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### From “Student”-Athlete to Criminal-Athlete

From a more than avid sports fan and one that follows both big and small time college athletics religiously, I can't help but point out the need to come to terms with the disastrous state of collegiate athletes, with the first accepting the existence of hypocrisy in the collegiate ranks. The truth must be told - the glaring deficiencies in character of some of these big-time “student”-athletes are extremely disturbing.

The most recent scenario involves Div. I Duke University's men's lacrosse team. According to the allegations, an alcohol-fueled party involving most of the team's 47 players on March 13 led to the rape of an exotic dancer, paid \$400 for her services, at the players' residence. The accusations state that the woman was gang-raped, sodomized and choked by three members of the team.

These students, representatives of their university, and a prestigious one at that, *gang-raped, sodomized and choked* a woman. And now, hear the charges: first-degree forcible rape, common law robbery, first-degree kidnapping, first-degree sexual assault and felonious strangulation. Conviction of these charges would result in a minimum sentence of 16 to 20 years.

Perhaps you remember the situation at the University of Colorado, when a report came to light that the team was using sex and alcohol to lure recruits to the school. The controversy arose when reports surfaced about a recruiting party, alcohol involved, in which two UC students said they were sexually assaulted and raped at the party.

Then there was Katie Hnida, the talented female kicker on the team who came forward to say that she was repeatedly harassed by her *teammates*. She was also subjected to numerous rape attempts.

And then we have Colorado Head Coach Gary Barnett (later fired) whose response garnered a warranted uproar; “It was obvious Katie was not very good. She was awful,” Barnett said. “Katie was not only a girl, she was terrible. Okay? There's no other way to say it.”

Understand the situation: a coach, to cover his own self-mutilated behind, warrants rape and other forms of harassment because of a player's ability?

Hnida may have been the worst kicker in the history of college football (which would be an outrageous claim), but last time I checked, there is not a direct correlation between being a victim of constant abuse with the ability to kick a football through the uprights.

The most recent allegations at Duke follow the same pattern; a double-standard for collegiate athletes, one that states that talent on the field justifies an easy way out off the field.

Both of these examples of athletes' immorality suggest that these athletes have always been permitted to misbehave because they are not looked upon as students, but glorified as celebrities.

These athletes have so much celebrity in them that their education is not only on a plate and handed to them, but it is fed to them as if they were a newborn gnawing on Gerber baby food. Effortless. We have heard of far too many cases of players remaining eligible because of their athletic prestige. Again, the double standard for athletes. Many institutions offer majors or specializations in an athlete's respective sport. Put that on a resume – "I majored in *football* at the University of Colorado, and sexually harassed women day in and day out! Hire me!"

Also note that in both of these cases, and in 99.9% of like controversies, alcohol is not only involved, but is the main culprit.

Barnett claimed that he was unaware of any such behavior. *Please, coach.* You spend 10 hours a day with your players, you hear things. And the fact that nothing was done, even at the first sign of underage drinking, is disturbing. If an athlete is suspended indefinitely at the first sign of indecent, dangerous or illegal activity, decency in the college ranks might not be far behind.

However, a forward step will not be made if the NCAA does nothing to begin to assert that collegiate athletes are *students* first, *athletes* second, and *criminals*, well, hopefully never. NCAA Commissioner Miles Brand must begin to maintain a set of acceptable conventions rather than absurd ones.

It seems as though breathing is an NCAA violation of some kind. In 1994, then-University of Utah head basketball coach Rick Majerus purchased a meal for a player whose father died that same night. Majerus had the daunting task of informing his player of his parent's death, but the NCAA apparently didn't care a bit – and landed him with a violation of NCAA rules.

And yet, we never hear of "NCAA violations" in relation to alcohol abuse. How about cracking down on these team houses-turned-free-for-all that these teams live in? Why not subjugate them to the status of "normal" college students, placing them in the typical dormitory?

The denials of all the problems present in collegiate athletics are piling up like leaves on an October afternoon. The real issue is the fact that upper echelons just don't see that pattern: alcohol, celebrity image, and the common credence that collegiate athletes are foreign diplomats immune from the law.