

"Some of the nastiest players on the field are the nicest guys off the field. But some people have to draw the line between being on the field and real life."

**CHAD JOHNSTON,
JUNIOR,
QUARTERBACK,
WEST
VIRGINIA U.**

life skills, it can lead to problems," Jackson says.

Athletes have found that America's passion for sports can be both positive and negative factors in their college careers. Because they are frequently placed on pedestals, some college stars admit they must adhere to a higher standard of behavior.

Mark Sanford, an All-Conference basketball player and U. of Washington junior, says student-athletes are more likely to make headlines than regular students.

"We're human like anyone else," he says. "We handle situations just the way any other person would handle them, but because we're athletes, it becomes public faster than if the mailman was doing it."

Isaac Fontaine, a senior All-Conference basketball player at Washington State U., agrees.

"We're like the NBA team of the little city of Pullman [Wash.]," he says. "If we got a speeding ticket, our picture would be in the paper, and

creating an unfair stereotype of the college athlete.

"I think that people are identifying relationships [between sports and crime] that at this point I'm not prepared to say are accurate," says Frank D. Uryasz, director of sports sciences for the NCAA. "Certainly we're not in denial — there have been some well-known instances."

Adds Taylor: "The No. 1 thing is that if athletes commit a crime, they are much more likely to be observed than the average student."

Money talks

Miami-based super-agent Drew Rosenhaus says that perhaps if college athletes in revenue-producing

"If you start paying college athletes, they're going to start to get a big head..." says Beckwith, a junior who plays center. "That would make things even worse."

We are the champions

It's been an uphill battle for students who are fighting to change the negative stereotype of the college athlete. Chad Johnston, a quarterback and junior at West Virginia U., says leaving the game mentality on the field is the way to curb violence and crime off the field.

"Some of the nastiest players on the field are the nicest guys off the field," Johnston says. "But some

Dan Miller promises that no athletes, administrators or coaches were hurt in the writing of this story.



there would be a big article. If you don't want to be in the limelight in a negative way, then you have to watch the way you conduct yourself off the court."

U. of Florida senior quarterback Danny Wuerffel says that whether it's right or wrong, the college athlete is a public figure who must be conscious of those who might be watching.

"A lot of kids try to emulate what they see," says Wuerffel, who is also a well-known member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. "It's not a choice whether you want to be a role model. I think we are role models."

Meet the press

In today's competitive and expanding media, athletes and their teams are prime targets for investigative reports. The higher a team is ranked in the national polls, the harder it falls when its off-field troubles spill into America's living room.

"Violence and crime are obviously wrong, but I think now it's more of an issue than it was a few years back," says the U. of Colorado's senior middle linebacker Matt Russell.

Russell should know. Twelve of his teammates were suspended last October as part of NCAA penalties for improper use of long-distance telephone access codes.

Russell, like many athletes who are even remotely associated with an off-the-field problem, believes the media may have taken their coverage of the incident a bit too far.

"I know that the media do their job, and you can't fault them for that," he says. "But [the student-athletes] were young, and they made a mistake. They know what they did was wrong. I'm not sure that incident needed to draw as much attention as it did."

Some officials believe the public's thirst for violence has caused a change in media reporting, thus

sports like football, basketball and baseball were compensated for their services, there would be a decline in crime.

"A lot of the guys I currently represent feel that it's just a rip-off that they didn't get paid in college," says Rosenhaus, who represents more than 50 current NFL players. "I think it's absurd that college football players aren't getting paid. That's a huge part of the problem. A lot of guys wouldn't be getting in trouble if they had money. As long as the current system is in place, there will be problems."

U. of South Carolina football player Paul Beckwith disagrees.

people have to draw the line between being on the field and real life."

Colorado's Russell says the biggest problem is that bad behavior gets attention and good behavior gets ... forgotten.

"People who aren't associated with college football don't realize that a huge percentage of us are quality guys who are getting degrees and are good citizens," he says. "Unfortunately, that's not news. People don't want to hear about the Rhodes scholars or the athletes who are out doing community service. They would rather hear about some guy doing something violent."

Disclaimer: The students in these photos are models only. They have not been implicated in any crimes.

Good Sports

While some athletes misbehave and give college sports a bad rap, others try to use their notoriety for a good cause.

Last fall, four Division I football players — seniors Matt Russell (U. of Colorado, Boulder), Chad Johnston (West Virginia U.) and James Hamilton (U. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) and junior Paul Beckwith (U. of South Carolina) — participated in national public service announcements denouncing the abuse of women.

Beckwith says he welcomed the chance to be a positive role model.

"I told myself if I ever got in this spot, I would try to give back to the community," he says. "Even if I've helped only one person, it makes it worthwhile."

Liz Claiborne Inc., in conjunction with the College Football Association and the Center for

the Study of Sport in Society, produced the 30-second PSAs, which aired in college football stadiums across the country.

In November, the National Consortium for Academics and Sports took a zero-tolerance stance against student-athletes convicted of rape, sexual assault or battering. The non-binding resolution states that any athlete convicted of one of these crimes should be banned from intercollegiate competition for at least one year.

"We hope that with this resolution, schools will not allow these athletes to represent them," says Richard Lapchik, director of the consortium. "And we hope that the message is heard across America and used as a model for society: Do not let these kinds of people represent your institution."

Nationwide seminar series, such as the Mentors in Violence Prevention Program (MVP) and the NCAA's CHAMPS/Life Skills Program, are being used to help educate student-ath-

letes about acceptable forms of conduct.

"You have to intervene," says Art Taylor, the associate director of Northeastern U.'s Center for the Study of Sport in Society in Boston. "Coaches have to give messages about what is acceptable."

Taylor helped develop MVP, which was founded at Northeastern in 1993. His approach, he says, is not to blame athletes for social ills, but to instead encourage proactive behavior and leadership in those areas.

The NCAA's CHAMPS/Life Skills Program is based on a similar philosophy. The training consists of a series of on-campus lectures. One seminar focuses specifically on sexual responsibility.

The bottom line for student athletes is personal responsibility, Russell says.

"I know the limits of acceptable behavior," he says. "I don't break the law. I watch what I say, and that's the kind of example I try to set." — DM