

Play

Nice

Student-athletes don't always have winning police records

BY DAN MILLER

ARIZONA STATE U.

PHOTOS BY BARRY SCHWARTZ, OREGON STATE U.

EVER WONDER WHAT IT'S like to be a big-time college athlete? Just think — you get free tuition, fame, the chance to travel and, of course, the thrill of competing. Those are the pluses.

You also get life in a fish bowl, a bull's-eye on your back and media hounds on your doorstep if you happen to screw up. And lately many athletes *have* screwed up.

Big time.

Stat sheet

In recent months, criminal misdeeds have polluted the jock departments of colleges and universities across the nation. With a few high-profile schools assuming starring roles in this real-life saga of amateur sports gone awry, college athletics have suffered a significant black eye.

"Left unattended, athletes tend to be in more trouble than the average student," says Art Taylor, associate director of the Center for the Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern U., Mass. "I think it's the high-profile aspect of their lifestyle. They've gotten a lot of things for free."

A 1994 study conducted by researchers at Northeastern and the U. of Massachusetts, Amherst, suggests that male athletes are more likely to commit acts of sexual violence. Researchers reviewed 107 cases of sexual assault reported by internal judicial affairs offices at 30 Division I schools between 1991 and 1993. They found that male student-athletes at 10 of those schools were responsible for 35 percent of reported domestic violence incidents and 19 percent of reported sexual assaults on campus, despite making up only 3 percent of the male student bodies. Researchers tested their findings by studying 10 other schools at random.

"We think there's something going on that contributes to the frequency with which athletes commit sexual assault," says Todd Crosset, an assistant professor of sports management at UMass, who participated in the study. "But athletes only make up a fraction of the population. Violence against women is a huge social problem that is part of every community in our society. We shouldn't scapegoat athletes."



The usual suspects: student-athletes.

Scoreboard

Still, news of law-breaking sports stars has become so mainstream that it's difficult to go a week without seeing an athlete's transgression splashed across the sports pages of your local newspaper.

Consider this laundry list of woes that made news — all on Nov. 6 of last year:

- Seven Virginia Tech U. football players, including All-American defensive end Cornell Brown and starting fullback Brian Edmonds, were charged with beating a member of the school's track team. A grand jury indicted the players, along with a former player, for their involvement in the Aug. 31, 1996, campus attack, in which a sprinter was allegedly hit, kicked and beaten with a cane.

- Boston College suspended 13 football players for gambling, including two who bet against their own school in a 45-17 loss to Syracuse U. last October.

- Five U. of Rhode Island football players were charged with conspiracy to commit assault and assault after a criminal investigation into an Oct. 7, 1996, attack on three members of the Theta Delta Chi fraternity house.

The U. of Nebraska, the defending two-time national college football champions, and the U. of Miami—two of the more high-profile football programs in the past 10 years—have had several image-damaging incidents recently.

Perhaps Nebraska's most prominent brush with the law came in September 1995 when star running back Lawrence Phillips assaulted his former girlfriend.

He was suspended by head coach Tom Osborne for six games, later pleaded no contest and was found guilty of misdemeanor assault and trespassing. Phillips was just one of at least six NU players

whose names have surfaced in police reports in the past two years.

Lee Barfknecht, who has been the NU beat reporter for the *Omaha World Herald* for the past 12 years, says writing about all of the Cornhuskers' criminal activity has become one big headache.

"It's tiresome," he says. "You like to cover games. You don't like to cover the police blotter; otherwise, you would've become a police reporter. But you can't ignore it."

At Miami U., meanwhile, no fewer than one of every seven scholarship players on the Hurricanes' 1994 football team was arrested while enrolled at that institution, according to a report in the *Miami Herald* in May 1995.

Falling stars

Tom Jackson, professor of psychology and director of clinical training at the U. of Arkansas, Fayetteville, says the rash of criminal activity in college sports is sometimes the result of athletes' isolation from regular students.

"They lead a very sheltered, disciplined and focused lifestyle in order to be a Division I scholar-athlete," says Jackson, who conducts seminars on sexual responsibility for college athletes across the country. "They don't always have the same emotionally maturing experiences as the average student."

Jackson's research mirrors that of the Center for the Study of Sport in Society. His findings indicate that athletes in competitive, revenue-producing sports are more likely to commit assault than the average student. He says that the "win-at-all-costs" mentality instilled in athletes can carry over into their daily lives.

"When you have these physically overdeveloped men who haven't had the opportunity to learn the same



Guest Expert: RuPaul

On athletes and crime: "Put them in jail if they deserve it."