

NEWS & OPINION

Two Student-Athletes Reflect on Time at NCWC

John Kostet

I write this with only days left before graduation. It is time to summarize and put an end to my American experience, and what an experience it has been. Four years of my life have gone by, and who would have thought that I would spend all of them here in Rocky Mount, NC. I am very restless and I am always daydreaming about my next step, my next trip. I simply can't stay in the same place for too long. But somehow I got stuck here. Something made me want to stay and commit to a team (men's basketball) and a degree (in political science) for four years. I don't know what that something was, and I don't think I will know until years from now. I guess it's true that "you don't know what you have until it's gone." But I know that when I put my feet on the frosty parking lot in Sweden, I will definitely miss the ability to wear shorts and a T-shirt.

But the weather was not what brought me here. I came to fulfill my dream of playing basketball in the country where the sport was invented. The playing part never really worked out for me, as I suffered from a variety of injuries and settled for the bench. I did not mind, the competition was tough and I wasn't motivated enough to make much of a difference. But I still loved it. The overall experience gave me more knowledge than any class had ever taught me. The things we learned and experienced as a team have been priceless and the memories will forever stay with me. The friends I made through basketball might not be my closest, but our relationship is special and my teammates will never be forgotten.

I have met a lot of people throughout these years, and I have made friends from different parts of the world. It has been amazing to see how such a small school like Wesleyan has been able to attract such a variety of students. Not everyone stays to pursue a degree; instead many international students leave after only a semester or a year. But the high number of foreigners has truly contributed to an important cultural mix that I have really enjoyed. I think that the diversity at this school is what makes it so special. It feels great to know that I have friends from New Zealand to Fayetteville, from New York to Brazil, from Cameroon to Iceland and from England to San Diego. Hopefully it also means a free place to stay when I come to visit.

When I first got here, I'll admit I was very skeptical of the liberal arts concept. It did not make any sense to me. I already had my mind set to study political science, and I was questioning why I had to take all those unrelated courses. At European universities, you usually choose a field of study and stay within that field. I couldn't see how studying theatre, biology or underwater rocks could help me understand

politics. I still can't, but I realize that most of my peers were not sure about what they wanted to study, and a year of a little bit of everything might have helped them. I also discovered that I prefer writing and thinking rather than reading and memorizing, which led me to journalism. That would probably not have happened in Sweden. In retrospect, I am glad that I had to take other classes, and today I might even write better in English than I do in Swedish.

I don't regret coming here and I don't regret staying here. Instead, it has been four great years that have been both joyful and inspirational. At times I might have felt a little "stagnant," but that has only produced an even greater urge to travel. The general education and the classes I have taken might have just touched the surface, but it created an interest for certain subjects. I might miss the friends I made, but the memories will always remain.

Patrick Laffin

I always knew I wanted to play a sport in college. I was devastated, after hurting my neck in football, to find out that I would no longer be able to play the sport I loved, hockey. I had lofty, and possibly semi-realistic, dreams of playing in the NHL, and to this day it pains me to see some of my Boston-area peers playing Division-I hockey and getting drafted into the NHL because I know it could easily have been me. After my injury, I focused all of my energy and time on another passion—baseball. After being told baseball was one of the only sports I could play due to my neck, I decided it was the sport I wanted to play in college. It was my dream to play college baseball in the South, because I was sick of the cold weather and snow cutting my baseball season short. While in high school I was recruited heavily by Wesleyan and I decided to come down for a visit with my father and we both fell in love with the beautiful field and the rich history of the program, its tradition of winning. I decided that I wanted to play for Wesleyan and before I knew it, I got a letter in the mail saying I had been accepted.

Looking back it feels like my three years here flew by. I still remember the butterflies in my stomach before my first college game. I will always remember my first college hit, a 9th inning game-tying double against Eastern Mennonite College. My first season was 2009 and we had one of the best teams I have ever played on, as we made it to Regionals and were two wins away from going to the College World Series. I experienced the highest of highs and the lowest of lows my sophomore season. After starting off the season hot, I fell into a slump and lost my starting right-field spot. I was so upset, but I kept working and soon I won the DH job, not a role I particularly wanted, but at least I was in the lineup again. I started hitting really well again and by the end of the season, I successfully won back my starting position in right. I was on fire by the end of the year,

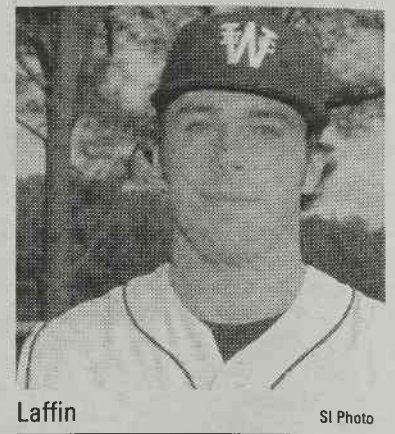
going 5 for 10 in the conference tournament with two homeruns. Then tragedy struck at home and I was forced to leave Wesleyan and attend another college in 2010-11.

I was heartbroken when I had to leave behind the school, teammates, coaches and teachers that I had grown to love. I enrolled in a college at home in Massachusetts, but the feeling wasn't the same. I struggled to make friends in a school that was incredibly cliquy, and I hated playing baseball on a team where no one, including the coach, cared enough to put in the time and effort to be good. I quit the team, sadly realizing my college baseball career was over. I only needed one more year of classes to finish my degree, so I decided to focus on school and earning my business degree. Then toward the end of the spring 2011, I decided to write Coach Long a letter, thanking him for believing in me and giving me the opportunities he did, and for allowing me to play in such an incredible program. I especially appreciated the way Coach Long coached the NCWC team, after a season of playing for a coach who had no idea how to run a college program. At the end of the letter, I explained that I was not playing baseball anymore, choosing to focus on school instead. A week later I got a phone call that would change my life.

Coach Long told me point blank that I had too much talent to give up on baseball. He explained to me that I had one of the best swings he had ever seen and that there was no way on earth I should give up playing. He encouraged me to think long and hard about giving up on baseball. After I hung up, I realized what I wanted to do, so I called him back and told him I wanted to return to Wesleyan. He was ecstatic and helped me with the transfer process. My parents were thrilled, as they had become concerned with how depressed I was after quitting baseball. I was so happy to be back at Bauer field, playing for the Battling Bishops.

My senior year flew by, but looking back I am very happy I decided to return. I was a First Team All-Conference selection, an NCAA Tournament First-Team selection, the MVP of the baseball team, an Academic All-Conference selection. And I was nominated for Wesleyan Male Athlete of the Year. The awards and accolades were a tremendous achievement that I am very proud of, as I worked so hard in the off season to get back in baseball shape; however, the awards are not what makes me the most happy about my season. I am happy because I got to play with some incredible teammates and make life-long

friends in the process. Baseball great Bo Jackson once said, "If I miss anything about the sport, it's the camaraderie of old teammates." I believe that is true, because at the end of the day no one remembers how the team performed as a whole; you just remember the guys you played with. I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to play with this group of men one last time. My teammates are what made this year so exciting for me and I am going to miss them tremendously as I move on to the next chapter of my life.



Laffin

SI Photo

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

About the Cross

By Rebekah Cain

(This letter was submitted in response to a page-two article, "Groups Raise Cross," in the March 8 edition of *The Decree*.)

When considering others' right to their own opinions and perspectives it's always important that we remember the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This rule is what has helped sustain the "melting pot" that is the United States of America for hundreds of years. If this rule is embraced by people of different viewpoints, we can truly live in peace together. Scriptures say that with the help of the Lord we will always aim to "conduct [ourselves] in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27). Though we might disagree on moral or theological points, as adults we should respect each other enough to appreciate one's willingness to stand up for something. After all, our country was founded by people of faith and it was Alexander Hamilton, one of our founding fathers, who said, "Those who stand for nothing will fall for anything."

It has been pronounced by a minority representation of our faculty that the nine-foot cross (placed by students) was offensive and an infringement on student rights. Last time I checked each of the paychecks that faculty members willingly accept and deposit are funded in large part by student tuition, alumni giving and the Methodist Church. And the checks have the words "North Carolina Wesleyan College" on it. I can only imagine how much of an undue burden this is for someone who willingly accepted employment at a small Methodist college. Let's be realistic. This is North Carolina Wesleyan College, a school founded by the Methodist church to

educate individuals through Christian beliefs. It is mind-boggling to me that a school that claims to promote "Wisdom and Courage through Christian Education" would remove the Christian and Methodist symbol of a cross until a verdict is reached on its appropriate or inappropriate nature. The opinion that students at a Christian College are trying to force religion on others by simply posting biblical scriptures on a cross is profoundly misguided. If this were the case, then all faculty, students and staff would be oppressed by religion when they view our college's name on the website or stationary. If the symbol of a cross is offensive, then all 10,000+ alumni of our college must break underneath the burden of seeing the symbol of the cross printed on their diploma and having the motto: "Wisdom and Courage Through Christian Education" imprinted there as well. After all, our college is named "Wesleyan" after John Wesley, a devout Christian and founder of Methodism.

As the leaders of tomorrow, we cannot afford to live in fear. Inaction for fear of offending anyone is an unrealistic philosophy that some in our community are trying to push. Not allowing one to voice his or her opinion based on the thought that it might offend another leads to a meaningless cycle that leaves everyone oppressed by fear. This is not tolerance or true equality. This is unrealistic bias and unnecessary "drama." Common sense dictates that if religion offends someone, then they should rethink attending and seeking employment at a Christian college. If tolerance is what is needed, then let us truly be tolerant in every situation. To many, this situation only reinforces the need for more Christian virtues like Love, Patience and Kindness on this campus. One can only imagine the reaction of our college's founders if they were to hear the claim that a cross—the ultimate symbol of Christian love—is offensive and an inhibition to students finding their own path of faith.

The intent of the Cross is to have a visual reminder, for everyone who comes on this campus, that Christ made the ultimate sacrifice, the perfect example of love. The beauty of this portrayal lies in the fact that He rose from the dead and is now alive in every believer. The verses that are placed on the cross are for another purpose; they are well thought out and prayed over before they ever go up. The night before the scriptures are placed, student representatives carefully consider scriptures that will encourage the student body! The scriptures cause readers to think, but an important fact is that each student independently interprets the scriptures they see for themselves. There is no pressure from other students or organizations. They are just as free to stop and look as they walk by.

It was Christian faith that was at the heart of the college's founders and there are many who believe that this same faith should be encouraged on campus. After all is said and done, I don't believe it is negative or offensive for students acting out of their Christian faith to encourage others as they continue to grow at NCWC. It is important to realize that the placement of a cross on campus was initially an effort entirely led by students, and not organizations. On our campus, Christian organizations are encouraged by the cross and appreciate the administration's eventual approval of its installation. The cross is now properly maintained by Refuge Campus Ministries and Campus Crusade for Christ. We ask that before anyone creates a bias about Christians, they understand the basics about the campus ministries...we are here to glorify God in everything we say and do (Colossians 3:17). We meet to uplift and encourage each other in mind and spirit. We are always excited to meet for fellowship each week. All are welcome to come to CRU on Monday nights at the Chapel and Refuge on Tuesday nights in the Hartness Center.

Additional reports indicated that at least one of the arrested students had been expelled once before from the college because of previous alleged crimes, but that he had been readmitted to campus last fall. Dean Williams would neither confirm nor deny that this was true.

When Jackson, the team's starting quarterback in 2011, was asked about the possibility that teammates might have stolen from each other, he said that's what hurt the most. "I thought we all had good friendships and that we could trust each other," he said. "But I guess you never know with people."

Jackson said that when the arrests were made, the trust and chemistry had dropped among his teammates, but that he now hoped that they can come together and become even stronger than before. "Hopefully we have gotten rid of our weak links," he said.

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THEFTS

from pg 1

two controllers and three games, a Toshiba laptop computer, a 19-inch Magnavox flat-screen TV, five baseball hats, NCWC baseball sweatpants, an Overbrook (N.J.) High School hoodie, two pillows, acne medicine, and \$10 in laundry change. "My sister had just bought me the laptop before I came to school in the fall," he noted.

A master key was found in a trash can outside Collins, which explained why there were no signs of forced entry. "We will have to change every lock on campus now," Dean Williams said.

John Jackson was shocked when he came back after spring break to discover that almost everything he had of value was gone, including his PlayStation 3, seven games and three controllers. Other missing items included a set of headphones, an iPod charger, hair clippers, and several books.

"The door was locked but the light was on," Jackson said in describing what he found when he returned to school. "My roommate's bed was flipped, the drawers were pulled out, and all our stuff was gone. I was really shocked because I thought I was cool with everybody here."

Dean Williams said that the college will replace the stolen textbooks, which students now rent as part of their tuition. But there is no policy in place to reimburse students for thefts of their possessions. Instead, the students must rely on their own insurance. But both Huff and Dietrich said they doubted that their home insurance would cover their losses. "I just sent the police report to the insurance company back home, but I'm not too sure," Huff said.

Jackson was surprised and disappointed that the school doesn't have a reimbursement policy. "The doors were locked and our stuff was supposed to be safe," he said.

Dietrich agreed and said there was nothing he and Huff could have done differently to prevent the thefts. "They need to step up security somehow," he said. "This is ridiculous."

The police told the victims that gaming consoles with serial numbers on them will be much easier to retrieve, but since most of them did not have that marking, they are pessimistic

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