

An American tragedy

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turn professional appear to have a more difficult time adjusting to life than the average student who drops out.

Athletes are pampered throughout their careers and are told daily where to go, what to do and what minimums are acceptable. Food, shelter and jobs are provided. But after that ends, players often lack the discipline and experience to survive on their own.

The problem is especially acute for black athletes, who dominate most college football and basketball teams. Their graduation rate lags far behind that of white athletes.

According to a study commissioned by the NCAA, only 14 percent of black male athletes will graduate after four years. The number increases to 27 percent after five years and to 31 percent after six years.

Of the white male athletes, 27 percent will graduate after four years, 48 percent after five years and 53 percent after six years.

Furthermore, black athletes often receive a rude homecoming, said sociologist Dr. Harry Edwards, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, who has done extensive research on the subject.

"It is immensely tougher for the black athlete who doesn't get his degree than it is for the white athlete," Edwards said. "The black community is a much more mobile community ... and a lot less economically stable. Even if the black athlete does come back into the community and even if anybody there does remember him, they will not be able to do anything for him economically.

"The white athlete comes from a more stable community. When he comes back, somebody remembers that this is the kid who threw the touchdown pass against the cross-town rival or scored the winning basket in the big game. They give him a job in an auto dealership and teach him how to sell automobiles. They give him a job at the insurance company and teach him how to sell insurance. Or the bank gives him a loan so that he can open his own filling station.

"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."

Some officials are responding to the need for reform. Paterno and Notre Dame basketball Coach Digger Phelps are among those pushing for tough academic standards that will prevent unqualified students from participating in college sports.

The Proposition 48 controversy

The issue has become a heated debate, one that has been fueled by tough new NCAA legislation called Proposition 48. Scheduled to be enacted in August 1986, the measure

will call for incoming athletes to score at least 700 on the SAT or the equivalent of 15 on the American College Test.

In addition, athletes would be required to have at least a 2.0 high school grade-point average (on a four-point scale) in a specific number of college

preparatory courses.

However, some educators, particularly those at historically black universities, argue that admission exceptions should continue for weak students who also are excellent athletes.

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