

Academic captains lead beyond playing field

Help fellow athletes with schoolwork

BY MEGHAN GAMBLING
STAFF WRITER

Kym Orr wanted to reward athletes for more than scoring goals, beating times or completing the perfect pass.

As an athletic academic counselor at UNC, Orr co-founded the fledgling Academic Team Captains Program with help from Robert Mercer, director of UNC's Academic Support Program for student athletes. The program, which started a year ago, serves to honor UNC athletes who have been successful outside the playing field.

"We want to recognize these students as academic leaders," said Orr, who worked with coaches and academic counselors to select the first academic team captains last spring.

The program was designed not only to foster leadership among athletes, but also to help incoming freshmen adjust to the rigors of balancing college sports and classes.

"We act as a liaison between the academic center and the team," said senior Josh Lee, who serves as academic captain for the wrestling team. "We keep guys up to date on deadlines, registration. It's an easy thing to do, but in the middle of

the season it can slip your mind."

Those selected as academic team captains hold small group meetings about once a month with their respective academic counselors to discuss problems or concerns about their teams.

The captains also assemble as a large group to hear the success stories of former athletes such as Bob Love, a seven-time NBA all-star player for the Chicago Bulls, and Tony Waldrop, UNC vice chancellor for research and economic development and NCAA record-holder for the indoor mile.

"It shows that you can do great in sports and do great in a career as well," said senior Richard Treis, academic team captain for the men's golf team.

Treis emphasized that real-life academic success stories have a huge impact on college athletes. "Most people in athletics don't make it," he said. "College life will be over one day, and you have to pay attention to what is coming. ... It's important to have a decent education."

Orr said he hopes the academic team captains will come away from leadership lectures inspired to continue in academic success and,

thus, inspire their teammates.

Junior Anne Felts, academic captain for the women's soccer team, said it is especially hard for incoming freshmen to cope with the transition from high school.

In addition to adjusting to college life, the players are thrown into game season immediately upon their arrival at UNC.

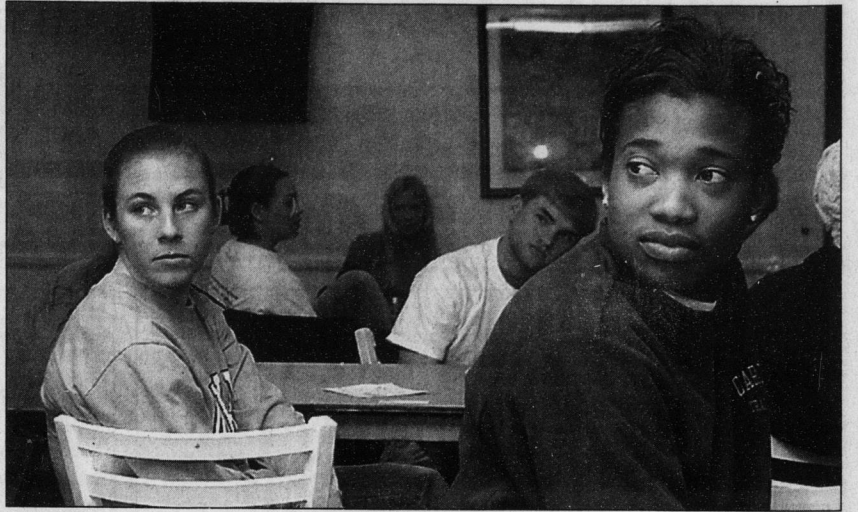
"I like to put myself in a position to be there," Felts said. "If they are in trouble and really need help, I like to be there to help."

Many of the academic team captains offer themselves as tutors for players who need assistance. Last spring juniors Katy Tran and Kelsey Keeran, academic co-captains for the field hockey team, organized an outdoor study hall session.

"We got all the freshmen together," Tran said. "As students, it is important to emphasize the academic aspects of athletics. Kelsey and I work hard to organize our time and set a good example for the freshmen."

The program not only attempts to motivate underclassmen, but also gives team members a chance to hold a leadership position.

"It is designed to be rewarding," said senior Ben Aiken, who represents men's tennis. "It solidifies an academically oriented role within



Tiffany Flomo (right), academic team captain for women's track, attends a meeting of team captains Tuesday at the Pope Academic Support Center as part of the new Academic Team Captains Program.

the team."

Having a student athlete work as the middleman between counselors and team members also adds to the teams' cohesiveness.

The current academic team captains will complete their terms at

the end of this semester. Many of the captains said they will play an active role in suggesting candidates for the position next year.

Although the program has been in existence for only a year, Orr said he has high hopes for its future.

"My vision is in five years to have an academic team captains' reunion," he said. "It's a crazy vision, but I know those guys can do it."

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