

Foul Play

Universities struggle to deal with athletes in trouble

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As student-athletes move from the sports page to the front page, the headlines depict an alarming trend of crime and scandal.

For example:

In January, sophomore Tyrone Williams, a defensive back for the U. of Nebraska football team, allegedly fired several rounds at a car being driven by another student.

Also in January, Robert Glanton, a running back at Northwestern U., withdrew from school after allegedly entering several women's rooms late at night, watching and sometimes touching the sleeping residents.

Auburn U., U. of Notre Dame, UNLV and a host of other schools have experienced lawlessness among student-athletes in recent years. Even at Pennsylvania State U., which traditionally has boasted a squeaky clean program, five football players were arrested on charges including felony theft and selling cocaine in 1992. As a result, schools are asking some difficult questions: Why are these athletes getting into trouble, and what can be done about it?

The reasons behind the headlines

Those who supervise student-athletes have struggled to find common factors behind these crimes.

Arizona State U. has been searching for answers since a nationally publicized wave of scandals hit the campus in 1991-92. During a 14-month span, 19 student-athletes were named in criminal complaints ranging from burglary to aggravated assault. As a result, ASU moved into the national spotlight of athletic controversy, and university President Lattie Coor responded by ordering two studies to investigate the situation. Both studies concluded that the isolation of student-athletes was a problem.

According to one of the studies: "If we were to cite a single complaint concerning the lives of student-athletes, particularly those in the major revenue sports, it would be that these young men and women are isolated from the academic and social community."

Mike Sertich, hockey coach at the U. of Minnesota, Duluth, says, "A lot of kids want to go out and be part of the mainstream, but because they are recognizable, they can't. Consequently, people may take advantage of them, pursue them and push them a little bit. When alcohol and egos get involved, trouble starts brewing."

Sertich and others say the spotlight burns brighter because athletes are public figures. But is it fair that they find



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themselves on page one every time they get in trouble?

Not in the opinion of U. of Wisconsin Athletic Director Pat Richter, a former Washington Redskin.

"The athlete is not only given very little chance within the press to have the whole story come out, but because of the coverage, their case is much more closely scrutinized," he says.

But most agree that whether the attention is fair, it comes with the territory of being a public figure.

"Most athletes that are competing in sports at NCAA institutions are role models," says Kathryn Reith, director of public information at the NCAA. "Unfortunately there do seem to be, from time to time, a few athletes that

don't [set a good example]. And because they're athletes it probably will be on page one. Whether it's the right thing or a good thing or not, that is what's going to happen. Athletes need to understand that."

Fixing the system

The community responded to ASU's situation with disgust. In one poll, 70 percent of those surveyed in the Phoenix community had a negative view of ASU as a result of the scandals. Even *Sports Illustrated* berated the "bedeviled Sun Devils."

"The system is somehow broken, and we have got to fix it. And fix it we will," ASU's Coor said during the crisis.

Coor ordered background checks on

all ASU athletes, appointed a team to investigate unlawful acts related to ASU athletics and called for a student-athlete conduct code. Since the conduct code was devised, no ASU athlete has been linked to a major offense.

"I think [the code] helped... because here's our set of rules, and we have to follow by it, rather than the rules that society says," says senior Toby Mills, former starting center for ASU's football team. "The rules we follow here are tighter than society's."

Athletic Director Charles Harris says he received requests for copies of ASU's policy from between 40 and 50 schools, including Auburn and Syracuse U.

Last fall, Syracuse also developed a strict conduct code for athletes. According to the campus paper, *The Daily Orange*, last year's arrest of a basketball player charged with vandalism prompted Chancellor Kenneth Shaw to call for the new code, which is 33 pages long and reads in part, "You will be held to a standard of ethical conduct and behavioral expectations which may well exceed those of non-athletes."

In Shaw's opinion, the restrictions of the new code are balanced out by the perks it establishes, such as counseling and development programs specially designed for student-athletes.

"As I see it, a good university doesn't treat everybody alike," Shaw says.

And at ASU, although things have improved, Coor plans more changes. One of the studies he ordered issues 27 recommendations, including recruiting stronger students, monitoring their progress more closely and pairing athletes with non-athlete roommates.

According to the NCAA's Reith, measures such as these aren't intended as penalties, but as a way to integrate athletes into the student body by removing unnecessary privileges such as athletic dorms, which will be phased out at all NCAA schools by 1996.

"The philosophy of the NCAA is that the athlete is an integral part of the student body," she says. "The athlete is a student first and shouldn't be treated as another being." One of the themes of the next NCAA convention will be the ethical conduct of student-athletes.

As universities look toward the future, Coor says, "Those who study the natural phenomenon of the Earth note that fires, as painful and damaging as they are, are therapeutic to the longer-term ecology of the area. I think we should all learn from misfortune."

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