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Cassidy Evelyn Derda  
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THE UPSIDES & DOWNSIDES OF COLLEGE ATHLETICS WITHIN THE NCAA:  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE RULES AND A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE POWER  
OF RESILIENCE

A Thesis Presented

by

Cassidy Derda

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Education  
Specializing in Interdisciplinary Studies

May, 2019

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Thesis Examination Committee:

Robert J. Nash, Advisor  
Kieran Killeen, Ph.D, Chairperson  
David Rosowsky, Ph.D., P.E., F.ASCE, F.SEI  
Cynthia J. Forehand, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

## ABSTRACT

For the past five years, I have been a Division I Women's Basketball player under the National Collegiate Athletic Association. I have played at two different schools, I have spoken to numerous investigators and lawyers, and I am now on my third set of college basketball coaches. Most athletes that enter college have one set of four-five coaches during their four-five-year period, I have had thirteen. College basketball has presented countless challenges for me mentally and psychically. For a while I thought that the adversity that I was facing as a young woman playing a high level of athletics was considered normal, but now that I have grown, reflected, and sought out opinions of professionals I know that my experience wasn't a "normal" one. Throughout my time as an NCAA athlete I have been home to the harsh routine that so many young student-athletes struggle to get through. In this paper, I am reflecting upon my experience as a college athlete and college sports as I know it. The NCAA is one of the most corrupt corporations in our modern-day world. Despite its claims that ensure success of student-athletes, the NCAA treats athletes not developing human beings, but as objects that contribute to their dirty multi-million-dollar franchise. At the end of the day, they NCAA is a business that operates around making money around student-athlete's identity and runs in a way that doesn't benefit student-athletes. Throughout my paper I will be discussing the rules of the NCAA and how they play out in reality, as well as how they can be improved. I am also writing this paper to have a conversation about how hard it is to be a college athlete in general, many people have a false perception of the life we live, and I want to clear some things up.

The NCAA doesn't take the mental health of athletes seriously. There are plenty of opportunities to improve the way the NCAA treats its athletes, while still profiting from the goldmine they make off of amateurism. The NCAA doesn't put student athletes in a position to take full advantage of their scholarship, let alone gives them a chance at being a healthy, functioning, young adult. I will be telling personal stories that relate to bigger topics and issues within the NCAA, as well as how I think they can be improved for the well-being of college athletes. This paper is my story, this paper is a personal account of the power of resilience.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge Professor Robert Nash. It was not until I met you that I thought I had a story worth telling. You have believed in me from the day we met at Chef's Corner last spring and I can't believe here I am a year later completing a thesis. Your passion for teaching is something that I have been waiting for in so many of my professors throughout my academic career. Thank you for all that you have done for me, thank you for pushing me to tell my story, thank you for opening up a new world of writing with your creation of SPN methodology.

I would also like to acknowledge my Mom and Dad. Mom, thank you for being such a strong, hardworking, and supportive role model in my life. I truly believe that I wouldn't have made it through this journey without you. Thank you for always pushing me to be my best, and always demanding that I have more to give even on days when I didn't think I could. I know that your experience as a college athlete has shaped who you are today. You always told me to never give up, and I needed that in more ways than one. Dad, thank you for always being there. Thank you for all of the countless hours that you spent in a gym with me from the moment I picked up a basketball. Thank you for helping me reach my goal of playing Division I basketball, you always believed in me even when other people didn't. Thank you for all of the traveling and planning to make sure you could catch as many games as possible. I am so thankful that these past three years I have been able to see both of your faces in the crowd. I love you both so much.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my teammates, particularly the senior class I will be graduating with. I can't imagine going through these past five years without each

and every teammate that I have met along the way that has had a great influence on my life on and off the basketball court. It has meant the world to me to have come out of this experience with lifelong friends.

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## **CHAPTER 1: SCHOLARLY PERSONAL NARRATIVE WRITING**

### **1.1 What is Scholarly Personal Narrative Writing?**

I was first introduced to Scholarly Personal Narrative Writing, otherwise known as SPN writing when I entered the Masters of Interdisciplinary studies program at the University of Vermont in the spring of 2018, after obtaining my BA. At first I was skeptical about how this writing differed from the strict writing format that I was used to throughout my many years of academia. I found out that this type of writing was actually something that I had never done before, and that it was harder. The reason that this type of writing is so unique from other types of writing so many students are used to is because there are no limits when it comes to scholarly personal narrative writing. This type of writing is done from the inside out and brings out the deepest and most passionate experiences a student can possibly get down on paper onto paper. Among its countless possibilities, SPN helps students to make sense of and convey personal stories of meaning. The main goal of SPN writing is to show that personal stories matter.

“Everybody has a story worth telling.” I have heard this sentence many times throughout my twenty three years, and I have always found it somewhat cliché. Could it be true that we all have a story worth telling? For the majority of my life, I disagreed. Many people, including myself, downplay the need for them to tell their story. When I entered Robert’s program I didn’t believe that my story was worth telling, I mean, I didn’t even think I had a story to tell. Overtime and through my courses with Robert I have learned that not only do I have a story, but it’s definitely one worth sharing with the world. One of my favorite books I read during the fall semester of my senior year is titled *How Stories Heal*, which Robert co-wrote with one of his dear friends, Sydnee Viray. This book

taught me that there is nothing more appealing in the academic setting than stories with meaning-making implications that can touch the lives of students. I have seen this play out first hand in the courses that I have had with Robert. Through personal storytelling and listening to others' stories, I have connected more and learned more about life than I did in any undergraduate class. Listening to complete strangers who were brave enough to tell their story and talk about their biggest life lessons has enabled me been able to write better, focus better, and become a better person.

The synopsis of *How Stories Heal* is as follows: “It is time for academics to embrace the fact that nothing is more appealing to readers – especially to our students – than personal stories with meaning-making implications that can touch all lives. No matter the age or stage in life, the personal or collective identity, everyone deals with meaning-making issues that challenge them – and others – throughout their lifetimes. And everyone we know finds that when encouraged to write their stories in the academy, they find meaning, wholeness, and healing.”<sup>1</sup>

So you may be wondering, what exactly is Scholarly Personal Narrative Writing and how is it judged? Yvette A. Hyater-Adams describes it best in her article *How to Get Going with Personal Narrative in Scholarly Writing* as “an emerging trend in the worlds of the social sciences, communications, education, and management studies: self-narration is accepted as scholarship. Methods such as auto ethnography, scholarly personal narratives, and transformative narratives are approaches available to researchers and OD-ABS practitioners to write about their fieldwork in a creative, honest, first person voice,

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<sup>1</sup> Nash, Robert J., and Viray, Sydnee. *How Stories Heal*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004.

and with scholarly rigor. This type of writing expands the pool of those interested in contributing toward scholarship, especially with non-traditional and marginalized voices. Research, emotion, and experience are recognized as key components in the written work.”<sup>2</sup>

Robert J. Nash created this style of writing in 2004. Robert has been a professor in the College of Education and Social Services here at University of Vermont for 48 years and is reaching his 50 year anniversary for teaching this year. He specializes in philosophy of education, applied ethics, higher education administration, scholarly personal narrative writing, and religion, spirituality, and education. He holds graduate degrees in English, Religious Studies, Applied Ethics and Liberal Studies, and Educational Philosophy. He holds a faculty appointment in the Department of Leadership and Developmental Sciences. He is the founder, and director, of the graduate degree in Interdisciplinary Studies in Education; and he is the co-founder of the Higher Education and Student Affairs Program (HESA).<sup>3</sup> I was first introduced to Robert in the spring of 2018 when I sat down for an interview with him prior to being accepted into his Masters of Education and Interdisciplinary Studies program at the University of Vermont. I have taken many classes with Robert throughout graduate school. He is my advisor, my mentor, and has been a huge influence on me in my final years of academia.

Over our time together, my relationship with Robert has grown and he has also learned more and more about me. I met with him monthly to discuss my plans for

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<sup>2</sup> Hyater-Adams, Yvette A. “How to Get Going with Personal Narrative in Scholarly Writing, *Practicing Social Change*.” The NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, Issue 5.

<sup>3</sup> "Interdisciplinary Studies-About the Program" The University of Vermont, Accessed March 4 2019, [https://www.uvm.edu/cess/dlds/interdisciplinary\\_studies\\_about\\_program](https://www.uvm.edu/cess/dlds/interdisciplinary_studies_about_program).

graduating over the course of him being my advisor. To this day, I remember the moment he proposed that I write a thesis dissertation. When he first mentioned it to me, I thought that he was insane. There was no way that I was going to write a 20,000+ manuscript on anything, let alone the most challenging experience of my life that have taken place over the past five years! Robert instilled confidence in me and persuaded me that my story *was* worth telling and convinced me that I could do it in a way that others could try to conceptualize and understand. For the past year I have been putting together my thesis dissertation on my experience as a five year Division I athlete, and the more I reflect on it, there couldn't have been any other possible way for me to express this experience on paper other than through an SPN manuscript.

## **1.2 Why I Chose SPN Format for my Thesis**

Tonya M. Stremlau is quoted in Robert Nash's book *Liberating Scholarly Writing* the following about SPN formatting. "If the goal of a dissertation [or thesis] is to produce the best piece of original scholarship a student is capable of, in a manner appropriate to one's field, then personal narrative should not only be acceptable but desirable. Allowing graduate students the full range of written expression should [be the goal of educators] who understand the importance of ethos and who should not exclude a whole mode of communication, especially a mode that enables a writer to both establish and question the authority of her experience. I am not a disinterested observer; why should I pretend to be? It is a matter of academic honesty. The bottom line here is that I could not convey my story

as an athlete or the topics and issues that I am passionate about discussing without using all of the elements that SPN allows students to do.”<sup>4</sup>

As many athletes know, it’s hard for anyone to understand what we go through on a daily basis. For example, someone who has season tickets to a women’s basketball game shows up at the gym for about an hour to an hour and a half to watch the given competition that they have tickets for, and when the buzzer sounds at the end of the game, they leave. They see us suited up, focused, and ready to step onto the stage that we do everything for when the buzzer sounds. For them, this is a source of entertainment and a time to sit back and relax with their friends. But what these people don’t see is the entire day that’s devoted to our 7 p.m. game, which could start as early as 7 a.m. on the day of depending on the fourteen different class schedules and obligations of each student athlete competing. People don’t see the hours on end that are put into scouting our competition through numerous team film sessions, three hour long practices that take place every day, strength training, or the traveling that student athletes do every week during their grinding conference game schedule. Unless you have a Division I athlete in your family or have been closely associated with Division I sports personally, it’s practically impossible for someone on the outside to understand the lifetime of work that it has taken for Division I student athletes to even get to college, let alone maintain the exhausting schedule for four plus years.

This process is overwhelming to spell out to the average person, but through SPN, I intend to take you inside the lives of student athletes. I will be telling this story through

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<sup>4</sup> Nash, Robert. *Liberating Scholarly Writing*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2004.

my perspective as a college athlete combined with stories and experiences that I have been a part of and what has affected some of my closest friends. The topics and issues that I will be discussing are connected to greater issues within the NCAA. I understand there are many people out there who aren't big advocates for the NCAA. I understand that it is a very easy association to critique, but I believe that people cannot fully understand what it's like to be a college athlete or be a product of the NCAA to the full extent unless you have been one. I describe my experience using personal connections that make the bigger picture easier to understand, as well as explaining the rules and regulations of the NCAA and how they affect athletes, particularly women's basketball players. I believe that writing about this from the perspective as a college athlete provides deeper insight and honesty than someone who has not experienced it.

### **1.3 What I Want People to Take-away From my Writing**

First and foremost, I hope my readers understand that I am not writing this paper to place blame on any particular entity or any particular person, but rather to have a conversation and bring to light many of the issues and challenges that college athletes face on a daily basis. This paper is my story and my opinion on college sports as I know it. I am not writing this trying to prove to you that my opinions are right or wrong, I am simply telling my story and sharing what exactly I have faced every day for the past five years. I will use statistics and stories to back up the information I am presenting, and I hope that these stories show people what being a college athlete is like. For the majority of my life, I have felt this energy that many people think being a college athlete is a luxurious, enlightening, and fun experience. What I want people to understand is that although being



a college athlete has extremely fulfilling moments, is not a luxurious by any means. This piece of writing will primarily be made up of personal experience and stories that pertain to major topics that affect student athletes as a whole while touching upon the bigger challenges within college sports. Furthermore, I will also explore the rules, regulations, and values the NCAA puts in place for student athletes and how those rules and regulations affect the daily life of student athletes.

Many of the topics that I will explore within this paper are also discussed in a publication called *Mind, Body, and Sport*. The publication discusses many different challenges that athletes face and backs them up with numerous studies and statistics. This publication reflects what I want people to take away from my writing. It is summed up best by author and NCAA Chief Medical Officer Brian Hainline:

I have since met with hundreds of student-athletes and dozens of student-athlete groups to ask them their primary challenges from a health and safety standpoint. Almost to a person, the No. 1 response is student-athlete mental health and wellness. That may surprise people whose only contact with student-athletes is from watching them compete on television. It's just a game, after all – what could be so hard about that? But those of us who have gone through the college sports experience along with those working in the trenches with student-athletes on a daily basis know the challenges they face. While student-athletes may play games, being a student-athlete isn't a game at all. Student-athletes are college students, with all the challenges and opportunities presented to emerging adults, and with an additional role – as sports performer and in many cases campus celebrities, wearing the colors of their school and representing hopes and expectations of their campus and community. College students in general represent a healthy cohort among same-aged peers, and student-athletes an even healthier subpopulation, buttressed by a discipline, commitment and attention to exercise and nutrition required to meet the demands of their sport. As such, and rightly so, athletics departments have developed sports medicine services that increasingly engage a multitude of resources and expertise to address student-athletes' injuries and illnesses to ensure they are in the best condition to compete. But there's more to being a student-athlete than just physical preparation and performance. As more media coverage, commentary and public scrutiny are devoted to what student-athletes do off the field, along with the accompanying pressures to perform (and win games) on the field, student-athletes are inundated with factors that may affect their mental health

and wellness. And the “culture” of athletics may inhibit student-athletes from seeking help to address issues such as anxiety, depression, the stress associated with the expectations of their sport, and the everyday stress of dealing with relationships, academic demands, and adjusting to life away from home.<sup>5</sup>

From my personal experience, I can attest that student athletes are under a great amount of stress on a daily basis. Being a college athlete is mentally and physically exhausting even when you’re a part of a positive atmosphere, and have a great support system on and off the court, let alone if you’re in a toxic environment. Secondly, I would like to say that not all coaches are bad or insensitive people, not all administrations handle things the same way, and not every college athlete has had an experience like mine. With that being said, I do not believe the NCAA puts student athletes in a position to be healthy functioning students, even though it claims that this is something they take great pride in. The NCAA is a business and money will always come first before the well-being of student athletes. I think that the NCAA treats student-athletes as objects, not as young adults in need of guidance, confidence, and healthy environments in order to grow and flourish. The purpose of this paper is to share what the inner life is of the many college athletes. To reiterate, I am not here to place blame or even put pity upon myself, but rather to start a conversation. I believe that there needs to be a sense of accountability when people have experiences like I and so many of my teammates have had. There needs to be a conversation that goes deeper than a senior exit meeting.

The past five years of my life have greatly impacted who I am as a twenty-three-year-old woman. No matter how messy and complicated this experience may have been,

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<sup>5</sup> Brown, T Gary, *Mind, Body, And Sport; Understanding and Supporting Student-Athlete Mental Wellness* Indiana: National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2004.

it has taught me so many life lessons and has molded me into the young woman that I am today. At the end of this paper, I will reflect on a question that many of my experiences bring me back to: “*would you do it all over again?*” I would like you as the reader to keep this question in the back of your mind as you discover my story.

## **CHAPTER 2: REMINISCING**

### **2.1 What do I do now?**

I still remember it like it was yesterday. The bright red numbers flashed across my alarm clock as they brightened up the pitch black room in which I barely slept. The beeping and buzzing noises from the alarm clock were sounds I dreaded hearing. It was 4:45 a.m. and every ounce of my body awoke with an anxious, sad feeling. I dragged myself out of bed to gather my things to leave. My Dad had already arrived to pick me up. On this early morning I was getting ready to take a flight back to school in New York City from Burlington, as I had done so many times before. My family knew that I was struggling and they suggested that I come home for a weekend before my sophomore season of basketball started. I went home as many weekends as I could during my first two years of college, and thankfully the forty-five minute flight from school to home was accessible and available as much as I needed it to be.

I found myself silent in the passenger seat of my Dad’s car. He knew, and I knew, that nothing needed to be said. When he dropped me off at the airport, he gave me a hug that lasted a little longer than usual. I could sense changes in his breathing and body language as I hugged his warm, tall frame. I could tell he was about to cry. This was exactly what I tried to avoid, but by that point it was impossible to avoid. My Dad’s pink

watery eyes looked back at me as he said, “I love you, you are strong, and you will get through this.” I tried not to cry, I smiled and told my Dad I loved him and I went inside the airport to catch my flight. I went through security, arrived at my gate, and took a seat. Eventually the announcement came on for my 5:45 a.m. flight and I walked through the gate into my seat on the small plane. I put my headphones in, and tried to find a moment of clarity before my plane took off.

Suddenly, out of nowhere a wave of heat came over me like nothing I had ever felt before. I felt my blood pressure rise and my head start to pound. I was so hot and sweaty, so hot and *so* sweaty that I had to strip off my sweatshirt even though it was late October and I had felt cold the entire morning. One moment I felt normal and the next moment it felt like my blood was boiling inside my skin. I raced to get my sweatshirt off of my body. Just when I thought I was starting to calm down after removing my outer layer, I felt a trembling feeling in my arms and legs. I couldn’t feel my toes and my chest became so heavy. It felt like my heart was trying to jump out of my chest and my veins were trying to jump out of my skin. I tried to make it stop, but whenever I did, my heart seemed to pound even harder, even faster. I tried to take deep breaths, but I couldn’t. My eyes felt like they were popping out of my head. Whenever I shut them and reopened them things became fuzzy. I couldn’t help but wonder if the plane was crashing? I have never felt a sense of impending doom like this before. As I looked around everything seemed to be moving in fast forward. I had no one to turn to as I was in an empty seat and the flight only had about ten people. I was grasping my phone so hard that at one point I thought it was going to snap in my hands. I felt nauseous as I took in the different stale smells of the airplane. As I tried to gather a sense of reality, I couldn’t tell when this panic had started,

but it felt like it was happening for a lifetime. Just when I thought this overwhelming feeling was starting to plateau, the plane began for takeoff. And then it came to me, I was having a panic attack. I had learned about them in a psychology class that I had taken the previous spring. I remember brushing it off in class and dismissing that part of the lecture because I couldn't take the idea of a panic attack seriously, like, people really get those? Yeah 'panic attacks'...whatever that is. The thoughts I had about going back to school to continue my life as a student athlete had given me so much anxiety that there I was on a plane having a panic attack. The fear and loneliness that I experienced for that forty-five minute plane ride was something that I have tried to block out many times. I felt helpless. I couldn't contact either of my parents. I was too embarrassed to tell anyone on the plane, and when it was over I felt so exhausted that the only I started to cry. My headache continued through the rest of my day. I cried so much that day, more than I thought it was possible for a human being to cry. The tears started on the plane after I had the panic attack, and flowed through my travel home on the subway. When I got to my college dorm room the tears amplified to a full blown melt down. I really couldn't stop myself no matter what I did.

I had never been someone who struggled with anxiety, or so I thought. Growing up I had always been healthy, mentally and physically. People who knew me always described me as a kid that had my life together. I'm sure you may be thinking every teenager thinks they have it all figured out; I did not by any means have it all figured out, but I was a strong, determined, hardworking, and happy young woman with a chip on my shoulder. I didn't have any issues with anxiety. I was a standout athlete and a good student in high school. I had a lot of friends, and a great family. My life was amazing. Looking

back on it, my teenage years seemed easy compared to what my life had become once I got to college.

This was the fall of 2015. I was nineteen years old and a sophomore attending college in Brooklyn, New York where I was studying business. I had already been in college for over a year before I experienced my first panic attack. Looking back on it now, it was only a matter of time before things were bound to come to a boiling point. But there I was, nineteen years old, dreading every day of the life I was living as a college athlete. Things had gotten bad. I was living in a constant state of depression. I wasn't sleeping due to the anxiety associated with basketball. I spent every chance I had drinking. I started experimenting with alcohol my freshman year and it quickly became my coping mechanism for dealing with stress. I wasn't eating enough. I was losing all sense of who I was as a person, and now I could add panic attacks to the long list of burdens I was facing on a daily basis. There were many late nights and early mornings during which I would sit in bed and think to myself, how did I end up here? How did things get this bad? What am I supposed to do? I hope to try and answer those three questions and try to rationalize what I was going through during this time. I can only do this through speaking about my experiences of being a Division I college athlete and a member of the NCAA.

## CHAPTER 3: HOW DID I GET HERE?

### 3.1 Painting the Picture

The picture the NCAA paints of a student athlete experience is a luxurious one. The National Collegiate Athletic Association defines itself as “a member-led organization dedicated to the well-being and lifelong success of student athletes”<sup>6</sup> on the front page of their website. Now I’d like to break down this quote. “A member-led organization” is self-explanatory. The second part, “dedication” is where the problem lies. Dedication may be defined as the means that one commits to a goal or a way of life. In reality, this definition is simple. Dedication can mean to devote the worship of a divine being, to give your all, and to be “all-in” to a cause. The term “well-being” may be defined as the state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous. This is pretty self-explanatory, those who have a good well-being would be considered to be living a happy life, a life with purpose, positivity, and meaning. Breaking down “lifelong success” is harder to define. To me, this would insinuate that the NCAA ensures that athletes mean more to them than just their one to five year eligibility. Ideally, this means the NCAA plans to go above and beyond to show that athletes matter to them even after they are done competing for a university. So if an institution claims they are “dedicated to the well-being and lifelong success” of student

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<sup>6</sup> “What is the NCAA?” *National Collegiate Athletic Association*. Accessed March 4, 2019, <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/ncaa-101/what-ncaa>.

athlete, this means they are doing everything they possibly can to insure that athletes are in fact healthy, happy, and prospering people. They are working around the clock to make sure that athletes have a complete college experience on and off the sidelines. And to go above and beyond, the NCAA is even insinuating in this sentence that they want athletes to have lifelong success after their experiences in college.

If you were to ask me what I thought about this statement as a high school freshman, I probably wouldn't think much of it. During a prospective athlete's freshman year of high school is typically when the process of becoming a Division I athlete begins, even though the rules say otherwise. The NCAA rules technically say that recruiting begins in high school to ensure that kids aren't getting recruited too early. But I know from experience that the dream to play college basketball starts way before this. For me, it started when I was in 3rd grade.

### **3.2 Where It All Began**

My parents put a basketball in my hands from the moment I could walk. They installed the classic fisher price plastic basketball hoop in the living room. I would play shoot hoops on it with a small rubber ball for hours on end. There are photos of me as a toddler walking around with an orange Wilson basketball that I could barely hold onto because my arms weren't large enough to hold it. Although both of my parents were heavily influenced by basketball throughout their lives, they never put pressure on me to play basketball. They merely introduced me to the sport that I fell in love with. My Mom was an All-American basketball player coming out of high school and attended James Madison University on a full scholarship. Her team was very successful, and she was part



of two sweet sixteen teams in the NCAA tournament. My Dad had a passion for basketball throughout his youth, playing throughout high-school and played at the junior college level. My Dad has coached professionally, for different high school programs, and also helped coach my AAU teams. He was even the coach when my elementary CYO team made it to the New England Championship. To this day, my Dad still coaches and wakes up at 6 a.m. three days a week to get some runs in with his buddies who all hold an unbreakable love for the same sport.

My Mom's experience as a college athlete has shaped the businesswoman that she is today. They have made the perfect pair of role models for me. When I began to walk, my Dad would bring me to games at UVM and I'd run around in the back of the bleachers during the games. As time went on and I attended more games, I can remember becoming infatuated with the college basketball players that I watched. As I grew up, my passion for basketball got stronger and when I saw the UVM men's team win the conference championship in 2003, my dreams were put into perspective. I remember hearing the buzzer sound and rushing the floor with my Dad and the thousands of fans that had sold out Patrick gym. Everything changed for me that day. I remember being introduced to my idol at the time, Taylor Copenrath, and thinking I wanted to be just like him. Taylor Copenrath was from a small rural town in Vermont and attended St. Johnsbury Academy. He did not start playing basketball until he reached high school. With his talent, he was picked up by UVM late in his high school career. He then went on to play at UVM from 2001-2005 and after his redshirt freshman year, he led UVM to three straight America East Conference titles. At the end of his college career, he was Vermont's second all-time leading scorer in total points (2,442) and points per game (21.4). He also ranks the

university's all-time leader in field goals made (851), is fifth all-time in rebounding (839) and blocked shots (83).<sup>7</sup> Taylor was a hometown hero, and he still is. I remember looking up at my Dad in my oversized men's basketball jersey that went down to my knees and telling him, "Dad, I want to go to UVM. I want to win a championship and play basketball. I want to be just like Taylor." I remember thinking to myself if he could do it, why couldn't I? I was eight years old at the time.

"You can do it, just work hard and follow your dreams. Work really hard, and you can do it." My Dad worked with me from then on to help me follow my dreams.

Before I knew it, basketball became my main focus and was the center of my life. I started to play CYO in elementary school under my Dad's coaching. We played in an old dusty gym attached to our church and practiced on the weekends. We were a bunch of energetic rug rats just trying to run an offense and have fun, but somehow we won the CYO state tournament. After winning the state tournament, we then went on to win our first New England playoff game and played in the New England Championship in the Basketball Hall of Fame. This was one of my fondest childhood memories. In preparation for the then biggest game of my career, I remained focused. When we lost in the championship I was crushed, I didn't talk to anyone for three days. It was a little dramatic for a 5th grade girl, but hey, I wanted to win. Throughout my youth it wasn't hard to see that I stood out from other girls my age not only physically, but mentally. I was tall, athletic, and never really went through an awkward stage. I was extremely competitive from a young age, so competitive that it probably annoyed other girls my age. During

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<sup>7</sup> "Taylor Coppenrath," ESPN, Accessed March 4, 2019, [http://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/player/\\_/id/99/taylor-coppenrath](http://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/player/_/id/99/taylor-coppenrath).

middle school I was always moved up with older kids and still dominated. Moving up helped me to get better, and introduced me to a coach that would change my life forever.

I met my AAU coach, Wayne Lafley, after he saw me drop twenty in a middle school basketball game when I was the youngest player on the floor. Despite the praise I got from so many after playing well, he wasn't itching to compliment me. I met with him in the lobby after my game with my mother and father. He told me about his AAU team, Lone Wolf Athletics. When I met him, he told me he was interested in doing skill work with me to see if I fit in on his AAU team. AAU is known as the 'Amateur Athletic Union' which is commonly understood as travel teams for different states. I had known that many standout Vermonters played for Wayne and went on to play in college, so I was very open to the opportunity. The AAU team I played for had the best players from every school in the state of Vermont on one team and traveled out of state to play against better talent, and where college coaches do 90% of their recruiting. I was a young, clueless teenager, but I itched at the chance to work out with Wayne. I figured it would be a piece of cake. It wasn't until my first workout with Wayne that I got a reality check of what it meant to be pushed to my limits as a player and as a leader.

"You're out of shape, your first step isn't quick enough, your ball handling is mediocre, your shot needs major improvement, and you need a better variety of post moves" he told me. After the first time I worked out with Wayne, I couldn't walk for three days. I worked out with him for an hour and did everything that he asked of me and by the end of the workout I thought that I was going to die. I had never been worked that hard in my life. Everything that I had known about basketball changed that day. I remember going home thinking that there was no way I could go through that again. My parents told me

that this is what it took if I wanted to be great, not good. I worked out with Wayne a few more times and we began to develop a relationship. He pushed me to my absolute limit mentally and physically, as he did with all of his players. Until this point, I had been praised by every coach I had ever had. Working with Wayne was a slap in the face. But I needed it, and I believe that everyone needs someone like Wayne in their life if they want to succeed. Although Wayne pissed me off beyond belief for the majority of my basketball career, I wouldn't have ever made it to college without him or the girls that I competed with on Lone Wolf. Wayne was one of the most intense, most demanding, most 'in your face' role models I've witnessed as a player and there were many times that I doubted his leadership style. There were days that he pushed me to my absolute limit and demanded that I give more even when I didn't think I could, but these were the days that I got better. He constantly challenged me mentally through his coaching style, but he saw a potential in me from the first day he saw me play and he refused to let go to waste. To the average person looking from the outside in, Wayne was nuts, and he probably was more often than not! However, he was what I needed to grow as a player. He set the bar high, and I have been desperate in searching for his coaching style in every coach that I've had since. Wayne taught me that hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard, and if there was even a moment on the court when players weren't giving it their all, he would expose them, and demand change. He was always brutally honest with me, even when it was hard to hear. He would yell, scream, humiliate me, and make me so mad that I had to hold back tears half of the time. However, off the court, he was one of the people I trusted the most. He was a great friend and mentor to me when I stepped outside of the lines, and nothing that happened at practice was ever personal or brought outside of the gym. Through

traveling to different tournaments and showcases through Lone Wolf, I found myself visiting to schools and even receiving scholarship offers for college. I still remember when Wayne told me about the first few scholarship offers I had received at one of our AAU games. I was so happy that I instantly broke down in tears and hugged both of my parents. I had options. I was going to play Division I basketball. With this opportunity came a great amount of stress, and I was not ready for the stressful process of recruitment when it came to choosing a college.

### **3.3 The Chase**

Engaging in the recruitment process of selecting a college to compete for was single-handedly the hardest decision and the most stressful process I had to endure as a young girl. From the moment I entered high school, the recruitment process started for me. I was fourteen years old and already had to try and think through prospective colleges recruiting me and trying and picture if I could see myself playing basketball there. Imagine being fourteen years old and trying to picture what college you want to go to? I don't know how I did it looking back on it. This process is extremely flawed and the amount of change and growth that happens between freshman and senior year for athletes is unmeasurable. During high school, I played varsity for my high school team while also playing on a Vermont travel team with the other best players from all over the state. AAU tournaments are an opportunity for players to gain exposure for college. In Vermont, most college coaches don't bother to take trips to watch uncompetitive high school games. AAU provided the opportunity for me to be recruited by college coaches. If I didn't play AAU, I wouldn't have been recruited to play in college at all.

The recruitment process can get very complicated and messy. The NCAA recruiting rules around coach-recruit contact are written to protect student athletes from getting too many calls from coaches, yet coaches still find loopholes to recruit prospective athletes. To do this, the NCAA has a recruiting calendar that dictates when and how coaches can contact recruits. This periods include the open contact, evaluation, quiet, and dead periods. The golden rule in the recruiting process is this: coaches can't directly contact a recruit before June 1st of their junior year of high school. While this golden rule limits when and how coaches can contact high schoolers, athletes are often being recruited way before this. Coaches can recruit and even offer scholarships way before this time – even though they aren't supposed to. The NCAA has made this rule extremely bendable; this rule was created to ensure that young kids aren't getting too heavily recruited, but they often are. This process isn't illegal, and here's how it happens:

Even though the NCAA rules dictate that a college coach can't recruit an athlete before certain dates, the NCAA also allows for the recruiting process to still happen. Recruits' coaches become heavily involved in this process before a coach can officially reach out to a player. Coaches use other coaches of the prospective athletes as a channel of communication for recruitment. In a sense, AAU coaches play telephone between players and coaches up through students' junior year. Students are also able to contact college coaches as much as they want. As you can imagine, it's not hard for this recruiting process to happen regardless of the rules. Athletes are also allowed to take what is called an "unofficial" visit to a college. Meaning if an athlete or family visits a college campus, they are free to meet with the coach and tour the campus on their own dime.

Now that you know the rules a little better, I'm going to breakdown this process in reality: high school is an extremely tough time in any young person's life. Besides the social struggles that high school brings along with the body changes and pressure to succeed academically and athletically was hard, but not unbearable for me. Traveling to different states each weekend with my team was extremely draining, but before I knew it, I was leaving tournaments and waking up to texts from my AAU coach about coaches that were interested in me early on. I took many official visits to schools that recruited me, and I had a pretty good grasp of my future as a college athlete. It wasn't until my junior year that things started to get stressful. Although I had sparked interest from numerous Division I colleges, none of them had officially offered me a scholarship yet. My junior year of high school was by far the most stressful. I was told by teachers and advisors to explore my options and apply for colleges in case I didn't get a scholarship. I had to take my SAT, keep up with all of my school work, all in the midst of being recruited. I went into my final summer of AAU with the assumption that I would get a scholarship. I played great, had double digit scoring in almost every game that I played in- not to mention in front of coaches that had been recruiting me all through high school. I was confident. So was my family. However, as went on, I heard nothing. No coaches called and my AAU coach had to constantly burden me with the news that he hadn't heard anything from college coaches either. I was playing a very stressful waiting game, as many high school athletes do. My high school advisors even recommended that I consider the possibility of giving up on my dream of playing college basketball. I kept working hard and ignored many role models in my life who instructed me to do otherwise. At the end of that summer, my team played our last tournament. I went into this tournament with zero scholarships, and left the

weekend with offers from LaSalle University, Fairleigh Dickinson University, St. Francis College of Brooklyn. I had visits lined up with Delaware University, Fairfield University, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Bucknell University, and Davidson College. When I got the news, I was so relieved and happy that I broke down the minute my Dad told me the news. I had proved everyone wrong, but most importantly I proved myself right. I would be going to school on a full scholarship and I had options for a bright future.

Then came time for the visits. The one main thing that the NCAA doesn't highlight during the recruiting process is how stressful it is to choose a school. I was expected to visit all of the universities within a month and each coach wanted an answer from me on where I would be spending my next four years as soon as possible. My parents and I packed up our car and did the damn thing. We visited five college campuses within a few weeks. After visiting and connecting with all of the coaches who I spoke with, it was clear for me what my top choice was. However, I still didn't know if my top choice would actually offer me a scholarship. The head coach of this school drove me around in her Lexus for six hours that day. I visited every athletic facility, toured the academic buildings, and was even given a photo of myself in a jersey of what the future would look like. In my final meeting with the coaching staff, I sat down with my parents and the coaches told me that I had passed every test, answered every question in a way that impressed them, and they thought that I was a great kid and they thought that the school would be a perfect fit for me and that they'd be emailing me next week with the details of my next step in the application process. I left this visit in tears because my dream was coming true. I called my AAU coach and told him about the visit. He instructed me that I should start informing the other college coaches that were recruiting me that they should look elsewhere for a



player in my position. I know you're probably thinking that this is the silver lining, but it's not. A day went by, then a week, and I hadn't received an email from the coaches about my visit. I told myself to relax, but there came a point where everything seemed fishy, and it was. The scholarship that they intended to offer me was already offered out to another player, and my AAU coach found out all of this through the grapevine (basketball is a small world.) I no longer had a scholarship offer from this school, and the girl they offered it to before me accepted it the following week.

I was never made aware that this situation could occur. In the midst of the other college visits, I learned that each school had a timeline for when they wanted me to accept their given scholarship. At this point I was in shambles. I finally had my mind made up and then I was back to the drawing board.

Time was ticking and I had to make a choice within the next few days. The fear of losing the scholarships to other athletes seeped into my head and I felt I was running out of time. I quickly had to make some very tough phone calls. I swallowed my pride and called the college coaches that I had politely turned down in hopes that they would still want me. Most were willing and at the time I didn't understand that the situation I was in was not uncommon.

When a full scholarship is offered to a student athlete, it's rare that those scholarship are theirs to hold onto and as they take time to decide where they want to go. Every coach that offers a scholarship to a prospective athlete can go about it in whatever way they want. As in, there are no rules when it comes to offering a student a scholarship. They are allowed to rescind the offer until the student has you have signed a national letter of intent. In my

experience, coaches have deadlines for when they want a yes or a no. This deadline can be anywhere from days, to a few weeks. Often, coaches want decisions to be made as quickly as possible. I only had one college coach offer me a scholarship that was fully mine to have until I made my decision without a deadline. Other college coaches want an answer within a week, and every college coach wants to know what other schools you're looking at and when those deadlines are. This whole process means that high school students are expected to go on as many unofficial college visits as humanly possible in the shortest time span possible in order to have more time to make this decision. Student-athletes are caddied around college campuses for a day with college coaches and a few players where everyone is on their best behavior to win you over, and you're expected to make a decision that will affect the next four years of their lives based off of one impression. Now in a way this is understandable because coaches have the pressures of ensuring winning seasons—meaning they have spent a majority of their time recruiting and getting the best fit players for their programs in order to get their teams up and running. However, the tremendous stress that this process puts on teenage kids is beyond what many people understand. Even in the early stages of recruitment, the NCAA doesn't take the mental health of its athletes seriously. The NCAA expects them to make decisions that will ultimately affect the rest of their lives in a matter of weeks.

Through this process I narrowed down my college decision to two schools, one that was in the lower ranking of the Atlantic 10, a top mid major Division I, and the other that was in the middle of low major Division I. After speaking with my parents and exploring the differences between both schools, I felt torn. I had absolutely no idea which one to choose. I loved both of the coaches and felt that I would fit in well on both teams. Both

schools had good academic reputations and I liked the girls from both teams. Ultimately, I chose to attend a school that I thought I would be the best for me. I chose the school where I thought that I could have a balance of a social life and an athletic one and a school where all of the girls seemed happy and enjoying their experience. My parents felt good about this choice. They thought the coaching staff was a supportive, diverse group of adults who would help me mature into a young woman and mentor me during my college athletic experience.

### **3.4 Defying the Odds**

I called the head coach and told him that I wanted to commit to their program. Even though he seemed surprised, he was also ecstatic to have me. After that phone call I felt a tremendous weight off my shoulders. I had done it! Despite all of the early mornings I sprinted in my backyard, all of the late nights I spent shooting hoops in the gym with my Dad, and despite all of the local criticism I received from people in the community insisting that I was an ‘overrated’ player, and even dealing with the high school coaches that said they didn’t see potential in me, I was on my way to becoming a student athlete. There were so many times during this time of my life when I didn’t think that I was going to reach my goal. When I didn’t hear from college coaches after I played my heart out at tournaments and performed well, I was living in a state of anxiety. I was consumed over the fear of what would happen if I never got the phone call from college coaches. There were so many days I remember sitting around waiting for the phone to ring. I remember the many days when my phone didn’t ring. During my junior year, I remember meeting with my high school advisor to discuss my “options” if college basketball didn’t work out. I sat through that meeting and didn’t say a word to my advisor when he asked me about potential colleges

that I would want to apply for. I had good grades and could have gotten into a decent school and not played basketball, but in my mind that wasn't even an option. I remember looking at my parents and my advisor and saying "thanks for your concern, but I'm not applying to any colleges, I'm going to get a scholarship, and it's going to happen sooner or later." My advisor looked at me like I was nuts and my parents were growing impatient with me. My Mom and I argued the whole way home after the meeting. She called me stubborn, stupid, and thick-headed. There is no doubt in my mind that I was probably all three of those at the time. But my hard work paid off and everything had fallen in place. Against all of the stress, I had made it. According to the NCAA, the estimated probability of competing in NCAA athletics beyond high school for all sports sits around 6%. There are around 7,300,000 high school student athletes and only 492,000 of those athletes go on to play for the NCAA. For women's basketball, this percentage is even lower. There are around 429,400 women's basketball players in the country and only 16,600 go on to play college basketball. This means 3.9% of female high school basketball players continue their athletic career in the United States. This made me one of the 7,300,000 to have the opportunity to chase their dream.<sup>8</sup>

### **3.5 "Signing Your Life Away"**

The process of "committing" to a school in college means that an athlete makes the decision on which school they want to attend for the next four years. The athlete does this by informing a coach officially, typically this is done over a phone call. This phone

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<sup>8</sup> "Estimated Probability of Competing in College Athletics" *National Collegiate Athletic Association*, Accessed March 4, 2019. <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/estimated-probability-competing-college-athletics>.

call is what is known in the sports world as a “verbal commitment”. Although athletes “commit” to a school, there is a period of time that they go through before they sign their NLI, the National Letter of Intent. The NLI is a binding agreement between a prospective student-athlete and the NLI member institution (the college) that they plan on attending. A prospective student-athlete agrees to attend the institution full-time for one academic year while the institution agrees to provide athletics financial aid for one academic year. The athlete must resign his or her NLI every year of college. The NLI also states that “once the agreement has been bound the recruiting prohibition is applied.”<sup>9</sup> This means that other institutions must cease recruitment of a prospective student-athlete once an NLI is signed with another institution. In other words, once a student athlete signs an NLI, other schools must stop all recruiting immediately. The one thing that I have learned about this binding document is that once you sign in, you are now under control of the university that signs you. This means that the athlete now represents the university that they will compete for. In a sense, the university owns the athlete.

The NLI is typically signed the following spring after an athlete has committed to a University. Although this is a very exciting time for young athletes and involves a lot of praise, this is the moment when they sign their life away for the next four years. I remember the day that I signed my NLI, I was surrounded by my family, friends, and coaches that helped me. I still remember the gorgeous pen and I can still feel the way the ballpoint slid across the paper as I signed my name on the first page. Each signature brought a happier and happier feeling through my veins and I felt so much control in those moments. This

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<sup>9</sup> “About the NLI” National Letter of Intent, Accessed March 4, 2019. <http://www.nationalletter.org>

was one of the best days of my life. Everything that I worked so hard for finally paid off. Every early morning when I would get up and watch the sun rise as I sprinted on the bike path near my neighborhood before school, every night I spent at the gym practicing, every weekend I would spend traveling to AAU tournaments and playing three games a day and travelling back home for school the next day, every day I spent in the gym with my Dad shooting until my wrist ached, the moment of signing that paper made everything worth it. I would be going to college on a full scholarship I would leave school without debt. I truly did this for myself, and I was proud. I ultimately chose the school that I thought would bring me the most happiness and a coaching staff that would help me flourish into a strong, hardworking, young woman. Unfortunately, I learned very quickly that I had made the wrong choice.

## **CHAPTER 4: MY FRESHMAN & SOPHOMORE YEAR**

### **4.1 It's Hard to Think About**

Many of the memories I have from my first two years of college are tainted. My first two years of college were the lowest, darkest times in my life, and reflecting upon them during the process of writing this paper has brought me back to a place I vowed to leave forever. I was depressed and spent most of my life during those years in a constant state of anxiety. I have tried to block many of these memories out and when I try to reminisce on exactly what I was feeling, it's hard to think about. I'm sure there are feelings and memories that I am simply forgetting because my mind did so on purpose. In this chapter, will reflect on some of the memories I have of my first two years and I will touch upon the larger topics later.

The minute I arrived on campus I knew that I had made a big mistake. Even my parents knew something was off when they met with my coaches on move in weekend. When all of the freshman arrived on campus the coaches took time to meet with the parents separately. Every single parent came out of this meeting with an odd look on their face. My parents later told me how upset they felt after listening to the four coaches. The coaches spoke subliminally about each of their kids and shared all of their judgements they had made about each one of us before we even stepped on campus. They spoke about all of the flaws they believed each one of us athletes had. I tried to tell myself that my parents

were overreacting. I was naïve and the truth was I didn't understand what I was getting myself into. Although, looking back, I know I had a gut feeling that something was wrong because I quickly discovered the culture of intimidation I was about to become a product of.

Eventually I said my goodbyes to both of my parents and moved into my dorm room with my new roommate. Just like that I was a college freshman. My roommate was from Ohio and luckily, we bonded right away and became close friends. There were five of us in the freshman class and we had a tight knit pack from day one. Four out of the five of us transferred or quit. By the time our four years of eligibility were up, there was one person left in our graduating class who hadn't left.

I learned quickly that many of my new teammates played a role in convincing me to commit to the school were completely and utterly miserable. I had never seen a more unhappy group of women in my entire life, I remember thinking to myself, why are they so miserable? This can't be that bad. But the truth was, it was that bad. There always seemed to be an elephant in the room when the coaches were around and I could sense a great amount of intimidation and fear when my head coach walked in the room.

## **4.2 The Team Dynamic**

As I described earlier, my freshman class had five girls. The team was made up of five seniors and two juniors (and us). The upperclassman were not the role models they were supposed to be. There were a few of them that were great people, but in the midst of our team dynamic it was hard for them to overpower the destructive environment that we were all a part of. The age gap on our team wasn't great, but it wasn't an excuse for the



way the seniors treated the freshman. The team leaders on my team who elected by the coach were manipulative, two-faced, bullies. I came to learn that they were taught to act this way by my head coach and the rest of his coaching staff. The head coach didn't set an example for the upperclassmen to treat us any other way. After all, those girls had been a product of their environment for four years. Looking back on it, I now understand that the upperclassmen sought out their tight knit relationships with the head coaches so they wouldn't be targeted themselves. Their behavior contributed to a very destructive team dynamic.

Before I get into the detail of a few of the actions that made my first college coach so toxic, I will describe the coaching staff who worked under the head coach. My head coach hired three assistant coaches who almost seemed like members of a cult. I know that my head coach thought that it was in his best interest to hire assistant coaches who would bow down to this every move in order to avoid coaching conflict. This way, he could act however he wanted to.

In the midst of all of the inexcusable behavior demonstrated by my head coach, what disappointed me the most was how the three female assistant coaches were bystanders to the abusive and negligent behavior of my head coach. The girls on my team were in desperate need of guidance and support and none of us felt like we could ever go to our female assistant coaches. The coaches created an environment of fear and negligence and the assistant coaches supported the head coach as he manipulated and brainwashed every young woman that came through the program. It was never even in the realm of possibilities to turn to any of the female coaches for support, because all they would have done was taken our plea for support and transfer it back to my head coach and as a sign of

weakness. It is hard for me to reminisce on the meetings that I had with my head coach one on one because they were so humiliating and uncomfortable that I believe parts of my brain have blocked the conversations out completely.

After the first week of workouts we had a team meeting that lasted over two hours. During that meeting my teammates and the assistant coaches sat in front of the head coach as if he was a military leader and we were all of his soldiers. He read us through a “team contract,” which included rules like no drinking, no drugs, study hall hours, etc. Things of that nature didn’t bother me so much and I figured they were general rules to ensure our safety. Then my coach got to the things that weren’t in writing:

- “1. No hanging out with the men’s basketball team.
2. No boys are allowed in your dorm room.
3. If we find out that you are friends with the men’s basketball team or have any boys in your room from the men’s basketball team, we will take your scholarship.
4. We suggest that you do not spend any time in men’s basketball players’ rooms either, as the rules do not change in those situations.
5. If anyone except your roommate spends the night in your room you must ask us first if it’s okay.
6. If your parents come to visit we must know about it.
7. If you sign this document and break any of these rules, you are subject to punishment as well as being kicked off the team as well as losing your scholarship.”

This, shows the abuse of power that head coaches can get away with. My coach had this meeting every time a new freshman class came in and he gave the same lecture to the following classes that were already on the team just to reiterate his “rules.” My head

coach was not only controlling, but the possessiveness he instilled over all of us was disgusting and horrific. There were so many times when I felt my body didn't belong to me and that nothing in my personal life was private. My coach insinuated to us that if we had sex, we were morally corrupt. He made rules to prevent us from having any sexual contact with anyone. My coach was a master at passive aggressive slut shaming. But every year he made us re-sign that paper. In other words, he basically said 'If you don't sign this paper and let us have complete control of your life and every level of your privacy, there will be a problem.' I remember sitting in this meeting wondering how someone in a position of power could abuse it so much. How was it even possible that a coach could do this? How is a coach going to tell me who I can and can't hang out with in my personal time? Another rule that was implemented was that every day athletes must come to the coaches office and "sign out." The sign out sheet was posted right outside of the head coach's office. Signing it implied that we went to class that day, and if we didn't come in and sign it, then it was assumed that you skipped class and therefore be allowed to practice the following day. We also had to report every single grade that we received back on that given day onto this sheet. This seems a little controlling, but not *that* bad, right? Wrong. The reason my head coach implemented this preposterous rule of "signing out" was so that each one of us would come into his office every day to be interrogated. The interrogations would start with exactly what we did that day leading up to the time we sat down and met with him, and quickly resorted to questions about every area of our lives. He wanted to know exactly what we did the weekend before, exactly who we were hanging out with, and exactly where we were and what we were doing. During these meetings, he insisted he was "strengthening" his personal relationships between all of us, which would only lead to

success on the basketball court. Instead, he was brainwashing and manipulating us. He often made us feel guilty and picked on. So many girls on my team conformed to this because they were afraid of being punished on the court (like losing playing time, or being coached differently, or not being coached at all.) My coach would always insist that if we didn't have these meetings with him, that we didn't care about strengthening our relationship with him, essentially meaning that we didn't care about the team. He made everything about the team, and if you went against what he wanted, that you didn't care about the team. If my coach didn't have anything new to interrogate us about on any given day, he would use our grades as a last resort.

“You got a 90 on your test, well why didn't you get a 100?” he would ask or say something like: “You have a B in this class right now, why don't you have an A?”

The lifestyle and team culture that my coaches expected of us was unattainable, but their demanding pressure and brainwashing became normal to me after a while. I was going through the motions. During the fall semester of my sophomore year I remember walking into the basketball office and seeing half of my team waiting to go into my head coach's office because they were scared of what would happen if they didn't. Girls on my team would spend almost an hour in in his office every day. My coach expected us waste hours of our day waiting outside his office to take our turn to sit down and take his emotional abuse. If we didn't go in and say hi to my coach every day, he would have a problem with that. If we didn't leave a note on his door saying that we came by when he wasn't there, he would have a problem with that. If we didn't waste our precious time lined up outside of his office, he would have a problem with that. Pretty much, if we didn't

conform to all of these rules that my coach put in place for our “Team Rules”, you were considered a bad kid and labeled problematic.

I remember being in meetings with him and seeing slideshows of the team on his computer. I saw photos of us in bikinis flashing on his screen saver. There were pictures of past players hugging him as well as random photos he’d found online of us from high school that could only come from deep internet searches. My coach felt so comfortable in his position of power that he often commented on old photos of us, our weight, what we were wearing, and we were expected to sit there and laugh off the uncomfortable comments he’d often make. Whenever we would travel for games my coaches would treat us like children. They would tell us what we could and couldn’t order at a restaurant, give us dirty looks if we did anything they didn’t like, they would speak down to us as if we hadn’t spent a day on this earth. If I felt a bad vibe from my coach on the court I would often schedule meetings with him and beg him to tell me how I could improve things so that I could be a better player. Many of these meetings resulted in my coach making me feel stupid for even coming to him in the first place. When asking him how I could improve, I often got a response along the lines of “that’s not up to you to know, I can’t just give you all of the answers if I don’t want to.” I went in there so many times to try to repair our relationship, and I would end up apologizing for things that I didn’t even know what I was apologizing for. Every single time I had a meeting with my coach, I would leave feeling worse than when I went in. This became a daily routine and I started to dread the time that my classes came to an end knowing I’d have to walk to my coach’s office and face him.

At the time I couldn’t explain exactly why my life had taken such a turn when I was playing basketball in New York City, but now I understand that I was living every day

of my two years there under psychological abuse. According to Healthline's article written by Ann Pietrangelo, when someone is in the midst of abuse it can be easy to miss: "Psychological abuse involves a person's attempts to frighten, control, or isolate you. It's in the abuser's words and actions, as well as their persistence in these behaviors."<sup>10</sup> Some of the signs of emotional abuse listed in the article are as follows: Name-calling, character assassination, patronizing, public embarrassment, dismissiveness, "joking," monitoring your whereabouts, lecturing, treating you like a child, digital spying, insults of your appearance, belittling your accomplishments, put-downs of your interests, pushing your buttons, and threats.<sup>11</sup>

My teammates would have meetings with my head coach and leave balling. Girls on my team would break down during class and have to go back to their dorms because of how our head coach spoke to them. The upperclassmen were too worried about where they stood and often tried to bond with the head coach by talking about how terrible and pathetic the younger players were. By now my roommate from freshman year had already quit. The environment became too tarnished for her to even try to play basketball again. She went home and went to a state and no one ever blamed her. The environment was toxic, unhealthy, and hateful.

The head coach could get away with abusing his players because college coaches are put on a pedestal and even when their behavior is reported, it often gets swept under the rug. There is no outlet for players to report coaches without facing backlash from coaches themselves.

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<sup>10</sup> Pietrangelo, Ann. "How to Recognize the Signs of Mental and Emotional Abuse." Healthline. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.healthline.com/health/signs-of-mental-abuse>.

<sup>11</sup> Pietrangelo, Ann.

### **4.3 The Boiling Point**

As time went on during my freshman year the separation on my team only got worse. There were the upperclassmen and the freshman. Girls in my class were consistently subject to horrible comments about their bodies, their food choices, who we were friends with, even who we slept with. The constant cycle of criticism became normal and it was just something that our freshman class dealt with.

I'll never forget when one of my teammates came into my dorm room one night and broke down in tears when she told me that she found out one of the seniors peed in her food and left it in the fridge for her to eat. My teammate was so shaken up and confused that she didn't even know what to do. She knew if she went to my coaches that they wouldn't have believed her and definitely wouldn't have done anything about it. This came after the endless bullying that came from a select group of upperclassmen on and off the court. The bullying was from anything and everything. It would be about our sexuality, reputation with the coaches, the mistakes we made in practice, which guys we were talking to, our weight, how we looked, anything really. I mean, I get it, were freshman, were not supposed to have it easy, but this was a whole other level. This was hazing.

Even though we knew how serious this was, my friends and I tried to figure out to do and the best idea was to just stay quiet and keep our head down. We knew there was no point to go to the head coach because he was the worst perpetrator of them all. There was no point in confronting our captain because she would have lied and everyone would have

covered it for her. Through all of this manipulative behavior, the coaches still viewed my class as the problem. In their eyes, we were bad teammates for not “supporting” the upperclassman and kissing the ground they walked on. *We* were the problem, *we* attributed to toxicity to our teams; success because “we didn’t care.” I remember when our assistant coaches called all of the freshman into one of the hotel rooms where we were staying during an away game. The minute we got into the room, we could tell that two of our assistant coaches were angry. They asked us if we knew why we were being called in for a meeting. We really didn’t have any idea. My mind started to race as I thought about the realm of possibilities. Could it have been about the hazing that took place? No, because they wouldn’t have been this hostile towards each of us if it was about the hazing. Nonetheless, this was at the end of my freshman year and I was fed up. I was sick of being treated like a piece of dirt, and although throughout that year I had lost so many parts of who I was, I was done having these people treat me like dirt.

My coaches went on to tear us apart. They made it clear how ungrateful and undeserving they felt each one of us were, called us immature, said we had bad attitudes and that we should be ashamed of what bad teammates we were. After they were done going off, they demanded a response for all of the things they thought to be true and asked us if we had anything to say for ourselves. We were all shocked and we didn’t know what to say. No one said a word. My blood started to boil and I couldn’t stop my mouth from opening. This is when I reported the hazing incident that took place within our team, this is when I finally ripped each one of my assistant coaches a new one and told them what a disgrace the both of them were. I told them that I wasn’t so sure why they were acting so surprised because they played a role in this too. They acted completely clueless to what



had been taking place. I went on to tell them how bad they were to us as coaches and how each one of us deserved better than them. Despite all of the dark awful things that I had just brought up to my coaches, my teammates couldn't help but sit there and look at me relieved looks.

Both of my assistant coaches' jaws dropped. They both looked at each other and didn't know what to say. They looked at me with surprise and insisted that if what I was saying about the hazing incident was true, they were going to have to "look into it" more and meet with us again. The meeting was over and they told us we could leave. The expression on my coach's faces became worrisome and they dismissed us immediately. I had never spoken to an adult like this in my life and even though I didn't know what was going to happen next, I was speaking my mind and telling the truth. I finally felt a sense of relief. This was hazing, they couldn't ignore it.

#### **4.4 The Breaking Point**

I had reached a breaking point. I didn't care what happened to me or how my coaches viewed me anymore. I had accepted the fact that I was never going to be good enough for them. I was done with the abuse, the bullying, and the depression, all of it. I know you're probably expecting some silver lining after hearing that I told my coaches what happened. But I'd be lying if I said this changed anything at all.

Even though I reported the hazing incident to my coaches at the time, nothing was done about it. It was never addressed and no action was taken. It was just as my freshman class and I suspected. To this day, I don't know if my assistant coaches even told the head coach exactly what I had said to them in that meeting or if they even reported the hazing

incident to him. I never heard about it again. The seniors responsible for the hazing incident were never confronted or punished. It's very possible that the assistant coaches didn't tell the head coach out of fear of what would happen to them if they did. It's also possible that they told them and he didn't do anything about it.

The day after I told my coaches what had happened, my head coach called a team meeting after breakfast. The seniors sat on one side of the room and the freshman sat on the other (as usual.) My head coach started crying. He then fought to hold back tears while he told us a random story about when he played college baseball and how much he loved each one of his teammates. He started to sob like the pathetic child that he was, and after he told the story he walked out. Nothing about the hazing was addressed. Nothing else was said, there was no conclusion to the story, nothing. Obviously he was told something because our meeting wasn't a coincidence. When he left, the senior that had hazed my teammate looked at all of the freshman and said "We need you guys, we need your help to win," with puppy dog eyes, I started to shake my head at her and she looked at me and I began to laugh. When we made eye contact and she looked at me with a confused look on her face, I stood up out of my chair and told her to shut the f--k up and told her what I really thought of her. I was so disgusted with the way she was treating my friends. I told her to watch her back and if she didn't start treating us with respect that I was going to tell everyone what she did, including the athletic director. This conversation helped. Although my class was nowhere close to building a friendship with the seniors, the bullying died down and she didn't mess with my teammates for the rest of the year.

Somehow, my team actually went on to win the conference championship that year. But in all honesty, I would give that championship back in an instant if it meant I didn't

have to go through so much bullshit. I would have traded that win to instead be on a team where the players were genuinely happy and healthy.

Winning the conference championship was the worst possible ending to my freshman season. Although I got a championship ring and got to play in the NCAA tournament that year, all of the horrible things that happened that year were suddenly justified somehow. The hazing incident was never talked about again, the bullying didn't matter, the abusive environment my coaches created didn't matter. There was no way anyone on my team could have gone to the athletic director and told her about all of the stuff that had happened. This is a huge flaw in the system, but is very much a thing. The perception was that we won a conference championship, so our team must have been close, tight-knit, and happy.

#### **4.5 Looking Ahead**

After my freshman year, I returned home to Vermont for the summer. At this point, I knew that I wanted to transfer. It was only a matter of how and when I was going to do it. I spoke with my parents and old coaches and we came to the decision that if I tried to transfer at that point, it would result in the unknown and ultimately was a huge risk due to the transfer rules.

I had taken the opportunity to do everything I could that summer to get better with the goal in mind of leaving school in New York City after my sophomore season. I knew I was going to find a way for another school to want me and I knew I was going to get out of New York.

I wish I could say that my sophomore year was better, but it was just as bad. I was starting at the forward position and was one of the players my team and coaches depended on to win games. This gave me a little bit of leeway with my coaches. I stopped going into my coach's office every single day as I had done during my freshman year. I didn't care what my head coach thought about it. The season was long and very stressful. There were still numerous times when my coaches would create team drama and my head coach would consistently demean the team and individual players. We were a team of underclassmen now, which brought tremendous stress and pressure. I was also starting to cope with the environment that I was in because I had gotten used to it.

Throughout the year I stayed focused on my goal of getting out. I had a 3.7 GPA my freshman year and continued to do well in school. I was selected to live with another athlete that year and to this day I am convinced that fate brought us together. I met Brooke my freshman year and we ended up living together in the dorms our sophomore year. To this day, she is my best friend on this planet. She played volleyball and was going through a lot of the same things I was with her team and coaching staff. We did everything together and I heavily relied on her during my sophomore year.

#### **4.6 Is It Friday Yet?**

As my sophomore year progressed, I found myself looking forward to the weekend more and more each week. I had started to drink more. I know drinking is part of the college culture, but looking back I don't know how I was as functional as I was with the amount of alcohol I drank on weekends.

Every Friday my team would practice early on in the morning. Then we had class and then we'd be done basketball and school for the day by mid-afternoon. There wasn't anything that I looked forward to as much as buying alcohol and knowing that after drinking a fair amount of it that I would forget about basketball. I would forget about the disappointment that college basketball was to me. I would forget about the little things I replayed in my mind over and over again and I wouldn't question every move I made. I would forget to think about my parents and how emotional I felt knowing they were at home in Vermont knowing I was unhappy. I would forget everything.

Sometimes my teammates and I would start drinking at 3 p.m. in the afternoon. We often turned to drinking in times of stress. I can say with complete honesty that alcohol was a form of self-medication for me my freshman year and now that I had experienced drinking by my sophomore year I had this self-medication down to a science. My teammates and I would drink away the bullshit we were dealing with and stay out all night and spend the following day in bed. I wish that I could say that this was a special situation, but athletes often turn to alcohol to cope with the constant pressure we put on ourselves.

#### **4.7 I Can't Sleep**

The biggest mental and physical challenge that I dealt with during my freshman and sophomore year was sleep. My constant anxiety about practice, school, and my life in general kept me up late at night and unable to sleep. There was one point that I would wake up almost every hour thinking about something that happened the month before, the week before, the day of. I was unable to fall asleep on my own so I started taking Nyquil every night and was still not sleeping straight through. I started to lose sleep over how

little I was sleeping. I would stay up late thinking about the next day of practice or how I was going to perform on a test. I would wake up paranoid that I was going to be late to practice. I would have worst case scenario nightmares about interactions with my coaches. Moments from the uncomfortable and dreadful meetings I had would randomly pop into my brain and I'd replay them over and over and think of the things I could have said to make my coach like me more. I would wake up sweating with my heart beating out of my chest for no reason at all.

There was a stretch my sophomore year where I was getting around four hours of sleep per night for over a month. I was in a constant state of paranoia. I was anxious and jumpy for the entire day and became irritable whenever my parents tried to check in on me. I avoided telling them how I was doing. This effected how I performed in school. Regardless of how much I studied, I felt easily distracted and un-alert during my classes. My teachers noticed a change in my behavior and whenever they went out of their way to ask me how I was doing, I would just say that I was tired because explaining everything else was too exhausting. I had no motivation to interact with anyone besides my roommate and whenever I wasn't in school or at practice I couldn't wait to go home to bed.

Somehow, I kept this pace up through my sophomore year and even though I was mentally and physically exhausted, I performed well on the basketball court.

#### **4.8 “Misery Loves Company”**

During my sophomore the team developed a more relaxed environment. We all had each other's back and were all in agreement that we had to stick together despite our toxic coaching staff. We started making team rules that we were to follow. For example,

we weren't allowed to bring up another teammates name in a meeting with the coaches or give the coaches any leeway into anyone else's lives.

Still, we were all still miserable. Our coaches still put a great deal of unnecessary stress on us and seemed to pull problems out of their asses on a daily basis. Every week it was something else. If there was a hair out of place on my head, the coach would come in in a bad mood and we all had to take the toll emotionally and physically. I remember one game a girl on my team was suddenly benched out of nowhere and she did not play a single minute the entire game. All of us were confused about why she didn't play and instead of focusing on our loss after the game my coach made a speech about "if people don't take stretching seriously before the game how can I expect you to be prepared when the game comes?" It's true: if my coach didn't like the way we stretched, there would be a problem. It didn't stop there. If the coach didn't like how one of the athletes wore our hair he would comment on it: "you played better when you wore your hair in a ponytail, why are you wearing a bun?" If we didn't walk into practice every day with a smile on our face sucking up to our coach, there was a problem. There was always a problem. We were a problem.

One day after a game, our coach yelled at one of my teammates. This time he made it extremely personal, he embarrassed my teammate as he confronted her about her "attitude problem," when in reality my teammate was struggling with a great deal of depression not only because of basketball but because of family struggles. I felt awful for her, and all I could do was go out of my way to support her when my coaches weren't around. He continued to rip her apart and all the rest of us could do was sit there and listen. There were many times in those moments when I thought about standing up for my teammate and telling my coach to back off, but I never acted on the thoughts no matter

how much I wanted to. My teammate was drowning, and out of all the girls on my team that were struggling I was worried about her the most.

The next day I went into my head coach's office and told him how inappropriate and disgusting I thought this was. I told him how worried I was about my teammate and that I didn't think she was okay mentally, and that the way he embarrassed her in front of the entire team might have been the thing that sent her over the edge. I told my coach that instead of going out of his way to make sure my teammate was okay, he took the opportunity to kick her while she was down. My coach did NOT like this. My calling him out on his behavior was like the ultimate sin in his eyes. Instead of his trying to listen to me, my coach instead attacked my character

“Misery loves company, Cassidy” he said firmly.

“Excuse me?” I said.

“So the question is, are you the misery? Or you the company?” he asked, trying to muster up my courage.

I remember the words coming out of his mouth like it was yesterday. I remember shaking my head at my head coach and getting up and walking out of his office without saying another word. I couldn't even go into my coach's office and advocate for one of my teammates without getting personally attacked or victimized myself. Instead of trying to understand or sympathize what one of his players could possibly be going through, he took the opportunity to make the situation even worse by making me, an advocate for my teammate, try to feel bad about myself for sticking up for her.

## **4.9 Get Out**



As the season continued, I started to take my sophomore year one day at a time. I talked to my parents numerous times a day and spent time with my roommate a lot. I started to take my mental health more seriously. I took the convenient forty-five-minute plane ride home to Burlington as often as I could and found ways to cope. I tried to cut down on the drinking as much as I could. Sadly though, every time I had to fly back to the city, I felt anxious. Taking that forty-five minute flight was never the same after I had a panic attack. I never told anyone about that experience and I tried to suppress the memory had also reached a point where I was so drained and depressed at the thought of going back to school that I didn't even cry anymore, I was just went through the motions.

But thankfully, I got out. I arrived to campus in New York City in the summer of 2013, and left in the spring of 2015. I'll never forget the feeling in my chest when my mother pulled up to my dorm in her SUV. I remember watching her get out of the car with a huge smile on her face and hugging me tightly, knowing I never had to come back or look back. At the time, it was hard for me to believe that I had practically spent the past two years of my life in a place that wore on me so negatively. I still can't believe that was my life.

As you can see, the NCAA rules and regulations give programs and head coaches a lot of opportunities to have complete control over student-athletes. The NCAA doesn't value the mental health of student-athletes. The NCAA only cares about the money student-athletes bring in, not the student-athletes themselves. Throughout the rest of this paper I will explore areas within the NCAA that need major improvement.. I will also offer suggestions on how these rules can improve.

## **CHAPTER 5: THE DIFFERENT SEASONS & THEIR DEMANDS**

### **5.1 Summer Sessions:**

A major topic that needs improvement in the NCAA are the number hours that coaches are allowed to spend with athletes throughout the year. Not only are the rules and regulations regarding maximum hours per week excessive, but they are easily bendable. Although the NCAA only allows a maximum number of hours for practice on a given day during the week, those hours don't include the numerous other responsibilities required of athletes

Summer is a time when most college students return home, travel, or even get a job. Student athletes don't get the same luxury. As I approached my freshman year of college, I was due to report on campus in June before my first fall semester. I was instructed to do this because right before I entered college, the NCAA implemented the summer rule which allowed coaches to spend up to eight hours per week with their teams.<sup>12</sup> This meant that students could stay on campus and take classes during the summer, but the primary reason that the summer rule was implemented was to allow coaches to have their players on

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<sup>12</sup> Berkowitz, Steve. "Newly Proposed NCAA Rules Would Help Fix Time Loopholes for Student-Athletes." USA Today Sports. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/college/2016/11/02/ncaa-rules-student-athletes-time-academics/93164832/>.

campus for summer training. As you read this from an outside perspective, I can understand how you might think this is a good opportunity: Freshmen arrive on campus early, take a few courses to lighten their load for the fall semester and start to understand college life. I have participated in four different summer workout programs, and while I agree that the academic piece of it was helpful, the athletic part of it was overbearing and not necessary.

When student athletes arrive on campus in the summer, they are there five months before their season even starts. The summer workouts are filled with intense strength training and conditioning. We typically spend around an hour and a half on weight-lifting three days a week. We spend the other two days are spent conditioning. Usually these programs last between eight to twelve weeks. This training is not easy by any means. Some of the hardest and most grueling workouts of my life were done during the summer. I remember throwing up every week from the intensity of the workouts. As the weeks progress, the workouts do not get easier and we are constantly pushed to our limit and demanded to run more and lift heavier weights as each week of the summer program progresses.

Another challenge of these workouts was the time of day that they were scheduled. The only chance that coaches can give athletes at having a summer schedule that's not completely devoted to basketball is to have the workouts scheduled early in the morning back to back. This allows the athletes to work out in the morning, and enjoy the rest of the day. Unfortunately, in my experience things are rarely scheduled in a way that gives athletes any free time. The past two summers, our workouts took place early in the morning and in the afternoon. We would have two training sessions a day, otherwise known as two-

a-days. The morning trainings were dedicated to weight training or conditioning and the afternoon was dedicated to basketball skill work. That schedule offered us a huge chunk of “free” time in the middle of the day. The problem with this is that athletes cannot afford to do anything during that time “off”. We would wake up at the crack of dawn to run or lift, go home to shower and rest until our next workout later that afternoon. If coaches found out that someone went to the beach and were lying in the sun all day before your skills workout, they were pissed. Coaches would admit this, but there’s an unspoken rule that if athletes exert a lot of energy doing anything that doesn’t revolve around practices, they must not take basketball seriously don’t care about the team. This schedule doesn’t give student athletes a time to be normal kids. I spent so many summers laying around in bed while the sun was shining waiting for my next workout to come, partially because I was tired, but mostly because I didn’t want to be a zombie during my next workout.

So what does a day in the life of a college athlete actually look like during the summer? Here is how my August schedule looked like: I would wake up around 6:20 a.m. and get to the gym around 6:30 for our 7:00 a.m. lift. Depending on what exercise we had ahead of us, our lifts would be last about an hour and a half. During the summer we also had two weeks of our working at a team camp. After lifting, I would shower and be on my feet all day working camp from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. After camp, we typically had shooting workouts or a team workout (or both). We practiced hard for an hour and then we played pickup twice a week. After practice ended, my team played pickup for an hour. This schedule left us in the gym from 6:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.

When the end of the summer session ended in late August, we get about two weeks “off” to go home and spend time with our families before the hectic school year starts.

Unfortunately, “time off” for college athletes doesn’t really exist. I mean this when I say that “time off” is never time “off” even when you aren’t on campus. During the summers before my Junior and Senior year, my strength coaches signed us up to use apps that tracked our fitness. Every day we had to go through a workout that involved vigorous weight lifting, strength training, running, and sprinting. My summer days spent at home revolved around when I could get these workouts done. We had to go on these apps every day and log workouts. This was on our time *off*.

The issues of the schedules affect all levels of NCAA sports. An article called *What Off Season?* explores these issues as well, particularly in an article written in 2015 about the Big 12 conference. The author, Jake News, questions if student-athletes really get any time off at all: “While many topics came up like getting rid of evening games, realigning the conference so that athletes don’t have to spend so much time traveling, requiring athletes to sit out their freshman year, none of the athletes felt any of these topics needed major change. But the one issue that all of the athletes agreed needing addressing was the amount of time they spent on sports during the ‘off-season.’”<sup>13</sup>

New’s first quote comes from a high major student-athlete: “I don’t need to be in the gym six days a week in June to stay in shape,” Sune Agbuke, a women’s basketball player at Baylor University said. “In-season, it’s understood that we don’t perform well [during games] when we’re dead tired,” Agbuke said, meaning coaches know not to push athletes too hard during workouts and practice, a concern that isn’t as pressing during the off-season. ‘Commitments out of season could use some work.’”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> New, Jake. “What Off Season?” Inside Higher Ed. Accessed March 4, 2019 <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/05/08/college-athletes-say-they-devote-too-much-time-sports-year-round>.

<sup>14</sup> New, Jake.

New says that this complaint is not a new one, yet athletes continue to be overlooked by the people in charge of reforming college athletics. The difficulty of managing athletics and academics during the season is to be expected, but athletes made it a point to say they feel just as overworked in the off-season. For some college athletes, the off-season can be more draining: “In a 2010 NCAA survey, more than three-quarters of Division I baseball players reported spending ‘as much or more time on athletic activities’ during the off-season as during the competitive season. About 70 percent of men’s basketball players reported the same, as did 70 percent of football players. It was a similar picture for the remaining men’s sports. Just less than half of women’s basketball players reported spending equal or more time on athletic activities during the off-season, and about 60 percent of athletes in all other women’s sports said the same. In Division II, about 80 percent of baseball players reported spending as much or more time on their sport during the off-season, as did 54 percent of women’s basketball players. A 2006 NCAA survey had comparable findings. ‘Athletic time commitments for student athletes can be very high and there is little downtime, even in the off-season,’ NCAA researchers wrote in a report about the findings. ‘This issue is crucial to developing the balance that should be a goal for student athletes.’<sup>15</sup>

While the NCAA has rules for how much time athletes can spend on athletic related activities, it’s not a secret that coaches and players find ways around them. This supports my point that the NCAA rules and regulations are easily bendable in ways that coaches want them to be and that these rules support coaches and not student-athletes. These rules give coaches more time with athletes during the summer, while allowing the maximum

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<sup>15</sup> New, Jake.

time coaches are allowed to be training athletes the new minimum. Another challenging factor that exacerbates this situation is the fact that coaches often go over the permitted time hours, and from my experience, if players ever complain about this, coaches get pissed.

New evaluates this concept by backing it up with real data from the NCAA in his article: “It is said that during the season, college athletes aren’t permitted to devote more than 20 hours a week to competition or official practices and workouts. Yet the average number of hours spent in season on athletic activities, according to NCAA surveys, far outnumbers that limit for every sport. On average, football, men’s basketball, women’s basketball and baseball players in Division I spend about 40 hours a week on athletic activities. In 2010, no sport in any division had an average lower than 28 hours. If the majority of Division I and II athletes are spending as much or more time on their sports during the off-season, then they are spending vastly more time on athletic activities than what the NCAA permits. During the off-season, athletes are only allowed to spend eight hours a week on athletic activities. New goes on to say in his article that “a handful of programs have been penalized by the NCAA in recent years for conducting countable ‘athletically related activities’ out of season.”<sup>16</sup>

From my experience, this system of constantly pushing one’s body to the limit five months prior to the first game only results in fatigue by the time our first game approaches! We spent two and a half months on campus in the summer and got ran into the ground. By the time our season starts, none of the lifting or conditioning from the summer even translates over because of the long window. I think student athletes should instead take that time off and go home to recharge mentally and physically before returning to campus

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<sup>16</sup> New, Jake.

for preseason, when the intensity starts all over again. Why not let student-athletes go home and work out on their own?

It's clear that the NCAA put the summer rule in place to allow coaches to get a head-start preparing for the season ahead. If students wish to come to campus early and take courses, they should be able to do so on their terms. Anytime that I was on campus in the summer I was instructed to only take online classes anyways, which is something that I could do at home. On the flip side, I think that this rule is extremely beneficial for freshman because they can get experience and get comfortable being on campus before the busy school year begins, but as students' progress into an upperclassmen, this system becomes exhausting and unnecessary. Since the summer rule was implemented, I have observed that most schools are trying to outdo one another and get the absolute most amount of time working out with their athletes. I have not found this summer program beneficial physically or mentally especially after my freshman year. I have gone back and forth about this rule and I have wondered if the NCAA should make these summer sessions optional or voluntary? I then remember that the word "optional" in college sports is as fake as it gets.

As Jake News' article progresses his focus from talking about mandatory rules by coaches shifts to "voluntary" rules. New argues that there is not a big difference between mandatory and voluntary as a college athlete:

In 2005, the association's infractions committee placed Texas State University on three years of probation after it required football players to attend a 'voluntary' strength and conditioning summer program. The athletes were required to sign attendance logs that were reviewed by the then head coach, according to the infractions report. In one instance, the coach even called a player's parents to warn them that the student would no longer be allowed to play football if he missed the voluntary workouts. Similar cases have occurred at Ball State University, Florida International University and Northern Ohio University. Attempting to thwart



NCAA time limits by describing out-of-season activities as voluntary is common practice, said Mark Nagel, a professor of sports and entertainment management at the University of South Carolina. Voluntary activities are described by the NCAA as being initiated by athletes and having no coach present. 'There's technically an off-season, but there are these voluntary workouts that most coaches say are voluntary but then expect athletes to be at,' he said. 'The system is set up to where the coaches encourage athletes to train all year round, but there's also pressure from the athletes themselves. Even when an athlete is given a situation where it's truly voluntary, they still might be practicing. It's the competitive nature of sports.'<sup>17</sup>

The author of the article uses direct quotes from NCAA athletes themselves with the underlying theme that nothing is optional:

Rachel Scott, a softball player at the University of Texas at Austin who spoke at the recent Big 12 forum, said much of the extra work she does during the off-season is indeed voluntary, but it doesn't always feel that way. 'It's not mandatory,' she said. 'But it's expected.' The emphasis for how involuntary 'voluntary' training is in college athletics is shown by a survey done by the Pac-12 conference in New's article. About 73 percent of athletes said they felt voluntary activities were actually mandatory. More than 60 percent of Pac-12 athletes said they would like to see voluntary activities become 'truly voluntary,' giving them more time for studying, internships and part-time jobs. Some of the athletes reported that coaches had threatened to kick them off the team for missing 'voluntary' activities, or had punished an entire team in retaliation for an athlete missing a non-mandatory practice or workout. Jamie Zaninovich, deputy commissioner of the Pac-12, said this week that the conference has now assembled a task force made up of administrators, coaches and athletes to discuss potential legislation that would address overall time demand issues, especially activities that are meant to be voluntary.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly NCAA rules and regulations are not created to benefit student-athletes. Based on the data presented above, it's obvious that the NCAA rules are easily bendable and more often than not, coaches don't have a problem breaking these rules. While many regular students spend the summers having fun and recharging before coming back to school, athletes spend these hot summer days in the gym. There were some days

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<sup>17</sup> New, Jake,

<sup>18</sup> New, Jake.

throughout my college career where I would get to the gym at 6:45 a.m. and not leave until 7 p.m. How is this beneficial for an athlete's mental health?

Attached is the July and August summer calendar from my senior year (Refer to Wednesday, August 1st on attached calendar). I would be scheduled to be in the gym from 7 a.m. to around 3:45 p.m. However, what is not included on those calendars are the two times per week that our team was required to play pickup for an hour. On the weekends, which was technically our time to relax, we would constantly have team obligations and visits that we had to tend to.

Coaches are given way too much power over student athletes and there isn't sufficient time for student athletes to rest their bodies mentally and physically because of the over-demanding rules put in place for off-season training and team obligations.

## **5.2 Preseason:**

Preseason means practice. This is the time of year where the practices are long, intense, and difficult. The eight hour summer rule no longer exists. During preseason, practices are scheduled within a three hour segment and the entire team usually practices together and uses every minute of those three hours for on-court practice. Practice does not include weight lifting. On top of those practices, add in an extra hour of conditioning with our strength coaches for an hour plus two to three times per week. This means that were looking at about a four hour window of just the physical demands required by student athletes. This four-hour window doesn't include all of the other academic, personal, or social demands that college athletes have.

One of the many challenges that student athletes deal with is figuring out when to schedule practice so that everyone can attend. This means taking into account fourteen different class schedules.

Attached was my preseason schedule for the month of October. Below is a schedule of my day during preseason: During the fall semester of my senior year, practice started at 5:30 a.m. (Refer to Tuesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> on the calendar attached). Although 5:30 a.m. is when practice starts, team rules declare that athletes must be dressed and ready to go on the court at 5:20 a.m. To put this into perspective, I had to wake up around 4:30 a.m. to get my stuff together, eat, walk over to the gym and get ready for practice. This past fall I struggled with injuries, so I would additionally have to get those taken care of before practice. My rehab typically started around 4:40 a.m. which meant I had to get up even earlier. After our two-and-a-half-hour practice, we then had scheduled gun workouts. Those workouts were designed for us to strictly work on shooting. Gun workouts took place directly following practice. After our gun workouts we had one-hour of weight lifting. Once I was finished with practice, gun workouts, and lifting, I would shower and get home around noon where I'd start to do my schoolwork. I'd struggle to focus after being awake for eight hours of basketball, and finish my work before my three-hour lecture that started at 4 p.m. I would then go to my three hour graduate classes every Monday-Thursday during the week. Some of those classes didn't get out until 7:30 p.m. I would get home around 8 p.m. and struggle to finish school work before I did it all again the next day. In total, I typically had fifteen hour days every day of the fall semester of my senior year.

This time is a very challenging time for athletes not only because of its physical challenges, but because of the intense daily practices that happened a month before games even started. It felt like what I was working for was still so far away. It gets extremely exhausting after a while. I understand that the preseason is a beneficial for a team growth, especially when players are learning new systems and working to become a unit for the season ahead. I also understand why there is so much team devotion during this time of the year, but the total hours spent time practicing, doing gun workouts, lifting, along with a full course load is not sustainable or healthy. Looking back on the fall semester of my senior year, it's hard for me think about the tremendous amount of stress and anxiety I felt.

### **5.3 In-Season:**

As I have reiterated already, the NCAA's rules are easily bendable. While the NCAA only allows for 20 hours of required athletically related activities per week in season, the association's own research indicates that athletes typically spend about 40 hours a week on their sport.<sup>19</sup> In season, the main focus of athlete's lives is their games. A college basketball season typically starts in early November and includes a few scrimmages and non-conference games. During the non-conference games, players travel a lot and compete against schools in higher divisions. There are also a few buy games mixed in this time. A college basketball player's season starts in November and goes all the way through non-stop until early March when the NCAA tournament starts. Depending on how a team

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<sup>19</sup> New, Jake. "Mental Health of College Athletes." Inside Higher Ed. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/01/14/ncaa-establishes-best-practices-mental-health-college-athletes>.

competes during playoffs, players could be competing until the end of March. You may be thinking, oh there's Thanksgiving, winter, and spring break right? Wrong!

Although athletes get time off from school during these breaks, they do not get time off from practice. In fact, this is when we're expected to go into overdrive while other students go home for a break from school to spend time with their families and friends. Student athletes practice every day over break just as we did during the semester. We also spend this time getting ready for a yearly Thanksgiving tournament. During these school "breaks" is actually when most coaches ramp things up. I've had many different coaches say and insinuate things like: *"Oh, you don't have class? Why aren't you getting extra shots up or doing more to become a better player? You can spend more time in the gym since you have nothing else to do! If you aren't getting in here extra now that you don't have school you aren't living up to our expectations! You're pro's now, no school, no class, now you can put all of your focus into basketball!"* You might find this funny, but every coach that I've had expressed this mentality during any school breaks that took place during the season. School breaks is the perfect time for athletes to recharge, but instead it often weighs on our mental health even more. Coaches have a primary focus of winning and will push their student athletes far, even to the point of burnout.

The season is by far the most demanding time of the year for athletes. We spend three hours a day practicing while studying and attending our regular college classes. During my senior year, the season schedule was very similar to the pre-season schedule. So instead of taking you through that schedule all over again, I'm instead going to illustrate what winter break looks for student athletes. (Refer to December attached calendar attached). As you can see, once we compete on December 21, we have "off" days until

practice on the 27th. Logistically, this means we should have about five days at home with your family (not including the travel to and from campus). In reality, having five days off is extremely generous and basically unheard of. During my first two years of college I only had three days off (not including traveling to and from campus) which took place the day after Christmas. This time period is the only time of the winter that we had away from school. Every time our post game talk came around before Christmas break, every coach I've had has always made it a point to remind us to better not relax when we go home. It is expected that we exercise every day to prepare for practice and conference schedule. Even when we are physically absent from practice, we are never mentally absent. Mental health is not a priority for NCAA coaches.

The game before winter break is our last non-conference game, meaning when we come back from break our regular season conference schedule starts. Essentially our game record resets. We play all of the non-conference games to prepare and perfect for the conference season, during which we compete for a championship and a ticket to the NCAA tournament. The NCAA game scheduling disregards the mental health of its athletes. The timing of the non-conference schedule into the conference schedule is not beneficial for anyone, especially athletes.

I can't stress this enough: "off days" are not really off days for student athletes. When we go home for any academic break during the school year, we are expected work out every day. We are sent home with mobile apps on our phones that we are expected to sign into everyday logging our workouts so strength coaches can track us and configure with coaches. For me, the physical part of this wasn't the challenge. When I would go home for Christmas and finally start to feel like I had some breathing room from the

intensely draining daily schedule I would remember that I had to plan my holidays around running and lifting. I guarantee if you ask any athlete if they felt anxious over winter break about what's to come when they return to campus, they will all tell you how distracting the thought of working out is and how the mental weight of that prevents them from enjoying their time at home. One of the most frustrating parts about this is when an athlete has to try to explain to a rational person why we are doing something as preposterous as going on a run when it's ten degrees outside on Christmas morning. Hearing a person with no connection to college athletics try and persuade me how absurd they thought this was annoyed the living hell out of me. *"Can't you just take a break? It's just a day or two!"* Why would I be putting myself through this if I didn't have to? People outside the athletic world do not understand how big of a commitment we made when we became college athletes. Our entire life revolves around being an athlete. Even if we are physically absent from practice, we are never mentally absent.

Another thing that athletes have to juggle on top of their demanding schedule is constantly traveling and missing classes. At the beginning of the semester we hand in absence forms to our teachers letting them know the dates we'll be missing for the semester. What happens from then on weighs on athletes. In my experience, teachers don't understand that we aren't in control when we miss these classes. I have had teachers that have been very difficult to work with as I tried to catch up on things that I have missed due to traveling for basketball. I have also had classmates who think that this is somehow a choice that athletes just show up to class when they want. Missing classes is out of our control, and teachers and peers tend to not understand this, which makes doing group work and rescheduling things way more difficult than they need to be. On occasion I have had

to go to the athletic department for assistance because some of the teachers I had were so difficult and unwilling to work with me when I missed class due to things beyond my control. I take school very seriously, so you can imagine how frustrating it is when some people think that my missing class for basketball was a choice I had any sort of say in.

Professional athletes can attest to this experience in college and some might argue that college athletes aren't given enough time to take advantage of their education. Seattle Seahawks cornerback Richard Sherman explains this very well. In an interview, Sherman shared his opinion about being a college athlete and the NCAA in general. His interview was then quoted in CBS Sports in an article titled *Seahawks' Richard Sherman, Michael Bennett blast NCAA* written by Jerry Hinnen:

I don't think college athletes are given enough time to really take advantage of the free education that they're given, and it's frustrating. A lot of people get upset with student athletes and say they aren't focused on school and they're not taking advantage of the opportunity that they're given. I would love for a regular student to have a student-athlete's schedule during the season for just one quarter or one semester and show me how you balance that. Show me how you would schedule your classes when you can't schedule classes from 2-to-6 o'clock on any given day. Show me how you're going to get all your work done when after you get out at 7:30 p.m. or so, you've got a test the next day, you're dead tired from practice and you still have to study just as hard as everybody else every day and get all the same work done. Most of these kids are done with school by three o'clock and have the rest of the day to do as you please. You may spend a few hours studying or at the library for a few hours doing some casual reading then you may go hangout with friends and have a coffee, when you're a student athlete you don't have that kind of time. You wake up in the morning you have weights, then you could have class, then you go get a quick bite to eat, and after you have a quick bite to eat you go straight to meetings, and after meetings you have practice, and after practice you have all of that work done you have to get done throughout that day. You have your lectures and your focus groups and those aren't the things that people focus on when talking about student athletes. They are upset when a student-athlete says they need a little cash. Well, I can tell you from experience, I had negative-40 bucks in my account...You've got to make decisions on whether you get gas for your car or whether you get a meal for the day...People think, 'Oh, you're on scholarship.' They pay for your room and board, they pay for your education, but to their knowledge, you're there to play football. You're not on scholarship for school and it sounds crazy when a student-athlete says that, but that's those are the things coaches tell them



every day: 'You're not on scholarship for school.' and luckily I was blessed to go to Stanford and a school that was primarily focused on academics so it was a blessing and a little bit better, but we were also there for football. There were guys on my team who majored in engineering, which is an incredibly tough role to take when you're on a football team because a lot of the classes conflict when you're a football player. If you have an engineering class that's from two to three thirty, there's no way you can do both, when we got team meetings, what do you do? Do you switch your major? Or do you tell your coach 'Hey I got engineering class from two to three thirty and I have to go that' and that's a conflict of interest and people don't realize that.<sup>20</sup>

Although Sherman is a product of the NFL and played college football, I assure you his description is spot on and I can attest to this from personal experience from being a Division I women's basketball player.

During my sophomore year I had to take a public speaking class required under my major. It met three times a week. I was learning to get more comfortable around my classmates every day. One of my teammates happened to need the class for her major as well, so we took it together. The class took place across campus during the spring semester. It fell after our morning practices. In New York City, this basically means we had to run to class in the ninety-degree weather through the hectic city sidewalks to even have a chance to make it there on time. We would barely make it to class on time and when we did, we showed up sweating. Sometimes we wouldn't even be able to shower. As you can imagine, this presents a number of issues for a public speaking class. Our teacher was a very caring man who went out of his way to work with us whenever we needed extra help, and even insisted that we didn't have to run in the hot weather to make it if it meant being a few minutes late. He was one of the better teachers that I had during college. For our final project of the semester, we had to give a speech on anything that we were passionate about.

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<sup>20</sup> Hinnen, Jerry. "Seahawks' Richard Sherman, Michael Bennett blast NCAA." CBS Sports. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.cbssports.com/college-football/news/seahawks-richard-sherman-michael-bennett-blast-ncaa/>.

During the semester we had worked our way up to give this final speech by offering smaller speeches. A student in my class decided that he wanted to give his speech on the notion that ‘athletes shouldn’t be allowed to get scholarships.’ During his speech, he continued to go on a rant about how entitled student athletes are and claimed that non-athlete students have it way harder than students who do. He said that student athletes get to miss class and blame it on sports and that they are treated better by teachers. He basically said that every student athlete is a trashcan of a human being.

Now, I don’t know what anyone could have possibly done to this guy to make him feel so bitter about college athletes, but his speech stuck with me for years (not only were his points not credible, the speech was a complete and utter train wreck filled with hatred and ignorance.) During his presentation I didn’t know whether to laugh, interrupt, or get up and leave because of how annoyed I was. My teammate and I were shocked to hear all of the things that came out of his mouth. I could feel my blood boiling as I looked up at his face and saw him smirking as he went into more detail about a topic he knew nothing about in the first place. My teacher was also shocked and asked the student in the middle of his speech to kindly stop and sit down. I was so irritated that I couldn’t even present my final speech that I worked so hard on. After class I saw the student in the hallway and to be honest, I said some things that weren’t very nice. His speech created a false perception of student athletes.

Professional athletes agree that the NCAA doesn’t put student athletes in a position to take full advantage of their scholarship. We are also not able to have a healthy college experience because of all of the unrealistic expectations our coaches put on us.

## 5.4 Postseason

Postseason is a time of year that every basketball player dreads. We are so exhausted from our hectic season filled that was with long days and a lot traveling. We are then given a taste of what it feels like to rest and recharge, but then we are right back at it. Just as we get used to having a little bit of time off to focus on school after the regular season, postseason starts. Postseason is completely devoted to strength training and conditioning. There is little to no basketball involved in this time. In my time as a student athlete, our playoffs always ended before or during spring break. By the time we start postseason, it's practically impossible for our bodies to recover from the seven months of intensity. On the teams that I have been a part of, we would enter post season with only one week off of basketball obligations.

A typical day in postseason is a little more laid back than what a normal practice would look like schedule is. However, it is more intense. Our time during the week opens up more because we don't have a three hour window closed off for practice. Instead, we spend our time lifting and conditioning for around an hour and a half. During the postseason, athletes continue to spend almost every day with their strength coach. From what I witnessed, postseason lifting and conditioning plan also depends on the whims of the head coach wants. My postseasons have been differed year to year, but they were never easy. I once had a coach who planned on putting us through a 'punishment postseason' because he was so displeased with how our season went. He basically told our trainer to put us through hell. During that punishment postseason, the head coach had made it very clear what he wanted from the strength coach. Even though the strength coach didn't necessarily agree that this was healthy or what my team needed, it wasn't his choice. You

can see where there might be a grey area here. The strength coaches' jobs and livelihood depend on how pleased his or her head coaches is with them. This creates a conflict of interest for many trainers. If an athlete has a head coach who wants something done his way it's going to be done his way. The NCAA gives head coaches way too much power and allows them to often create environments of intimidation that are far from efficient.

I have often wondered why a postseason is necessary, especially given that all student athletes will experience a two-and-a-half summer program. When does the NCAA expect student athletes to get the rest that their young bodies and minds need in order so its athletes can perform at their best? I could understand the need for a postseason if there was an actual summer break for student athletes. Unfortunately, that's not the case. As soon as the grueling season ends, we are instantly thrown right back into the weight room instead of allowing our bodies a chance to rest, as we so desperately need. Why can't the NCAA allow student athletes a spring break before summer sessions? Sadly, this is because the NCAA is in charge of rules and they don't regulate them in a way that is beneficial to athlete's mental or physical health.

## Vermont Women's Basketball

**July 2018**

Updated 04/24/18

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
22	23 12:00pm - Pick-Up 1:00-2:30pm - S&C 1-2pm, 5-8pm - MBB	24 2:30-3:30pm - Pick-Up 12:30-1:30, 5-8pm - MBB	25 7:00-8:30am - S&C 4:30 - Head shots, action shots (PG Lobby) 5-8pm - MBB	26 1:40pm - Team Meeting in Patrick Gym. 2:00-4:00pm - Team Workout 5-8pm - MBB	27 9:30am-11:30am Team Workout 12:15-1:45pm - S&C 2:00pm - Community Service 5-8pm - MBB	28
29 5pm - Team BBQ	30 Recruit Visit: Shea Fuller '19 7:00-8:30am - S&C 3:15-4:30pm - Team Workout 9am-3pm - WBB Camp	31 Recruit Visit: Shea Fuller '19 3:15-4:30pm - Team Workout 9am-3pm - WBB Camp				
	3:15-8:00 - MBB	4:15pm - 8:00 - MBB				

## Vermont Women's Basketball

**August 2018**

Updated 06/07/18

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 7-8:30am - S&C 3:15-3:45 - Post Gun Workout 3:45-4:15 - Guard Gun Workout 9am-3pm - WBB Camp	2 Groups: 3:15pm - RC, NC, EW, LH, CW, MP, SW 4:15pm - Scott, JL, CD, CH, ASet, HC, CoW 9am-3pm - WBB Camp	3 Recruit Visit: Delaney Richason '19, Sophie Wittenback '18 7-8:30am - S&C 12:30 - Meet Kelly Thorre 9am-3pm - WBB Camp	4 Recruit Visit: Emma Utterback '19 10am-4pm - Elite Camp 5pm - Team BBQ
			4:15pm - 8:00 - MBB	4:15pm - 8:00 - MBB	3:15pm - 8:00 - MBB	

## Vermont Women's Basketball October 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 7-9:30am - Practice 9:30-10am - Gun NC, CH, LH, Asett, CoW 10-10:30 - Gun EW, SWells, SWitt, CD, MP 11:00-12:00am - S&C MBB - 2:30-6pm	2 5:30-8am - Practice 8:15-8:45am - Gun RC, SWitt, HC, MP, CW 9:30-10:30am - S&C 11:15am - CD, HC, CW Interview with AE MBB - 1:30-5pm	3 6:30-9am - Practice 9:15-9:45am - Gun JL, Asett, SWells, LH, CoW 10:00-10:30am - Pool MBB - 2:30-6pm	4 5:30-8am - Practice 8:15-8:45am - Gun RC, JL, EW, HC, CW 9:30-10:30am - S&C MBB - 1:30-5pm	5 Homecoming & Family Weekend 6:30-9am - Practice 9:15-9:45am - Gun NC, Asett, CH, CD, Asett 10-10:30am - Pool MBB - 2:30-6pm	6 Homecoming & Family Weekend OFF 7am-3pm Comm Serv Wiffleball tourney strike3foundation MBB - 12:3pm
7 Homecoming & Family Weekend OFF MBB - 12-3pm	8 Fall Recess/ Columbus Day (No Classes) 10-11:30 - Capt Gun 11:30-2:00 - Practice 3:30-4:30pm - S&C MBB - 3-6pm	9 5:30-8am - Practice 8:15-8:45am - Gun RC, NC, CD, HC 8:45-9:15am - Gun JL, SWitt, CoW 9:30-10:30am - S&C MBB - 1:30-5pm	10 6:30-9am - Practice 9:15-9:45am - Gun EW, SWells, LH, Asett 10-10:30am - Pool MBB - 2:30-6pm	11 5:30-8am - Practice 8:15-8:45am - Gun CH, Asett, MP, CW 9:30-10:30am - S&C MBB - 1:30-5pm	12 OFF MBB - 2:30-6pm	13 OFF Team Community Service Cancer walk MBB - 10am-1pm
14 9:45-10:15 - Gun RC, Asett, LH, MP 10:30am-12pm - Team Practice 12-1pm - Basketball Season Ticket Pick Up Event	15 7-9:30am - Practice 9:45-10:15am - Gun JL, SWells, CD, Asett 11:00-12:00am - S&C 5:30-6:30pm - Community Service (KingStCenter) MBB - 2:30-6pm	16 5:30-8am - Practice 8:15-8:45am - Gun NC, SWitt, HC, CoW 9:30-10:30am - S&C 8:30am-12 - Flu shots MBB - 1:30-5pm	17 OFF 12-1pm - Media Day MBB - 2:30-6pm	18 5:30-8am - Practice 8:15-8:45am - Gun CH, EW, CW 9:30-10:30am - S&C Gym Closed at 4pm MBB - 1:30-5pm	19 7-8am - Team w/Kelly Thorne (Bostwick) 5:30-7:30pm: Practice @Rice H.S. Gym Closed - Fall Fest MBB - 2:30-5pm	20 9-11am - Rally the Family Brunch 12-2pm : Green & Gold Scrimmage MBB - TBD
21 OFF TBD - Team pumpkin carving (Winooski)	22 OFF 8-9:30 - Team Meeting w/Sarah Mell (Bostwick) MBB - 2:30-6pm	23 5:30-8am - Practice 8:15-8:45am - Gun RC, NC, HC, CoW 9:30-10:30am - S&C MBB - 1:30-5pm	24 6:30-9am - Practice 9:15-9:45am - Gun SWells, EW, LH, Asett 10-10:30am - Pool MBB - 2:30-6pm	25 5:30-8am - Practice 8:15-8:45am - Gun Asett, SWitt, CD, MP 8:45-9:15: CH, JL, CD MBB - 1:30-5pm	26 7:00-8:00am - Shoot- Around 2pm - Pregame Meal 6pm - Franklin Pierce Scrimmage (EVH) MBB - 2:30-5pm	27 OFF 7pm - MBB vs Concordia
28 OFF MBB - 12-3pm	29 7-9:30am - Practice 9:30-10am - Gun JL, EW, CD, LH 10-10:30 - Gun Asett, SWells, Asett 11:00-12:00am - S&C MBB - 2:30-6pm	30 5:30-8am - Practice 8:15-8:45am - Gun RC, CH, HC, CW 9:30-10:30am - S&C MBB - 1:30-5pm	31 6:30-9am - Practice 9:15-9:45am - Gun NC, SWitt, MP, CoW 10-10:30am - Pool MBB - 2:30-6pm			

## Vermont Women's Basketball December 2018

Updated 04/12/18

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 7:30am: Flight for NJ 12:2pm - Practice @ NJIT
2 9am - Pregame Meal <b>1pm: Away @ NJIT</b> 8:30pm - Flight to BTV	3 8:15-9:15 - Post workout 9:15-9:45 - Post Film 9:45-11am - Guard workout 10:00-11:00am - S&C 11am - Guard Film	4 <b>OFF</b> MBB - 1:30-5pm	5 6:30-9am - Practice	6 5:30-8am - Practice 8:30-9:30am - S&C	7 6:30-9am - Practice	8 8:45-9:45am - Shoot-Around 10am - Pregame Meal <b>2pm: Home vs. Yale</b> 7pm - MBB vs Harvard
9 <b>OFF</b>	10 - Final Weeks 10am-1pm - Practice MBB - 12:30-3:30pm	11 - Finals Week <b>OFF</b> MBB - 12:30-3:30pm	12 Reading Day (No Exams) 10am-1pm - Practice MBB - 1-4pm	13 - Finals Week 9am-12pm - Practice MBB - 12:30-3:30pm	14 - Finals Week 8:30-9:30 - Post workout 9:30 - Post Film 4:00pm - Guard workout 5:00pm - Guard Film MBB - 12:30-3:30pm	15 10-10:30am - Gun 10:30am-1pm - Practice Out of dorms by noon MBB - 1-4pm
16 6:30am - Flight to Tampa 3:00pm - Practice @ South Florida	17 12:30-1:30 - Shoot around 3pm - Pregame Meal <b>7pm: Away @ South Florida</b>	18 <b>OFF</b> 3:10pm - Flight to BTV (10:19pm arrival)	19 9-10am - Gun 10-12pm - Practice 12:30-1:30 - S&C MBB - 12-3pm	20 TBD: Depart for Canisius TBD: Practice @ Canisius MBB - 9am-12pm	21 TBD: Shootaround 10am - Pregame Meal <b>2pm: Away @ Canisius</b>	22 <b>OFF</b>
23 <b>OFF</b>	24 <b>OFF</b>	25 Christmas <b>OFF</b>	26 <b>OFF</b>	27 3-4pm - Gun 4-7pm - Practice	28 1-2pm - Gun 2-5pm - Practice 5-6pm - S&C	29 5:45am: Flight for Kansas 1:00pm - Watch Kansas MBB Game 3:30pm - Practice @ Kansas
30 TBD - Shootaround 10am - Pregame Meal <b>2pm: Away @ Kansas</b>	31 10:00am: Depart from KC 2:00pm: Arrive BTV 4:47pm - Practice					



## Vermont Women's Basketball January 2019

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
30 Kansas	31 4-7pm: Practice	1 New Year's Day Freshmen Workout 9am: RC, EW, AScott 9:20am: NC, SW, ASett Shooting Gun 9am: HC, ASett, NC, SW, SW/it 9:30am: RC, EW, AScott, CW 10am: CD, LH, CH, JL, CoW 10:30am-1pm: Practice MBB 1-4	2 11:30-12:30 -Shootaround 12:45: Depart for Lowell <b>7pm: Away @ UMass Lowell</b>	3 Freshmen Workout 10:30am: RC, AScott, SW 11am: NC, EW, ASett Gun Workout: 2:30: RC, JL, HC, CoW 3:00: CW, CD, SW, NC 3:30-6pm: Practice 6:30-7:30pm: S&C MBB 11:30-2:30	4 Freshmen Workout 10:30: RC, NC, SW 11: EW, AScott, ASett Gun Workout: 2:30: AScott, NC, CH, SW/it 3:00: ASett, SW, RC, JL 3:30-6pm: Practice MBB 11:30-2:30	5 9-10am: Shootaround 10am: Team Meal <b>2pm: Home vs. Albany</b>
6 <b>OFF</b>	7 Freshmen Workout 10:30: RC, AScott, EW 11: NC, EW, ASett Shooting Gun 2:30-3:30 3:30-6pm: Practice 6:30-7:30pm: S&C MBB 11:30-2:30	8 Freshmen Workout 10:30: RC, AScott, SW 11: EW, NC, ASett Shooting Gun 2:30-3:30 3:30-6pm: Practice MBB 10am-1pm	9 2-3pm - Shootaround 3pm - Team Meal <b>7pm: Home vs. Maine</b>	10 Freshmen Workout 10:30: RC, NC, ASett 11: EW, AScott, SW 4-7pm: Practice 7-8pm: S&C MBB 1-4pm	11 TBD: Depart for Hartford TBD: Prac @ Hartford MBB 1-4pm	12 10am: Team Meal <b>2pm: Away @ Hartford</b>
13 <b>OFF</b> Move in to dorms	14 First Day of Classes 3:30-6:00pm: Practice MBB 12-3	15 3:30-5:30pm: Practice MBB 5:30-8:30	16 3pm - Shootaround 4pm - Team Meal <b>7pm: Home vs. New Hampshire</b>	17 3:30-5:30pm: Practice 6:00-7:00pm: S&C MBB 5:30-8:30	18 TBD: Depart for Binghamton 4-7pm: Practice @Binghamton	19 10:15-11:15am Shootaround 10am: Team Meal <b>2pm: Away @ Binghamton</b>
20 <b>OFF</b>	21 Martin Luther King, Jr. 10am-1pm: Practice 1:30-2:30pm: S&C MBB 1-4	22 10:00am: Flight to UMBC 11:30: Arrive in Dulles 3:00-5:00pm: Practice @ UMBC	23 8am - Team Meal <b>11am: Away @ UMBC</b> 5:15pm: Flight to BTV	24 10-11am: Dept Meeting 3:30-5:30pm: Practice 6:00-7:00pm: S&C MBB 5:30-8:30	25 3:30-6:00pm: Practice MBB 12-3	26 8:45-9:45: Shootaround 10am: Team Meal <b>2pm: Home vs. Stony Brook</b>
27 <b>OFF</b>	28 Last day to add/drop classes 3:30-6:00pm: Practice 6:00-7:00pm: S&C MBB 12-3	29 3:30-5:30pm: Practice 6:00-7:00pm: S&C MBB 5:30-8:30	30 3:30-6:00pm: Practice MBB 12-3	31 3:30-5:30pm: Practice 6:00-7:00pm: S&C MBB 5:30-8:30		



## CHAPTER 6: COACHES & CULTURE

### 6.1 Strength Coaches

Up until this point, I have explored the challenges of the student athlete's schedule, especially as it pertains to strength and conditioning training. Basketball wise, my skills were in a good place entering college. I could hold my own when it came down to competing on the basketball court. I understood that when I started college I would have to meet the physical demands expected by my head coaches and strength trainers, but I was not ready for the intense weight training. When I started college I weighed around 185/190 pounds. By the end of my sophomore year I weighed 225 pounds. Why did I gain so much weight? From extreme weight lifting.

The first strength coach I worked with during my freshman and sophomore year was kind hearted, but intense. Whenever I stepped in the weight room, I became a different person. The focus and dedication it took me to get through these lifts was one of the hardest things I did my freshman year. I remember lifting early in the morning weights and my legs felt like noodles for the rest of the day. It was hard to gain so much muscle during that time. I went from being a thin, mobile guard like post player who played primarily on the perimeter to then playing a power back-to-the-basket center forward. That position was where my head coach wanted me and my strength coach helped make that happen. I gained thirty five pounds thanks the intense weight lifting and following a strict meal plan. Unfortunately, I lost my mobility and felt like a completely different player.

By the end of my sophomore season I had successfully transferred to the University of Vermont. At UVM I met my new trainer, Marc Hickok. Marc was a former kicker for the New York Giants and a graduate of UConn. He was qualified to be working with

student athletes and his despite his bubbly personality outside the weight room, he was one of the most demanding, intense, results-driven coaches I have ever been around. When I arrived at UVM, my head coach pretty much told me that I needed to lose about twenty pounds during my red shirt season to become more mobile. To be frank, I was ready for the challenge and look forward to getting back to the mobile guard-like post player that I had been for most of my life. Marc got ahold of me the summer after my sophomore year when I started a nine week summer program with my new team. My new teammates had the bodies that I had wanted. They were thin, yet strong and chiseled and this showed on the court. I would hear my teammates mention every now and then how hard Marc's lifts were, but I figured that since I already had two years of lifting under my belt, it couldn't be *that* bad?

I wish I could go back and slap myself in the face when I downplayed how difficult these lifts were. The first time I did one of Marc's lifts my body went into shock, and for those of you who think I'm exaggerating, I wish I was. The first lift we did during my redshirt summer I remember feeling my wrists start to tingle and my brain go fuzzy as I went through the beginning of our lift, and the rest is blank. I remember doing what my team referred to as 'cardio lifts' which is when we rotate through three exercises as fast as we can and get as many reps as we possibly can in a certain amount of time. We also did a lot of conditioning during my redshirt summer. I remember running so much that sometimes during the workouts I would worry about passing out. I vomited after the lifts a lot. I spent many nights sobbing alone because I was so unsure of how I was going to keep up the strength training because it was so hard mentally and physically. I remember always wondering if I would make it through the workouts. Somehow I did. The culture

that I became a part of whenever I stepped into that weight room is unexplainable. The mentality each one of my teammates and I had was so strong, each one of us refused to see the person standing across from us fail. I mean this literally and figuratively. There were days I had to literally push my teammates on a sled across a finish line while they refused to let me stop even though it felt like my legs were going to break. There were days I'd be on the sled yelling in my teammate's ear to get to the finish line, and they did. These grueling workouts made the bond between my teammates and I unbreakable. Marc helped transform me physically into the player that I always wanted to be. He pushed me to do things that I didn't even know my body could do. He was so passionate about helping his athletes succeed. It showed every time we met him in the weight room. I cannot give Marc enough credit for what he has done for me not only as an athlete, but also as a person.

I have had three different strength coaches in college. I want to make it clear that I truly believe all three of them wanted the best for me physically and mentally. Strength coaches do everything in their power to make sure players succeed. That is their priority. Strength coaches don't play mental games, and nothing they ask of you has to do with how talented of a basketball player you are. They care about three things: effort, heart, and hard work. Weight lifting has nothing to do with basketball IQ, but it does show which players work hard (and which ones don't). The best strength coaches I have worked with have demanded more from me than anyone. They put a challenge in front of my teammates and I and pushed us through it. These were the moments as an athlete when I felt a great sense of pride and fulfillment. I was pushing my body to the absolute limit and I was proud of my body and my mind for finishing those workouts. The strength coaches taught my teammates and me to push ourselves to the absolute limit again and again. We started to

change too. Completing these grueling workouts helped us build character, discipline, and mental toughness. The mental toughness that I gained through strength training will stick with and benefit me for the rest of my life.

My biggest cheerleaders have been my strength coaches. Nothing made them happier than seeing our hard work the number of many hours we spent in the weight room. The bond we have with them is special. They are the people behind the scenes who really help us become the strongest and fastest players that we could possibly be. They also understand how hard our schedule is and they find ways to push each player individually. The relationship that players have with their strength coaches is a vital one. Aside from head coaches, players spend the most of their time with their strength coaches

We can see how important this relationship in Bill Landis' article *Ohio State's Other Head Coach: Mickey Marotti's Crucial Role as Buckeyes Navigate Camp Without Urban Meyer* Landis demonstrates how important strength coaches really are, particularly in the Ohio State Football program. The key aspect discussed in Landis' article is how Ohio State Football strength coach Mickey Marotti played a significant role in his players' lives. Other sports writers including Doug Lesmerises described Marotti as a "motivator and therapist"<sup>21</sup> to student-athletes. In Landis article, he emphasizes that Marotti spends more time with their team than anybody else in the football program besides from their head coach at the time, Urban Meyer:

"'Coach Mick is the guy who keeps that team together,' former OSU center Billy Price told cleveland.com on Wednesday. 'He's with us more than any other coach.' This

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<sup>21</sup> Lesmerises, Dough. "An inside look at an early morning with Mickey Marotti, Ohio State's strength coach, motivator, and therapist." Cleveland.com. Accessed March 4, 2019. [https://www.cleveland.com/osu/2013/08/post\\_110.html](https://www.cleveland.com/osu/2013/08/post_110.html).

isn't to diminish Day's role as acting head coach, because we don't know what's happening in meetings and the safe assumption is that he's taken on some added responsibility. If the time ever comes that it's needed, he'd be the face of the program. But when it comes to the voice that keeps the team together while Meyer is away, it's Marotti that's best equipped for that.”<sup>22</sup> As the article progresses, Landis notes how vital Mariotti’s presence is in the absence of the team’s head coach:

It's essentially Marotti's team for half the year. It's Meyer's program, obviously. When the Buckeyes are in spring practice for five weeks in March and April, in camp in August and during the season, Meyer's is the constant voice. When he's on the road recruiting, or in the times of the year of when coach access is restricted and strength and performance training are the focus, Mariotti's voice is the one that rings loudest.’ Right now, in this void, Ohio State needs that voice more than it ever has. ‘Coach Mick is basically the head coach when Coach Meyer is on vacation or on the road recruiting,’ former linebacker Joshua Perry told cleveland.com this week. ‘He works with everyone. He has a united front with Coach Meyer as well, so there is a sense of continuity.’<sup>23</sup>

Landis makes it a point to give credit where credit is due. However, at the end of the day, the role Marotti plays is crucial to team success. “This isn't to diminish that either. Guys like Parris Campbell, Terry McLaurin, Dre'Mont Jones -- you know the names -- are surely taking up the task of keeping things on track while the program waits to hear what will happen with Meyer. But when looking to someone for stability, a familiar face with a commanding presence and words that carry weight throughout the building, look to Marotti.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Landis, Bill. “Ohio State's Other Head Coach: Mickey Marotti’s Crucial Role as Buckeyes Navigate Camp Without Urban Meyer.” Cleveland.com. Accessed March 4, 2019.

[https://www.cleveland.com/osu/2018/08/mickey\\_marottis\\_crucial\\_role\\_a.html](https://www.cleveland.com/osu/2018/08/mickey_marottis_crucial_role_a.html)

<sup>23</sup> Landis, Bill.

<sup>24</sup> Landis, Bill.

Landis' article shifts focus to explore the methodology between the two head coaches that has evolved over the years:

Meyer and Marotti have been together off and on since they were both graduate assistants at Ohio State in 1987. Their bond started to take shape when Marotti was at Cincinnati, Meyer's alma mater, in 1995. When Meyer got hired as Florida's head coach in 2005, he brought Marotti with him. They've been linked ever since. The methodology has evolved over the years. What hasn't changed is Meyer's total trust in Marotti to develop his players the right way. Marotti has been an integral part of Meyer's player leadership council, and a close friend and advisor to the coach. In 2013, both opened up to cleveland.com about their relationship, and how Marotti can at times provide the same kind of mental stability for Meyer that he does for players.<sup>25</sup>

Landis' article illustrated the importance of the relationship between a head coach and a strength coach, using Meyer and Mariotti as examples. Where the head coaches and strength coaches work well together, the players enjoy the benefits and teams are more successful. But what happens when head coaches and strength coaches aren't on the same page?

While I was a student athlete I witnessed this conflict. Strength coaches are assigned to a few different varsity teams. This means that throughout the day they have teams coming in to train with them at different times to lift and condition. They keep track of all the different training schedule via a master schedule. It's very complicated to try to schedule training for two to three teams and to plan it so all the players are able to attend/not miss class. I had a head coach who would cancel our lifts and not inform our strength coach. The head coach told us to lift at times when it was convenient for him without confirming with the strength coach. There were times in college when I'd walk into the weight room and our strength coach was training another team. As you can imagine, this

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<sup>25</sup>Landis, Bill.

created a complicated situation for everyone. Sadly coaches pretty much have to deal with behavior like this regardless of how they feel about it? Strength coach's jobs' depend on how satisfied their head coaches are with them.

If and when head coaches are unhappy with strength coaches, things can get switched around in ways that benefit the head coaches. I remember one instance when one of my coaches came into the weight room and got upset because he didn't see anyone on the team lifting 200 pounds. He insinuated how pathetic our lifting was and insisted that we needed to just throw 200 pounds on the bar and "fucking lift it." Our strength coach was completely undermined in this situation and when it comes to heavy lifting, it's vital to work your way up to avoid injury. I have had more than one coach would take over running our conditioning workouts and essentially dismissing our strength coach (who was only there to help us!). I've had head coaches who've demanded their strength coaches punish us and run us into the ground, even when strength coaches disagree. Strength coaches do it, because else are they supposed to do? This is just another example of head coaches in the NCAA having too much power. For anything to change, the culture surrounding head coaches needs to change.

## **6.2 The Weight Room Culture**

College strength training typically involves pushing student athletes as hard as they can. While this can be a great thing when it is done safely, it sometimes gets to the point of being unsafe and unnecessary.

There was only one time during my college career when I felt physically unsafe in the weight room, and it was during the beginning of my sophomore year. Could it have

been to my lack of experience? Maybe. During the time I remember having a gut feeling that I should stop going up in weight, but when a strength coach tells a player to do something and the player insists that they physically can't, they are considered weak or unwilling to get better. As athletes, we put pressure on ourselves during training only because we want to do the best we can and do what is asked of us, regardless of how absurd the task may be. That's how I broke my hand during the preseason of my sophomore year.

As preseason was starting, I was one of the most physically fit people on my team. I pushed myself hard during summer training and during my time home I spent practically every day running, lifting or doing basketball skill work. After being a sixth/seventh man my freshman year and playing behind a starting five of skilled upperclassmen, my role was to go in and give them a break when they needed time to rest at the end of each quarter. I understood my role and I did it well, I was pretty much one of the only other people on the team who played besides the starting five. During my sophomore year, four starting spots were open, including my position. I was determined to take this spot and become the high impact player and scorer that I was recruited to be. When I got back to campus my coaches noticed changes in my body right away and noticed that I had stepped my game up. I was blowing people out of the water in conditioning. In the weight room I was more equipped to push myself with the level of confidence that I had gained from the summer.

One early morning we headed to lift right after practice. It was Friday, meaning that most of us were tired from the intensity of our workouts from the week. We came out of a really tough, three-hour-practice and headed right into the weight room I remember my teammates and I were praying that we had a light lift because we were all exhausted from the practice we just had. I distinctly remember the faces of my teammates when our



trainer told us that we were doing a max-out lift that day. A max out lift means that we do three main exercises with lower reps, but we then push the weight as high as we possibly can and do as many one rep-maxes as we can. This means that if I just benched a hundred pounds and I performed the rep successfully, I then add on ten pounds, and do another rep. If I completed that rep successfully, I then add ten more pounds until I fail the rep.

I had done well on my first two main exercises. The last exercise of the day was hang-cleans. A hang-clean is an exercise when you bend down into a squat like position, grab hold of a weighted bar, and pull the bar up in the air from the floor to your chin. Once the bar reaches your chin, you must jump slightly and adjust your body so you are under the bar. Then, you catch the bar on your shoulders. I was actually pretty good at hang-cleans and I was confident going into it that I would do well.

I remember stepping up to the plate and getting the first two reps at a high weight, a weight that I hadn't lifted before. I knew that I was getting close to the end when I did a third rep and barley got the bar on my shoulders. My strength coach was in front of me coaching me through my fatigue and exhaustion from the morning and I remember him giving me the go to add weight and do another rep. I remember being shocked that he instructed me to try more, I was certain that he was going to instruct me to stop, but he didn't. A red flag went off in my head and I started to get nervous as my teammates added weight onto bar for me. I didn't let this show. Instead, I gave myself a mental pep talk before stepping up to the bar again.

Feeling shaky, I picked up the bar and I actually cleared it under my chin, which was exactly what I was supposed to do, but my hands were sweaty and my arms felt like noodles. Everything happened really fast, but before I knew it, one of my sweaty hands

slipped off the bar and I no longer had control over the weight I had pulled up into the air. I tried to step away from the bar as my strength coaches always instructed us to do if something like this happens, but due to my fatigue I wasn't quick enough and the bar slammed down on my hand, sandwiching it between the bar and my left knee.

Like I said, it happened so fast. When the bar was back on the ground my strength coach looked alarmed and asked if I was all right. I wasn't. I felt all the blood in my body start to rush and I was overcome with nausea. Silently, I placed my left hand to the side of my body behind my back so I couldn't see it and walked out of the weight room into the training room. When my trainer asked me what was up, I picked up my hand and put it in front of me. The impact from the bar hit my hand so hard that my fingers looked out of place and there was a giant egg in the middle of my hand reflecting to the opposite underneath my middle and pointer finger.

"I think I broke my hand." When I finally looked down at what I knew to be my left hand, I didn't even recognize what I was looking at. My trainer ran to the phone, called the hospital, and put a bag over my hand so I didn't have to look at its dysmorphia. After my adrenaline wore off, the pain began. I started to ball my eyes out, not just because of the pain, but because of the unpredictable timeline ahead. I was out for two months.

As I articulated before, I have always felt very safe under the supervision of the strength coaches that I worked with and besides that incident, I can't remember another time where I was afraid to do something. My strength coaches had my back and always insisted that they would never put a challenge in front of us that we couldn't tackle. That gave me great self-fulfillment and confidence. As I progressed throughout my college career, I looked forward to the time spent in the weight room with my amazing strength

coaches. However, there have been instances of college athletes training in unsafe conditions.

Jordan McNair was a football player at the University of Maryland. He was a strong and talented offensive lineman. One day, his football team was doing field training. His field training included different repetitions of sprints across the football field. During his training session, Jordan started showing signs of exhaustion and heat stroke. His trainers moved him inside for treatment after his symptoms started, and ultimately waited too long before calling 911. Jordan McNair died two weeks later as a result of heat stroke and exhaustion from his college football training. Following Jordan's death, journalists Talia Richman and Doug Donovan investigated the University of Maryland athletic department. Their report noted that during an investigation of an athletic department, athletes rarely speak out due to fear of future backlash by their head coaches.

### **6.3 Nowhere To Turn**

Months after the investigation was opened in the Maryland athletic department, the Baltimore Sun published an article titled "*Death of Jordan McNair: Why did so few Maryland football players talk to investigator?*" by Talia Richman and Doug Donovan. The article questions why so few of the Maryland men's football players who were there on the day of McNair's death chose to meet with an investigator after the death of their teammate. The national public scrutiny that followed this story was focused on how strength coaches were to blame/There is something that is worth shedding light on following the tragic death of this college athlete, but it's not the strength coaches. It's the backlash that athletes face from their coaches when any sort of investigation takes place.

Richman and Donovan explore why so many of these guys didn't talk to an investigator and why so many other athletes don't talk to investigators in situations like this one.

Richman and Donovan open up their article discussing why some parents and wonder whether more players might have come forward and spoken to an investigator if they didn't fear the backlash from coaches or administrators within the athletic department. I say yes, absolutely.

According to the Baltimore Sun article, the investigation of McNair's death started with a "sign-up sheet hanging in the Gossett Football Team House where the young male athletes could sign their names and then be accompanied by their assistant athletic director to meet with the investigator. This meant that the process initially did not allow players to come forward anonymously to describe what they saw during McNair's final practice. Richman and Donovan cite in their article that "while the names or identify of the six players who spoke were not made public in the final report, there was no private tip line or email set up for students to reach out to the investigator."<sup>26</sup> However, once the process became anonymous, things changed. As the article progresses, the Richman and Donovan reiterate the findings of the investigation: "the Walters group conducted more than 50 interviews during the review process. The university said it received feedback on the initial sign-up, and arranged for players to have a second opportunity to talk with Walters away from the athletics facility."<sup>27</sup> The two journalist continue to report in their article that "the university set up a commission to look into the 'culture' of the football team, which some

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<sup>26</sup> Richman, Talia, and Donovan, Doug. "Death of Jordan McNair: Why Did so Few Maryland Football Players Talk to Investigator?" The Baltimore Sun. Accessed March 04, 2019. <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/investigations/bs-md-umd-athlete-interviews-20181003-story.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Richman and Donovan

media reports have described as toxic, but it is not charged with looking into McNair's death."<sup>28</sup>

Initially, only six men on the football team felt comfortable enough to speak with an investigator in a case concerning the fact that their teammate died. Only six players! Once the interviews with an investigator were available away from athletic campus, more than fifty interviews took place. This part of the article alone shows that student-athletes are under so much power by their head coaches that they're afraid to talk to investigators on an athletic campus due to fear of backlash of their head coaches. You may think that I'm exaggerating, but my point is backed up time and time again throughout the rest of the article.

Parents of student athletes made it very clear when weighing in on the situation, and even asked not to be named because out of fear retaliation against their sons. "Any coaching staff could walk by and see the list"<sup>29</sup> Richman and Donovan write. The authors then discuss how the parents feel this would ultimately affect their children: "The boys that came out have nothing to gain and everything to lose."<sup>30</sup>

Richman and Donovan then explore another side of the investigation from a mental health perspective: "A psychologist who works with professional and college football teams said it's not surprising that so few students spoke out and says there is an unwritten rule that athletes shouldn't talk to outsiders about issues that could 'hurt your own.'"<sup>31</sup> Richman and Donovan's article continues by talking about the unrealistic expectations a

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<sup>28</sup> Richman and Donovan

<sup>29</sup> Richman and Donovan

<sup>30</sup> Richman and Donovan

<sup>31</sup> Richman and Donovan

sign-up sheet poses to student athletes. “Posting a sign-up sheet to solicit interview subjects would ‘impact the fairness of the investigation’ as it would likely intimidate players.”<sup>32</sup>

Richman and Donovan have shown through two outside sources, (parents and psychologists) that when athletes speak to anyone outside of their team, they only end up hurt. From my experience, this prevents student-athletes from speaking out at all due to the fear of consequence from their head coaches. Richman and Donovan’s article even goes on to describe reports the players made during the workout that ultimately ended up killing Jordan McNair: “The athletes reported an athletic trainer yelling across the field at McNair to ‘get him the f---k up!’ and told his teammates to ‘drag his a— across the field’ after McNair struggled to finish a conditioning drill, which he couldn’t complete on his own, the report said. One player said McNair was walked back to drills after displaying signs of illness, now known to be the precursors to his fatal heatstroke.”<sup>33</sup>

Essentially that article explains the culture of intimidation surrounding head coaches in athletic programs. To put things into perspective, there are more than 100 players listed on the Maryland football team roster and initially only six guys went to talk with an investigator. This situation is one of the most extreme cases that I have ever heard of: a student athlete died and players were still worried to speak out against coaches and programs even when there was proof that the staff was to blame. The bottom line here is that players don’t have anywhere to turn in situations like this. They’re damned if they do, and damned if they don’t. Players know it, parents know it, and coaches know it and even the NCAA knows it, because they let it happen time and time again. The fear of

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<sup>32</sup> Richman and Donovan

<sup>33</sup> Richman and Donovan

intimidation and backlash that players would receive if their coaches found out they went to the administration or to an investigator would ultimately affect them in a negative way. The NCAA doesn't care about the mental health of student athletes and doesn't put them in a position to be successful in situations like this. I can speak from experience from numerous situations throughout my athletic career that the NCAA doesn't give athletes any sort of outlet to turn to in situations of distress without the fear of backlash and resentment from head coaches. By title, head coaches hold a position of immense power when athletes speak out against behavior they think is wrong and many players just keep their mouths shut and have nowhere to turn in these situations.

#### **6.4 Head Coaches**

It's overwhelming for me to try to put into words what exactly goes through my brain when I hear the word head coach. I have had three very different head coaches in my five years as a college athlete, the head coach that I wrote about throughout this paper was the first one that I had coming into college. He was the head coach that ultimately changed the way I felt about basketball for the rest of my life. Looking back on it now as a fifth year senior as a strong, determined, outspoken woman, it's hard for me to reflect on the emotional abuse and the mental games that my teammates and I became routine to during my first two years as a college athlete.

My first impression of my head coach was a positive one. I remember seeing him at many of my basketball tournaments as he recruited me in high school. He was a small, white haired old man that had a pep in his step and seemed very warm and caring. He offered me a scholarship and although the school he coached for was in fact a Division I,

it was a low major Division I, and the lowest of my scholarship offers by a lot. Overtime I narrowed my choices down and ultimately ended up choosing his program. The reason I chose his program even though it was at the bottom of the list competitive wise is because I thought I would be the happiest there. I thought I would get more playing time. I would be in a school in New York City away from rural Vermont, and I really thought I cliqued with the coaching staff when I was being recruited.

It took a week for me to realize that I had made the wrong choice. Once I grew to know the girls on my team, it was clear that many of them were in a deep depression and extremely unhappy due to the toxic coaching environment some of them were three-four years into. Overtime, I began to learn why they were so unhappy, and I became unhappy too.

I think a lot of my memory from those two years of college are blacked out in my brain and trying to reflect upon the horrible place that I was in during that time is difficult. It's difficult for me to pinpoint exactly what my coach was doing that was so demoralizing, but at the end of the day I would have to say that he was obsessed with the position of power that he was in, and he wanted to have control of everything. He wanted to know everything that was going on and he felt that he had to have a say in every part of our lives as players. Having zero privacy and questioning every decision we made caused tremendous anxiety, I really mean it when I say that we had to walk, talk, and act in a way that my coach liked or else there was a big problem. The smallest things my head coach did even leading up to the bigger things that he did created a horrible environment of intimidation and a toxic team culture.



## 6.5 Meetings

I could easily say that the times as a college athlete where I have felt the lowest came after some of the meetings I had with my head coach. Every player can attest to this in some shape or form. I remember leaving meetings with my first head coach feeling hopeless, demoralized, dejected, and taken advantage of. It's hard to put into words what exactly happened during those meetings, but in my experience that was when most the emotional abuse that I've been through, and many of my teammates have been through, took place. To this day whenever I sit down in a coach's office and the door shuts, a feeling of anxiety comes. I get a hole in the pit of my stomach and I start to sweat. This is because of the meetings I had early on with my initial head coach.

The conversations started off as my head coach getting to know me. He'd ask about how I was doing in school, if I liked any of my teachers, how I liked the city. At first I believed that my head coach was really trying to get to know me and build trust so that this could translate onto the court, but somewhere along the way he overstepped, as he did with everyone.

The conversations started to go south. He'd ask me about my teammates and wanted me to talk negatively about them. He'd want every single detail of what I did the following weekend when we had time off from practice. He ask if I was in a relationship, and insisted he needed to know, and say that it was all for the foundation of our relationship to help me on the basketball court. He'd ask me if other girls on my team were in relationships, and if so who they were with.

One of the things I will never forget about my head coach was his presence on social media. He was friends with all of us on Facebook, and from what it seemed like to me, every time that there was a photo of us posted he was the first to see it. I started to worry about every single photo I had on Facebook back to when I was a freshman in high school out of fear there would be something on there that he didn't like or could use against me. I would walk into his office on Monday mornings and on his screensaver there would be photos of us that he'd save from Facebook to be the background of his laptop. There would be photos of us all in bikinis, selfies, and random photos from the past of us that would be on there. I remember how uncomfortable I was seeing a photo of myself in a bikini on my coach's screensaver. One day he found a photo of my boyfriend and I that was posted from an account that I didn't even know was on the internet and somehow he saw it before I did. I remember him asking me "who is this?" with a weird, interrogating look on his face. I tried to keep this a secret from him because my boyfriend was African American.

It was an unspoken rule on my team that you better not tell my head coach that you have a black boyfriend, because he'd look down upon you for dating a person of color. The first time that I heard this I was disgusted. He would "joke" around with us and say that they couldn't recruit black players because odds are, he wouldn't offer them a scholarship. I lived in a constant anxiety of trying to fit the unattainable perfect young woman that he expected all of us to act like. The perfectionism that he expected of all of us was unattainable.

My head coach started to comment on the clothes I wore, the color of my hair, and my weight. He would bring up old photos of me and talk about how I used to look. He

even had the nerve to comment on the guy that I was dating. Every time I went into his office I felt awkward and uncomfortable. Every single day I had to be the person that my coach wanted me to be, instead of the person I was. He expected every girl on my team to have the same bubbly, happy, attention-giving personality that basically kissed his ass and bowed down to him every chance we got, despite the abuse and negligence that we were facing every day. If we didn't fit this standard mold, we had an "attitude problem" or "didn't care about building a relationship with him" or "weren't respectful." If something went on in our meeting that day that he didn't like, he would bring it up before practice in front of the team. Practically every day before we started practice my head coach would go on a rant about someone that came into the office that day and he would talk about what he didn't like about them. Even worse, he would never say who he was talking about which left us all in a state of anxiety and very distracted before practice began. I came to college to play basketball, and it seemed that every day that was the last thing that I had to worry about. I never knew where I stood with my head coach on any given day. During times where I felt something was wrong, I'd try to go to him to work things out only to be shut down and told that I was the problem, not him. To this day, I don't think my head coach understands the impact that his mental games had on his players. These meetings have affected every meeting I've had as a young adult since.

There was a point that every day that I met with my head coach I would leave feeling exhausted to the point where I would get back to my dorm room and cry. I felt like I wasn't good enough and the standard that I constantly was expected to live up to wasn't attainable. My head coach made every single thing that any of us did personal and he created an environment of intimidation that translated onto the basketball court.

Imagine having an authority figure treating you like this in your free time during the day and still being expected to perform at your best athletically? There was a time where things were so bad with my team because of things happening off the court with my coaches that we couldn't get anything done at practice because nobody could focus on anything. This, of course, was also our fault. We were told how disappointing it was that we refused to "buy in" to team expectations and that our behavior was selfish. I look back on this and sometimes I don't know how I made it through a practice without having a breakdown. The abusive relationship and the culture of intimidation surrounding my head coach affected me not only on the basketball court, but it also affected my academics, my personal life, and my social life.

There have been so many times throughout my college career when my teammates have come out of meetings with my head coaches sobbing and in a manic state, and it then became a he-said she-said ordeal of the conversation that took place. A lot can happen behind a closed door and coaches are always given the benefit of the doubt regardless of what any player said happened during those meetings. Often the problem was not only the conversation that took place, but the feeling of demoralization and disrespect that players get from their head coaches. The only reason players should ever go to their head coaches is to improve in some sort of way and more often than not, players come out of meetings feeling more frustrated and upset than they did going into them. This is because of the position of power that head coaches are in. They have too much power over athletes and often aren't held accountable for these conversations behind closed doors. When we have a gut wrenching meeting with our coach, there is nobody to go to except our teammates. Our teammates are the only people who can understand what these meetings are like.

## 6.6 Assistant Coaches

You might be wondering how head coaches can get away with treating players the way they do when there are numerous other assistant coaches working with them. Assistant coaches play a part in the way that head coaches treat players and regardless of the situation, assistant coaches usually condone the behavior of head coaches, regardless of how terrible that behavior may be. From what I've seen, their job depends on it.

During my freshman and sophomore year I had three female assistant coaches. To this day one the biggest disappoints of my coaching staff in New York City was not only how utterly inexcusable my head coach acted, but also the fact that there were three females under him who supported the way he treated young woman. They turned their head and ignored all of the behavior that was going on. There is absolutely no privacy when players go to assistant coaches for anything. If we approach to an assistant coach with hopes of confiding in them for something, whatever we say will get circulated back through the coaching staff right up to the head coach.

From my first day as a college athlete to my last, this has been the case with every assistant coach that I've worked with. When things are brought to the table about how head coaches were acting, the assistant coaches insist they had no idea what was happening. They sometimes even insist that if they did that "they would have done something" to help players. I have never believed that for a moment in my life, because if assistant coaches speak up or call head coaches out on their abusive or bad behavior, head coaches will simply fire them. There is a lot of turnover with coaching staffs in college basketball. If a

head coach discovered that their assistant coach has gone against their word or speaks out against the way they want to run things, an assistant can be easily replaced. I've seen head coaches and head assistant coaches treat coaches below them like absolute trash, and more often than not assistant coaches soak it, or go to work at other programs when the opportunity arises. This is just another example of how the NCAA gives head coaches too much power.

### **6.7 The Turnover**

As I mentioned, in situations when head coaches are not happy at a program, they are free to leave. Normally this happens when their contract is up so they can leave with a big paycheck. But from my experience, head coaches can pretty much treat players however they want and no matter how horrible they treat them their behavior often gets swept under the rug. When these situations arise, coaches leave a program but get thrown right back into the pool of coaches available to be hired at the hundreds and hundreds of schools across the country that aren't happy with their coaching staff. Even when administrations take initiative of investigating coaches and looking out how bad their behavior was, schools end up making deals with coaches so that everyone comes out looking as good as possible.

Another thing that many people don't understand is that the basketball world is small. When things happen at programs, it is only a matter of time before other coaches and players find out about it. I've heard rumors of coaching sleeping with their players, and putting put their hands on players. Yet they still end up getting coaching jobs at other schools or staying at the school where the instance happened. Regardless of how a head

coach treats a player and the findings that come out within the athletic program, colleges usually find a way to cover it up, pay the coach off so that he's no longer affiliated with the program, and let them back into the mix of other college coaches. That coach is then recycled back into the pool of coaches and eventually finds a home at another school where they build their coaching career up all over again. Usually the coach will get busted for treating his players badly and will be in the headlines, but then time will pass, and people forget. But hey, at least he's no longer at *your* program treating *your* athletes badly, it's someone else's problem now!

The NCAA lets coaches jump from school to school whenever they please while players legally have to sit out a year when they switch programs, and more often than not coaches aren't held accountable for their actions. As I have reiterated, the NCAA rules work in a way that support coaches, and not the student-athletes.

## **CHAPTER 7: THE TRANSFER RULES**

### **7.1 Coaches Can, Players Can't**

Another critique I have of the NCAA is the fact that head coaches can jump from whatever school they please regardless of the reason, but when players want to transfer or leave schools they are permitted by the NCAA to take what is called a “redshirt” year. A redshirt year means that when a player transfers from one Division I program to another Division I program, they must sit out from competition and aren't legally eligible to play in games or travel with their team for an entire season. From my research and experience, I believe the NCAA puts this rule in place is to prevent players from jumping from program to program. This is by far the weakest excuse I have heard from the NCAA. If a student athlete is happy at their school, why would they want to leave? I assure you that even at big programs, if a student athlete is having the time of their life playing the college sport like the NCAA wants, they aren't going to leave schools constantly just for the hell of it. More often than not, athletes that want to transfer are doing so as a last possible resort. Athletes are trying to get themselves out of a toxic situation and the NCAA has a transfer rule in place that makes it very difficult for athletes to do this. The transfer terms are as follows:

If you play at a Division I school, you have five-calendar years in which to play four seasons of competition. Your five-year clock starts when you enroll as a full-time student at any college. Thereafter, your clock continues, even if you spend an academic year in residence as a result of transferring; decide to redshirt, if you do not attend school or even if you go part-time during your college career. There are legislated exceptions to this rule, meaning that you may be eligible to play right away and certain regulations may not apply to you. The school to which you are



transferring determines whether you are eligible and has the authority to apply exceptions.<sup>34</sup>

The one-time transfer exception reads:

If you transfer from a four-year school, you may be immediately eligible to compete at your new school if you meet ALL the following conditions: One, you are transferring to a Division II or III school, or you are transferring to a Division I school in any sport other than baseball, men's or women's basketball, football (Football Bowl Subdivision) or men's ice hockey. If you are transferring to a Division I school for any of the previously-listed sports, you may be eligible to compete immediately if you were not recruited by your original school and you have never received an athletics scholarship. Two, you are academically and athletically eligible at your previous four-year school. Three, you receive a transfer-release agreement from your previous four-year school. Another way that athletes may be eligible to play is if they get a waiver. A waiver is regulated if an action that sets aside an NCAA rule because a specific, extraordinary circumstance prevents you from meeting the rule. An NCAA school may file a waiver on your behalf; you cannot file a waiver for yourself. The school does not administer the waiver, the conference office or NCAA does.<sup>35</sup>

In reality, getting a waiver from the NCAA is a long, difficult, and complicated process. This process typically starts with a player requesting a waiver that is then sent to the NCAA for process. College basketball analyst Andy Katz describes the NCAA's process around waivers in his article *College basketball transfers: What you need to know about the transfer process*. He writes: "To allow competition immediately after transfer between two four-year schools, there must be mitigating circumstances outside a student-athlete's control"<sup>36</sup> Academic records are considered as part of waiver requests to increase the chances of a seamless academic transition. The previous school's stance on the transfer also is considered. When medical issues are referenced in a waiver request, NCAA staff

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<sup>34</sup> "Transfer Terms," National Collegiate Athletic Association, Accessed March 4, 2019. <http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/current/transfer-terms>.

<sup>35</sup> "Transfer Terms."

<sup>36</sup> "College basketball transfers: What you need to know about the transfer process." National Collegiate Athletic Association. Accessed March 4, 2019. <http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/current/transfer-terms>.

members rely on documentation provided by the school, which often includes opinions from relevant subject-matter experts.”<sup>37</sup> This time it takes to get an answer from the NCAA after sending in the waiver is what makes this process so long and complicated. Katz then takes us through the process of waiver submissions explaining: “Once a waiver is submitted, NCAA staff members review each waiver request independently, with a focus on what is best for the student-athlete.”<sup>38</sup> Katz continues to explain how why waivers exist: “The reasons given for the waiver requests vary quite a bit, coaching changes, injury or illness, environment, mental health and financial issues are some common categories. Within each of these categories, NCAA member schools have adopted guidelines that help NCAA staff make the right decision.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Katz says that this process is different for every student athlete: “It’s critical to understand that no two waivers are created equal. NONE. And don’t expect the NCAA staff or the school to divulge the reasons. These are kept private in accordance with federal student privacy laws. If the student-athlete wants to divulge the reason, then that’s up to him or her.”<sup>40</sup>

Katz makes it a point to say that the NCAA claims “there is no intent to “punish the players, but rather ensure they are best positioned to succeed both on and off the court,”<sup>41</sup> But the NCAA makes this process so long and difficult that athletes hardly consider even trying to go through it. The statistics that Katz presents in his article display this: “In the 2017-18 season, there were 5,537 athletes playing Division I men’s basketball, 689 of them transferred. Of that number, 331 left for another Division I program. And there

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<sup>37</sup>"College basketball transfers: What you need to know about the transfer process."

<sup>38</sup>"College basketball transfers: What you need to know about the transfer process."

<sup>39</sup>"College basketball transfers: What you need to know about the transfer process."

<sup>40</sup>"College basketball transfers: What you need to know about the transfer process."

<sup>41</sup>"College basketball transfers: What you need to know about the transfer process."

were only 32 request for waivers submitted.”<sup>42</sup> Even if an athlete applies for a waiver, there is no guarantee that they will receive one regardless of how long the NCAA takes to review your waiver case. I can attest to how difficult it is to get a waiver because I considered trying to get one when I transferred after my sophomore year. Once I saw how complicated the process was, I changed my mind. Although the NCAA claims that the success of their student-athlete success is their primary goal, the details of the rules shows otherwise. Getting a waiver is a difficult process and doesn’t give any security to athletes who want to transfer, ultimately proving that the NCAA rules aren’t formatted in a way that benefits the well-being of athletes.

## **7.2 Getting the Release**

The process of transferring was one of the most stressful processes that I endured during my college career. The rules that the NCAA has in place when athletes want to transfer make this process difficult and for me it seemed practically impossible at times. I understood that after the first month on campus at my initial college that I wanted to transfer, and it wasn’t until the end of my sophomore season that I felt I had the best opportunity to do so. Even when I did, I was doubtful that things would improve for me at the next school. At the time I wanted to transfer, the rules were a huge gamble. The reason that transferring is such a gamble for athletes is because they are required to be granted a release by their given University which gives them permission to contact other coaches at other programs. This means that athletes have to burn a bridge with their coaching staff with absolutely no guarantee of being picked up by another school. We aren’t allowed to have any form of communication with other coaches before getting our release. If we do

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<sup>42</sup>“College basketball transfers: What you need to know about the transfer process.”

contact other coaches, the NCAA has consequences in place for breaking their rules. Their release gives players “permission to contact” other coaches which is how players find another school to go to.

The NCAA writes the permission to contact rule is as follows:

If you are enrolled full time in a four-year school, athletics staff members from an NCAA school cannot contact you or your parents unless they first have a letter from your current athletics director (or athletics administrator designated by the athletics director). If your current school does not grant you written permission-to-contact, the new school cannot encourage you to transfer and — in Divisions I and II — cannot give you an athletics scholarship until you have attended the new school for one academic year. If you are transferring from a school that is not a member of the NCAA, you do not need a permission-to-contact letter.<sup>43</sup>

This rule often prevents many athletes from transferring out of fear that if they get a release and tell their head coach that they want to leave, they’re afraid that they won’t get picked up by another school and they will not be able to complete the transfer process. This would mean that a student couldn’t return back to the school they wanted to leave because their coaching staff would know that they wanted to transfer, which ultimately would diminish their reputation. If they were not picked up by another school, they are basically done being an athlete. And the real kicker is if their head coach really doesn’t want to give them a release for whatever reason, they legally don’t have to. Student athletes should not be penalized and forced to sit out a year for wanting to get out of a toxic situation or leave an environment that they aren’t flourishing in. The NCAA doesn’t allow athletes to do this, and a lot of times student athletes stay in toxic programs because they don’t want to deal with the process of transferring and having to sit out.

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<sup>43</sup>“College basketball transfers: What you need to know about the transfer process.”

When I wanted to transfer, the permission-to-contact rule was one of the most challenging aspects in the process of trying to find another school to attend. Thankfully there has been some legislation on this rule recently that allows players to contact coaches at other programs before getting a release from their coaches. My guess here is that players who were transferring were already breaking this rule, and the NCAA came to the conclusion that changing it would be in the best interest for everyone. The NCAA says the following about the updated transfer rules:

Division I student-athletes will have the ability to transfer to a different school and receive a scholarship without asking their current school for permission. The Division I Council adopted a proposal this week that creates a new “notification-of-transfer” model. This new system allows a student to inform his or her current school of a desire to transfer, then requires that school to enter the student’s name into a national transfer database within two business days. Once the student-athlete’s name is in the database, other coaches are free to contact that individual. The previous transfer rule, which required student-athletes to get permission from their current school to contact another school before they can receive a scholarship after transfer, was intended to discourage coaches from recruiting student-athletes from other Division I schools. The rule change ends the controversial practice in which some coaches or administrators would prevent students from having contact with specific schools. Conferences, however, still can make rules that are more restrictive than the national rule.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “New transfer rule eliminates permission-to-contact process” The National Collegiate Athletic Association. Accessed March 19, 2019. <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/news/new-transfer-rule-eliminates-permission-contact-process>.

While there have been steps made in the right direction with the amending of the permission-to-contact rule, the NCAA still allows conferences to make the transfer process more difficult for athletes if they please: “Additionally, the proposal adds tampering with a current student-athlete at another school to the list of potential Level 2 violations, considered a significant breach of conduct,” states the NCAA. This rule will without a doubt create more flexibility for student athletes, and hopefully cleans up the process more when athletes wish to transfer.

### **7.3 A Bright Day in May**

I still remember the night before I went to my coach’s office to get my release. I probably only slept for about an hour that night. I hadn’t told anyone on my team that I was planning on transferring because I didn’t want my coaches to find out. The only people who knew were my family and a few of my high school coaches who I knew would help me once I got my permission-to-contact release. I remember the day like it was yesterday: It was a bright day in May and I had just finished my statistics class that I was taking for an intersession at the end of May. I had a hole in my stomach that entire day and dreaded facing my head coach that afternoon.

The day before I had gone through the steps with my Mom on Facetime and I had planned out everything that I had to say to my head coach in order to get my release. I was in fact threading together a lie to tell my head coach whatever he needed to hear to grant me my release, because if I had gone into his office and told him all of the real reasons why I wanted to transfer, there was no way in hell he would have granted me my release.

The anxiety of sitting in my coach's office alone was already horrible as it was, and knowing I had to do this only made my anxiety worse. I remember walking in and pretending like everything was normal. I had come off a successful sophomore season where I had started playing almost every game. I had become an important piece of the puzzle that I had worked so hard for. That fact made my coach's abuse and mental game easier on me as I had more breathing room than most people.

I sat down. My head coach was sitting there scrolling through Facebook as he always was, and was barely acknowledging me and was waiting for me to say something to deserve his attention. The coach barley asked me how I was until I got up and shut the door abruptly and sat down again, demanding his attention. It was only then that he turned away from his computer and gave me the eye contact that I worked so hard to avoid for the past two years. Every part of me wanted to scream at the top of my lungs in his face and tell him how horrible of a coach he was and how I deserved so much better than what I had gotten.

“So Cass, how are things going?” he asked.

There were so many thoughts I had leading up to this moment. Even though I promised my parents that I would go to my coach and lie in order to get what I need to put an end to what I was going through, I wanted nothing more than to find a way to make my head coach feel all of the horrible pain and regret that I had felt during my two years under him. But the fact of the matter is, this man was a lonely, abusive, bully with no sense of reality. Regardless if I went in there and swore at him and demeaned him as he did to me so many times, it wasn't going to change the fact that he was abusive or had just been my excuse of a college coach for two years of my life. My trying to sink down to his ugliness

was not going to make me any prettier. No matter how I tried to lay it out from him, he wouldn't have the capacity to understand the abusive impact he had had on my life. The fact of the matter was this guy was ultimately the one who was going to grant me a release or not. I needed something from him in that moment, so the fact of the matter was that personally attacking him probably wasn't going to help my case.

“I want a release to transfer” I said.

My head coach looked at me as if he had just seen a ghost, and was suddenly slurring and couldn't put words together because apparently he was so shocked that I wanted to leave.

“You want, you want-, to, to leave?”

“This isn't the right place for me and I just think that it would be better if I went somewhere else” I had to force the words out of my mouth.

I had just spoken the words that I had rehearsed in my head so many times, and at this point I was basically giving my head coach the “it's not you, it's me” talk.

“Well I thought that you were really flourishing here, and it would hurt me to know that something I had done would somehow have an effect on your departure, I will get you your release.”

I know I mentioned before that I was holding my tongue, but at this point I couldn't stop myself from letting out a laugh. He went on his computer, printed a release, and went to the printer to pick it up. When he was gone, I felt a sense of relaxation come over me. He came back in and handed it to me, and I was on my way. I like to think walking out of the doors of that school for the last time gave me a similar feeling to someone who has just walked out of prison. I never had to go back. I called my Mom and told her that everything



went as planned. Even though I didn't know where I was going or what was next, I was happy, content, and ready to take on the world.

The spring of my sophomore year after I got my release, it prompted another girl on my team to do the same thing, and another girl, and later, another. Three of the other girls in my class had decided that they weren't coming back the following year.. There were five people in my class at the beginning of my freshman year, and after my sophomore season, only one was left.

I had to lie in order to get my release from my head coach the year that I chose to leave, and thankfully I got it. Many athletes have to lie during this process, and the reason they lie is because if they don't get a release, this process becomes way more difficult. All of the abusive behavior that was happening within the basketball program at my old school had to get pushed to the side in order for me to get what I needed to leave. But thankfully, I left and never looked back. I ended up finding a home at the University of Vermont a few weeks later. During my transfer process I faced many moments of difficulty and self-doubt. I always had that voice in the back of my head saying I wouldn't get my release. The NCAA needs to adjust the rules around obtaining a release. The transfer rules that are in place now do not benefit student athletes, but of course they benefit coaches, schools, administrations, and the NCAA.

#### **7.4 Redshirting**

If everything goes smoothly when an athlete obtains a release, they then and to contact coaches. Once an athlete has the release, the timeline they have to contact schools in the midst of a busy recruiting periods is small and hectic. In my experience, coaches

look at players' film and then considers offering a scholarship based on what they see on the film. Players need to find another school as quickly as possible and many athletes do this without even visiting the colleges they commit to. Once a player commits to a school, they then have to go through what I described earlier as the 'redshirt year'. The NCAA rules for transferring are written as follows by the NCAA:

Under the basic transfer regulations, you must spend an academic year in residence at the school to which you are transferring. If you transfer from a four-year college to an NCAA school, you must complete one academic year in residence at the new school before you can play for or receive travel expenses from the new school, unless you qualify for a transfer exception or waiver. To satisfy an academic year in residence, you must be enrolled in and successfully complete a full-time program of studies for two-full semesters or three-full quarters. Summer school terms and part-time enrollment do not count toward fulfilling an academic year in residence.<sup>45</sup>

I redshirted my junior year. When I got to the University of Vermont and started with my new team, I felt at home. I was out of the toxic environment I had been in for the past two years and I felt like a new person. I was ready to take on the challenge in my new home for the next three years.

I got into the routine of lifting and practicing through the different seasons! However, there were times throughout my redshirt year that I felt separated and isolated from my team because of the NCAA rules. As a redshirt, athletes can pretty much do everything with their team except suit up and play in a game and travel. This might not seem too bad, but a lot can happen during away trips.

Typically when athletes travel to an away game, we leave the night before and come home the day after a game. When my team was away, I would stay home and workout with my trainer and spend a lot of time in the gym alone. I was the only redshirt on my

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<sup>45</sup> "College basketball transfers: What you need to know about the transfer process."

team, which meant that whenever my team traveled, I stayed home. This process wasn't totally horrible all the time, but I often felt like I missed a ton of important team conversations that would happen. I missed the in game action, the time outs, the coaching comments and feedback. I also missed the pre-game speeches and post-game talks.

Whenever I tried asking one of my teammates about the conversations that took place, they'd give me big picture. Asking teammates to go through every detail that I missed would have been a pain for them and my missing out on the information often resulted in my feeling out of the loop when my team would return from traveling.

Aside from the fact that I wasn't traveling with my teammates, as a redshirt I had to sit on the sideline in street clothes while the rest of my team stepped on the floor to compete. As an athlete, everything we do and all of the work we put in is for stepping into the sidelines and competing. I was skeptical about how much this would weigh on me leading up to the in-season games, but the first couple months where I had to sit on the bench and watch my team play and not being able to play myself was gut wrenching. There were times that I felt helpless when my team was in tough games and needed help to win, and there was nothing I could do but sit there and watch. Overtime I got used to sitting out and it didn't bother me so much, but there were times when it felt like I wouldn't ever be on the court. I made the most out of my redshirt year by cheering on my teammates and supporting them as much as I possibly could, but at the end of the day there were many times where I went to bed feeling like a helpless..

The NCAA needs to change this rule in a way that benefits athletes. As I have described earlier, athletes should not be penalized and be forced to sit out a year for wanting to get out of a toxic environment. Many student-athletes stay in toxic environments and in

programs where they are unhappy to avoid the transfer process. The NCAA claims that the transfer process isn't intended to punish the players, but "rather ensure they are best positioned to succeed both on and off the court."<sup>46</sup> If the NCAA believes this then I wonder why they don't make the transfer process easier for athletes? Why don't they allow transfer eligibility right away? I believe the redshirt year should be optional for student athletes and that they should only have to have a redshirt year if they want one.

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<sup>46</sup> "College basketball transfers: What you need to know about the transfer process."

## **CHAPTER 8: ADMINISTRATIONS**

### **8.1 Athletic Directors**

You be wondering what the role the administration plays when it comes to overseeing NCAA athletic teams. Administrators oversee the work of coaches and related staff involved within athletics. The highest role that is in hiring and overseeing coaches is the athletic director position. The athletic department always protects coaches before players, and at the end of the day, people in these positions want the university athletic department to look as good as it possibly can.

The reason that I never went to my athletic director at my first school despite the abuse that was going on was because I saw what happened when people went to her. She held a high position of power and completely abused it. I don't remember anyone ever trusting her. Every issue that my teammates or friends on other teams brought to her only got thrown back in their face and negatively impacted their position with the coaching staff. This is just a known fact: going to athletic directors is like going into a dead end trap. A player may be able to get some stuff off her chest, but 90% of the time going to an athletic director only hurts them. Players know it, parents know it, and coaches always hear about the issues brought to athletic directors.

During my freshman and sophomore year my athletic director's office was right down the hall from my coach's office. There was no possible way that anybody on my team could go into her office without my coach seeing. One of my teammates once went to our athletic director numerous times throughout her career and every single time that she

went in the athletic director said she would help her, but all she did was sweep the issues she brought to her under the rug. My teammate faced incredible backlash from the coaches when they heard that she went to the athletic director. They treated her in a passive aggressive way the rest of the year instead of sitting down and speaking to her about ways to improve her athletic experience.

As I referenced earlier, my incoming class had five girls and by the end of my sophomore year, there was one girl left in my class. Everyone else had either left or transferred and the athletic director never investigated the departures.

When I transferred along with the rest of my class, the athletic director did not ask any one of us why we were leaving. It wasn't till about five months later when I got a phone call from a lawyer representing one of my old teammates who had opened up an investigation against my old coaches and athletic director. Even though I had gotten out of that toxic environment and was on to better things, the rest of my teammates were still going through it. I spoke to that lawyer as often and long as I had to in order to advocate for one of my teammates. Learning about all of these issues all over again made me relive the first two years of college.

## **8.2 The Problem with Administrations**

The NCAA gives coaching staffs way too much power over student-athletes, and administrations aren't set up in a way that welcomes athletes to come forward confidently knowing that their voice will be heard. The role the athletic department plays in hiring coaches is a vital one, and when they hire a coach that isn't treating it's players well, they will everything possible to keep that out of the media and as secret as possible. This often

leaves players, parents, and teams out to dry when there are serious issues going on. Athletic departments are constantly checking in with coaches, but I don't understand why they don't constantly check in with players.

When coaching changes happen for whatever reason and players are presented with a new staff of coaches, why don't athletic directors check in with players to see if coaches are meeting expectations? They often meet with coaches to see if players meet expectations, but for some reason athletic directors refuse to hold coaches to the same standard by checking in with players. During my freshman and sophomore year, my athletic director was out to lunch. Even though there have been many improvements made during my transition, this topic still confuses me. Obviously head coaches are going to tell athletic directors that everything on their end is going great, because why would coaches tell them anything else? Their salary and job at the end of the day depends on it!

A new coaching staff was brought in the year that I transferred and there was another coaching change during my senior year. I did not hear from my athletic director a single time after the new coaching changes were made, and the same goes for the fourteen other girls on my team. Why not check in with players after such a big coaching change occurs? It was clear that my athletic director was checking in with my coaches, and like I said, I don't understand why athletic directors don't check in with players more.

I understand that athletic directors have a ton on their plate, but in my opinion their number one priority should be student-athletes because when student-athletes are performing at their best, programs are going to be at their best, which gives the athletic department more success ultimately bringing in more money. If an athletic director is too

busy to have these meetings with athletes, an assistant athletic could make it a priority to ensure their players are happy and healthy.

The problem with administrations ultimately results in the system the NCAA puts in place. This system gives coaches too much power and leaves players with no power whatsoever. Administrators don't spend enough time with athletes to know the severity of situations because they chose to focus on other things first. This is an extreme flaw within our athletic system. Athletic directors don't hear from athletes until things are bad. Even when players check in with athletic directors at this point, things are typically far beyond repairable and chances are the problems the athlete has face have already snowballed. The NCAA needs to work and implement changes to better this culture. If athletic directors checked in with players consistently, many conflicts between players and coaches could be addressed early on and fixed, which would only help teams be more successful.

### **8.3 Parents**

In the five years of my college basketball which included three coaching changes and two investigations, my parents have never once contacted an athletic director. There is nothing athletic directors dread more than dealing with parents. I know this because my Dad was an athletic director for a number of years, and combined with his experience coaching the last thing that an athletic director wants to deal with is parents complaining about the way coaches treat their kids. It is no secret that today's parents go to preposterous lengths to eliminate all adversity from their children's lives. The cultural phenomenon that labels kids as "soft" has only made things harder for college athletes their families.



Nobody speaks with more honesty than South Carolina men's basketball coach Frank Martin when it comes to how kids in sports are treated today: "You know what makes me sick to my stomach? When I hear grown people say that kids have changed. Kids haven't changed. Kids don't know anything about anything. We've changed as adults. We demand less of kids. We expect less of kids. We make their lives easier instead of preparing them for what life is truly about. We're the ones that have changed. To blame kids is a cop-out"<sup>47</sup>

Coming into college, I was lucky enough to have grown a thick skin because of the tough coaches I had growing up. Getting yelled at by coaches never bothered me, because the coaches I had up to college always had a foundation of trust and I knew the yelling was never personal, and I probably deserved it! But when I got to college, the thing that bothered me most was not getting yelled or screamed at for making a mistake, but when things became personal. I consistently felt that my head coach made every possible thing that I did personal, and that was when things became a problem.

My parents helped raise me to have a thick skin. I never talked back to coaches, I always said okay and took criticism in a constructive way. I never complained about the coaches that I had, because when I did my parents would tell me to get a grip. I had parents who had a similar mentality as Frank Martin. But over time my parents started to notice how emotionally messed up I was because of the way my coaches were treating me. They knew that this didn't have to do with me having thick skin. I had a thick skin, and my coach was still making my life a living nightmare.

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<sup>47</sup>Zirin, David. "South Carolina Coach Frank Martin Has It Backward on 'Today's Kids'" The Nation. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.thenation.com/article/south-carolina-coach-frank-martin-has-it-backwards-on-todays-kids/>

As a parent, what are you supposed to do in these situations? You're damned if you go to an athletic director because doing so only hurts your kid, but are just expected to sit back and watch while your kid struggles to get through each day while they're in another state hundreds of miles away, and you're damned if you don't. My parents never once considered going to an athletic director because they knew this would only hurt me. They knew if they tried to help me fight my own battles, I would be labeled as a problem or someone that relied on their parents to fight their own battles, ultimately making me un-coachable and I would wreak the consequences. This resulted in my parents having to sit back helplessly as they worried about my mental health. Every time players go to athletic directors, the judgement tends to be that their kids aren't tough or mature enough to deal with their coaches on their own and that creates even more drama for everyone involved.

Even in extreme cases like the one with Jordan McNair, most parents understand that they're going to administrators will only hurt their kids. This culture around talking to administrations is present at all levels of NCAA sports. The NCAA gives coaches too much power and the fear of backlash from going to administrators results in student-athletes putting up with inexcusable behavior and toxic environments.

#### **8.4 Kids Today**

One of the issues that has only progressed over my time as an athlete is the cultural phenomenon that our young generation is consistently offended. While I do stand with the mentality that our generation's kids are trained to be overly sensitive cry-babies, and in most cases any time a kid involved in athletics hears any sort of constructive criticism it ruins sports for them all together, there is a spectrum in college athletics where this

mentality falls. After reading The Spectator's article *Generation Snowflake*, by Claire Fox, it's easy to see numerous connections between our easily-offended generation and the collegiate sporting world:

First, it is important to note that young people who cry offence are not feigning hurt — generational fragility is a real phenomenon. Speaking at numerous school and university events in recent years, I've noticed an increasingly aggrieved response from my young audience to any argument I put forward that they don't like. They are genuinely distressed by ideas that run contrary to their worldview. Even making a general case for free speech can lead to gasps of disbelief. But why do they take everything so personally? The short answer is: because we socialized them that way.

Why are we surprised that teenagers demand safe spaces? Historically, adolescents might have been risk-takers and adventure-seekers, but today we rear children to perceive the world as an endlessly scary place. NGOs and charities, in particular, promote panic, arguing that what used to be called puppy fat is childhood obesity and will lead to premature death, while those sugary drinks the young love to swig are 'kids' crack cocaine'. Reared on a diet of disaster hyperbole, it's no wonder children grow up scared of their own shadows.

Today, parents go to ludicrous lengths to eliminate all risk from their children's lives. Inevitably this narrows their horizons and teaches them to be less daring. Health-and-safety mania means the young are denied resilience-building freedoms that past generations enjoyed, such as playing outdoors, climbing trees and walking to school unaided. Modern mollycoddling means that pupils have been prevented from engaging in activities such as leapfrog, marbles and conkers. Three in ten schools have banned the playground game British bulldog. Last week, a headmistress in Dundee suggested changing the color of her school's red uniform because 'some research indicates that it can increase heart and breathing rates'. In March, there were moves to ban tackling in school rugby matches due to the perils of this 'high-impact collision sport'.

Even more damaging is a child-protection industry that actively encourages children to see potential abuse everywhere. Safeguarding has become the top priority in every organization that works with children, to the extent that parents are banned from taking photographs of their own children at swimming galas and are let into many parks only 'if accompanied by a child'. In 2010, Home Secretary Theresa May seemed to recognize that things had gone too far and promised to 'scale back' egregious criminal-record checks. But little has been done. Why do

we wonder that today's students see abuse in so many of their interactions, when they have been brought up to view every stranger they meet as a threat? <sup>48</sup>

Fox uses a lot of ludicrous examples to show how thin skinned our generation has become. But when we ask why kids today have become so thin-skinned, I agree with Fox when she says the answer seems to be obvious. Kids only act like this because adults have raised them as so. Frank Martin would also agree that adults are to blame, not kids.

The connection of this generational fault can be easily connected to college athletics. Administrators get sick of dealing with parents daily because of the leading belief that all parents believe that their kid is a victim. Another accepted belief is that coaches are out to get them and they deserve to have the most luxurious college experience without facing any adversity whatsoever. The cupcake mentality surrounding our generation tends to lead to dismissal of serious issues that take place in college sports. I would like to make it very clear that there is a fine line between what Fox describes as a "generational snowflake" college athlete and college athletes that are in fact in abusive, unhealthy, toxic environments. There is a very large spectrum here and people tend to get the two opposite ends of the spectrum confused and often place athletes on either end because of their worldview regarding this cultural phenomenon.

There is a difference between kids today that do not have the mental capacity to deal with any sort of constructive criticism, and those who become get emotionally abused and harassed by college coaches and who are then labeled as snowflakes for not wanting

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<sup>48</sup> Fox, Claire. "Generation Snowflake: how we train our kids to be censorious cry-babies, "The Spectator. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/06/generation-snowflake-how-we-train-our-kids-to-be-censorious-cry-babies/>.

to put up with emotional abuse and negligence. This is a huge flaw in our generation and only negatively affects athletes in toxic situations within the NCAA.

I have had many different “snowflake” teammates throughout my basketball career. I having teammates who would break down crying or cop attitudes whenever our coaches would give them any sort of constructive criticism. I even had teammates like this in college. I remember hearing numerous parents complain about coaches and coddle their kids after coaches wouldn’t play them as much as they felt they deserved. There is a heavy presence of entitlement in a lot of parents and players, and this has driven me up the wall more times than one throughout my athletic experience. Some kids are just not meant to play college sports, period.

I also had a teammate in college who was emotionally abused and harassed so severely that for months she couldn’t even come to the gym. The place where the abuse had happened had tainted her basketball experience so badly that she had to stop coming to athletic facilities all together. When she returned, she had a panic attack in the locker room because the thought of walking out to the basketball court made her so anxious and upset.

The problem here is that people often label athletes who deal with this emotional abuse as snowflakes, when they are actually suffering from emotional abuse. The culture surrounding this mentality more often than not gives coaches an easy way out of their bad behavior by labeling athletes who put up with this abuse as thin skinned, easily offended, babies. Administrators often believe head coaches because of this generational issue. People in the community who hear about players being emotionally or mentally abused are quick to make judgements about players and not the coaches. Coaches are quick to imply

that some students are tough enough and don't have what it takes to be a successful college athlete. The idea of coaches asking demanding players to be "mentally tough" tends to get confused with the notion of "you better put up with how badly I treat you and if you don't you are mentally weak." The culture surrounding the notion that coaches can easily target players as having a mental weakness whenever they question their coach's behavior has become very present within the NCAA. The result of this negatively affects the mental health of student athletes.

## CHAPTER 9: PHYSICAL HEALTH

### 9.1 Nutrition

After seeing the hectic schedules that I have described throughout, you may be wondering *when do athletes eat?* I often struggled with getting enough to eat during my hectic schedule, let alone consume foods that were nutritious for my body. During my senior year I would get to the gym around 2:45 p.m., practice until 6 p.m. and lift until 7 p.m. By the time I showered and got home, it would be around 8p.m. This meant if my schedule from earlier in the day wasn't hectic, I would go for more than five hours without eating. There were some days during the week when I would get to the gym for practice at 2:45, then go to class from 6-9 p.m. By the time I got home I was too exhausted to make myself anything to eat, and the next day many of my early mornings would start with a granola bar and a coffee. I can speak for many athletes when I said I didn't exactly have the time in college to make well balanced meals that were high in nutritional value. I often would eat snacks on the go throughout the day. Even when I have had head coaches who make it a point to find time to eat during the day between workouts, I've found it practically impossible to get sufficient nutrients on a daily basis as an NCAA athlete.

There was a nutritionist available to me after I transferred schools, and while she was extremely helpful in recommending foods for me that were high in nutrition, I never

felt that I could keep up the pace of planning out my meals and sticking with eating three well balanced meals throughout the day. During my senior year, I probably had one meal per day, if that. We are too busy to consume healthy foods consistently and I am sure this affects how we play

## 9.2 Injuries

Getting injured is an s are an unavoidable part of participating in college athletics. With the amount of demand that we put on our bodies every single day, it's inevitable that many college athletes deal with some sort of injury throughout their athletic career. At the end of my college career, I felt like my body was holding on by a thread just to make it through the last few weeks of practice! When exhaustion and fatigue are present in the body, injuries happen. When athletes get injured, they are encouraged to get healthy as quick as they can, even if that mean not completely healed.

I have put my body through the ringer since I entered college and I consider myself very fortunate with the injuries that I've had. I've had severe plantar fasciitis in both feet for the past five years, I've sprained my ankles countless times, experienced tendinitis, shin splints, strained muscles, concussions, broken fingers, a broken hand, and a broken rib. In every single one of these instances, the first question I ask is how long will I be out for and when will we be healthy enough to step on the court again? The mentality around injuries has always confused me, because often instead of healing completely and doing what's best for our body, coaches expect us to return to competition as quickly as possible.

Margot Putukian's article *How Being Injured Affects Mental Health* in the NCAA publication *Mind, Body and Sport* explores how much injuries affect student athletes.



Putukian does a great job at relaying the central theme that athletes often identify their self-worth with their ability to perform their given sport and asserts that this has serious implications when athletes get injured: “While most injuries can be managed with little to no disruption in sport participation and other activities of daily living, some impose a substantial physical and mental burden. For some student-athletes, the psychological response to injury can trigger or unmask serious mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, disordered eating, and substance use or abuse. When a student-athlete is injured, there is a normal emotional reaction that includes processing the medical information about the injury provided by the medical team, as well as coping emotionally with the injury. Those emotional responses include: sadness, isolation, irritation, lack of motivation, anger, frustration, changes in appetite, sleep disturbance, and disengagement.”<sup>49</sup> Putukian discusses how important it is for everyone involved in a student-athlete’s life to be aware that all athletes recover from injuries differently: “How student-athletes respond to injury may differ, and there is no predictable sequence or reaction. The response to injury extends from the time immediately after injury through to the post-injury phase and then rehabilitation and ultimately with return to activity. For most injuries, the student-athlete is able to return to pre-injury levels of activity. In more serious cases, however, a student-athlete’s playing career may be at stake, and the health care provider should be prepared to address these issues. The team physician is ultimately responsible for the return-to-play decision, and

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<sup>49</sup> Brown, T Gary. *Mind, Body, And Sport; Understanding and Supporting Student-Athlete Mental Wellness*. Indiana: National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2004

addressing psychological issues is a significant component of this decision.”<sup>50</sup> The last part of Putukian’s article argues that some injuries must be taken seriously and, in some cases, need intervention:

It’s important for athletic trainers and team physicians, as well as student-athletes, coaches and administrators, to understand that emotional reactions to injury are normal. However, problematic reactions are those that either do not resolve or worsen over time, or where the severity of symptoms seem excessive. Examples of problematic emotional reactions are in the accompanying table. One problematic reaction is when injured student-athletes restrict their caloric intake because they feel that since they are injured, they “don’t deserve” to eat. Such a reaction can be a trigger for disordered eating. When a student-athlete is already at risk for disordered eating, this problematic reaction only heightens the likelihood these unhealthy behaviors will worsen. Another problematic response to injury is depression, which magnifies other responses and can also impact recovery. Depression in some student-athletes may also be related to performance failure.<sup>51</sup>

When I was injured, I still had to attend the three-hour practices and watch countless hours of film. When I had a broken rib, I was expected to be at every practice. I had to walk to the gym with a broken rib in severe amounts of pain at 4:45a.m. to watch our 5:30a.m. practices after hardly sleeping the night before due to the pain. Attending practice with an injury isn’t even “voluntarily expected,” it’s mandatory. Instead of resting, athletes are forced to watch practice and feel helpless. Helplessness sets in when you become used to sitting out, and as all athletes know, injury tends to lead to an unspoken disconnectedness from your teammates who are healthy and able to practice. It’s hard to explain what exactly this disconnectedness feels like, but when we spend every day with your teammates working through the adversity of practice, things feel weird when we’re suddenly on the sidelines watching.

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<sup>50</sup>Brown, T Gary, 61

<sup>51</sup>Brown, Gary T. 62/63.

### 9.3 Sickness

The mentality that coaches have around sickness was easily one of my biggest pet peeves throughout my college career. If one player on a team gets run down and catches a nasty cold, an entire team catches it in a matter of days because coaches would rather have that one sick person practice instead of letting the team take a day or so to get over the sickness. As a college athlete, the only time that you ever get out of practicing from illness is when you get the flu. I have had teammates that have still been expected to practice when they've had strep throat, bronchitis, laryngitis, you name it. As long as we weren't contagious, we practice.

One year there was a horrible flu bug that made its way through the athletic department and practically every single person on my team got it. My symptoms were so bad from the flu that I had to stay overnight in the emergency room. I didn't eat for five days but after I was out of the hospital and barley functioning, it was expected that I practice.

The expectation of being at practice is so serious that players could practically be on their deathbed one night, but if we're feeling any sort of improvement the next morning, we practice. When players get run down and contract a sickness, coaches make them practice which often results in getting the entire team getting sick. Coaches choose time and time again to do this and the same thing always happens. When the sickness runs its way through the entire roster, coaches then insist that players "have to take care of themselves" more. They insinuate that the getting sick is our fault because we aren't doing

everything in our power to avoid it. In reality, one sick person touches a basketball and it literally gets passed around the entire team.

## **CHAPTER 10: MENTAL HEALTH**

### **10.1 Sixty Percent**

I remember during my junior season my teammates and I were approaching the end of an insane sprinting workout with our trainer in a ninety-degree gym in the middle of July. I was in great shape at this point of my career. During that workout I remember feeling so exhausted from the running that I thought I was going to pass out on my last run. Our trainer stood at the finish line of my last run and found a way to get me and every single one of my teammates and I across the baseline on time.

Later, our trainer presented us with a question:

“How much of college basketball do you think is mental?” he asked.

Maybe my mind was still fuzzy from the cardio, but this question has stuck with me for my entire athletic career.

“Thirty percent? Forty Percent?” He looked at all of us.

The more I thought about it, thirty percent wasn’t even close. My teammates and I were breathing heavy and none of us felt that those percentages were sufficient enough.

“Fifty percent? Sixty?” He questioned.

Practically all my teammates raised their hands at this point. My strength coach went onto say that he agreed, and because more than half of college basketball is mental, we can work to train our bodies to push through even if every part of our body wants to shut down.

It's quite incredible what the human body is capable of. Through workouts like this one with my trainer and many other forms of competition, I've done things I never thought I'd be able to in a million years. This mental part of college sports is incredible and gives athletes a fulfillment unlike any other. Knowing that we have the capacity to push ourselves to do the impossible is one of the greatest feelings in the world. However, while athletes can break through mental barriers and reach milestones, there is a very dark side to mental health that often overlooked in the collegiate sports world.

## **10.2 The Facts**

Throughout my paper I have referenced mental health many times. While anyone can list the potential benefits to playing a college sport, the truth is that there is a very dark side of college athletics that should not be ignored. The physical demands that athletes are expected to meet is commonly discussed, but the mental struggles that athletes face tend to come later when it should be discussed first. I can say with confidence that I was totally prepared for the physical demands that were required of me coming into college, but what I was not prepared for was the mental piece of playing college basketball. At the lowest points of my college career, I experienced severe depression, anxiety, isolation, sadness, lack of motivation, anger, frustration, disengagement, and insomnia. Many of the topics that I want to touch upon during this chapter about mental health root from an incredible

publication called *Mind, Body, and Sport*. This publication takes information from student-athletes, sports psychologists, mental wellness researchers and advocates, doctors, coaches, and counselors. Authors Ann Kearns Davore and Seunghyun Hwang open up the discussion of mental illness within student athletes in their chapter in *Mind, Body, And Sport* titled *Depression and Anxiety Prevalence Within Student-Athletes*. Davore and Hwang start off their chapter in *Mind, Body, and Sport* with some facts about mental disorders: “In 2011, more than 41 million U.S. adults over the age of 18 had a mental disorder, and nearly 9 million U.S. adults had a mental illness that greatly affected day-to-day living or resulted in serious functional impairment.”<sup>52</sup> The two authors continue to explore student athletes in particular, noting: “college students-including student-athletes, are not immune to struggles with mental well-being. About 30 percent of the 195,000 respondents to a recent American College Health Association survey reported having felt depressed in the last 12 months, and 50 percent reported having felt overwhelming anxiety during the same period.”<sup>53</sup>

As the article *Depression and Anxiety Prevalence Within Student-Athletes* progresses, concerns are raised about student-athletes is discussed. “One of the primary concerns regarding the prevalence of mental illness among student-athletes is that it may affect not only their success in academics and athletics but also their general well-being. While depression and anxiety have been found to be significant predictors of a lower grade-point average and poor athletics performance, they’re also highly correlated with other risky behaviors, including suicide.”

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<sup>52</sup>Brown, T Gary. p 38.

<sup>53</sup>Brown, T Gary. p 38.

It is so important when Davore and Hwang's say that athletes encounter different stressors than normal students: "While it's not clear whether the source of challenges to student-athlete mental well-being is the same as those non-athletes face, they do say that collegiate student-athletes are known to encounter unique stressors that the general population doesn't have to deal with, such as time demands, relationships with coaches, and missed scheduled classes. To help determine the prevalence and effects of anxiety and depression in the student-athlete population, the two authors studied data from eight National College Health Assessment surveys the ACHA administered from 2008 through 2012. The surveys cover issues including substance use, sexual behavior, physical health, weight, personal safety, violence, and mental health and well-being."<sup>54</sup>

Davore and Hwang found this information by having athletes identify if they played varsity sports in college, setting their data apart from the rest of the college population. "In total, 19,733 student-athletes and 171,601 non-athletes were included in the analyses. Two independent logistic regression models were applied to investigate variables related to depression and anxiety,"<sup>55</sup> and these are their findings: "A few factors presented a comparatively strong relationship with depression and anxiety. Not surprisingly, the strongest was the perceived level of stress in the last 12 months. Stress can be associated with a number of the daily challenges college students face, including academics, interpersonal relationships, health concerns of a family member and financial concerns. Symptoms such as fatigue, hypertension, headaches, depression and anxiety can be attributed to stress."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 38.

<sup>55</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 38.

<sup>56</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 38.

Davore and Hwang explore their findings from the data in more detail:

Sleep difficulty was a self-reported measure asking if the respondent had experienced trouble sleeping in the last 12 months. Of those who reported yes, just 9 percent indicated that they had been diagnosed with insomnia in the last 12 months, and an additional 4 percent reported they had been diagnosed with another sleep disorder. Fewer are being treated with medication for their diagnoses – just 7 percent in total. While few are reporting official diagnoses, a significantly greater percentage are reporting that difficulties with sleep are affecting them. Among those who said they are experiencing difficulty sleeping, 34 percent indicated that sleep difficulties resulted in a lower grade on an exam or test, and an additional 13 percent reported that it resulted in a lower grade in the course.<sup>57</sup>

The two authors also go on to discuss how females and males are affected differently:

The data also show that females and underclassmen were more likely to report difficulties with intimate relationships and other relationships. While reports of physical or sexual abuse in an intimate relationship are generally low (around 2 percent of all respondents), emotional abuse appears to be a greater concern, with 10 percent overall reporting having been in an emotionally abusive relationship. In all, 22 percent of those who claim having experienced difficulties in an intimate relationship report emotional abuse. Loneliness is a common factor related to difficulties in relationships. Among those who reported relationship problems, 85 percent reported feeling very lonely in the last 12 months, compared with 50 percent of those who did not report problems with relationships. The data indicate that loneliness also is highly correlated with both anxiety and depression.<sup>58</sup>

Lastly, the authors discuss how these mental illnesses affected athletes in the classroom: “Anxiety also was strongly related to difficulties with academics. An additional factor with a significant relationship to both depression and anxiety was a catch-all category of “other” traumatic events. This may potentially include characteristics of collegiate student-athletes that were not covered in the survey. For example, poor athletics performance or loss of an athletics scholarship may be traumatic for student-athletes who are highly motivated athletically.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Brown, T Gary. p 39.

<sup>58</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 39.

<sup>59</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 39.



From the data presented in these noteworthy studies, it's clear that student athletes are under a great amount of stress. This can be attributed to the numerous indicators found in Ann Kearns Davore and Seunghyun Hwang's findings. I believe that all of these stressors arise from the unattainable lifestyle the NCAA expects student athletes to carry out on a daily basis. The NCAA clearly sees that athletes are struggling because it reports its findings in this publication, yet they don't athletes any decent outlets of help when they experience mental illness symptoms.

In Jake News' article *The Mental Health of College Athletes*, Dr. Brian Hainline, chief medical officer of the NCAA, and Clinical Professor of Neurology at Indiana University School of Medicine and New York University School of Medicine is quoted after a study was done indicating exactly how much time college athletes spent on their given sports, and that their heavy schedules are to blame: “exacerbating athletes’ feelings of anxiety and depression, are the time commitments required of them.”<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, Hainline shows how easily bendable the NCAA rules are and cites how much time student-athletes actually spend on their given sports, “while the NCAA only allows for 20 hours of required athletically related activities per week, the association’s own research indicates that athletes typically spend about 40 hours a week on their sport. Those time commitments are frequently cited by athletes as one of their primary concerns with playing college sports.”<sup>61</sup>

Hainline continues: “You need time to recover, and when you don’t recover mentally, spiritually, emotionally and physically, you can’t function as well. And when

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<sup>60</sup> New, Jake.

<sup>61</sup> New, Jake.

you're constantly stressed and you're sleep deprived, suicidal thoughts increase. We know that for a fact."<sup>62</sup> Even with this recommendation from the NCAA's chief medical officer, not much has changed. Hainline says that we need time to recover mentally, but when exactly does the NCAA expect student athletes to do this "recovering" with the preposterous rules it puts in place for athletes?

There are 168 hours in a seven-day week. Hainline noted earlier in his study that even though the NCAA only allows for 20 hours of required athletic activities per week, athletes spend about twice as much on their given sport, which is around 40 hours. That cuts a potential week down to 128 hours. Also, there's school. During my senior year, I spent three hours per day in class four out of the five school days during the week. That puts me down to 116 hours per week from just being in class and having basketball obligations. I also spent at least an hour a day on homework. That makes 109/168 hours during the week devoted to just school and basketball. This doesn't include sleeping and having a social life. The NCAA knows that sports take up twice as much time as their "guidelines" require, the chief medical director even says that this schedule seriously impacts the mental health of student-athletes, yet nothing changes. These show how the NCAA doesn't care about the mental health of its student-athletes.

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<sup>62</sup> New, Jake.

## **CHAPTER 11: SIDE EFFECTS OF MENTAL ILLNESS**

### **11.1 Alcohol**

I have mentioned how prevalent the role alcohol played in my weekend routine during my freshman and sophomore year. My teammates and I abused alcohol, and more often than not, we drank way more than we should have been drinking. I remember there were a few mornings I would wake up in my dorm room and I'd have to make an effort to collect my vision and I'd often forget how exactly I made it home. Now that I've grown up, it comes as a shock to me that I didn't put myself into more unsafe situations with the amount that I was drinking. I was drinking to cope with all of the stress that athletics were causing me. There is no doubt that substance abuse correlates with mental health issues. We see the correlation between drinking, mental health, and sports related stressors among thousands of athletes within the NCAA. Brian Hainline, Lydia Bell, and Mary Wilfert's

section titled *Substance Use and Abuse* in the NCAA publication *Mind, Body, And Sport* explores this as well.

A noteworthy study in Hainline, Bell, and Wilfert's article was the one done at Harvard University in 2004 about college student's substance abuse. "A 2004 Harvard University study described patterns of depression and alcohol abuse among young adults in college, and confirmed that 'a substantial fraction of college youth are experiencing poor mental health – at any given time approximately 5 percent – and that these youth are at high risk for alcohol abuse, with depressed young women at highest risk.' The Harvard study noted the age of traditional students, 18-24, coincides with peak years for onset of common mental health problems among youth related to alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, depression and anxiety disorders and suicide."<sup>63</sup>

Brian Hainline, Lydia Bell, and Mary Wilfert then explain how athletes stand out from normal college students when it comes to abusing alcohol:

College students, including student-athletes, are susceptible to the college effect. In a nutshell, the college effect says that heavy and frequent alcohol use increases when students arrive on campus, buying into the cultural myth that campus life is about alcohol abuse and drug use. The three professionals go onto prove that such beliefs result in an increase in negative impact on academic success, increased risk of sexual assault and other interpersonal violence, and other negative consequences. While student-athletes tend to have a more demanding schedule than regular students, it's been proven that student-athletes report higher rates of heavy episodic drinking, sometimes referred to as 'binge drinking' compared to other students on campus. Even more disturbing is that one in five male student-athletes who use alcohol report drinking 10 or more drinks in an outing when they drink.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 40.

<sup>64</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 40.

As the article progresses, Hainline, Bell, and Wilfert discuss studies done by the NCAA that pinpoint exactly how much alcohol college athletes consume when they drink alcohol:

Since 1985, the NCAA has conducted a quadrennial research study of substance use of college student-athletes, and collected survey data again in the spring of 2013 from more than 20,000 NCAA student-athletes from all three divisions and NCAA-sponsored championship sports. Figures 3A and 3B present data about heavy episodic drinking and the negative consequences reported as a result of alcohol use. It is particularly alarming that 30 percent of these student-athletes report experiencing blackouts and this data marks red flags for developing an alcohol addiction. In addition, more than 30 percent have done something they later regretted and more than 25 percent have been criticized for their drinking. These data also identify implications of use on both academics and athletics success, with more than 25 percent missing class and 16 percent performing poorly on a test or in practice due to use.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 41.

FIGURE 3A

**WHEN YOU DRINK ALCOHOL, TYPICALLY HOW MANY DRINKS DO YOU HAVE IN ONE SITTING?**

Female Student-Athletes			
	Division I	Division II	Division III
More than 4 drinks	31.9%	32.6%	37.8%
10+ drinks	2.4%	3.2%	3.3%

  

Male Student-Athletes			
	Division I	Division II	Division III
More than 5 drinks	39.6%	39.6%	50.4%
10+ drinks	15.5%	16.8%	20.4%

FIGURE 3B

**STUDENT-ATHLETE DRINKING BEHAVIOR – DURING LAST 12 MONTHS**

	Never	Once	Twice	3-5 times	6-9 times	10+ times
Had a hangover	36.7%	14.3%	11.5%	14.8%	7.4%	15.3%
Performed poorly on a test or important project	83.3%	6.9%	4.3%	3.3%	1.1%	1.1%
Been in trouble with police or other college authorities	91.0%	6.7%	1.5%	.6%	.1%	.2%
Damaged property, pulled fire alarm, etc.	92.9%	3.2%	1.8%	1.2%	.3%	.5%
Gotten into an argument/fight	77.0%	9.6%	6.2%	4.5%	1.2%	1.5%
Gotten nauseated or vomited	48.5%	19.8%	13.0%	11.7%	3.7%	3.3%
Driven a car while under the influence	86.3%	5.5%	3.5%	2.4%	.8%	1.5%
Missed a class	73.9%	7.9%	6.7%	6.7%	2.0%	2.7%
Performed poorly in practice or game	84.0%	6.6%	4.3%	3.2%	.9%	1.0%
Have showed up late or missed practice or game	94.3%	3.0%	1.4%	.8%	.2%	.3%
Been criticized by someone you know	74.6%	9.8%	6.6%	5.1%	1.5%	2.4%
Thought you might have a drinking or drug problem	94.4%	2.5%	1.2%	.8%	.4%	.7%
Had a memory loss	70.0%	10.4%	7.0%	6.4%	2.9%	3.3%
Done something you later regretted	68.0%	12.0%	8.0%	6.6%	2.3%	3.1%
Been arrested for DWI/DUI	99.0%	.7%	.1%	.1%	.0%	.1%
Tried unsuccessfully to stop using	96.7%	1.6%	.7%	.5%	.2%	.3%
Had feelings of depression, feeling sad for two weeks or longer	92.9%	3.7%	1.6%	.9%	.3%	.6%
Been hurt or injured	87.7%	6.0%	3.5%	1.9%	.3%	.5%

We see from these figures above that come directly from Mind, Body, And Sport that there is a clear correlation between student-athlete stress and alcohol abuse. Most people may be quick to argue that student athletes engage in binge drinking because they get less time off than normal students do, but I think athletes often turn to alcohol in times of stress. Regardless of which side you stand with more, both arguments confirm that the NCAA doesn't take the mental health of student athletes seriously. They may be doing lots of research about it, but the NCAA continues to let athletes suffer in many programs without an outlet. Although there has been plenty of research done, the grueling schedule the NCAA puts in place for athletes negatively affects mental health of student athletes and many athletes turn to alcohol when dealing with these mental burdens.

### **11.2 Body Image & Eating Disorders**

Before I even stepped foot onto campus, my head coach badgered me about my weight. He insisted that in my last year of high school that I had lost too much weight and insisted that I had to gain all of the weight I lost back in muscle before I arrived on campus. There were many times throughout my athletic career that I have struggled with eating and body image. Most of the time, my body did not feel like my own. Between the time I entered college and the end of my sophomore year I had gained more than forty pounds. Although this is what my coach wanted and insisted it would help me perform better on the basketball court, I was too intimidated to share how weight affected my body image and my perception of myself. I lost a good amount of this weight when I transferred schools. Luckily, my weight has leveled out a bit. However, the pressure of attaining a perfect body for our coaches is very stressful.

Issues around body image is best explained by Ron Thompson in his chapter titled *Eating Disorders* in the publication *Mind, Body, And Sport*. Thompson explains why body image for athletes differs from non-athletes: “The relationship between body image and body dissatisfaction in female student-athletes is more conflicted and confused than in the general population. Sports Women have two body images – one within sport and one outside of sport, and disordered eating or an eating disorder can occur in either context or both. Additionally, some female student-athletes are conflicted about having a muscular body that facilitates sport performance but may not conform to the socially desired body type and may be perceived as being too muscular when compared to societal norms regarding femininity.”<sup>66</sup>

Thompson explains exactly what I experienced in college. There were times throughout college that my coaches insisted that the more weight I gain, the better it’ll be for my athletic performance. Many times, I would look in mirror and feel uncomfortable and disappointed at the reflection looking back at me. Athletes pretty much always gain weight during strength training and many of my teammates have also had body image issues. These expectations along with all the other challenges that student-athletes face in college athletics can cause severe body image struggles, disordered eating, and eating disorders.

One of the most prevalent notions of Thompson’s chapter in *Mind, Body, and Sport* is the concept that the environment that student-athletes are a part of can affect these disorders:

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<sup>66</sup>Brown, T Gary. p 25.



Just as society and culture emphasize the “thin ideal,” similar pressures exist in the sport environment regarding being thin/lean and its purported positive effect on sport performance. This emphasis on reducing body weight/fat to enhance sport performance can result in weight pressures on the student-athlete from coaches (or even teammates) that increase the risk of restrictive dieting, as well as the use of pathogenic weight loss methods and disordered eating. Even the student-athlete’s perception that her coach thinks she needs to lose weight can heighten weight pressures and increase the risk of disordered eating.<sup>67</sup>

Thompson then goes on to discuss how big of a role coaches play when it comes to eating disorders and disordered eating:

Coaches have considerable influence with their athletes, and it appears that their relationship with their student-athletes – and more specifically their motivational climate – can influence the risk of disordered eating. A relationship between coach and athlete characterized by high conflict and low support has been associated with increased eating pathology among athletes. Additionally, an ego/performance-centered motivational climate (vs. a skills-mastery climate) that some coaches use has been associated with an increased risk of disordered eating.<sup>68</sup>

As the article progresses, Thompson notes that the pressure to fit certain stereotype bodies affects student athletes:

Another risk to student-athletes relates to aspects of the sport environment that make identification of disordered eating/eating disorders more difficult. In society and sport, athletes are often expected to display a particular body size or shape that becomes characteristic of a particular sport, such as distance runners being thin. Such ‘sport body stereotypes’ can affect coaches’ perceptions of athletes, and athletes who fit the ‘thin’ stereotype are less apt to be identified as having an eating problem. Identification by coaches is sometimes influenced by sport performance, and student-athletes are less likely to be identified if their sport performance is good.<sup>69</sup>

In summary, Ron Thompson shows that there are many different things that contribute to body image, eating disorders, and disordered eating. Because of all these

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<sup>67</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 26.

<sup>68</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 26.

<sup>69</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 29.

factors, coaches and trainers have to be aware of the risks that student-athletes face and they should be on the lookout for warning signs. Finally, Thompson makes it a point to say that there is a difference between eating disorders and disordered eating: “All eating disorders involve disordered eating, but not all disordered eating meets diagnostic criteria for an eating disorder. Disordered eating and eating disorders are related but not always the same. All eating disorders involve disordered eating, but not all disordered eating meets diagnostic criteria for an eating disorder.”<sup>70</sup> Some of the eating disorders most often diagnosed are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating. Thompson lists the following eating disorders in his article and are written as follows:

- Anorexia Nervosa is characterized by persistent caloric intake restriction, fear of gaining weight/becoming fat, persistent behavior impeding weight gain, and a disturbance in perceived weight or shape.<sup>71</sup>
- Bulimia Nervosa is recurrent binge eating, recurrent inappropriate compensatory behaviors to prevent weight gain such as induced vomiting, excessive exercise, and self-evaluation unduly influenced by shape and weight.<sup>72</sup>
- Binge Eating is recurrent episodes of binge eating without compensatory behaviors but with marked distress with the binge eating.<sup>73</sup>

Thompson concludes his section by saying the correlation of why student athletes struggle so much with all of these different eating issues “lies on the emphasis on a lean body and its purported relationship with enhanced sport performance,”<sup>74</sup> and that those involved in a student-athletes life play a role in helping them with these disorders, “those with influence in the sport environment can play a key role by

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<sup>70</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 25.

<sup>71</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 25.

<sup>72</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 25.

<sup>73</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 25.

<sup>74</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 26.

recommending and encouraging timely and appropriate mental health treatment for their student-athletes. This means that coaches and others in the sport environment need to recognize that such an emphasis on weight or leanness puts student-athletes at greatest risk for developing eating problems.”<sup>75</sup>

Although I have never experienced a major eating disorder, I have witnessed teammates and friends struggle with them. Because this topic is so sensitive, I’m going to withstand from speaking too much about the eating disorders that I have seen first-hand, but the fact of the matter is that the coaches that I’ve had throughout college have been oblivious when it comes to recognizing eating disorders. Could this be because coaches often see weight loss as a positive and assume athletes always lose weight in a healthy way? Maybe. But in Thompson’s article, he explains this more:

Identification by coaches is sometimes influenced by sport performance, and student-athletes are less likely to be identified if their sport performance is good. Finally, eating disorder symptoms (such as dieting, weight loss and excessive training) may be misperceived as “normal” or even desirable in the sport environment, and personality characteristics/behaviors similar to those of eating disorder patients (such as perfectionism and excessive training) may be misperceived as ‘good athlete’ traits.<sup>76</sup>

I have witnessed this first hand. I have watched coaches praise teammates who were evidently dealing with eating disorder behind the scenes. As you can imagine, this only made those eating disorders worse for my teammates because of the justification and praise my coaches gave them.

One of the most mind-boggling situations I’ve ever heard regarding these sensitive topics was from my Mom’s college basketball team. Her coaches would look at each

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<sup>75</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 29.

<sup>76</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 26/27.

member of their team with absolutely no background in nutrition and tell each player the exact number that they should weigh. My Mom and her teammates would get on the scale in front of their coaches every week as the coaches would read off numbers indicating if they were above or below the weight that they labeled each of them with. There were consequences if they did not “make their weight” on any given day.

If a player was deemed “overweight,” they would have to stay after practice with the other girls who were placed in the same category and run what my Mom described to me as “reminders.” Reminders were sets of full court sprints. If a player was measured as “overweight” again, they would have to get up at 6 a.m. and run a timed mile. If it kept happening (and as you can imagine, it happened often with this unattainable, ridiculous standard), players would be succumbed to extra timed miles and conditioning in addition to their regular practice and lifting schedule. This does not include the verbal abuse that went along with the extra work outs. If a player was underweight, they would have to write a summary to the coaches about “the dangers of being underweight in college sports.”

As you can imagine, this mind-boggling system made my Mom and her teammates extremely anxious and paranoid and it seriously affected the body image of practically every single person on the team. There was more than one girl on my mom’s team with bulimia and one showed serious signs of anorexia. My Mom says the worst part about this situation was that nobody ever knew when these weigh-ins were scheduled. The team weigh-ins would be once a week, every day, or the middle of the week. Weeks or a month would pass by and nobody would get weighed in, and then you would they would get weighed in every day. If the team thought they were going to get weighed in the day of practice, they might not eat the entire day of or the night before getting weighed in, and

once they got weighed in, they would binge eat. Players that were underweight would try to sneak quarters in their underwear. This created a cycle of serious ups and downs and was an extremely unhealthy environment to be in as a young woman. To this day, my Mom refuses to get on a scale because of the memories and anxiety it brings back from her time as a college-athlete.

Coaches have a tremendous impact on their athletes. Ron Thompson also describes this relationship in his publication in *Mind, Body, and Sport* and writes: “Coaches have considerable influence with their athletes, and it appears that their relationship with their student-athletes and more specifically their motivational climate can influence the risk of disordered eating. A relationship between coach and athlete characterized by high conflict and low support has been associated with increased eating pathology among athletes.”<sup>77</sup> My Mom’s awful experience has stuck with her to this day. The thought of how many adults and other people in the athletic department were bystanders to this kind of behavior and let it go on is inexcusable. Furthermore, that this abuse didn’t happen at just any program, either. It took place at a high major Division I program with a great reputation for women’s basketball. My mother’s team was the top of the conference and went to the Sweet Sixteen twice during her time as an athlete. Sadly, stuff like this can happen anywhere, and to this today, it happens. My Mom said that her athletic trainer and assistant coaches were responsible to do the weigh-ins and report the numbers back to the head coach. People are quick to think that she's exaggerating, but they don't understand that things like this happen every day in college athletics. Head coaches are given way too

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<sup>77</sup> Brown, T Gary. p 29.

much power in college athletics, and unfortunately assistant coaches are quick mask their behavior and even do their dirty work for them.

### **11.3 Mental Health vs Physical Health**

One of the biggest struggles when facing the mental health crisis is the assumption that athletes should be mentally healthy or the untrue notion that “being strong” means handling things on your own. Even though seeking out mental health is not a sign of weakness and should be taken as seriously as a physical injury, a lot of athletes won’t ask for help. Asking for help is a great way to improve one’s mental health, but finding ways to get help and reaching out is a tough for many athletes. If an athlete has have some sort of physical injury, it’s very easy to go to a trainer and openly tell them what’s bothering us to get the treatment we need to feel better. Injuries are easy to talk about in front of other people or in front of your teammates, but talking about mental health isn’t always easy and cannot be done in the same fashion.

During the fall of my senior year, a student-athlete took her own life on the athletic campus where she practiced her sport every day. Although I didn’t know this student athlete personally, I had many close friends in the athletic department who did, and I had seen this student athlete many times before. Her suicide came to a huge shock to everybody that knew her, even some of her lifelong friends. I’ll never forget attending her vigil and hearing all the wonderful people that knew this student athlete talk about how bubbly and happy she was. Everyone spoke about how she was always there for their friends. It’s painful to think that this student-athlete was fighting a battle mentally, but couldn’t reach

out for the help that she desperately needed. Among the many people who spoke, the student's roommate the roommate spoke and described how although this student athlete had been such a positive and impactful person, she was fighting a lot of inner battles and never sought out help. Suicide is a sad, but very prevalent problem in our world today.

Dr. David Geier discusses the prevalence this problem by asking the question *How Common are Suicides in College Athletes* on his blog: "This is a critical issue that everyone involved in sports and sports medicine needs to recognize. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in college students – athletes and non-athletes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports an incidence rate of 7.5 suicides for every 100,000 college students."<sup>78</sup>

Geier's article goes on to cite data found in other studies that breaks down suicide deaths among college athletes:

In an article recently published in the journal *Sports Health: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, Ashwin L. Rao, M.D. and other researchers reviewed NCAA data regarding student-athlete participation and deaths in Divisions I, II and III over a nine-year period. They found some important findings: 35 suicides, including six cases of suspected suicide, occurred among student-athletes over the nine-year period. 477 athletes died from all causes in that time. Suicide represented 7.3% of all deaths. It was the fourth most common cause of death after accidents, cardiovascular fatalities and homicide. 29 of the 35 suicides (82.9%) were male athletes. In terms of sport, football players made up the highest number of suicides (13 of 35). Soccer had five. Cross country and track had five. Baseball had four. Swimming had three. The overall suicide rate was 0.93 per 100,000 student athletes, lower than the incidence rate of 7.5 per 100,000 that the CDC reports for all college students.<sup>79</sup>

People often wonder, how can you prevent something so tragic from happening if people aren't showing any warning signs of mental illness? I don't think that any one area

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<sup>78</sup> Geier, David. "How Common Are Suicide in College Athletes?" *Dr. David Geier* Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.drdauidgeier.com/suicide-college-athletes-how-common/>.

<sup>79</sup> Geier, David.

is to blame for such a sensitive topic that is different in every case, but I think that the culture around mental health at universities could do a better job at supporting student athletes. Clearly the NCAA needs to do a better job at supporting mental health of student-athletes given the data presented earlier. This is not to downplay that suicide is a national problem that our generation is facing, but everyone involved needs to do a better job to try to prevent these tragedies from taking place.

During my last three years of college I attended a university that made it a point to take mental health seriously and the conference itself was often praised for its mental health initiatives. Yet, still there was a student athlete who took her own life. I cannot tell you how vital sports psychologists can be to NCAA teams. Just knowing I had one available to me at UVM was a weight off my back. But often whenever I felt feelings of anxiety or depression, I never went out of my way to seek help from one of the psychologists. This was not because I didn't feel comfortable or thought that it would be pointless to do but was due to the fact that I didn't put my mental health as a top priority. Many athletes do not put mental health as a top priority. Our schedules are so insane that it becomes easier to deal with mental health issues on our own instead of making it a priority to get help. I can speak for many athletes when I say that taking the initiative to treat my mental health as a top priority during my hectic schedule was difficult.

A clinical psychologist named Lisa Firestone discusses "the price of being strong" in her article published in *Psychology Today* titled *Risks to the Mental Health of Athletes*: "Contrary to what we are often told, 'handling' a problem does not mean holding it inside and keeping it to ourselves. Seeking out mental health assistance is a strong, brave, and proactive decision. Treating a psychological ailment should be given as much importance



as treating a physical injury. Athletes inspire us in so many ways. By standing up to the stigma and getting the help they need and deserve, they can become champions of mental health and inspire us with more than just their physical strength.”<sup>80</sup>

Firestone then argues that the stigmas attached to mental health need to change: “One of the most significant things we can do when it comes to the mental health of athletes is to remove the stigmas associated with mental illness and enforce the message that help is available. Each person has a right to find the treatment that works for them. Friends, teammates, and family members can offer support by looking for warning signs, paying attention, noticing, and taking seriously signs that the people we love are starting to struggle.”<sup>81</sup>

There were times I tried to schedule time to sit down and talk with a psychologist, but everything else in my life often came first. I never once considered missing a practice to go see a sports psychologist because the culture around mental health in college athletics permitted me from even thinking it was an option. Even when we should take time to sit down and talk with these mental health professionals, it often comes second to everything else we have going on. People often wonder what went wrong when a suicide happens, yet they don't see grueling schedule and tremendous pressures that NCAA student athletes are under. The bottom line is student-athletes have a lot on their plate, and sometimes it becomes too much for them to handle. The NCAA needs to do better when it comes to prioritizing mental health. There's money to do it, there's resources to do it, but it's not a top priority because the NCAA doesn't care about the mental health of student athletes.

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<sup>80</sup> Firestone, Lisa. "Risks to the Mental Health of Athletes." Psychology Today. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/compassion-matters/201211/risks-the-mental-health-athletes>.

<sup>81</sup> Firestone, Lisa.

### **11.4 Perfectionism among Student-Athletes**

For as long as I can remember, I always wanted to be the best at everything that I did. I wanted to be the best basketball player on my team and the best student in my class. I constantly compared myself to other women in my life and I worked to attain a high beauty standard. This mentality can be described perfectionism. Perfectionists are very motivated, have a strong work ethic, are committed to their goals, and have a desire to learn and improve. This creates a good mindset for athletes and in addition coaches love to work with this type of athlete because these consistent goal-oriented traits make them very coachable.

While the concept of perfectionism pushed me to work hard and brought me tons of success, this standard became exhausting, especially as an athlete. The unattainable standard of being perfect is exhausting. Perfectionists demand a lot from themselves around quality of their performance and when we don't perform up to these standards, it can result in things like losing confidence, being very self-critical, dwelling on mistakes and missed chances, and the expectation that we mustn't make any mistakes/be human. As athletes, we already have high expectations of ourselves. We want to excel in every area of life, not just athletics. This tends to lead to let down when we don't reach the tough goals we set for ourselves daily. This can also lead to a lot of self-doubt when we do not perform up to our standards. When we feel like we aren't excelling athletically, academically, even socially, it weighs on us. Sometimes things become so stressful that it's hard for us to find the right outlet.

One story that can shed light on the dangers of perfectionism among student-athletes is that of University of Pennsylvania runner Madison Holleran. Kate Fagan discusses the secret struggles and tragic death of Madison in her book *What Made Maddy Run* where she tells the story of the All-American teen who struggled with mental illness and perfectionism throughout her athletic career.

The Instagram account of Madison Holleran seemed to show a successful and happy college freshman. But behind the scenes, the University of Pennsylvania track athlete was struggling with her mental health. Madison had a very supportive family, all of whom were aware of the internal battles she was facing during her career. Her parents sought out professional help and therapists for their daughter to see. Her father insisted on one of his last phone calls with Madison that she needed to find a good therapist while away at school.

Like other NCAA athletes, Madison portrayed to her family that she was doing just fine when she wasn't. In *I'm Not Right' — the Turmoil and Death of a College Athlete who Seemed to Have it all*, Carlos Lozada writes about her final moments on earth:

In fact, she was, at that exact moment, buying the items she would leave for her family at the top of a parking garage. Godiva chocolates for her dad. Two necklaces for her mom. Gingersnaps for her grandparents, who always had those cookies in their home. Outfits for her nephew, Hayes, who had been born two weeks earlier. *The Happiness Project* for Ingrid, with a note scribbled inside. And a picture of herself as a young kid, holding a tennis racket. Over winter break she had told her dad that she was borrowing a picture from her Dad, that she needed it for something. She didn't say what...<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Lozada, Carlos. "I'm Not right' the Death of a College Athlete who Seemed to Have it all." The Washington Post. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/.../im-not-right-the-turmoil-and-death-of-a-college-athlete-who-seemed-to-have-it-all.htm>.

On the night of January 17th, Madison Holleran jumped off the ninth level of that same parking garage in downtown Philadelphia and took her own life. She was nineteen.

Kate Fagan uses Madison's story to make it a point to discuss mental health with experts. She also interviews survivors of suicide attempts and her memories of her time as a college basketball player. Fagan uses the metaphor "freshman year of college is like walking through an obstacle course wearing a blindfold, and like walking a path lined with land mines. Thoughts break into one's mind like a train cutting through a snowstorm, or like an iron fist on a collision course with its destination"<sup>83</sup> to take the reader into what a freshman year student-athlete experience is really like.

Fagan outlines the link between mental health and physical health and explains that there is a huge flaw in our system regarding the different approaches to the two and how little attention is given to mental health in college athletic departments: "If a football player pulls a hamstring, nearly half a dozen licensed professionals hover over him, discussing the most innovative ways to rehabilitate his strained muscle," Fagan writes. "Yet if most athletic departments' commitment to mental and emotional health were visualized as a weight room, it would more closely resemble this: a few rusted dumbbells, a cracked mirror, cobwebs, and plenty of open space."<sup>84</sup>

Based on research done by the CDC, Dr. David Geier affirms that suicide is a big problem among student-athletes: "This is a critical issue that everyone involved in sports and sports medicine needs to recognize. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in college students – athletes and non-athletes. The Centers for Disease Control and

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<sup>83</sup> Lozada, Carlos.

<sup>84</sup> Lozada, Carlos.

Prevention (CDC) reports an incidence rate of 7.5 suicides for every 100,000 college students.”<sup>85</sup> This statistic shows that our generation needs more mental support, and until we get it, suicide is going to be a reoccurring problem. Maddy’s story signifies how seriously the mental health crisis is and how the pressures of perfectionism among student athletes is very present. Holleran had mental health professionals in her life and a family that was aware of her struggles, it wasn’t enough. There are so many students like Madison that are struggling every day with the concept of perfectionism and not getting the support they need. Stories like this one only prove that the NCAA needs to make mental health a top priority and take it as seriously as they take physical health.

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<sup>85</sup> Geier, David.

## **CHAPTER 12: MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES**

### **12.1 Sports Psychologists**

There is an unspoken expectation that student athletes are expected to run like machines. This assumption needs to end, especially when student-athletes' emotions and mental wellbeing are concerned. In addition to coaches, trainers, and physical therapists, sports psychologists should be mandatory at every university for every athletic team.

So, what exactly does a sports psychologist do? The American Psychological Association breaks it down best in their cover story *A Growing Demand for Sport Psychologists*: "Sport psychologists are best known for helping athletes overcome mental roadblocks and improve their performance. While that performance emphasis remains a cornerstone of sport psychology, it's only a slice of what sport psychologists are now doing to support athletes. Their expanding roles include helping athletes navigate interpersonal issues and addressing mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and eating

disorders.”<sup>86</sup> In a separate article also published from the American Psychological Association, the strategies of sport psychologists are broken down further:

- **Enhance performance.** Various mental strategies, such as visualization, self-talk and relaxation techniques, can help athletes overcome obstacles and achieve their full potential.
- **Cope with the pressures of competition.** Sport psychologists can help athletes at all levels deal with pressure from parents, coaches or even their own expectations.
- **Recover from injuries.** After an injury, athletes may need help tolerating pain, adhering to their physical therapy regimens or adjusting to being sidelined.
- **Keep up an exercise program.** Even those who want to exercise regularly may find themselves unable to fulfill their goal. Sport psychologists can help these individuals increase their motivation and tackle any related concerns.
- **Enjoy sports.** Sports organizations for young people may hire a sport psychologist to educate coaches about how to help kids enjoy sports and how to promote healthy self-esteem in participants.<sup>87</sup>

While all these strategies and sport coping mechanisms are structured to help athletes have success on the field, these special psychologists are also available to talk to student-athletes about anything they so please. When I spent time with a sports psychologist, I spoke about anything and everything that was on my mind. This not only made me feel more confident as an athlete, but as a human being.

According to the American Psychological Association, “sports psychology can even help people off the playing field. The same strategies that sport psychologists teach athletes — relaxation techniques, mental rehearsals and cognitive restructuring, for example — are also useful in the workplace and other settings...sport psychologists may serve as important resources for the victims of assault and violence, such as the members

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<sup>86</sup> “A Growing Demand for Sport Psychologists.” *American Psychological Association*. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2018/11/cover-sports-psychologists>.

<sup>87</sup> “Sport Psychologists Help Professional and Amateur Athletes.” *American Psychological Association*. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2018/11/cover-sports-psychologists>

of USA Gymnastics and USA Swimming who have spoken out recently about sexual abuse and misconduct in their sports.”<sup>88</sup>

If there had been a sports psychologist available to me initially at my first college I without a doubt would have spent more time focusing on my mental wellness instead of turning to alcohol every chance I had. I can’t explain how important sports psychologists are and how necessary they are for student-athletes. Just knowing that there was one available to me my last three years took a tremendous burden off my back, as well as my other teammates. And while my sports psychologist was readily available to me whenever I needed her, I think that the NCAA can go a step further through providing sports psychologists to athletes.

It is by no means mandatory that every NCAA university has a sports psychologist available to athletes. Sure, there might be therapists and outlets on campus that are provided to everyone at a given school, but it’s not enough. In fact, according to Time Magazine “the average university has one professional counselor for every 1,737 students which is fewer than the minimum of one therapist for every 1,000 to 1,500 students recommended by the International Association of Counseling Services.”<sup>89</sup> This is a huge problem, and I’m telling you from first-hand experience student-athletes have a hard time seeking out help that is not available to them within an athletic department due to our hectic schedules. It should be mandatory by the NCAA for every athletic university, Division I-Division III, to have more than one sports psychologist within an athletic department.

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<sup>88</sup> Sport Psychologists Help Professional and Amateur Athletes.

<sup>89</sup> Reilly, K. “Record Numbers of College Students Are Seeking Treatment for Depression and Anxiety- But Schools Can’t Keep Up,” *Time Magazine*. Accessed March 4, 2019. <http://time.com/5190291/anxiety-depression-college-university-students/>



Colleges need to start utilizing sports psychologists to benefit their student-athletes. Mental health has become such a huge issue today, I think these sports psychologists can do more than just have open office hours. Coaches and administrators need to integrate them into teams so they can better understand what each athlete needs to succeed. This means having them at practice every now and then, having them in locker rooms, having them travel to away games, and having monthly meetings with coaches and athletes to ensure they succeed athletically. The way I see it, each psychologist could be assigned two-three sports teams depending on their seasons and schedules. A psychologist could be assigned sports that don't have overlapping seasons and work with them throughout the year. Meaning a psychologist would work with a fall sports team, like soccer team primarily through their season and could then take on a spring sports team, like lacrosse. That way psychologists could serve two different teams while making time for every athlete on each team. Teams with more demanding schedules like hockey, football, or basketball, could have a single sports psychologist year-round, considering there is never an off season for these athletes.

Throughout this paper, I have reiterated time and time again that the NCAA doesn't care about the mental health of student athletes. To show how much this argument is true, I'd like to share a NCAA publication about what the NCAA considers "the best" mental health practices for student athletes in its forty-page document published by the NCAA Sports Science Institute. The publication starts off with a background addressing the serenity of mental health and how important it is to address the tough topics around mental health. It reads:

Mental health is an important and often overlooked dimension of overall student-athlete health and optimal functioning. Mental health exists on a

continuum, with resilience and thriving on one end of the spectrum and mental health disorders that disrupt a student-athlete's functioning and performance at the other. Approximately one in five adults experiences mental illness in a given year, and this rate tends to be highest among young adults, many of whom are college students. Prevalence estimates of mental illness among college athletes are relatively similar to their non-athlete peers. Even in the absence of a clinically diagnosable mental health disorder, student-athletes may have impaired overall well-being as a result of sub-clinical symptoms of mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression and insomnia or the misuse of substances such as alcohol or prescription drugs.<sup>90</sup>

You can clearly see here that the NCAA has an educated view about how mental health, and has clearly hired people to advocate that they care about mental health. The publication even goes on to say that mental health is “a key component of student-athlete wellness.”<sup>91</sup>

All these lengthy definitions should not to be confused with how the NCAA actually deals with the mental health crisis that student athletes face. As I read through the publication, it didn't come as a surprise when I approached the section titled “Best Practices” for student-athlete mental health and how hypocritical the practices were. The first bullet of the publication under “Best Practices” reads as follows:

In concert with campus counseling professionals, establish an ongoing dialogue with off-campus community resources that could potentially be involved in caring for a student-athlete who is experiencing a mental health challenge (e.g., local police, emergency care providers, community mental health providers) and consider consulting with them during the protocol development process.” Secondly, it recommends to “be transparent with student-athletes and parents about the content of the protocols and the circumstances under which they could be invoked. Communicate protocols with families systematically through handbooks, websites, etc.” Third, “Principles of confidentiality should be clearly established and communicated to all stakeholders. It may be helpful to consult legal services regarding how confidentiality of student-athlete care limits a clinician's

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<sup>90</sup> “Mental Health Best Practices.” *National Collegiate Athletic Association*. Accessed March 3, 2019. <http://www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/mental-health-best-practices>.

<sup>91</sup> Mental Health Best Practices, 12

communication about potentially at-risk students with sports medicine staff, athletics administration, coaches and college administration.<sup>92</sup>

Lastly, it says to “Consult legal services and/or risk management to ensure that the protocols comply with applicable laws.”<sup>93</sup> In my eyes, the NCAA is basically saying that if a student-athlete is struggling with any sort of mental health challenges, they should seek out help from a 3rd party source, off-campus professional which is not limited to the local police or emergency care providers. The NCAA is insinuating here that ‘if you’re having any sort of mental health struggles, we’re totally here for you! We’re just not going to provide you with any sort of realistic resources to help, maybe try to seek out an expensive 3rd party therapist, an emergency care provider, or even the police! They’re here to help you!’ The NCAA should be ashamed of themselves. This is their number one recommendation and their “best practice” for student athletes to seek help for mental health? Please tell me what student athlete is going to be able to afford to go see a 3rd party counselor or therapist? Let alone have time to go see one god knows where outside of campus and the athletic department? Does the NCAA really expect a student athlete to contact the local police when they’re having thoughts of anxiety or depression? It’s laughable that the NCAA really published this article and thinks that it’s going to make a difference for any student-athlete that needs treatment for their mental health challenges.

The second bullet point that the NCAA recommends as a “best practice” is almost as amusing as the first. It reads: “Be transparent with student-athletes and parents about

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<sup>92</sup> Mental Health Best Practices, 12

<sup>93</sup> Mental Health Best Practices, 12

the content of the protocols and the circumstances under which they could be invoked. Communicate protocols with families systematically through handbooks, websites, etc.”<sup>94</sup>

Here, the NCAA recommends someone (it doesn't say who) to be “transparent” with student athletes and parents about the circumstances under which they could “evoke” or be appeal to. In what situation has anyone from a university or from the NCAA ever taken initiative to be “transparent” with student athletes and families about the possible mental hardships that NCAA athletics pose? This is just unrealistic and a complete cop out. The fact of the matter is this never happens, because the NCAA could care less. My favorite part about the second bullet is when the NCAA recommends communicating mental health implication protocols “systemically” through handbooks and websites. This basically means that the NCAA is not willing to take these issues seriously, but when a problem arises to redirect people to bullshit handouts or websites that are no help at all. “Oh, here’s a fantastic handbook about what anxiety or depression in student athletes may look like! Even though as a parent you may be thousands of miles away, we want to make sure you know that we are taking care of your kid, check out this handout or refer to our website!” I can’t even explain as a student athlete how pointless a hand booklet or pamphlet is. To me, even having these available to athletes is a slap in the face. I’m going through all these tremendous hardships and the best you can do for me is have a wall of thirty different pamphlets available for me to take? Where is the real support? There was a wall of these pamphlets in a part of athletic campus and I swear that the stacks of different pamphlets haven’t been touched in about three years because they are so useless. But,

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<sup>94</sup> Mental Health Best Practices. p 12.

according to the NCAA, this is a “best practice” to deal with mental health? It’s hysterical, really.

The third bullet point reads: “Principles of confidentiality should be clearly established and communicated to all stakeholders. It may be helpful to consult legal services regarding how confidentiality of student-athlete care limits a clinician’s communication about potentially at-risk students with sports medicine staff, athletics administration, coaches and college administration. Some student-athletes may find that a limited level of communication with coaches about their mental health care seeking is appropriate.”<sup>95</sup> Here, the NCAA makes it a point to say that confidentiality about the mental health of student athletes should be in accordance with the NCAA rules around confidentiality. The NCAA rules are so serious when it comes to this that they say “it may be helpful to consult legal services.”<sup>96</sup> Any student athlete that reads this and sees the line “it may be helpful to consult legal services” won’t seek out anyone to talk to about mental health with because of the fear that their information may not be kept confidential. The NCAA is proving here that they aren’t willing to give athletes an outlet to talk about mental health.. This alone keeps student-athletes from seeking out help and doesn’t make the process and less stressful when they do seek out help.

The NCAA is making clear in that they know student athletes don’t feel comfortable discussing their mental health with their coaches. This is because the NCAA knows that coaches aren’t equipped or given any sort of civic duty to make mental health

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<sup>95</sup> Mental Health Best Practices. p 12.

<sup>96</sup> Mental Health Best Practices. p 12.

a priority. This sentences also insinuates that it's not the coach's responsibility to deal with this

Lastly and certainly not least, the fourth "best practice" says: "Consult legal services and/or risk management to ensure that the protocols comply with applicable laws." This insinuates that the NCAA is not responsible for any backlash legally when it comes to dealing with mental health. They also suggest that students should consult legal services to make sure that the steps they take to treat mental health doesn't break any NCAA laws.

Clearly the NCAA doesn't care about the mental health of student-athletes despite its claims. This publication says it all. The NCAA doesn't give student-athletes an outlet to deal with mental challenges and cares more about the physical health of athletes and literally says in writing to that they should seek mental support elsewhere. When athletes are physically healthy, the NCAA sees them as healthy as they must be to compete in the sidelines, ultimately making them more money. To them, nothing else matters. Even though mental health is completely overlooked by the NCAA, there are thankfully programs taking initiative to make these hardships a top priority.

## **12.2 Athletes Connected**

The University of Michigan has created a pilot projected called "Athletes Connected." The University of Michigan School of Public Health, the University of Michigan Depression Center, and the University of Michigan Athletic Department are "working together with a goal to increase awareness of mental health issues, reduce the stigma of help-seeking, and promote positive coping skills among student-athletes who are

often reluctant to seek help when it comes to mental health,”<sup>97</sup> according to Author Steve Kornacki. Kornacki discusses the impetus for this initiative in his article *Athletes Connected: Program Supports Student-Athletes Mental Health*.

Kornacki’s article begins by praising of Will Heininger, an athlete that sparked the mental health initiative, “Will Heininger was a defensive lineman for the University of Michigan football team. Will’s trainer, Lenny Navitskas, noticed that Will was in distress and suspected that he might need help from a professional. Another athlete on campus named Kally Fayhee who was the captain of the Michigan swim team was struggling with anxiety and an eating disorder. Both athletes made it through these tough times with the support from friends, family, teammates, and coaches. And, perhaps most importantly, Kornacki says they got on the path to recovery by connecting with athletic department counselor Barb Hansen.”<sup>98</sup>

Kornacki discusses in his article that “while both athletes broke down in private, that they were both facing an entirely differently opponent and one that required more than inner strength to defeat. While both athletes’ quests to wellness came with plenty of adversity, ultimately they both got help and stayed the course to understand what was happening mentally and how to address it.”<sup>99</sup> As the article progresses, Kornacki speaks about how these two athletes set the stage for removing the stigma around mental health: “these two individuals now use their experiences to help other Wolverine student-athletes reach out for help, hope, and direction. Heininger became the driving force behind Athletes

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<sup>97</sup> Kornacki, Steve. “Athletes Connected: Program Supports Student-Athlete Mental Health.” University of Michigan. Accessed March 4, 2019.

[https://mgoblue.com/news/2015/1/13/Athletes\\_Connected\\_Program\\_Supports\\_Student\\_Athlete\\_Mental\\_Health.aspx](https://mgoblue.com/news/2015/1/13/Athletes_Connected_Program_Supports_Student_Athlete_Mental_Health.aspx).

<sup>98</sup> Kornacki, Steve.

<sup>99</sup> Kornacki, Steve.

Connected, a program designed to remove the stigma attached to mental illnesses while raising awareness and providing solutions. After first sharing his story at the UM Depression on College Campuses Conference, he left a job in finance in Chicago to become involved with the initiative and is contemplating making it his life's work.”<sup>100</sup>

Kornacki quotes some very important contributors of the pilot program: ““The goal of Athletes Connected is to engage student athletes in resources that benefit their mental health’ says Daniel Eisenberg, Associate Professor, Health Management and Policy at University of Michigan School of Public Health.”<sup>101</sup>

Through their popular videos, Athletes Connected professionals explain how the pilot program has grown. This initiative started off as a pilot program through smaller support groups within athletics that have since turned into targeted support groups for students that meet regularly. Trish Meyer says that they are working on building the pilot program based off the responses they’ve gotten, and how they are going to continue certain elements of the pilot and add new components like additional training.<sup>102</sup>

In an article titled *Research from U-M Pilot Program Confirms Need to Support Student-Athlete Mental Health* published on the University of Michigan website for Michigan News, the impact that Athletes Connected has made on its student athletes hasn’t gone unnoticed. “More than 90 percent of U-M’s 900-plus student-athletes took part in the program last fall. Of those participating, 96 percent said they were likely to use what they

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<sup>100</sup> Kornacki, Steve.

<sup>101</sup> Kornacki, Steve.

<sup>102</sup> "Student Athlete Mental Health." *University of Michigan School of Public Health*. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://sph.umich.edu/mentalhealth/student-athletes.html>



learned, either to help themselves or others,”<sup>103</sup> said Eisenberg. “As part of the program, student-athletes were surveyed before and after their participation in educational presentations to all 31 athletic teams, and drop-in support groups that were offered biweekly. Eisenberg also noted among the responses that 63 percent of student athletes reported having an emotional or mental health issue that had affected their athletic performance in the four weeks prior to the survey.”<sup>104</sup>

Daniel Eisenberg is also adds “that statistic says to me that these issues already are on people’s minds. It might not be in the forefront. It might not be in regular conversation. But I think there’s a lot of interest and need for this general initiative,”<sup>105</sup> he said. “So what we’re hoping to do is built on that beginning and engage people and make discussions of mental health part of the culture.”<sup>106</sup> The data surrounding the Athletes Connected initiative serves as the primary reason why this pilot program has been so important. The article presents previous research indicating how necessary the pilot program was: “‘One in three students experiences significant symptoms of depression, anxiety or other mental health conditions. Yet only about 30 percent of these students seek help, and that number goes down to only 10 percent for student-athletes.’ Eisenberg later asserts that the core traits of athletes, including the need to ‘be tough,’ often lead them to ignore their mental health needs.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Eisenberg, Daniel. "Research from U-M Pilot Program Confirms Need to Support Student-Athlete Mental Health." The University of Michigan. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://news.umich.edu/research-from-u-m-pilot-program-confirms-need-to-support-student-athlete-mental-health/>.

<sup>104</sup> Eisenberg, Daniel.

<sup>105</sup> Eisenberg, Daniel.

<sup>106</sup> Eisenberg, Daniel.

<sup>107</sup> Eisenberg, Daniel.

The Athletes Connected has an entire website focused the mental health of student-athletes. The website is helpful because it gives student athletes outlets and the contact information for support right within their campus. They also have a team dedicated to help student-athlete success. The website also has an area where viewers can ‘help a student athlete’ that may be struggling to reach out for help themselves. The athletic department at Michigan is changing the way that the athletic community approaches mental health and should be a model for all colleges.

Michigan is setting the stage for the college campuses around the country. They were able to create this initiative due to their receiving a \$50,000 grant from the NCAA Innovations in Research and Practice Grant.<sup>108</sup> A small amount of money had a huge effect on a large college campus. 50,000 dollars is practically pocket change to the NCAA. The NCAA could afford to put this money into almost every Division I school across the country, but it chooses not to. This presents a bigger question: How much is the NCAA making, exactly? And where is this money going?

## **CHAPTER 13: SO HOW MUCH IS THE NCAA MAKING, EXACTLY?**

### **13.1 March (Mad)ness Money**

Steve Berkowitz of USA Today Sports reported in an article that “the NCAA had close to \$1.1 billion in annual revenue during its 2017 fiscal year, according to an audited

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<sup>108</sup> Hosick, Michelle Brutlag. “NCAA Grants Will Fund Research that Benefits Student-Athletes” National Collegiate Athletic Association. Accessed March 4, 2019. <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/news/ncaa-grants-will-fund-research-benefits-student-athletes>.

financial statement the association released Wednesday.”<sup>109</sup> Berkowitz reports in his article *NCAA Reports Revenues of More Than \$1 billion in 2017*: “It is the first time the association has surpassed \$1 billion in annual revenue, although it had come close in two of its past three fiscal years.”<sup>110</sup> Just let that sink in for a minute: the NCAA made over a billion dollars in just one fiscal year!

This number was a dramatic increase from the year before, and my guess is that it’s only going to keep increasing. In an article published by Fortune in March 2018 titled *The NCAA Raked in Over \$1 Billion Last Year*, Bloomberg notes some important statistics: “The National Collegiate Athletic Association earned \$1.06 billion in revenue last year, eclipsing the \$1 billion mark for the first time as the governing body defends its business model in court. It’s a 6.6 percent jump from fiscal 2016, in which the Indianapolis-based organization made \$996 million, according to audited statements released Wednesday. The NCAA turned a \$105 million profit.”<sup>111</sup>

The article goes on to describe the NCAA’s number one source of revenue, basketball: “The vast majority of the NCAA’s revenue comes from the organization’s television deal for its annual men’s basketball tournament — rights that CBS Corp. and Time Warner Inc.’s Turner Sports have locked up through 2032. The NCAA made \$761 million from that contract in 2017. The NCAA doesn’t own the top-tier college football playoffs.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Berkowitz, Steve. “NCAA Reports Revenues of More than \$1 Billion in 2017.” USA Today. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/college/2018/03/07/ncaa-reports-revenues-more-than-1-billion-2017/402486002/>.

<sup>110</sup> Berkowitz, Steve.

<sup>111</sup> Bloomberg. “The NCAA Raked in Over \$1 Billion Last Year.” Fortune. Accessed March 4, 2019. <http://fortune.com/2018/03/07/ncaa-billion-dollars/>.

<sup>112</sup> Parker, Tim. “How Much Does the NCAA Make off March Madness?” Investopedia. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/031516/how-much-does-ncaa-make-march-madness.asp>.

The amount of money that March Madness makes alone is staggering. So much so, that it's worth breaking down. Investopedia's article written by Tim Parker does a beautiful job of breaking down March Madness in his article *How Much Does the NCAA Make off March Madness?* He begins his article explaining all the sales associated with March Madness:

Last year the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) raked in a record \$1 billion in revenue from media rights fees, ticket sales, corporate sponsorships and a proliferation of television ads anchored around the three week long tournament. And the games aren't just a big business within the collegiate ecosystem. The American Gaming Association estimates that the number of brackets completed is going to hit 70 million and about \$9.2 billion will be gambled on the tournament. Meanwhile, 81.5 million employees are expected to spend at least an hour of company time filling out a bracket, costing their employers \$2.1 billion, according to calculations by Challenger, Gray & Christmas. Big brands will also take their piece of the profits but the NCAA conference commissioners and execs will see the heftiest cash out.<sup>113</sup>

Parker then goes on to talk about the revenue and broadcasting of March Madness:

Basically, March Madness is the NCAA's bread and butter. College athletics' governing body will earn somewhere around \$900 million in revenue from the tournament, representing about 90% of its annual revenue. On the surface that seems like cause for outrage, especially in light of how much the players earn: nothing. One of the most lucrative contracts connected with the tournament is the one for the broadcast rights. In 2010 the NCAA signed a 14-year, \$10.8 billion contract with CBS Sports and Turner Broadcasting, paid over the 14-year term. The deal was extended in April 2016 for a combined total rights fee of \$8.8 billion that will keep the tournament on the networks until 2032.<sup>114</sup>

According to the NCAA about 96% of the money it collects immediately flows out to the Division I membership. It's the only system in place that assigns a monetary value based on athletic performance.<sup>115</sup> Lastly, the article goes into how this money is divided:

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<sup>113</sup> Parker, Tim.

<sup>114</sup> Parker, Tim.

<sup>115</sup> Parker, Tim.

This year, 68 teams got an invitation to play in the tournament. Each of those team's conferences will get a piece of a \$220 million pot of money. For each game a team plays, its conference gets a payout, spread over six years. For playing one game the team's conference gets roughly \$1.7 million. If a team makes it all the way to the final game, it can earn as many as five units, totaling \$8.3 million. If a team makes the final game from the first-four bracket, it could earn a total of six units. Of course, each conference wants to see as many of its member schools in the tournament as possible, to raise the payout it receives. For smaller, lesser-known conferences, the basketball fund money they receive can represent more than 70% of their annual income. For that surprise team that is virtually unknown and makes it through multiple rounds, the payout can represent a much-needed cash injection for its conference. For larger conferences, however, such as the ACC or the Big 10, the basketball fund is more like financial icing on the cake rather than a major source of revenue.<sup>116</sup>

Parker breaks down the comparison between conferences and schools even more:

The NCAA urges conferences to divide the money equally among their member schools. Larger conferences, which have multiple sources of income, routinely divide up most of the money and send it to their school's athletics programs. Smaller conferences, however, count on that money to cover their own expenses. Only the money that's left over goes to member schools. In fact, most schools don't make money on their basketball programs. Only about one-third of schools made a profit or broke even in the 2013-2014 school year. At the top: the University of Louisville, which brought in more than \$24.2 million in profit during the same school year; the University of Arizona was second, at \$17.7 million.<sup>117</sup>

Below, you will see the figure that I inserted straight from the NCAA website illustrating how money is distributed within the NCAA:

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<sup>116</sup> Parker, Tim.

<sup>117</sup> Parker, Tim.



Throughout this paper I argue that college coaches have too much power within their given programs. A part of this power is due to how much they are paid. In David A. Tomer's article *The 25 Highest-Paid College Coaches of 2019*, he reports that the highest paid coach is Duke University Men's Basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski, who brought in \$8,982,325. The third highest paid college coach is Nick Saban, University of Alabama's Football, who brought in \$8,307,000. Ohio State Football coach Urban Meyer brought in

\$7,600,000 and Jimbo Fisher of Texas A&M University; Football, brought in \$7,500,00.<sup>118</sup>

I'm not arguing that these guys don't deserve how much they make, but the fact that head coaches are making millions while their prospective players make nothing is preposterous. College coaches are paid enormous paychecks from athletic departments and seen as public heroes. Coaches can leave coaching jobs whenever they please to coach at other schools (often while still being paid out at former universities) and they can mistreat their players (often because their behavior will be covered up). College coaches are given way too much power.

Let's take a deeper look at one of these coaches: Urban Meyer. Meyer may be one of the most irresponsible coaches in the entire country. He has turned back to misconduct taking place by his players and turned his head the other way while his assistant coach domestically abused his wife. But hey, no big deal, as long as he could compete for championships, right! I'm sure his \$7.6 million dollar paycheck didn't hurt.

ESPN staff writer Andrea Adelson explores these issues in her ESPN article *As Society Has Evolved, Urban Meyer Hasn't*:

During Meyer's six-year tenure at Florida, some 31 players were arrested, with at least 10 accused of crimes ranging from misdemeanor battery to felony domestic assault to felony theft to domestic battery. Punishment varied depending on the player, but let's just say it was uneven at best. In perhaps the best example that illustrates that, star running back Chris Rainey was suspended only four games in 2010 after he was charged with aggravated stalking for allegedly texting his girlfriend, 'Time to die, b----.' Not included in that arrest total? Then-graduate assistant Zach Smith, arrested in 2009 for allegedly shoving his pregnant wife against a wall. Meyer explained last week at Big Ten media day that he and his wife, Shelley, got involved to help Smith and his wife through counseling. Meyer went on to deny knowing that Smith was investigated for domestic violence

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<sup>118</sup> Fierily, Steve. "The 27 Highest-Paid College Basketball Coaches in 2018." The Street. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.thestreet.com/lifestyle/sports/highest-paid-college-basketball-coaches-1477433>.



in 2015. Courtney Smith, Zach's now-ex-wife, said Wednesday that she told Shelley about both the 2009 and 2015 incidents.<sup>119</sup>

Sounds like a great role model, right? Urban Meyer stood by through all this behavior and he only lost about a sixth of his earnings from Ohio State before retiring. Meyer lost \$570,000, according to USA Today.<sup>120</sup> He made millions while all of this misconduct took place and it barely cost him. This is just another example of how programs support coaches way more than they support student-athletes.

### 13.2 A “Free” Education

The most baffling part about the 1.1 billion dollar revenue that the NCAA made in 2017 is the fact that the players don't see a dime of this money. Without the talented players at these schools, none of this revenue would even be possible, and yet the NCAA continues to take in millions while still claiming “student-athletes are at the heart of the NCAA's mission.”<sup>121</sup> With the distribution of this money, the NCAA basically tells athletes to sit down, shut up, and be grateful for the education they're given back in a trade known as a scholarship while the NCAA makes over a billion dollars per year. Whenever a student-athlete speaks up about the corrupt rules the NCAA has in place, a popular response is often “a student-athlete has something to complain about, are you kidding me? You're getting a *free* education!” There is nothing that agitates me as much

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<sup>119</sup> Adelson, Andrea. “As Society has Evolved, Urban Meyer Hasn't.” ESPN. Accessed March 4, 2019. [http://www.espn.com/college-football/story/\\_/id/24259780/urban-meyer-ohio-state-buckeyes-coaching-scandal](http://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/24259780/urban-meyer-ohio-state-buckeyes-coaching-scandal).

<sup>120</sup> Perez, A.J. “Urban Meyer Docked More than \$570,000 as part of his Ohio State Suspension.” USA Today. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/ncaaf/bigten/2018/09/19/urban-meyer-docked-more-than-half-million-ohio-state-suspension/1357703002/>.

<sup>121</sup> Where Does The Money Go? *National Collegiate Athletic Association*. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/Where%20Does%20the%20Money%20Go-WEB.PDF>.



as people who say that NCAA athletes get a “free” education. This common misconception is one of the most inaccurate and ignorant arguments I heard during my time as a college athlete. There is absolutely nothing “free” about our education. As I displayed earlier, student-athletes spent more than forty hours a week practicing. Let’s compare this to a corporate job (even though corporate jobs are much less demanding physically), an employee that would work over forty hours per week in their given job would never do so without compensation, yet nobody compares the grueling work of student-athletes to those who have professional jobs when in fact they are very similar.

Another thing that people tend to overlook is that not every college athlete is on a full scholarship. More often, they aren’t. Kelly Holland and John W. Schoen of CNBC News prove this in their article *Think Athletic Scholarships Are a 'Holy Grail'? Think Again*: “Overall, colleges and universities awarded more than \$3 billion in athletic scholarships in 2013, but very few of those were full rides. In most sports, coaches are allowed to divvy up scholarships. In 2013, the average amount of money awarded to NCAA Division 1 athletes was \$13,821 for men and \$14,660 for women. Other divisions offer less, and Division 3 schools offer no athletic scholarships at all.”<sup>122</sup>

There were so many times throughout my time as a college athlete that people were quick to tell me how “lucky” I was to be on a full scholarship, as if being a college athlete was some sort of luxury and my scholarship was just handed to me out of thin air. I will be forever thankful for all of the opportunities that being a college athlete brought me, but my scholarship was well earned and most of the time I felt like I was working a full-time

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<sup>122</sup> Holland, Kelly. “Think Athletic Scholarships are a 'Holy Grail'? Think Again.” CNBC News. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.cnbc.com/2014/10/13/think-athletic-scholarships-are-a-holy-grail-think-again.html>.

job. To offer some perspective, I played women's basketball at a low mid-major Division I. Without taking anything away from that, I can't even imagine what it would be like to be a top prospect at a high major women's basketball program like Notre Dame or UConn and the amount of pressure that must come along with competing for top universities. I also find it hard to put myself in the shoes of a high major men's player at a big school where the majority of the NCAA's revenue comes from. It's worth noting how much of an impact high major players have on universities and what a difference their attendance within a program can do for a university.

### **13.3 The Zion Effect**

Zion Williamson is a 6'7" 285 pound forward at Duke University. During his freshman season with the Blue Devils, he's averaged 21.6 PPG, 8.8 RPG, and 2.2 APG.<sup>123</sup> After his freshman season, he is projected to be the number one pick in the NBA draft. This freshman sensation has been the face of college basketball in the 2018/2019 season. His athleticism and talent is so impressive that NBA stars like LeBron James and celebrities including Jay-Z have even gone out of their way to attend his college games. If you have such high-profile celebrities traveling across the country to watch Zion, imagine what other people are willing to do to get their hands on tickets to see the rising star play.

Because basketball tickets are in such high demand at Duke, students camp outside of Cameron Indoor Stadium, the home court of the Blue Devils, to get tickets. This year, students had to take a quiz just to be eligible to camp outside for tickets. Dan Gartland of

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<sup>123</sup> "Zion Williamson." ESPN. Accessed March 4, 2019. [http://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/player/\\_/id/4395628/zion-williamson](http://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/player/_/id/4395628/zion-williamson).

Sports Illustrated describes just how hard it is for students to get tickets to attend a Duke home game in his article *Duke Fans Take a Ridiculously Hard Quiz to Get into Krzyzewskiville*:

Due to overwhelming demand for spots in Krzyzewskiville, the tent city outside the arena where fans camp out for tickets to the game, organizers have been forced to allot some spots in line by administering a quiz on this year's Duke team. One of the conditions laid out in Krzyzewskiville 43-page policy manual is that more than 80 tents (each with 12 people) sign up in the first 24 hours to participate in the campout, the first 70 spots in line will be awarded to the groups who perform best on a trivia quiz. According to the *Duke Chronicle*, more than 150 tents signed up in the first hour that registration was open on Jan. 3, including 91 in the first *four seconds* of the sign-up period. As a result, over 1,800 students (which the *Chronicle* points out is more than 25% of the school's undergraduate population) took the test on Thursday night.<sup>124</sup>

Gartland goes on to tell us that the quizzes that students had to take to get into Krzyzewskiville were difficult:

The *Chronicle* got its hands on a copy of the whole test and, holy cow, it's a tough one. The very first question asks you to name all 15 members of the current Duke roster, plus their jersey number, position and hometown. If you don't know that senior walk-on Brennan Besser is from Chicago and wears No. 53 under the shooting shirt he wears on the bench, you could be out of luck. Other questions are a little easier, asking to name the Blue Devils' leaders in points, assists and rebounds per game and give the number rounded to the nearest integer. The real doozies are saved for the very end of the quiz, in the 'miscellaneous' section. Like this one: "Two players sat out during our tour through Canada. Which two players?" But wait, there's more. This quiz was only to determine which groups get a spot in line. A second quiz is administered to determine the order of the line. After all that, 840 lucky students will be in position to get the best seats in the house for the Feb. 20 game against the Tar Heels. They just better hope the flu doesn't spread through the camp like last year.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Gartland, Dan. "Duke Fans Had to Take a Ridiculously Hard Quiz to Get Into Krzyzewskiville." Sports Illustrated. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.si.com/college-basketball/2019/01/11/duke-unc-tickets-krzyzewskiville-fans-tents-quiz>.

<sup>125</sup> Gartland, Dan.

This is an example of “The Zion Effect.” Michael McCarthy explains just how big of an impact the college phenomenon has had on ticket sales since he got to Duke in his article *The Zion Effect: Duke’s Zion Williamson Ignites Ticket Sales*: “Duke’s freshman sensation has set the online ticket resale market on fire, with fans paying big money, and driving hundreds of miles, to watch the 6-7, 285-pound Williamson in the flesh. With the Blue Devils hosting the rival North Carolina Tar Heels at Cameron Indoor Stadium Wednesday night (ESPN, 9 p.m. ET), ticket prices are off the charts.”<sup>126</sup> McCarthy continues: “The most expensive ticket sold by Vivid to Wednesday night’s game? Try \$10,652, nearly double the \$5,400 price for the steepest ticket to last season’s game. As of Tuesday, the cheapest ticket cost \$2,990. The most expensive ticket left: \$6,452.”<sup>127</sup> The article also describes how much of an impact this Duke freshman has had on ticket sales compared to the following years: “Sales traffic to Duke Basketball’s ticket page at Vivid Seats is up 82 percent for the 2018-2019 season, reports Vivid’s Stephen Spiewak. Moreover, Duke Fans are traveling a median distance of 469 miles to watch the 18-year-old Williamson. Vivid’s ticket sales for this season’s Duke-UNC games are more than double the previous three seasons.”<sup>128</sup> McCarthy’s article also explores effect the freshman sensation has on the ticket sales of Duke’s opponents:

The so-called “Zion Effect” is also in full swing at national ticket reseller SeatGeek. Duke has been the hottest ticket in college basketball this season, said Nate Rattner of SeatGeek, selling out every game. Thanks largely to Williamson, ticket price are up an average of 178 percent at SeatGeek when Duke is the visiting team. When Duke traveled to Charlottesville, Va., on Feb. 9 to play Virginia, game tickets resold for an average of \$305. That was the most expensive home ticket for the Cavaliers since SeatGeek started

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<sup>126</sup> McCarthy, Michael. “The Zion Effect: Duke’s Zion Williamson Ignites Ticket Sales.” Sporting News. Accessed March 4, 2019. <http://www.sportingnews.com/us/ncaa-basketball/news/the-zion-effect-dukes-zion-williamson-ignites-ticket-sales/1b5ouskbtvzr1nj29hjkjrlfz>.

<sup>127</sup> McCarthy, Michael.

<sup>128</sup> McCarthy, Michael.

tracking secondary ticket sales in 2010. Williamson is also a big draw at home in Durham, N.C. The average resale price for Duke's home games at Cameron is \$264 on SeatGeek. That makes Duke the most 'in-demand' of any men's college basketball team, Rattner said.<sup>129</sup>

During the same game where the most expensive ticket sold was \$10,652, Williamson took an awkward step and ripped through his entire Nike basketball shoe in the first minute of play. Zion did not return in the game and he has since been sidelined with a knee sprain. Williamson has not played a single minute in a college game since the Duke North Carolina rivalry.

In situations like this, people are quick to jump to athlete's defense. The 18-year-old's presence alone is selling out stadiums and pushing ticket costs to over \$10,000 a piece, yet he doesn't see any of it. The NCAA rules are completely scamming Zion Williamson. The rules work against athletes so much that if Zion Williamson signed an autograph for a fan, that fan could sell the autograph online and collect money from the highest bidder. Athletes can't even make money off their own name, image, or likeness, but the NCAA can.

The NCAA rule is as follows:

Any commercial items with names, likenesses or pictures of multiple student-athletes...may be sold only at the member institution at which the student-athletes are enrolled, the institution's conference, institutionally controlled (owned and operated) outlets or outlets controlled by the charitable, educational or nonprofit organization....Items that include an individual student-athlete's name, picture or likeness (e.g., name on jersey, name or likeness on a bobble head doll), other than informational items (e.g., media guide, schedule cards, institutional publications), may not be sold.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> McCarthy, Michael.

<sup>130</sup> "Amateurism." *National Collegiate Athletic Association*. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://web3.ncaa.org/lstdbi/search/proposalView?id=1479>

This means that for a student-athlete to be eligible to play for the NCAA, they have to sign a compliance form agreeing to this rule. Duke can sell Zion Williamson jerseys and profit millions off of his name, yet he isn't allowed a dime of it. The NCAA completely exploits every athlete they make sign this piece of paper, yet claim that it's only beneficial for players because of amateurism.

### 13.4 Amateurism

Of all the hypocritical, corrupt claims that the NCAA has made over the years, their claiming amateurism this one by far is the most laughable. The NCAA argues that amateurism isn't "educational" and allowing athletes to get paid would only hurt their education. The well-known class-action lawsuit that started this conversation was brought by Ed O'Bannon, a University of Carolina, Los Angeles basketball star. Patrick Hruby of Vice Sports explores this in his article *Amateurism Isn't Educational: Debunking the NCAA's Dumbest Lie*. Hruby's article illustrates how O'Bannon fought to allow college athletes to be paid for the use of their name, image, and likenesses in television broadcasts and in video games, but fought a losing battle:

While arguing that no, actually, people like O'Bannon should not get a bigger slice of the money pie, the NCAA's lawyers insisted that the current one-small-size-fits-all portion doled out to players somehow enhances their schooling. And believe it or not, the three-judge panel that oversaw an association appeal of the case *agreed*—at least enough to overturn an original injunction from U.S. District Judge Claudia Wilken that would have permitted schools to pay players at least \$5,000 a year in deferred cash. Instead, the panel decreed that *all* college athlete compensation must be tethered to educational expenses.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Hruby, Patrick. "Amateurism Isn't Educational: Debunking the NCAA's Dumbest Lie." Vice Sports. Accessed March 4, 2019. [https://sports.vice.com/en\\_us/article/kzqevz/amateurism-isnt-educational-debunking-the-ncaas-dumbest-lie](https://sports.vice.com/en_us/article/kzqevz/amateurism-isnt-educational-debunking-the-ncaas-dumbest-lie).

Hruby continues to discuss how going against the NCAA from a legal standpoint can prevent college athletes from being paid forever: “There's more. The same tether could apply to a pending class-action suit brought against the NCAA and the major college conferences by former Clemson University football player Martin Jenkins, a case that essentially seeks to bring free agency to campus sports. Which means that the ludicrous logic of ‘if we write them checks, they won't study’ could end up acting as a legal firewall that prevents college players from *ever* being paid.”<sup>132</sup> While it’s easy to see just how slimy the NCAA is, seeing it from a legal lens is even more mind-boggling, Hruby quotes ‘It's insane,’ says David Grenardo, a 40-year-old attorney and associate professor at St. Mary's School of Law in San Antonio, Texas, who played football at Rice University in the 1990s. ‘What the NCAA has done is a great job of marketing and propaganda to say that amateurism is all about education.’”<sup>133</sup>

Hruby continues: “Speaking of ridiculous, on its website the NCAA says that ‘maintaining amateurism is crucial to preserving an academic environment in which acquiring a quality education is the first priority.’ Great. If that's true, then college sports should be relatively free of academic compromise and malfeasance. After all, they're already amateur.”

Hruby uses data to illustrate how the NCAA doesn’t care about athlete education at all: “A 2014 report from South Carolina's College Sports Research Institute found that the graduation rate of football players in the Power Five conferences was 20 percent lower than that of their non-athlete counterparts; for men's basketball players, the graduation rate

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<sup>132</sup> Hruby, Patrick.

<sup>133</sup> Hruby, Patrick.

in major conferences was 31.5 percent lower.”<sup>134</sup> Hruby then goes on to state these cases one by one:

Three years ago, the NCAA reportedly was investigating 20 cases of academic fraud at its member schools, 18 of them at Division I institutions. One of those schools, the University of North Carolina, was placed on academic probation by its accreditation body—the first Tier 1 research university to receive such a penalty. UNC remains under NCAA investigation for a massive scandal in which hundreds of athletes over a 23-year period were steered toward bogus "paper classes" that never met and required students to produce single, end-of-semester papers, which often were plagiarized or allegedly written by others and sometimes graded by non-faculty members.<sup>135</sup>

Hruby argues that of course none of this comes as a surprise.

None of this is new. When former North Carolina athletes Rashanda McCants and Devon Ramsay sued the school and the NCAA in 2015 over the paper classes scandal, their 100-page complaint cited 26 different examples of academic malfeasance at schools ranging from the University of Michigan to Texas Tech University. Among the cases was a University of Georgia class taught by an assistant basketball coach in which several of his players received A's despite rarely attending—and were given a final exam that included the question "How many goals are on a basketball court?"<sup>136</sup>

Hruby's article progresses to one last example: "While researching *Billion-Dollar Ball*, his book on big-time college football, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Gil Gaul spent a morning walking around the University of Kansas' 1,000-acre campus with "class checkers" (an athletic department official called them "varsity ambassadors") who stood outside classroom doors and had revenue-sport athletes sign sheets of paper confirming

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<sup>134</sup> Hruby, Patrick.

<sup>135</sup> Hruby, Patrick.

<sup>136</sup> Hruby, Patrick.



when they entered and exited their classes.”<sup>137</sup> Sure seems like preventing athletes from getting paid only ensures the quality of their education, right?

Other professional athletes have publically agreed with Hruby. In an *Uninterrupted* interview, Maverick Carter interviewed NBA Rookie of the Year Ben Simmons on his college experience at LSU in Jack Maloney’s Article:

Maverick Carter: After Monteverde you went to LSU, you were open about being one and done. Like, I’m here for one year, then I’m out. So is there even a point to go to college for that six, seven months?

Ben Simmons: If we didn’t, a lot of people would be losing money. So I think that’s the main reason. The NCAA, if they didn’t have the stars coming through, people wouldn’t be watching.

Carter: If I was as talented as you, would I see a point in that six or seven months of being there?

Simmons: I think no. I think I would have learned a lot more being around professional athletes. Looking at it now, I don’t really know what I learned, financially, or just being a person at LSU. I think I’ve learned a lot more this whole year in Philly, just being a pro, than I did at LSU.<sup>138</sup>

Ben Simmons basically called his college experience a waste of time and explains that athletes only go to college because they must do so in order to progress to the NBA. The NCAA’s one-and-done rule prohibits high school athletes from entering straight to the league instead of going to college for a year. This one-and-done rule is only in place so that the NCAA can make more money. It’s not because they want student-athletes to get a quality education, I mean what student-athlete is going to get a “quality” education if they’re only in school for a year? Take Zion Williamson for example’ look at all of the

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<sup>137</sup> Hruby, Patrick.

<sup>138</sup> Maloney, Jack. “Sixers’ Ben Simmons on his Time at LSU: ‘I Don’t Really Know What I Learned.’” CBS Sports. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.cbssports.com/nba/news/sixers-ben-simmons-on-his-time-at-lsu-i-dont-really-know-what-i-learned/>.

revenue and money the NCAA is making off just his one year in college. Superstars are forced to go into college for a year not because the NCAA wants them to get a quality education, but because the NCAA wants to make money off of them. This is just another way the NCAA exploits athletes.

Following Zion Williamsons knee injury, Demarcus Cousins shared his feelings about the NCAA in one of his post-game interviews, which was quoted in an article written by Mark Medina:

Knowing what I know now, college is bull----. College basketball and the NCAA is bull----,” Cousins said. “How much does Zion Williamson get?” Cousins asked rhetorically. “That’s who they’re coming to see. That’s what the NCAA gets. Actually, who does it go to? How does it benefit any player on that team? But to get \$20 and a free meal, they are labeled a bad kid and get a bad rap, are called un-coachable or thugs or whatever the case may be. It’s been bull---t.<sup>139</sup>

In a Deadspin article written by Nick Martin, the author quotes Philadelphia 76ers guard Ben Simmons “The NCAA is really f---ed up...Everybody’s making money except the players. We’re the ones waking up early as hell to be the best teams and do everything they want us to do and then the players get nothing. They say education, but if I’m there for a year, I can’t get much education.”<sup>140</sup>

Donovan Mitchell, a star of the Utah Jazz went to twitter following Zion’s injury: “Again let’s remember all the money that went into this game.... and these players get none of it.... and now Zion gets hurt... something has to change @NCAA.”

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<sup>139</sup> Medina, Mark. “DeMarcus Cousins shares gripes about NCAA after Zion Williamson Injury.” Valdosta Daily Times. Accessed March 4, 2019.

[http://www.atlanticbb.net/news/read/category/sports/article/the\\_mercury\\_news-demarcus\\_cousins\\_shares\\_gripes\\_about\\_ncaa\\_after\\_zi-tca](http://www.atlanticbb.net/news/read/category/sports/article/the_mercury_news-demarcus_cousins_shares_gripes_about_ncaa_after_zi-tca).

<sup>140</sup> Martin, Nick. Ben Simmons: "The NCAA Is Really F---ed Up," Deadspin. Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://deadspin.com/ben-simmons-the-ncaa-is-really-fucked-up-1788498520>.

Thomas Lott quotes Los Angeles Lakers guard Kyle Kuzma in his article questioning whether college athletes should be paid: "Someone take down the NCAA for generating billions of dollars to only pay its student athletes a cost of attendance of \$900 dollars a month."<sup>141</sup>

Of all the different weigh-ins on amateurism, nobody sums it up better than one of my favorite sports analysts of all time, Jay Bilas. Bilas played basketball at Duke University where he later earned his law degree. Today, he is one of the best college basketball sports analysts around. He consistently slams the NCAA on twitter. He is educated, smart, and been a member of the NCAA himself. In his ESPN article *Why the College Basketball Scandal Won't Get Fixed until the NCAA Pays Athletes*, Bilas says: "The NCAA continues benefiting from this multibillion-dollar business, while the players get only a scholarship, and the only ones exploiting the athletes are the NCAA and the member institutions. When you use a person to make money while at the same time limiting that person from making money, you exploit. Players are certainly not mistreated, but they are exploited."<sup>142</sup> I disagree with him. Not only are NCAA players exploited, but in my experience many are mistreated.

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<sup>141</sup> Lott, Thomas. "Prominent NBA Players Weigh in on Whether NCAA Players Should be Paid." Sporting News. Accessed March 4, 2019. <http://www.sportingnews.com/us/ncaa-basketball/news/ncaa-basketball-pay-for-play-lonzo-ball-players-should-be-compensated-ucla/17ix218hq3702179reldg8zil4>.

<sup>142</sup> Bilas, Jay. "Why the College Basketball Scandal Won't get Fixed until the NCAA pays Athletes." ESPN. Accessed March 4, 2019. [http://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/story/\\_/id/20841877/until-ncaa-solves-money-problem-pays-athletes-problems-continue](http://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/story/_/id/20841877/until-ncaa-solves-money-problem-pays-athletes-problems-continue)

## **CHAPTER 14: WOULD I DO IT ALL AGAIN?**

### **14.1 Is It Really Worth It?**

In the beginning of my paper I presented a question that many people often ask me about my college athletic experience.

*“Would you do it all again?”*

Absolutely, without a doubt, yes. I would do these five years over again in a heartbeat and I would not trade my experience as a student-athlete for anything else in the world. Even though they were without question the hardest years of my life, they were also the most rewarding. I would go through all the sleepless nights, anxiety, depression, paranoia, and all of the other low points over again because playing college basketball has completely shaped the person I am today and without it, I wouldn't be where I am today. Over these past five years I have learned invaluable life lessons that will stick with me for the rest of my life. The adversity that I faced as a college athlete has made me a stronger person. I entered college as a young, naïve eighteen-year-old girl who had a lot to learn about the world around me. I will be leaving college as a strong, resilient, twenty-three-year-old woman who has found her voice and purpose.

### **14.2 What I've Learned**

In this chapter I will be discussing all the major life lessons that being a college athlete has taught me:

**1. The ability to take criticism.** First and foremost, the most important lesson that college athletics has taught me is the ability to take criticism, regardless of the form that it is presented in. I've dealt with criticism from passive aggressive coaches, I've had coaches consistently screaming and yelling at me when they expect things to be done a certain way. I have faced high expectations from each coach that I have endured while playing basketball. I expect criticism in all forms whenever I make a mistake. This has made me accustom to direct blunt feedback. I have learned to handle constructive criticism privately and publicly and I have never let this deflate or impact my attitude. There were many times that instead of overthinking the way a coach delivered a message to me, I focused on the message, not the delivery. I have learned to take this criticism and apply it in a way to help me become a better player and a better teammate. I know that my experience as an athlete when it comes to constructive forms of feedback will only help me in my professional career.

**2. Teamwork.** As an athlete I have learned to understand that team goals always come before one's individual needs. Being a part of a team means that you are a part of something bigger than yourself. Everyone within a team has a specific role they need to play in order for teams to operate as a cohesive unit and to reach success. I have had to sacrifice personal needs for the greater team good. Being on a team has taught me how to work with people I didn't necessarily like but found a mutual respect for. Additionally, working under the direction of a head coach has helped prepare me for having a boss in the workplace someday. Being on a team has taught me that I don't need to be best friends

with everyone on my team, but I do need to respect them. I have learned to put my personal feelings about other players on the side in order to maintain a positive team structure.

**3. Choose Which Battles to Fight.** There were so many times in college where I disagreed with the way that things were done, the actions of others, and the way that coaches perceived my actions or my teammates' actions. I have learned that more often than not it's better to just let things go and agree to disagree. I have learned that everyone is different and sometimes we just aren't going to see eye-to-eye on things. There are certain situations that are worth a response and certain ones that aren't. I have also learned that many times no response is in fact a response in itself. Playing college sports taught me to pick and choose my battles and which ones were worth fighting for.

**4. The importance of goal setting and team culture.** A team is not going to find success if their players don't have the same goal. Unfortunately, throughout my college career not every team that I was a part of understood this, and early on in my career I can honestly say I didn't understand it either. It's hard to have fourteen people have the same goal. It's important that coaches work to help create a positive team culture of respect and to make sure that the majority of the people within a team are working towards the same goal.

**5. The importance of leadership.** It's important that a team has multiple areas of leadership. I never had a college coach who had the communication skills to build strong, trustworthy, relationships with each player on a team or had the skills to get the most of each individual player. Leaders need to have the platform to speak their minds and have

their voice be heard. I've learned that leaders can't be afraid of being disliked and that more often than not, leaders have to be the bad guy. I have always felt that when it comes to leadership, you either have it or you don't. While it can be developed and strengthened overtime, it takes a unique person to be an impactful leader and I don't think this is a skill that can be taught. Leaders are leaders in every area of their life and in everything they do, and the switch can't be flipped on and off as they so please.

**6. Honesty.** College basketball taught me everyone has a voice, and how they use that voice matters. During my five years as an athlete, I've learned how important is to speak up honestly. Not only with your teammates, but with your coaches. Although more often than not I would come out of meetings with my coaches feeling like I was on a completely different page than they were, I could leave knowing I spoke my mind truthfully. Telling people how you feel matters. The thing that most people want is to simply be heard-out and understood. The thing that I think more people in college athletics need to understand is that truly listening to others can do a lot. I wish I truly listened more to what my teammates or coaches were trying to get across instead of worrying about my response. On the flip side of that, I also wish that more of my coaches in college did more listening instead of quickly trying to justify every decision they made. College basketball has taught me how to present my thoughts to someone in an honest way. The skills and conversations that I had in college will help me handle future ones in my professional life someday.

**7. Look in the mirror.** There were so many times in college where I pointed the finger at others instead of taking responsibility first. College basketball taught me to take a long,

hard look in the mirror more times than once. Before blaming other people, you must check yourself first by looking in the mirror.

**8. Excuses are inexcusable.** At the end of the day, you either commit to doing things or you don't. Playing college sports has taught me that constantly finding excuses for not getting things done or not doing things the right way is a pretty lame way to go through life. If you truly want to get something done or accomplish something, you just do it. If you want to pass a fitness test, you train until you know that there's no chance you fail. If you want to master any given basketball skill, you practice it until you excel at it. If you want to do well in school, you study until you succeed. I also can apply this one to personal relationships. I don't think anyone can ever be "too busy" for anything. It's a matter of how you prioritize things. If you care about somebody, you will be there for them no matter what. If you care about friendships, you work hard to invest in them.

**9. You are in control.** This one took me a while to figure out, especially during my first two years of college. There are many different people in your life that have different opinions on what they think you should do or the choices they think you should make. But the only happiness that matters is your own! I learned quickly that making choices was a lot easier when I stopped caring about what other people thought of me. If you don't like where you are in life, do something different, make a change. You are in control of what you want your life to be.



**10. Mental toughness & resilience go hand in hand.** One of the greatest things that I will leave college with is mental toughness that is unbreakable. Having a strong mind is one of the most important things a person can have. The mental toughness that Division I athletes have from playing sports is an amazing gift. We are conditioned to see obstacles and adversity as challenges that we must overcome. Resilience is about coming back from difficulty. It's not always about winning, it's about not giving up. It's about getting up after you've been knocked down time and time again and coming back stronger than before.

I guarantee almost every student athlete that you talk to will say that they will do it all over again. Despite the hardships they have faced, almost every single one of them would say would go through it all again despite the challenges they faced.

#### **14.4 Student Athlete Testimonials**

I felt that it was important to hear what other athletes had to say about their college experience. I asked different female athletes from all different levels of sports to describe their college experience, the high points, the low points, the relationships with their coaches, and if they would do it all again.. Out of respect of some student athletes, some asked to be anonymous.

1) "My experience as a college athlete was definitely a positive one overall. Of course, there are high and low points, but when I look back at my career in totality, it was very positive. I will stress that being an athlete at such a high level requires so much dedication and commitment that it truly amplifies all aspects of your life for better and worse. When you aren't doing well in your sport, it negativity impacts your life off the court. When you are doing well in your sport, it influences other areas of your life and everything just feels better. Being a college athlete is truly powerful and can impact your emotional and physical well-being positively and negatively. For me overall, it was very positive.

My relationship with my head coach was interesting. He believed in me, he made me a better player, and he helped build a very successful team. However, I will say that some of his actions negatively impacted me, as well as my team. It was definitely a roller coaster of emotions that was very inconsistent. I would say that my team and I would not know what mood/side of our coach we would get that day which really would impact how we played. Overall, for majority of my career, I would say that my relationship with my coach was good.

I 100% would do it again. I look back at my experience as an athlete and I remember how tough those four years were. There was a lot of blood, sweat, and tears (literally) that went into my career. It was a lot of hours, a lot of frustration, but also a lot of fun. It was very rewarding, and getting to be surrounded by people with the same passion and love for the game was amazing. Truthfully, that is one of the things I miss the most about college sports. Being surrounded by people who love what they do as much as you do is incredible. Being a college athlete has taught me so many life lessons that apply to my life outside of sport. Not only that but it has given me lifelong friendships and experiences that are truly unforgettable. Being an athlete has literally shaped every part of my life and made me a better person. As I encounter more people who did not get to play sports in college, I realize how much of a privilege and honor it is to play in college.” *-Anonymous, Basketball*

2) “Overall my experience as an athlete was negative. I was lucky enough that there were many positive moments because of the bond I built with teammates. However, I never developed a good relationship with my head coach. My interactions with coach often left me feeling worthless and honestly diminished my love for the sport. Ultimately I left college basketball run-down and with a much lower self-esteem then when I began and I think a lot of that attributes to the actions of my coaches.

Although my experience was negative, I would do it again. From a basketball perspective, it was not at all what I had hoped for myself but I learned so much about myself and how to treat others. I think I learned a lot from my coach about what not to do, how to overcome a negative environment, and how find confidence in yourself when others don’t value you. I also left with amazing friends and loved the college I attended outside of basketball. Overall I am a much stronger person for it and I don’t regret my decision to stay and play four years.” *-Rachel Merrill, 23, University of Vermont, Basketball’*

3) “I had quite the up and down experience as a college athlete, which I’m guessing most players can relate to. I’d always go in and out of playing and get recognition here and there, yet was being told how consistent I was on the court and to keep everything up. I never quite understood how I could sit the whole first half and play the entire second, or sit an entire game and play the last 5 of a close game, but still I had to be ready. My relationship with my head coach was respectable enough where I could bring things to her attention that were bothering me or the team. Sometimes it ended well, other times it was frustrating and targeted communication. I didn’t hold back my thoughts on our team and the staff. I always presented my data or thoughts in a respectable manner and became a spokesperson for the team. Come senior year, after all the ups and downs, our point guard, one of my co-seniors and I were chosen to be “team leaders.” No captains for the year. I’d never felt

more disrespected by the staff. We were given all the responsibilities and duties of a captain, but not the recognition. It was hard to accept, but as the season went on there was no option but to be the same leader and voice I was for the team. At the end of my four years I wouldn't say I have a bad relationship with my head coach, but it's more business than casual. I've challenged the staff and they have challenged me.

Not a day goes by that I regret playing for Northeastern and developing my role as a player. I absolutely love being involved with a team, and I can't remember a time when I wasn't on a roster. It has taught me how to work hard, collaborate, stand for what I believe in, lead, and to have fun. It has also improved my ability to have confidence in tough conversations and to make hard decisions. I think being involved in sport is so important for the development of many skills. These skills will better prepare me for future jobs, relationships and leading a healthy lifestyle.” *-Maureen Taggart, 22, Northeastern University, Basketball*

4) “My experience as a college athlete has been disappointingly negative. Going into college I had a confidence in my game and I love for my game that I apparently took for granted. I have not had that confidence and love since high school. My body was criticized before I even got a chance to prove my strength and skill. I was told to lose weight months before I even graduated high school. That stuck with me throughout my college career and still sticks with me. I was scared of my head coach. I was scared of his ability to manipulate and get inside my head, make me doubt the things I was most confident about. I could never go to my coach for anything. I'm currently recovering from bulimia. After the previous head coach retired I found that I could place my trust in the newest head coach. She has been supportive and encouraging of me getting the help I need. It is truly a shame that I, as well as the rest of my class, get only one year with her.

I would not do it again. I have no problem going through it physically again, but to go through it mentally and emotionally, I wouldn't. If the situation with coaches was different than maybe. The whole experience has taught me that mental health is detrimental to the performance of an athlete that if an athlete is not mentally, emotionally, or physically well, their performance is hindered.” *-Lorraine Hickman, 21, St. Francis Brooklyn, Basketball*

5) “My experience as a Division I college athlete was a very positive one. I met my forever best friends and had an invaluable experience that could never be replaced. I often wish I could go back in time and relive it over and over. I took pride in representing the name on my jersey and leaving the program better than it was when I got there. High points are absolutely the relationships that were formed and still remain over ten years later. The class I graduated with talk on the regular and continue to support each other from all over the country.

I never had “low points” just challenges, such as overcoming team adversities. My best friend and roommate struggled with an eating disorder and that took a toll on our team and our friendship. She wouldn't have overcome that challenge if there were 30 teammates and staff members to support her. If we value those relationships that push us to be better people we are able to truly respect them as people and as coaches.

I had an incredible relationship with my head coach, I felt that she picked on me the most when I was a player but as I always look back I see she knew how to shape me into the best lacrosse player. I was horrible at communicating and she continued to push my limits and get me uncomfortable leading by having me voice my thoughts. To this day, she is one of the reasons I coach. She pushed me to be my better self as a leader, as a role model and as a communicator.

I would go back and do it all again, the exact same way. I think if I could change one thing, I would work harder for my coaches and teammates for how much effort it goes in to be a Division 1 coach. Being on the other side of it now, I couldn't imagine a better staff and teammates to have given me the confidence to continue my passion as a coach."

*-Jessica Drummond, 28, Oregon University, Lacrosse*

6) "Exciting, confusing, enjoyable, tedious and life-changing are only a few ways to characterize my experience as a Division 1 student-athlete. My experience as a college athlete ebbed and flowed from exceptional to heartbreaking and back to exceptional. I was so excited to play basketball in college, but my relationship with my basketball coaches was interesting. I respected them and they respected me but we had different mindsets. Although I was just a teenager, I was hardworking, loyal, respectful and self-willed. Unfortunately, my basketball coaches did not necessarily care for the self-willed trait. I was fortunate enough to transfer my scholarship to play volleyball. COMPLETELY DIFFERENT STORY. My volleyball coach encouraged me to cultivate my "hard-nosed" attitude because she recognized that that is what made me a Division 1 athlete. Moral of the story (exceptional to heartbreak and back to exceptional), coaches can either have an incredible impact on an athlete's life or really fracture their passion. I, however, moved on to prove a point to them and myself and it was the best decision I made in college. I have no regrets and hold no ill will toward my basketball coaches. Although we were many years apart in age, they were also just commencing their journey as Division 1 coaches and they had to find their path as I did as an athlete. I would suggest to any coach at any level that - just as they assess an athlete's physical and strategic skill level they also need to be cognizant of what makes their athletes pulsate. The coach is responsible to figure out how to utilize the whole athlete (psychomotor, affective and cognitive skills/characteristics).

Would I do it again? Absolutely, YES. Playing on two Division I teams in college was the greatest time in my life. It gave me the tools and skills to be responsible, hardworking and resilient in my personal and professional life. Those skills have supported me through devastating life events and made me a successful educational administrator (knowing how to manage and appropriately educate students). More importantly, I have lifelong friends from participating in college athletics. And, I can't imagine my life without them." -  
*Georgia Deren, 54, James Madison University, Basketball/Volleyball*

7) "My experience as a college athlete was honestly amazing. First of all, I enjoyed competing at a Division I level and that entire experience was rewarding. I learned a lot about myself as a person and I was forced to adjust to the high demands of college athletics and academics. I absolutely loved my teammates and the other athletes within the athletic

community whom I met along the way. I was lucky enough to have a great relationship with my head coach and assistant coaches, which I understand can be very rare. I am grateful for that experience and the relationships that I built.

I would 100% do it all over again. It was the best four years of my life and I miss it every day. I feel as if I did it all over again, I could have been even more successful academically and athletically. I feel as if at times I took it all for granted. I am forever grateful for my experience as a Division I athlete.” -*Sarah Martin, University of Vermont, Soccer*

8) “My experience as a college athlete, looking at the bigger picture, was definitely positive. I got a free education, got to live in the greatest city in the world, play the sport I love for a couple more years and meet some of my lifelong friends. But it was definitely one of the toughest times of my life because of the toxic environment, lack of leadership and accountability from the administrators leading the athletics program at SFC. And it should’ve been the best, it was something I worked my whole life to and looked up to college sports because I thought it would all be smooth sailing with people who were running a NCAA DI college program. I know not everyone will love their coaches playing sports, but I’ve never been treated so badly and immaturely in my life than when I played DI volleyball at SFC. I won’t go into too much detail, but it got so bad to where my teammates and I went to our athletic director and deans of the school because of the way we were being treated from our coach. Which turned into an investigation by the NCAA. We weren’t taken seriously by any of our schools administrators, even though our coach was verbally and physically abusive ( ex: gave three girls concussions in one practice from hitting balls at their heads ) it got so bad that 4 girls transferred in one year and started to see a therapist. After it all, she got to keep her job even though we all spoke out against her and so did two former assistant coaches. The athletic director didn’t sit down with any of us afterwards to see how we were doing. They acted like nothing happened and we didn’t matter.

The relationship with my coach started out positive, she originally wasn’t the coach that recruited me to come to SFC that coach left and this one was brought in two weeks before I reported to school freshman year. Overtime after my teammates and I were experiencing the crazy of it all we had to rely on each other for leadership and positivity. I can’t remember a time where I was told one positive thing from her the whole time I was there. She would make fun of my family, the way I look, stalk my mom on FB and make negative remarks about what my mom would post. Told me after a season was over I would never step foot on the court again for her (even though I was a starter and had the second highest kill percentage on the team). I asked why because I’m a hard worker and going to come back better than ever because I’ll be training at my home gym over the summer and she said “it doesn’t matter, what if you don’t?” As a coach you’re supposed to believe in and support your players. I never felt like I was supported, ever! Not from any administrators, only from my parents, teammates and other athletes in the program. I always felt like I had to watch my back. Each year we had a new assistant coach. They couldn’t stand to stay there another year. A direct quote from a former assistant coach “it came to a point where I had to decide if I wanted to have a normal happy life, or end up in jail if I stayed another year.”

I ended up having a career ending injury and couldn't return and when I told her she never asked if I was ok or how I was doing, even after I had surgery I never heard from her again and she would avoid making eye contact when I passed her at school. They thankfully ended up honoring my scholarship (per NCAA rules you have to honor a scholarship for an athlete that suffered a career ending injury in season) till I graduated so I didn't have to transfer or pay. But after I was unable to compete I never heard from one single person in the athletic program except teammates and other athletes. Even though they preached a "family" environment.

After it's all said and done knowing what I know now it's just sad that I looked up to playing college ball for practically my whole life and it ended up being one of the most emotionally and physically draining experiences of my life. If I didn't have the support system of my roommate, my friends at school and family at home I wouldn't have made it through. It taught me so many lessons and a lot about myself. I can say I'm a stronger person because of it, but no one should have to go through what myself and many other kids at SFC went thru in that athletic program. There are emotional scars that I'm still dealing with but I have to say I would do it again. I honestly don't have any regrets other than saying some things I should've said or done something more about what was going on. And of course it was the most heartbreaking thing in the world getting hurt and having to end my career early but I can't imagine staying in that program even a day longer. I wouldn't be where I am today if I was able to finish out playing my college career." - **Brooke Haliscak, 22, St. Francis Brooklyn, Volleyball**

9) "Overall my college athletic experience was a mix of both bad and good. The good parts of my experience were my teammates and I wouldn't have stayed on the team for long if it wasn't for them. The bad part of my experience was my head coach. I barely had a relationship with her. She is extremely hard to talk to and doesn't have any sort of communication skills at all. I felt like I couldn't talk to her about much and she didn't put in much of an effort to know her players and what was going on in our lives. I also didn't get much playing time and due to this I felt like my coach didn't really care about me.

Although my experience wasn't a very positive one I would do it again. I loved my teammates and I felt like I was part of a family. Playing a college sport also taught me so much that I know I will use going forward. I learned time management skills due to being in school and being on the road a lot. I learned how to push through something even when it's hard and it sucks. I also learned how to deal and interact with people that I don't like (my coach) which I know I will encounter in the future." -**Anonymous, Soccer**

10) "I would say my college experience as an athlete was overall a positive one. I was lucky enough to play on a very competitive team growing up which sort of conditioned me to be mentally tough when it comes to head coaches, though I know not all of my teammates at UVM were used to my coach's coaching style. I think my head coach expected a lot of me which could be draining at times, especially as a young athlete freshman and sophomore year, but ultimately made me a better player. Not saying it was always positive because there was times when my coach's words definitely left me



questioning my worth or ability as a player. However, as I matured as a player I realized who I was really playing for and that was my teammates and the bond we had.

College athletics overall gave me some of the best friends I have today and gave me a support system that I wouldn't have made it through college without. I do wish that there were more opportunities to talk about mental health in college athletics and that we were given more resources and supports in making sure we were all emotionally and mentally healthy. So much of the NCAA is making sure that athletes are in tip top shape physically, and getting them rehabbed and back to playing as possible- but no one is ever really checking up on our mental health and how we are doing off the field, which is equally as important. We are so young and in the middle of learning who we are in the chaos of a college campus, while having these high expectations by the athletic community placed on our shoulders on top of that.

Not to mention the seemingly lack of enthusiasm the NCAA has for women's sports!!! I did feel the difference in the way that we were treated in comparison to the men's soccer team- not to mention the men's hockey team and basketball team. So much effort and energy goes in to men's sports because they are bringing in the fans and ultimately the money, and this doesn't go unnoticed by the women's teams no matter how successful they seem to be. While I think UVM was one of the best schools to balance this gender gap, I think it's always going to be a consistent issue and one that needs to be addressed in the NCAA- even noticing the subtle differences in the way we were talked to, coached and supported by athletic trainers, strength coaches, professors, and more. Women go through the same process and hardship as men in college sports, yet never seem to get the same amount of respect on campus." *-Meg James, 23, University of Vermont, Soccer*

### **14.3 The Greatest Gift of All**

As you can see, almost every student athlete will tell you their college experience would have not been the same without the relationships. The greatest gift of all that college basketball has given me has been the friendships that will last through the rest of my life. Going through these five years would not have been the same if it weren't for the amazing, incredible teammates that I went through it with. I wouldn't trade anything in the world for the friends that I made in college. College sports brings people from all over the world and puts them together on a single team. If I hadn't played basketball or taken the path I took throughout college with transferring, I would not have met my best friends. Of course, I'm going to miss stepping onto a basketball court and having the identity as a basketball

player, but what I am going to miss the most are the girls that I shared it with and all of the amazing memories we created along the way. College teams are together for hours on end every single day. The bond college teammates have is unlike anything else in the world and I am forever thankful for every single teammate that I have had throughout college.

Another gift that being a college athlete has given me is my calling to athletic education. Through this experience, I believe that I have found my true calling in life. After graduating college, I am going to start taking steps in order to become an athletic director. My goal someday is to become an athletic director at a big university. I want to make sure that student athletes have a better experience than I did. I know that someday when I become an athletic director, I will put athletes first and work my hardest to build a relationship with them amongst my many duties. Student-athletes are a rare breed and working with them on a daily basis would be a dream come true for me.



## CHAPTER 15: THE END

According to the NCAA, there are around 430,368 high school women's basketball players in the country. Of that number, only 16,532 go on to compete at the college level. This means 3.9 percent of women go on to play college basketball, and of that percentage the probability of playing Division I is even lower. Out of the 430,368 high school athletes, only 1.2 percent go on to play Division I.<sup>143</sup> I am one of them. According to the National Center for Education Statistics as of April 2018, the percentage of twenty-five to twenty-nine-year olds with a bachelor's degree sits at 36 percent, and the percentage of that population with a master's degree sits around 9 percent. I have both. I am twenty-three years old. The combination of life lessons that I have learned from being a college athlete as well as the two degrees that I will leave this prestigious university with have created the perfect foundation and confidence for me to take on the next step of my life. The feeling of walking out on the floor during my last home game at the University of Vermont gave me a sense of fulfillment incomparable to anything else I have experienced throughout my life. I found a way to conquer every challenge that life has thrown at me over these five years. I've come out of it all with a smile on my face. I am forever thankful for the literal blood, sweat, and tears that made me into the resilient woman I am today from my experiences as a student-athlete.

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<sup>143</sup> "Estimated Probability of Competing in College Athletics." *National Collegiate Basketball Association*. Accessed March 4, 2019. <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/estimated-probability-competing-college-athletics>.

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