarily translate over to every university. Therefore, what happens with one team does not define every team. The mask that some players, such as football players are classified with does not mean that every player on the team is the same.

For instance, a lot of people do not know that the GPA, enrollment, etc. of student-athletes. At the end of the day the reality of collegiate athletics to an outsider may not be as clear as they want. The truth is athletic departments are providing brighter futures for some students that may have never had a future. As a student-athlete stated, "Athletics are a better chance for me to get a better education." No system is perfect, and athletics is no different. The reality is

that athletic departments work hard to ensure the student-athlete is succeeding in numerous ways.

Breaking it down, the fact of the matter is academics for the majority of the student-athletes come first. The perception would be to view the "dumb jock" instead of the "scholar-athlete." Although athletics may take more time, the student-athletes at Illinois think of their future in broader aspects if the right questions are asked.

On the other hand, student-athlete perception about their self also has to be examined. Collegiate athletics really are a complete balancing act. The true art is finding that balance in an athletic department that doesn't leave one side hanging. The balancing act starts within the sport and within the classroom. Both the factors have to balance the person at the end of the day. An athletic department has to understand the person to understand what makes them tick in the classroom.

The survey asked the student-athletes how much they felt the athletic department valued their education and their athletic performance. For the most part, the student-athletes felt both aspects were valued all the way around. 67.6% felt their education was valued and 23.5% said it was valued above all. The student-athlete's reasoning came from answers such as, "I think our school makes a point to emphasize the importance of performance as well as on the field." "The academic side of college is why we are here-- if our grades are not high enough we cannot compete at all." Other answers included, "because how you are off the field relates to how you will be on the field." "It makes the athletic department look good." When it came to athletic concern 58.8% of student-athletes felt that the athletic department valued their athletic performance and 35.3% felt it was valued above all. Their reasoning came from answers such as these: "That's where all the recognition and money is generated at." "Perform and produce or get

replaced." "Because winning creates revenue for the athletic department." "It's important that we are successful in our sport, because if we aren't there wouldn't be a sports program." "They're dependent on our success." are just a few. The numbers are higher for valued above all in regards to athletic performance by a little over 10%. 2.9% of student-athletes felt that their athletic performance wasn't valued, but the answers came from one team. One student-athlete said, "They don't care about swimming. We are not the 'money-making sports' so our performance really doesn't matter to them. We are a team that boosts the overall athletes GPA for the school. In my four years here I have seen VERY LITTLE interest in our sport and team from the athletic department." Looking at the academic side, 2.9% said their education was only valued a small amount. One student-athlete said, "Athletic performance seems to come first, there is more emphasis on that (athletics) than academics." Another student-athlete blamed himself saying, "Because I've gotten lazy in the classroom, but they know I have potential." 4.4% said the athletic department was indifferent saying, "doesn't directly contribute to the department," "They would like to see us do well in our sports, but if we do well in the classroom, it's just an added bonus." "Swimming and diving are not the most important sports at any university for obvious reasons."

The answers from the student-athletes displayed how important it is for an athletic department to keep track of its values. However, the athletic department needs to be careful of losing the academic values that come with the job. "Athletics was formally incorporated into higher education's structure because academic leaders believed that a successful athletic team could serve an important public-relations function for the university, which in turn would result in increased financial support" (Gerdy, 1997, 29). One student-athlete wrote, "I think if you are not in a high-profit sport, they care more about your academics, while in those money-making

sports, athletic performance far outweighs academic performance. The academic staff values academics though, but I wouldn't say the athletic department as a whole concentrates on academic performance that much."

While balancing academics and athletics, 83.8% of student-athletes think they can balance extracurricular activities in their lives even with the extra stress because more the most part they said they have learned time management or have been doing it their whole lives. "Student-athletes, to the degree possible, should seek out learning opportunities beyond the classroom and playing field. These will serve to make them better well rounded and satisfied with their college experience (Kissinger, 2009, 203). The 11.8% that said they couldn't balance extracurricular activities said they just didn't have time with their sport and with school.

The Game of Life by Lawrence Shulman and William Bowman (2001) looked at academically selective schools and their student-athletes. They included thirty schools and the schools ranged from division I to division III. Some schools included: Stanford, Duke, Princeton, Yale, University of Michigan, Kenyon, Emory, and Wellesley. The goal of Shuman and Bowman was to test assumptions and myths about student-athletes (xxx). The results they uncovered ranged from academic achievement to the way student-athletes perceived themselves. Student-athletes differed from their classmates and bought into the "athlete culture" (Shulman, 2001, 260). Just as the survey done by Shulman and Bowman revealed, the University of Illinois student-athletes believe their lives are more demanding because of their "athlete culture." Shulman and Bowman also noted that student-athletes had weaker academic qualifications when entering college, but when they left they were more competitive than other students (Shulman, 2001, 260).

Previously posed was the question “Are student-athletes asked to do too much?” Depending on who one asks there could be a various set of answers. “College student-athletes are expected to operate successfully in both the academic and athletic realm, each of which exposes them to any number of psychosocial stressor (Kissinger, 2009, 165).” They felt that way because of the load they carry from practice to academics and said it was much harder to balance. “Upon initial enrollment student-athletes had a broad range of interests and goals in academic, social, and athletic areas (Gerdy, 1997, 39).” Once student-athletes get more adjusted to college life their interests for other activities go down because of the pressure they feel in the classroom and in their sport. The majority of student-athletes at Illinois reemphasize the results from previous studies by saying that they have more stressful lives because they are student-athletes.

The student-athletes at Illinois responses for why follow.

Volleyball

- I want to succeed in **both academics and athletics** and I put pressure on myself to succeed, and put high standards on myself.
- Because it gets **overwhelming** most of the times.
- Just **adapting** to being a student athlete and college work
- Because I want to go to med school but also play pro after college
- We have to **manage our time** much better and have less time to dedicate to school work
- Time management
- **Managing** school, academics, and social life becomes very stressful at times.

Football

- Because I know **my talent can only take me so far**, and I feel as if my teachers in high school could have made it a better learning environment
- If you don’t do well in the classroom you can’t play. If you don’t perform in your sport you become more stressed in both.
- Because I know I have to get the exact same amount of work done as other students off of less sleep, shorter days, and a **higher demand for perfection**.
- I do feel like my life as a student athlete may be more stressful than a normal student because of the **intense schedule** that we have to keep up with as well as do school work.
- Time that other students spend on their leisurely activities and enjoying the college atmosphere is spent **training and/or recovering**.

- I feel that it's a lot harder to do well in school when you're involved in college sports. Daily practice and training takes a toll academically

Men's Gymnastics

- **Learned time management** and control stress levels
- I feel I have to **succeed in both** the gym and school
- Because there are more things to worry about on a daily basis

Baseball

- The **constant grind** to succeed in my athletics.
- There's a lot more things I have to attend to and extra standards to meet rather than kids who only attend school
- The athletic ride of my life helps me get rid of stress
- The amount of time put into the sport and the **higher standard** that athletes are held accountable at.
- It's not unbearable we have **more things to think about** and less time
- So many things to organize, **very little time off**
- I feel that I can handle both well but there is still a lot to think about and do

Men's basketball

- Lot to deal with in school and then basketball
- Simply because **student-athletes have more to do**. Class, study hall, practice, and games

Soccer

- I have a much stricter schedule
- I want to be successful and I believe some part of that is defined by how much money I will make. I feel blessed about where I am right now, but what to make my own success in the future.
- More work, **more pressure** to do well
- **More to do** with little time
- Compared to an average student, **more on our plate**
- It's hard to **manage** good grades while devoting so much time to sports

Women's Swimming and Diving

- Just because I am more tired than I would be without it! But I also think that if I were not an Athlete, I would not have as good of time management skills.
- **We have less time** to complete assignments and miss a lot of class for competitions.
- There is a **physical pressure** in my life that the majority of students do not ever face. I have to worry about taking care of/preparing my body at all times. I also worry about what practice or a competition will hold. I inflict discomfort and even pain on myself almost daily, and if I didn't have to worry about that, my life would be much less stressful.
- I, as well as other student athletes, put in a lot of time into my sport. Because of the **time commitment**, passion and work that goes in, especially in season, my stress level is higher

- I was unsure how to answer this question because I do not really know how stressed non-athletes are but I believe for obvious reasons that athletes are more stressed than non-athletes. We have less time in the day to get school-work done since we dedicate many hours to practice/ competition.
- Being an athlete has so many **more added aspects to the college experience**. With traveling and practices, I find myself stressed more than a normal student.

Women's basketball

- Because **I enjoy what I do** and getting the free education that I need!
- Time management is difficult
- A lot is put on my shoulders and I gave to **maintain** every issue whether bball, family, friends, school
- My stress level is higher because I need to focus on school and ball, but I feel like I am used to it so that's why I said both

Understanding the pressure and stress that can come from being a student-athlete is an important factor in grasping the perception that student-athletes feel during their college experience. Athletics in college is a definite time commitment, but it also is an incredible opportunity.

The student-athletes answered based off their perceptions on what they have to get done. For some throughout the sports they took the immediate response of factoring in how much they have to do. The fact that they have to focus on more than just school automatically makes their lives more stressful than a normal student according to themselves. While there is this “constant grind” that goes on in athletics, there were also answers on certain teams that reflected the opportunity that was presented for them. There were also a few student-athletes that felt they have mastered what it takes to succeed in their sport and in the classroom and therefore makes their life less stressful.

The importance of the mask and where it can become dangerous lies within this question. Once the student-athlete believes the mask owns their time or their future the chance of success from an athletics department stand point should be addressed. The topic needs to be addressed

because if the mask hinders a student-athlete from learning along the way the athletic department has failed at its job at teaching the student-athlete to prepare for life after college. The pressure of the mask can be overwhelming, but if the student-athlete manages to learn from the pressure the mask gives the results will be significant in a positive way.

Looking at the student-athlete responses the belief that they have much stricter schedules from an ordinary student is seen from how they have to balance academics and athletics. Student-athletes are expected to be committed to their academic and athletic load when they go to college. Literature such as, “College Student Athlete Success Both In and Out of the Classroom” (2001) compares a student-athlete’s schedule to non-athlete’s schedule may bring up differences, but non-athlete students who participated in more than just school had similar academic achievement (20). There are students who have jobs, loans, and have to pay for school themselves who may not see any differences in the demands that they have and their schedules. However, student-athletes have to learn the proper balance that comes into play when trying to earn a degree and trying to compete. Since a student-athlete is so involved in the athletic sense there can be a void. For instance, research says that the disconnect can lead to a negative experience for the student and result in poor athletic and academic performance (Carodine, 2001, 20)

So are the student-athletes engaged? Student engagement differs from student involvement as mentioned before. Student-athletes are involved in a number of activities provided to make them better people, but involvement in these activities does not necessarily ensure that the student-athlete is actually engaged. A student who shows up to a study group and doesn’t say a word compared to one who asks questions during the meeting would have a

different academic engagement focus (Harper, 2009, 5). Therefore, student-athletes who are involved may not be getting everything they can out of the experience if they are not engaged.

The student-athletes at the University of Illinois are a unique group. Competing at a Big Ten institution has its definite benefits. There are workshops from resume building to salsa dancing for the student-athlete to participate in. They bring in speaker's dealing with DUI issues to psychologists that speak about "winning on and off the field." The opportunities are endless to an outsider, but balancing the opportunities presents the challenge.

For instance, take a child and give him an endless amount of games to play. Some will be games he can't live without while others are less enticing. There are only twenty-four hours in a day and he has to get all of it done on top of school. He may excel or he may get sick of it all and slack in one of the areas. That same comparison can be given to a student-athlete.

The Douglas C. Roberts Illini Champs/Life Skills program at the University of Illinois is a program that targets five areas for student-athletes to develop and excel in: academic excellence, athletic excellence, personal development, career development, and community service (University of Illinois Life Skills Program). In each of the categories Illinois works on a number of levels to develop their student-athletes to the all-around person. The program also offers workshops that are used to enhance the student-athlete experience to create a well-rounded individual. The classes range from salsa dancing, resume building, to cooking lessons for after sport life.

The number of programs offered looks great to an incoming student-athlete and their parents; however, the student-athletes have to take full advantage of them. There is a choice of whether to get the most out of them or simply look at it as an hour out of their day. Also, the programs have to entice the student-athletes and become a benefit rather than a chore.

A lot is being asked of a student-athlete to make them the well-rounded person. With all of the activities and enhancement opportunities some ask if student-athletes are asked to do too much? Although the majority of student-athletes said they could balance the extra activities, the engagement level may not be there. . “Student-athletes with low academic motivation and higher athletic motivation (or who aspire to play professionally) are more likely to devote more of their attention, if not exclusive attention, to participation in their sport (Kissinger, 2009, 211).”

Take the Hometown Heroes program at Illinois. At the University of Illinois the student-athletes participate in the program called Hometown Heroes where they reach out to community (University of Illinois Life Skills Program). They volunteer at local elementary schools, nursing homes and hospitals. Hometown Heroes is a way for the student-athletes to give back to the local community at Illinois. When surveyed 30.9% of student-athletes answered that the Hometown Heroes program was not beneficial for their college experience. Out of the 30.9% who answered no, 66.7% of those were males. For the most part the student-athletes who answered no admitted they did not even know what the program actually was. However, 64.7% of student-athletes answered that the Hometown Heroes program was an important part of their development. When the program name was taken out and the student-athletes were asked about the help of the volunteering activities at Illinois 88.2% of them said they were helpful for their success after college. Only 4.4% said that the volunteering opportunities weren't helpful, 1.5% said yes and no, and 5.9% did not answer.

Volunteerism offers a student-athlete a way to give back. The student-athletes at Illinois realize this and their answers follow below.

Volleyball

- I enjoy volunteering and going to schools in the area. It helps the kids and lets the athletes be involved in the community.
- It allows me to reach out to the community and grow as a person

- It gets our team involved in the community and makes us easily accessible
- It's fun to get involved with the community and it makes the experience that much more rewarding.
- I think it gives me a chance to get involved in things I usually wouldn't
- Before it I rarely volunteered and it opened my eyes.

Football

- Gives me a chance to see how the pro's feel
- I think that it enhances my experience at the University of Illinois because I've never really been able to give back to the community like the Hometown Heroes program has allowed me to.
- Well the hometown heroes program doesn't really enhance my experience here because I'm used to doing community service back at home.
- It gives you a chance to give back to others all throughout the surrounding community

Men's Basketball

- Don't know what it is

Baseball

- I have never attended...
- Never heard of it
- As a student-athlete I am very thankful to be a person kids look up to, so having an opportunity to spread a positive message is cool.
- I don't know what it is

Men's gymnastics

- Not familiar with it
- I don't know what the Hometown Heroes program is
- Volunteer experience and asks one to take on a more active role

Soccer

- It helps to connect to the community
- Don't know anything about it
- When we practice with local kids makes me realize how blessed I am
- I haven't participated very much

Women's Swimming and diving

- Being involved in the activities helps me to feel good about volunteering. I wish I did it more often.
- It feels good to give back to the community or help someone out.
- I am not as involved in Hometown Heroes as I should be, but it gives me opportunities to give back to my community.
- Just meeting other people and learning some things about them makes me realize how lucky I am to have come where I come from and to have experienced all the things that I have.

- It has given me an opportunity to work with children and people that are not as fortunate than I am. It has humbled me and opened my eyes to the community around me.

Women's Basketball

- It enhances my experience because I love helping others and it's great to know how people look up to us and how we can change lives
- I don't know what it is
- Being able to give back to others who look up to me is very important
- It enhances my experience, the memorable moments doing whatever it is they have us doing is a great opportunity to realize what you have in life

The volunteer opportunities in a student-athlete's life offer a chance to represent a role model for others, but also be the importance factor that allows a student-athlete to learn about the person behind the mask. In a survey done about the motives and values of student-athletes interviewed also said that being a role model for young people made a big impact on motivation to participate in community service (Chalk, 2008,127). Athletics departments need to keep supporting and encouraging student-athletes to give back to their communities in bigger ways to develop into individuals that will be successful in society and a representation of the athletics department and the university's mission statements.

The interesting connection with the question about Hometown Heroes on the survey was the answers from the teams centered on how it enhances the student-athlete experience for them or they were unaware of what the Hometown Hero program was even though the majority of student-athletes participate in some way at Illinois. The community service opportunities offer a way for student-athletes to build their overall school experience by participating in more than just athletics.

Literature

In addition to the volunteerism and other activities through the Life Skills program that the student-athletes participate in, they also are selected by their coaches for the Illinois

Leadership Academy. The Illinois Leadership Academy is facilitated by Jeff Janssen, and his leadership program is known as the world-wide leader in sports leadership development. The academy has ten core values and they are: passionate, fun and interactive, caring, can relate and connect, practical and proven, results-focused, credible and competent, cutting edge, easy to work with, and perspective (janssensportsleadership.com). Student-athletes are chosen for this opportunity to grow in their leadership roles on their teams and in life.

All the programs offered at Illinois are meant to enhance the student-athlete experience, but what about the people who say it's too much? Would athletics alone be enough to put on a student-athlete resume? Collegiate athletic programs should have the focus of developing the whole person not just the character-building component that comes with the sport. There is more to the collegiate athlete experience that must be met on a variety of levels.

Athletics open the world for many student-athletes. In the survey some student-athletes make note that they would still go to college and get involved in other activities. Some say they would have to work and others can't imagine their life without the game. Sports are supposed to give student-athletes the teaching aspect in regards to characteristics such as teamwork and perseverance that are not necessarily taught in the classroom, but part of higher education's mission (Gerdy, 1997, 33).

The question that athletic departments should ask is if they are engaging their student-athletes? Involvement and engagement will separate the student-athletes who want to succeed after they finish their athletic career. "Regardless of your ability as an athlete, you must be prepared to play in the most important game—the game of life. In the end it will be the most important game you win" (Lapchick, 1987, 14).

Pardon the Interruption (Action Planning)

The student-athletes at Illinois come from different places around the country, different backgrounds, and different sets of motivation levels. Every sport works towards a goal they define at the beginning of the year. For some teams they may be working to improve a losing record, while also making sure more people on the team have above a 3.0. For other teams their goal may be to win a national championship in addition to achieving the highest GPA in the athletic department. Regardless of the wins and losses, at the end of the year they still have an overall goal of success. Success that does come in their sport, and success that comes in life.

For the majority of student-athletes their success after their collegiate athletic career is so important. When asked if money defines their success level 22.4% said that money does define success, but 77.6% said that it didn't. Success is relative in a sense, but athletic departments are not truly successful unless they are bringing in the revenue in some perspectives. However, athletic departments need to examine their success ratings and make sure to consider the success of the person behind the mask.

Athletics departments need to clearly lie out their goals and make sure they follow their mission statement. Everyone from the student-athletes to the coaches to the administration should know the goals that the athletic department as a whole aims to achieve. A part from the winning records, there should be goals communicated to the student-athletes from degrees earned to community service hours completed. "Higher education institutions have realized their obligation to provide a supportive environment as soon as possible for student athletes to succeed (Carodine, 2001, 21)." The all-around development of each student-athlete recruited should be considered at the end of the year.

Also, the NCAA also needs to structure their own system in a way that regulates and adds value to the support that student-athletes gain from their experience at their respective universities. The programs offered by the NCAA include: Emerging Leaders Seminar, Career in Sports Forum, NCAA inclusive Summit, and more (NCAA.org). The programs help student-athletes grow in ways for after their collegiate careers. The programs are good, but the NCAA should be investing more time and money into the overall student-athlete experience without just conventions and conferences. There should be more money invested in career development outside of sport beginning from a student-athlete's freshmen year. The NCAA should be required to fund resume workshops that develop along with the student-athlete as they go through their collegiate career. In addition, the NCAA should be in constant communication about the student-athlete experience. They should be conducting surveys every year to understand the way schools handle their student-athletes and how they are investing their time in them. This would allow all student-athletes to truly have a voice. They should also have representatives monitoring each school and work on the communication with the administration from the university to the NCAA. The student-athletes experience should be unique for everyone, but also offer high quality at instilling what it takes to work hard after the student-athlete mask comes off.

The Student-Athlete Advisory Committee is "a committee made up of student-athletes assembled to provide insight on the student-athlete experience" (NCAA.org). SAAC is supposed to be a student-athlete's true outlet for their welfare. Overall, SAAC is not given the full resources to communicate effectively with the NCAA and the administration. The members of SAAC should feel they have the ability and power to influence their administration and the NCAA. They should be given constant updates on rule changes that is broken down in an

explainable fashion and uncluttered with complicated language that would confuse even the smartest person.

All in all the coaches also play a tremendous role at the collegiate level and can not be left out in the piece of the puzzle that completes the steps that are needed to ensure a higher level of success of developing the all around person. The coach has an enormous amount of power when it comes to collegiate athletics. There can be a level of distrust and uneasiness in this relationship because the question that can pop up into a student-athletes mind may be, “Will this coach truly care about my success or will he or she care more about the outcome of his or her own success since the career is based off wins?” Coaches can have a huge influence on a student-athletes future and the NCAA and the institution have to regulate how coaching staffs go about their business and the treatment of student-athletes. The faculty representative for the university has the role of limiting the power of the coach so they do not jeopardize the future of some student-athletes. The faculty representative is the person who is truly invested in the success of the student-athlete as the student and person first.

Student-athletes also have the job at communicating what they are struggling with and what they want more help in. Problems occur early on before student-athletes reach the collegiate level. Once a student-athlete makes it to the collegiate level catch-up takes place. Student-athletes need to realize that their academic success will come before any athletic success ever occurs.

In addition, athletics departments need to setup a true sense of loyalty that radiates throughout. Athletics is viewed on a number of levels, but the leadership from up top and even at the very bottom adds a critical piece to the development of not only an athletic program, but most importantly the people behind the masks.

When those masks come off every student-athlete will meet that day when they wear their school colors as an actual competitor for their school for the last and final time. For some the day will mark an end to who they are, others just the next step in their athletic career, and for others a chance to finally escape from all they have ever known. That moment marks an important time where a student-athlete takes the next step in their life. For instance the NCAA has over 40,000 student-athletes competing and not many will continue with their professional athletic careers. According to the NCAA website (2011), only 8.9% of baseball players, 1.7% of football players, 1.2% of men's basketball players, and 0.9% of women's basketball players will play professional sports. The next step that includes competing is only for a very small select group of people that will also one day have to find out what else life has to offer.

With all that the world has to offer there may still be a sense of fear. The student-athletes at Illinois said they were afraid of failure while said they weren't afraid of failure. Failure can be reached on so many levels to a student-athlete. It can range from falling short of personal goals set early on in the season, bad grades, not reaching the professional career, and more. Failure extends to after their athletic career is over. Athletic departments have failed in regards to understanding the people who compete for them. This is the chance to understand what motivates some and what drives others forward.

At the end of a student-athletes athletic career, they don't just finish and walk away. Their sport became their family. 88.3% said that the one thing an outsider wouldn't know about their program was the family like bond they all had with each other. That bond is like nothing else that can be explained from wins or losses or grade point averages. That bond is the personal relationship that many will never see, but holds a team together through the biggest successes and the worst failures.

Conclusion

An athletic department can be an extended family at the end of the day that understands who the student-athletes are as people. It is a family unit that understands how to motivate its student-athletes to perform in the classroom and in their sport as well as their future careers. Student-athletes come to a school for a number of reasons, but when they leave they can honestly leave knowing they were part of a bigger family. Looking in, outsiders may never know about the structure of an athletic department and all that ultimately goes into it, but in the end it is supposed to be about the student-athlete.

The student-athlete that comes in with a mask has the opportunity to reveal the person underneath who has grown with the college experience. If while in college the student-athlete does not grow in a way where they can take off the mask, the athletics department has failed. The love for the mask has to grow into development of the person. An athletic career can be over as quickly as it begins and an athletics department has the role of cultivating a culture and an environment that has success because of the people that are brought in and remain a part of the program.

The study was limited to only a small group of student-athletes at the University of Illinois, surveying only 68. However, the survey took on different sports and students from different backgrounds to illustrate how the makeup of an athletics department looks. With the survey focusing on numbers and short answer it did not fully look into the student-athlete experience that could have been drawn from observation and interviews. Further research has to be done by observing student-athletes from the beginning of their athletic careers as student-athletes in college.

Also, more research in the future should be done on student-athletes before they reach the collegiate level. Questions should be asked about their schooling experience, the emphasis they have received on academics, and where they may fall short because of the focus on athletics in their lives. While the beginning of a student-athletes career is also important so is their future after the collegiate experience. More studies should be done on how student-athletes adjust to the working world and what limitations and advantages they have after they end their athletic careers.

Looking at the overall picture from the survey results, the true nature of student-athletes motivation for success is presented in their connection to the people they feel supported by and the chance to do what they love. The history of both the NCAA and Big Ten have been successful through their model of developing future leaders and producing great athletes and students.

A student-athlete has the job of asking questions that align with the institution that they choose. Collegiate athletics need to maintain the true mission of making sure that they fulfill their duty of educating the student-athletes that come through their door. In addition, the personal relationships built during and at the end of the career will leave an everlasting imprint on the university and athletics department that will lead to sustainable success for years to come and the ultimate reality of collegiate athletics. Finally, although athletic departments may seem as if they are asking too much they are only asking for their student-athletes to be the person without the mask at all times that has the chance to succeed.

As student-athletes embark on their future at the collegiate level the focus has to be on growing as a whole person while enjoying the experience. At the end of the day the student-

athlete cannot hide behind a mask of a football or soccer ball, but embrace the academic and social component that will enable to flourish a constant moving society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adler, Patricia, and Peter Adler. "Intense Loyalty in Organizations: A Case Study of College Athletics." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 33 (1988): 401-417. Print.
- Bandura, A. (1989). Human Agency in Social Cognitive Theory. *American Psychologist*, 44, 1175-1184.
- BIG TEN CONFERENCE Official Athletic Site - On Campus. (n.d.). *BIG TEN CONFERENCE Official Athletic Site - Big Ten Conference*. Retrieved January 25, 2012, from <http://www.bigten.org/school-bio/big10-school-bio.html>
- Brady, Erik. "Salaries for College Football Coaches Back on Rise." *USA TODAY* 17 Nov. 2011. Print.
- Branch, Taylor. "The Shame of College Sports - Magazine - The Atlantic." *The Atlantic — News and Analysis on Politics, Business, Culture, Technology, National, International, and Life – TheAtlantic.com*. Web. 14 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/10/the-shame-of-college-sports/8643/>>.
- Carodine, Keith, Kevin F. Almond, and Katherine K. Gratto. "College Student Athlete Success Both In and Out of the Classroom." *New Directions for Student Services* 2001.93 (2001): 19-33. Print.
- Chartrand, Judy, and Robert Lent. "Sports Counseling: Enhancing the Development of the Student-Athlete." *Journal of Counseling and Development* 66 (1987): 164-167. Print.
- Free The Children - Home*. Web. 6 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.freethechildren.com/>>.
- Fussman, Cal. "John Wooden Quotes - UCLA Coach John Wooden Quotes Death - Esquire." *Beautiful Women, Men's Fashion, Best Music, Drink Recipes - Esquire*. Web. 10 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.esquire.com/features/what-ive-learned/learned-john-wood-0200>>.
- Gerdy, J. R. (1997). *The successful college athletic program: The new standard*. Phoenix, Ariz: Oryx Press.
- Getz, Malcolm., Siegfried, John. "What Does Intercollegiate Athletics Do To or For Colleges and Universities?" Print.
- Howard-Hamilton, Mary F., and Julie A. Sina. "How College Affects Student Athletes." *New Directions for Student Services* 2001.93 (2001): 35-45. Print.
- Janssen Sports Leadership Center. (n.d.). *Janssen Sports Leadership Center*. Retrieved January 28, 2012, from <http://www.janssensportsleadership.com/programs/>

- Jordan, Janice, and Eric Denson. "Student Services for Athletes: A Model for Enhancing the Student-Athlete Experience." *Journal of Counseling & Development* 69 (1990): 95-97. Print.
- Lapchick, R. E. (1986). *Fractured focus: Sport as a reflection of society*. Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books.
- Lapchick, R. E., & Malekoff, R. (1987). *On the mark: Putting the student back in student athlete*. Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books.
- Lapchick, R. E., & National Education Association of the United States. (1989). *Pass to play: Student athletes and academics*. Washington, D.C: National Education Association.
- Lapchick, R. E., & Duffaut, J. B. (2010). *150 heroes: People in sport who make this a better world*. Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- McKissic, R. J. (1998). *How to play the sports recruiting game and get an athletic scholarship: The handbook and guide to success for the African-American high school student athlete*. Phoenix, AZ: Amber Books.
- Meeker, D. J., Stankovich, C. E., & Kays, T. M. (2000). *Positive transitions for student athletes: Life skills for transitions in sport, college & career*. Scottsdale, Ariz: Holcomb Hathaway.
- NCAA Public Home Page - NCAA.org. Web. 08 Dec. 2011. <<http://NCAA.org>>.
- Persell, C.A. (1977). "A Theoretical Synthesis". Chapter two in Educational Inequality".
- Petrie, T., & Denson, E. (2003). *A student athlete's guide to college success: Peak performance in class and life*. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth learning.
- Ryan, Frank. "Participation." *Journal of College Student Development* 30 (1989): 128. Print.
- "Salaries for College Football Coaches Back on Rise." *USA Today*. 16 Nov. 2011. Web. 5 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.usatoday.com/sports/college/football/story/2011-11-17/cover-college-football-coaches-salaries-rise/51242232/1>>.
- Sclafani, J. D. (2004). *The educated parent: Recent trends in raising children*. Westport, Conn: Praeger Pub.
- Shulman, J. L., & Bowen, W. G. (2001). *The game of life: College sports and educational values*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Simons, Herbert, Corey Bosworth, Scott Fujita, and Mark Jensen. "The Athlete Stigma in Higher Education." *College Student Journal* 41 (2007): 251-273. Print.

Student-Athlete Experience (Survey given in January 2012 to University of Illinois student-athletes)

"The Role of Social Supports and Self-Efficacy in College Students." (2011). Print.

Toft, D., Mooney, K. P., & Ellis, D. (2006). *Becoming a master student athlete*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Watt, Sherry K., and James L. Moore. "Who Are Student Athletes?" *New Directions for Student Services* 2001.93 (2001): 7-18. Print.

Wieberg, Steve. *News, Travel, Weather, Entertainment, Sports, Technology, U.S. & World – USATODAY.com*. Web. 12 Dec. 2011. <http://www.usatoday.com/sports/college/2010-10-27-ncaa-graduation-rates-study_N.htm>.