

COVER STORY

Dr. LeRoy T. Walker: Sometimes controversial views

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When Dr. LeRoy T. Walker talks about the black college athlete, people listen.

Walker, you see, has spent more than 50 of his 69 years as an athlete, coach or administrator working primarily with black athletes and black colleges. In addition, he has served as head coach of the 1976 U.S. Olympic track and field team; president of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics; coach of the Olympic teams of Ethiopia, Israel, Jamaica, Kenya and Trinidad; chairman of the U.S. Olympic Committee and chancellor of North Carolina Central University in Durham.

Thus, when Walker recently told a presidential commission in Washington that the black athlete should be held to the same academic standards as whites, it was not taken lightly. The NCAA's Proposition 48, Walker told the body, "is not a black athlete problem." Yet black coaches and administrators from a number of black colleges had insisted that the measure discriminated against the black athlete and against black institutions.

The proposition specifies that athletes must make a 700 combined score on the Scholastic Aptitude Tests, as well as a C average in major high school subjects, in order to participate in athletics in their freshman year.

In his office at the U.S. Olympic Festival headquarters last month Walker, a husky man who looks a few pounds over playing weight, 10 years younger than he is, and still moves about with the physical self-assurance of a former athlete, took the time from a busy schedule to elaborate on his controversial position.

"I could not in good conscience take the floor and say to a ninth-grader, 'You are incapable of making 700,' or 'You are incapable of making a C.' I could not send that message," he said. "What we need is the time and flexibility to adjust. It's what I call the all or some theory. There are some institutions that are not going to make it. You can't make it in an institution with 200 or 300 students. There's not enough foundation money that you can get to survive. But don't tell me that all of us are in the same category. I think that if a youngster prepares himself in high school, he can get a 700 and a C average."

Walker took a similar hard stand when he served as chancellor of NCCU from 1983 to 1986. Besides attracting more than \$250,000 in grants to the 5,200-student institution, he also improved collection of student loan payments and tightened the admission procedures for the academically needy stu-

dents. "You've got to be more demanding of students," he told a reporter, "since, in my view, I don't think there are any more entitlements out there."

Also during Walker's tenure as chancellor, the freshman survival rate at NCCU improved from 55 percent to 80 percent. "If we improve the pool that's coming in, it's going to improve everything down the line," he said.

Thus Walker's views on other topics come as no surprise to anyone who has been paying attention. Listen, for example, to his views on coaches who cater to their athletes: "Coaches have great control over

higher morality when you haven't had any morality in dealing with the athlete?"

On black athletes' reported use of drugs: "The black athletes get reported. Other athletes go in for the same reasons but when you see them in the hospital it's reported that they had another kind of problem. This drug thing is so pervasive; it's down in the elementary schools almost. With junior high school kids it's a shortcut to success, which is a lie. You get a false impression. Whatever they say, we know that drugs reduce your efficiency to play. It affects flexibility, reaction time, etc."



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athletes. You take away athletes' basketball, or their football or track, or what they love most -- it would kill them. So why is it that you rationalize their insensitivity to being what they should be? I think the inability of coaches to appeal to the higher morality of athletes these days is because they have given them under the table; they've broken all the rules. How do you appeal to the

On mandatory drug testing: "Yes. My advice when I was chancellor was that you test athletes anyhow. Every athlete that comes to school is put through a number of tests. You give them a heart test, blood test, metabolic test, etc. Why not test for drugs and stop making it a separate test? The purpose of the test is to determine fitness to play."

On repeated random testing: "I think there is enough legal precedent to support the idea. When you come to play on a team it is not a right; it's like driving an automobile; it's a privilege. Most of the cases lost on drug testing have been lost on procedural grounds: that it was not done properly."

And with this hard-nosed approach to athletics and academics, Walker has been, by any standard, a huge success on and off the field. In the late 1930s he performed as an All-American athlete in football and basketball at South Carolina's Benedict College. He then earned an M.S. degree at Columbia University in 1941 and taught and coached at Benedict, Bishop College and Prairie View State. In 1945 he began teaching and coaching at what would become NCCU, and he earned his doctorate in 1957 from New York University.

During his 30 years at NCCU he has coached 117 All-Americans, including more than 40 national champions in the men's and women's divisions, and 11 Olympic medal athletes. Yet, he said, "I had only 12 athletes to finish their eligibility and not finish school. And five of those were related to being inducted into the armed services."

For all of these accomplishments and more, Walker, already a member of several athletic Halls of Fame, was inducted July 16 into the Olympic Hall of Fame as a contributor. It was especially gratifying, he said, because the ceremonies were held at the beginning of the U.S. Olympic Festival in North Carolina.

"There is something unique about this one because it happens in my own hometown," he said. "With it being in Durham, most of the people on whose shoulders I've stood and shared in whatever success I might have had could be present to see it. So that gives it a sort of very special dimension in my book."

Still, this induction was not the moment he spoke of when he was asked to recount his greatest moment. That moment had occurred earlier in the year, he said, during Philadelphia's Penn Relay activities.

Every year former NCCU athletes come together during the Relays to break bread together, "tell lies" about their former athletic accomplishments and "tell lies on their coach." This year, Walker continued, "I started going around that room as they were talking and I saw accountants, physicians, school principals, an assistant attorney general, businessmen, coaches at major institutions And if you had just been in that room, I could have told you what my most glorious moment is, because I looked at about 20 of them."