

## Student Athlete or Athlete Student?

Many high schools offer sports to their students; that is nothing new. However, sports are becoming the main focus of schools rather than their students' academics. There is no doubt that this is becoming an issue. Whether all students not participating in a sport realize it or not, athletes are known for receiving special perks from the school to ensure that they are eligible to play during their games. This problem is not only prevalent in private schools like the one I am from, but also many area public schools as well. I have had many firsthand experiences with this form of favoritism. From athletes receiving no discipline when caught cheating to extensions on long term assignments, I have seen enough to realize that this is an issue that needs to be brought to everyone's attention.

Early into my freshman year, I was first introduced to this form of favoritism. "Can I have extension on the research paper? I didn't get a chance to complete it last night after the game," an athlete asked my teacher. "Of course, get it to me as soon as you have time," the teacher kindly replied. I was instantly angry, as were a majority of my classmates that overheard this situation. How does this teach anyone time management? We had a month to complete this research paper. This was not something you could complete in one night. It was evident that this student had not even began his paper. However, teachers were always at fault for an athlete's ineligibility. From that point on, I began looking out for this favoritism.

On Fridays, the dean of students would sit at lunch and call students who were receiving D's and F's over one by one to his table. It was clear to anyone within listening distance that the conversations between athletes were quite different than the conversations with those not in a sport. "You need to get your grade up," would be a common phrase heard by nonathletes. "I'll talk to your teacher," would be what an athlete would hear. It is quite simple to spot the difference and discover why that is an issue. Responsibility and accountability are lost when the blame is put on the teacher rather than the student that is at fault.

When accountability is lost, athletes tend to do whatever it takes to receive passing grades. During a winter final, I witnessed a girl in my class cheating off of Quizlet. She had found the test plus the answers and was quickly flying through the exam. A few minutes later, her phone began saying the answers out loud. She tried her best to cover it, and the teacher acted as though he did not hear it. A few minutes had passed, and the same voice echoed through the room. The teacher waited, the voice did not stop, and he walked over to remove her phone from her. Her test was not taken and she was not given a zero. After a short period of time went by, another student was caught cheating. He was not using electronics, but he had his study guide hidden beneath his test. His test was pulled and he received a zero for the final. That girl was a three sport athlete, the boy was in no activities. Coincidence? I don't think so. Neither student prepared in advance for the final, so both relied on cheating. Both were caught, yet only one was punished. As usual, the athlete got her way and the final went on.

Unlike many athletes, I had never expected favors from my teachers. I was responsible for doing my work on time. However, after an away volleyball game, my teacher decided to give the volleyball girls an extension on our math section due. I looked around at those on my team to watch them all look relieved. I turned in my assignment and sat back in my seat. My teacher walked over to me and asked, "Are you sure this is quality work? The team was up last night late and I want to ensure you get a good grade to avoid ineligibility." I was taken aback, but replied, "I did it two days ago when it was assigned because I knew the game would be late." My teacher nodded her head and walked to her desk. A girl on the team then asked me why I did it since we knew the teacher would let us be late with the assignment. I shrugged my shoulders, but in my head I thought, why not do something when it is assigned to get it out of the way? The athletes I was surrounded by were lacking that mentality; sports were becoming a bigger concern than their school work.

Many athletes fail to realize that sports are not forever. The chance of a high school athlete making it into the professional league is very low. And on a lower scale, many students

do not even play in their college years. Why are we letting student athletes get away with giving maximum effort on the court or field but giving less than the minimum effort in their studies? Our futures rely on how well we do at school. The time management, accountability, and work ethic taught in high school are essential aspects in success in college or the work force, and then eventually in their adult life. Athletes that are favored are missing out on those crucial lessons, and they becoming entitled to things they are certainly not suppose to be just given. This sense of entitlement will carry with those athletes through college and then eventually into their adult lives. We are shown this through the behavior of a lot of collegiate and professional athletes. This would be easy to prevent if athletes were taught these lessons like the rest of their peers during their high school years.

Teaching these important lessons during high school would better prepare many students for their future. However, before we can better these student athletes and their futures, we must make it known that this is an actual problem occurring in many schools. We can no longer turn a blind eye to this. More and more schools are at fault than we realize. Our society must work to ensure that athletics never come before education. Education is the future. Athletics are a hobby.