

SPECIAL REPORT

An American tragedy: Faded, used-up heroes

By BARRY COOPER
Review Staff Writer

Editor's note: The following article is condensed with permission from The Orlando Sentinel.

THEY ONCE KNEW Harry Kelly as "Machine Gun," a prolific scorer in college basketball, the nation's leader in 1982-83, twice an all-America. There are pictures of him posing with the mayor of Houston while accepting proclamations for "Harry Kelly Day." Kelly was the young man who kidded with the president of Texas Southern University. He always had free tickets to Houston Rockets games and rock concerts.

Yes, Harry Kelly put basketball on the map at historically black Texas Southern University. He was a hero and a legend -- then.

Now he moves about quietly while reading water meters for the City of Houston. He makes about \$6 an hour, and he once wore dark glasses and a baseball cap to ward off fans who would approach him with the same nagging question: What happened?

For Kelly the euphoria of stardom was aborted. Reality has smacked him in the face with damning impact. He has become another college star who built his life around the dream of becoming a professional athlete, who failed to pursue his degree despite the opportunity, another star whose dream has been shattered.

Such stories are becoming common in big-time college sports. For every Patrick Ewing or Doug Flutie there seem to be a dozen Harry Kellys. To be sure, there are million-dollar contracts, Heisman Trophy winners, awards dinners and appearances on "Good Morning America." But college sports also are producing unskilled workers, new faces in the unemployment line and disillusioned athletes who have spent as many as five years at a university and remain functionally illiterate.

Big-time sports are rife with athletes who were placed in demanding institutions only because they were capable of bringing recognition and money to the schools through athletics. Few have a reasonable chance to graduate.

Tulane University basketball star John Williams, who is at the center of that school's point-shaving scandal, admitted that he could not read the English portion of his Scholastic Aptitude Test. He reportedly scored 200 on the verbal part of the exam, the lowest possible score. Yet he was admitted into Tulane, a school renowned for its high academic standards.

Freshman center Chris Washburn was accepted by North Carolina State after scoring only 470 on his SAT, far



Ex-Florida State athlete Hardis Johnson: He depends on his 83-year-old dad for financial help (photo by Victor Junco, Orlando Sentinel).

below the maximum possible of 1,600.

Sammy Drummer, now a janitor at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind., played at three schools, the last of which was Georgia Tech. He was one of Tech's finest players but failed to make it into the NBA. His SAT score: 500.

There is plenty of blame to spread for such educational miscarriages. The

collegiate athletics. We have done a real disservice to many of these youngsters, and it is not a new phenomenon."

In interviews with *The Orlando Sentinel*, players, coaches and educators from around the country pointed to these factors as key problems in the education of athletes:

- Illegal recruiting practices and

"There is no question that alumni and booster clubs tend to favor the white athletes. Once the black athlete has completed his eligibility, the booster clubs have no use for him."

-- Dr. Harry Edwards

players gamble that ignoring class work and concentrating on sports will result in fat pro contracts. Coaches and administrators buckle under the pressure to win and do not stress seriously the importance of a complete education.

Said Penn State football Coach Joe Paterno: "We need a brand-new academic accountability factor for student-athletes participating in inter-

under-the-table payments miscast some players for college life. Many players said they assumed their coaches would find ways to circumvent poor grades.

- Some athletes, particularly those from the inner city, arrive at college grossly unprepared for the academic challenge. Many have failed to develop study habits and have not taken essential courses such as algebra and advanced composition.

- Many athletes "major in eligibility." Their goal, endorsed by their coaches and academic advisers, is to remain eligible for sports by taking easy, unrequired courses.

- The demands placed on athletes leave little time for study. College football players are said to spend as much as 60 hours a week either playing, practicing or watching sports films. Basketball players are said to spend about 55 hours each week on their sport and lose more study time traveling to and from games as many as three times a week.

- Some athletes simply don't care about academics. For them, college is little more than an escape, a way to spend time before going to work for a living.

Something must be done

It is unclear exactly how many athletes are damaged by today's lax standards. The NCAA says the graduation rate for athletes -- about 50 percent graduate after six years -- mirrors that of nonathletes.

But in many cases athletes who don't

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