• REACTION

Sports Psychology and the Collegiate Athlete: One Size Does Not Fit All

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George Howard has again provided a significant service to our field by bringing sports psychology to our attention with the superb selection of articles presented in this issue. The comprehensive model for the practice of sports psychology presented by Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1993 [this issue]) certainly is a major contribution to the skills training literature and a wonderful elaboration of the psychoeducational approach. Gabbard and Halischak (1993 [this issue]) emphasize the consultation model that characterizes the relationship between the athletic department and the counseling center at the University of Notre Dame. William Parham (1993 [this issue]) has provided a wide-ranging summary of issues and concerns confronting intercollegiate athletes, and Baillie (1993 [this issue]) wraps up the set of articles by focusing on the critical problem of retirement from athletics.

The life development intervention (LDI) strategy for athletes discussed by Danish, Petitpas, and Hale is a well-thought-out approach to teaching life skills to athletes. However, their approach falls somewhat short, in my opinion, because of the emphasis of attention on the relationship between the sports psychologist and the athlete. Traditionally, the sports psychologist has had limited access to working directly with athletes, and I do not anticipate that trend changing. The development of a tactic that would involve the coaches and/or parents to make them aware of the developmental needs of athletes at various stages is needed. The consultation model discussed by Gabbard and Halischak would be beneficial in this case because it does include the coach/parent in the process. The model employed at the University of Notre Dame has the academic services staff reporting to the executive vice president and is funded by the athletic department. Although this organizational structure may be effective at some Division 1 institutions, there are many institutions that would have difficulty functioning in a similar

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manner due to budgetary restraints. Some consideration also must be given to the use of the expertise of sports psychologists when dealing with athletic participation at the high school, junior high, and age group levels. At these levels, funding will also be a major problem; consequently, the consultation model discussed by Gabbard and Halischak could provide one possible approach.

Parham identified and briefly discussed many problems and challenges facing college athletes today and in the future, but he did not offer many solutions. Because he discussed only briefly how counseling psychologists could apply their traditional training to these problems, I believe the article will be valuable mainly to counseling psychologists with little previous contact with collegiate athletes by providing information pertinent to the athletic arena. Baillie points to preretirement intervention and postretirement programs as ways to assist athletes who are having difficulty dealing with retirement from athletics. Although these strategies may be of considerable benefit to the athlete in a time of crisis, it is important to remember that career and life planning is an ongoing process. The collegiate athlete has many opportunities to explore a variety of potential career options. Athletes should be encouraged to develop interests that are independent of their athletic involvement because it is certain that retirement from athletic competition, for whatever reason, will be a reality one day.

Because the articles under consideration focus on college athletes, because football and basketball are instrumental (e.g., revenue generating) college sports, and because the participation of African American athletes is critical to success in these sports, I found the lack of any significant reference to the minority athlete to be surprising, to say the least. Multiculturism is one of the critical topics in the counseling profession at the present time. A great deal of attention is being devoted to the delineation of competent multicultural counseling services. If sports psychologists are to be effective, a monocultural approach to counseling must be abandoned. Our training, thinking, research, and writing must be multicultural.

Sports officials need to understand what effect being a minority in America has on an athlete. Shortly after being suspended from baseball for one year, Cincinnati Reds owner Marge Schott defended herself on ABC's *Prime Time Live* by stating her opinion that it is no more difficult to be Black than to be White in America and that racism is a fiction of the media and does not really exist. I doubt that college coaches or athletic administrators would publicly endorse her bizarre statement, but that does not mean that decisions significantly affecting the lives of minority athletes are not made every day by people whose operating assumptions are essentially similar to those of this poor, (bigoted) rich lady.

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To provide effective assistance to minority athletes, an understanding of the developmental issues facing minority athletes is essential. The minority athlete's view of the world must be taken into consideration because that view could vary considerably from the dominant culture's worldview. The obstacles facing a White athlete are often different from the obstacles facing a Black athlete. The authors make a case for athletes being considered a special population. Minority athletes should be considered a special population within a special population, and the differentiating element is the racial/ethnic minority factor. The effects of being a minority athlete in America must be considered when using approaches such as the LDI strategy, because one size does not fit all.

Danish, Petitpas, and Hale discussed the importance of the development of identity across the life span. To deal with the identity concepts of minority athletes, it is necessary to understand minority identity development and the effect it has on a minority athlete's attitude and behavior. For minority persons, a significant aspect of their identity relates to their sense of racial/ethnic minority identity. A useful model of racial/ethnic minority identity development has been described in some detail by Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1993). This general model is compatible with the model of racial identity development for African Americans that is the work of Janet Helms (1990). Both include stages in which the minority person (a) accepts the orientation of the majority culture and evaluates his or her self accordingly, (b) rejects the majority orientation and focuses on his or her racial/ethnic minority culture, (c) is conflicted in regard to his or her racial/ethnic minority orientation, and (d) holds a balanced and integrated view of majority and minority cultures.

Understanding the stages of racial identity development and the attitudes and behavior associated with particular stages is essential information for athletic officials who deal on a daily basis with minority athletes on and off the playing field. Athletic officials are typically viewed as knowledgeable about minority athletes because athletics has traditionally been one of the few areas of our society where minorities have been accepted and afforded some opportunities. Although minority athletes have achieved some acceptance and success in athletics, the assumption that athletic officials are knowledgeable and sensitive to the needs of minority athletes on and off the playing field is not necessarily valid. For example, in recruiting for major college athletics, athletic officials at predominantly White institutions often create a false environment for minority athletes during their recruiting visit to a campus by having every minority person in the community present. When the minority athlete returns to campus to attend classes, however, the environment changes totally. At this point, the minority athlete is expected

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to make the adjustment, and if he or she does not the athlete is considered a bad apple. Yet one might predict that minority athletes who are in the resistance and immersion stage will find this transition more difficult than those in the conformity stage (see Helms, 1990). Knowledge of the stages of racial identity development and sensitivity to multicultural issues is crucial if athletic officials are serious about aiding the growth and development of the minority athlete and are not just concerned with the minority athlete's athletic performance.

From another perspective, Baillie cited a study that indicated a higher proportion of African American athletes who play basketball and football at the high school and collegiate levels expect to play professionally than do White athletes. When exploring career options with a Black athlete, the sports psychologist must be aware of the perceived obstacles faced by minority athletes. For example, minority athletes at the collegiate level are often criticized for aspiring to play at the professional level because of the overwhelming odds against making a professional team. Yet from the minority athletes' perspective, playing at the professional level is much more realistic than preparing to be a head football coach of an NCAA Division 1 school. At the present time, there is one Black head football coach at the Division 1 level, but there are several hundred minority professional football players. The same holds true for the sport of basketball and the counseling profession. Why would a minority athlete aspire to a career in an area where minorities are obviously underrepresented? There is a definite shortage of role models in these and other professions, and this must be taken into consideration when structuring career exploration activities with minority athletes.

When the specific needs of minority athletes are not addressed in the various intervention programs, minority athletes are confronted with inconsistencies between the information disseminated in the intervention programs and reality. This can potentially affect the credibility of the sports psychologist with the minority athlete. When assisting minority athletes in the goal-setting process, their minority status must be considered. The color-blind philosophy has been effective in some areas in society, but not in the management ranks of intercollegiate athletics.

In addition to how well prepared we are to address multicultural issues, how well are counseling psychologists prepared in general to work effectively with athletes at the various levels and particularly with college athletes? The authors of these articles appear to hold a range of opinions. Gabbard and Halischak apparently feel that no specialized training is necessary, and Parham notes that the kind of training counseling psychologists receive positions them uniquely to assist athletic departments to meet the needs of student athletes. Only Danish, Petitpas, and Hale confront the reality

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that a necessary set of knowledge in sports science exists and that "multidisciplinary training [is] needed to successfully work with athletes" (p. 381).

The only support for Howard's optimism that counseling psychologists are especially qualified to work in the sports psychology arena is his reference to our "psychoeducator philosophies." However, I share with Danish and his coauthors the concern that perhaps our training in psychoeducational interventions and the normal developmental process has eroded in the recent past, and I extend my concern to skills in consultation as well. The obvious temptations that have more recently beset us to emphasize a pathology conceptualization, offered in settings amenable to insurance-based reimbursement, have no doubt altered the focus of counseling psychology training over time. The question in my mind is whether we have retained enough of our uniqueness that we can still produce what these expert authors imply that we can deliver.

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