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**ENG 1102**

**4 April 2014**

College Athletes on Scholarships versus Walk-On College Athletes

**Introduction**

The identity of college athletes on scholarship as well as the identity of walk on college athletes and how their identities affect themselves, their schoolwork, social life, and how others view them is what I based my research off of. I found this topic especially interesting because I had the opportunity to be a college athlete of either choice with a scholarship or without and chose neither path. Interviews with the two different types of athletes I mentioned above and an interview with a college coach guided my research along with scholarly articles and Gee, an identity scholar.

**History**

Scholarships for college athletes have not always been around, and in fact it was looked down upon. This was because college was a place for academics not sports, and, when given a scholarship for a sport, that takes away from academics, which is the purpose of college. Although, the NCAA set regulations, and requirements had to be made in order to achieve a scholarship, it didn’t take long for those to become less and less strict. These policies, rules, requirements, and regulations changed over and over again. The first college sport event was in 1852 and the first athletic scholarships given were in the 1880s (Ruben). The idea was athletes were amateurs who could balance both academics and sport easily. Over time, big universities became like businesses seeking profit from college sports. Today, athletes aren’t considered amateurs but professionals. College athletes with a scholarship didn't succeed as well in school compared to non-scholarship athletes. Also, since athletes on scholarship receive their scholarship based on athletic performance, they aren't motivated as much for academics, whereas, non-scholarship athletes are intrinsically motivated to do well in both academics and athletics. “Student athletes recruited for athletic talent felt more pressure to focus on athletics over academics, were less intrinsically motivated in the classroom than their walk-on teammates, and earned much lower grades than walk-on student athletes”(Ruben).

**Characteristics**

College athletes tend to have stereotypes and are held to certain expectations. In personal experience, college athletes have the reputation of being “dumb and stupid.” Researchers have continuously called student-athletes an oxymoron because being an athlete and being a college student tends to have a negative impact and often times referred to as dumb jocks (Stone). Football college athletes with no scholarship showed more fatigue and anger compared to players on scholarship. College athletes who participate in a sport at a small college with no scholarship show more depression and confusion. Their moods correlate with their position, scholarship or non-scholarship, starting or not, and big college or small college (Newby and Simpson).

**Influences**

“Player preferences of coaching behavior can affect both their attitudes toward their sport experiences and team performance”(Stewart and Owens). The influence coaches have over their players is very high and it can affect how the players perform and interact with one another. Treating the scholarship athletes differently than walk-on athletes will and has affected their overall experience, work ethic, passion, and performance. This only gives those on scholarship a prestigious role that won’t make the team as a whole work or achieve goals. Horne and Amorose point out that athletes who are playing for intrinsic motivation (pleasure, fun, etc.,) have a better attitude and are a coach’s ideal player. These players aren't being rewarded to play for money (scholarship,), which can affect their attitude, behavior, and work ethic. “I work hard on and off the court, but it not because I’m a walk-on. To get better at my game, I go to the gym, on my own time, to work on my weaknesses. In the classroom I work very hard because there is a life after basketball and I need to be prepared for it,” said Terrance, a walk-on player. Terrance has a love for the game of basketball and works hard to achieve his goals. He states that he doesn’t feel that he gets treated any different and the only difference would be the fact the he is paying for college. He has intrinsic motivation to do well both on and off the court. They also state that college athletes on a scholarship have less intrinsic motivation than non-scholarship athletes. If an athlete has a full scholarship, their research found results of higher intrinsic motivation due to not having pressure. Interestingly, coaches have a major role intheir player’s motivation based on the achievement reward system.