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by

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**Beyond Sports:
A Guidebook for Potential Collegiate Female Student-Athletes**

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A Guidebook for Potential Collegiate Female Student-Athletes**

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Report

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Dedication

I dedicate this report to my incredible parents. With their love, encouragement, and support I have reached my dreams of becoming both a student-athlete and a Longhorn, among many other milestones along the way. I also want to thank Tim and Joseph, for not only paving the way to TLU and graduate education, but for your guidance and support my entire life. Abby, your acceptance and friendship has given me confidence that it is okay to be passionate about sports, and also kept me grounded. Finally to Coach Tran, for giving me the opportunity to play collegiate golf. Without that experience this report would likely not have been written.

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Beyond Sports:
A Guidebook for Potential Collegiate Female Student-Athletes

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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Female student-athletes are a growing population on most college campuses. While incorporated into a historically male model, their experiences and outcomes are unique. This report guides potential female student-athletes in the process of deciding to participate by providing information about the female student-athlete experience. Issues to be explored include decision-making, academics, health, and stress. Sports can be a rewarding experience despite the challenge of balancing academics with athletic commitments.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
History of Collegiate Athletics	4
Originally Just for Men	4
Title IX.....	5
Current State of Collegiate Athletics	9
Classifications of the NCAA	10
Other Governing Bodies	11
Choosing Which College to Attend	12
To Play or Not to Play	12
Additional Factors to Consider	14
Aspects of the Student-Athlete Experience	17
Academics.....	17
Health.....	23
Muscularity	24
Disordered Eating	25
Nutrition.....	27
Female Athlete Triad	28
Supplementation	28
Mental Health.....	29
Stressors	30
Time Demands	31
Homesickness	32
Dormitory Living	32
Coping Strategies	33

Conclusion	37
References.....	39

Introduction

On a chilly late winter Saturday, inside the gym, a home team is building a comeback against a national powerhouse in front of a few thousand fans. In other locations, tennis players are going through warm-ups and drills on the court in preparation for the spring season. Golfers are bundled up on the course, battling the breeze while playing a friendly round. A group is gathered on the track; running, stretching, jumping. Others are swimming seemingly endless laps back and forth across the pool, lifting in the weight room building muscle, or hitting a few in the batting cages. All are female. These student-athletes are competing, preparing for the season to begin, or conditioning for their sport; one of their many passions. Not all these women are stars on the court, field, grass or pool. Many are stars in the classroom, highly involved in their education. They face the same hurdles to adulthood as their non-athlete peers, and may sometimes struggle to balance it all. Their hard work will pay off on the field or court, in the classroom, and throughout their future. They are proud to call themselves student-athletes.

Much of the publicity of college sports is centered on football and men's basketball. Often one has to move beyond the headlines and ESPN in order to learn about women in college athletics. The publicity of college athletics is not entirely unfortunate, as much of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) revenue is from the rights agreement with CBS/Turner Sports to televise the Division I men's basketball tournament (NCAA, 2012). The revenue collected during the three weeks in

March and April help fund athletics and championships year round for the NCAA's 1,066 member institutions (NCAA, 2012). NCAA athletics is an important piece of many college communities, but only a few of them will ever be featured on SportsCenter, especially for their women's athletics programs.

While the records or experiences of female student-athletes and their teams, especially those at less competitive and lower division schools, may seldom be reported in the news, their presence still has a significant impact. With the aim of helping you, the potential female collegiate student-athlete, make informed decisions about your future, this resource will explore the past, present, and future of women's sports. The opportunities to continue playing sports (and explore new sports) is wide open for females. While this resource is aimed at all student-athletes, those who are not highly recruited and thus must do much of their own legwork may find it especially useful to learn about decision making, different levels of competition, types of schools, and issues involving female student-athletes once enrolled.

This resource explores factors to consider when making decisions about playing sports, choosing colleges, and selecting programs of study. It is intended to help you explore yourself in order to have a successful collegiate athletic experience should you chose to keep playing. The resource also discusses the intersections of academics and athletics for student-athletes. Health concerns follow, including issues to be aware for yourself and the health of your potential teammates. Finally, stress and coping is covered, with suggestions on how to get the most out of your experience. Student-athlete life is full of demands and can be tough, but most will say in the end it was well worth it,

and that the lessons learned, experiences and memories are irreplaceable. It is hoped that this resource will help you find your way.

History of Collegiate Athletics

College athletics in the United States has changed substantially in its 150-year history. Even so, many of the original debates that led to the creation and regulation of intercollegiate competition continue today. Despite these controversies, college athletics seems to be a lasting institution. As a well-rounded female athlete considering or pursuing competition in college, it is important to have knowledge of the history and important events that shaped intercollegiate athletics.

ORIGINALLY JUST FOR MEN

Athletic competition has existed on college campuses since the 1850s. The first documented athletic contest was a crew challenge between men from Harvard and Yale in 1852 (Smith, 2011). Students organized and controlled many of these early athletic contests. Even in the early days of intercollegiate athletics, questions arose about the eligibility of the students competing, amateurism and payment, purpose, and issues of student control. Competition often breeds a 'win no matter what' attitude, which manifested in teams looking for ways to beat the system. Some of the athletes were on rosters for several years, only intermittently enrolled in school, or may not have been students at all. It soon became apparent that these inter-school challenges were in need of regulation, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was founded in 1906. At the same time, in the early 1900s, football rose in popularity and the numbers of teams and spectators increased dramatically. During the 1905 competitive season, 18 student-athletes died playing football, and over a hundred more were seriously injured (Smith, 2011). Thus, one of the formative tasks of the early NCAA was to come up with

safety rules and regulations for the players and their universities (Smith, 2011). Eligibility rules pertaining to student status and amateurism were also addressed.

Intercollegiate athletics quickly became a central feature of higher education in the United States. Attention continued to focus on issues of student versus faculty control and other governance issues (Smith, 2011). The 1920s saw great expansion of athletics and athletic facilities, many of which continue to be in use today. In some ways this building frenzy was seen as a collegiate arms race; universities were no longer just competing in the classroom, but were actively competing on the field or court for resources and athletes.

Following World Wars I and II, the landscape of colleges changed. Through the GI Bill many more students, namely male veterans, were able to enroll in college because of the availability of educational benefits. Access to higher education increased in all sections of society. This led to more diverse student bodies and therefore athletic teams. Public interest in athletics also increased, especially with returning military veterans competing. Television technology was quickly developing, opening another avenue of promotion of intercollegiate athletics, and ultimately revenue for schools and the NCAA. Much of the early money earned by the NCAA went to strengthening authority for enforcement of eligibility (Smith, 2011).

TITLE IX

By the early 1970s, access to education had expanded through civil rights acts and legislation impacting the affordability of higher education. This made college and universities available to all males without regard to race, ethnicity and social class.

However, it was not until 1972, when Title IX was passed, that the door to college and athletics was fully open to women. Title IX significantly changed the athletic landscape for women. Regulation, both federally from Title IX and institutional from the NCAA, is enacted with the goal of leveling the playing field between men and women.

Previous to Title IX, competitive athletics in college purposefully did not exist for women on most campuses because of the belief that sports were too rough and women too frail. Female students were only allowed to participate in graceful forms of exercise. On university campuses faculty-controlled women's fitness programs, and physical training and health were considered integral to the education of women. Women's athletic activities existed under an educational model that valued the experience of sport more than competition (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1987). Women were able to navigate around the institutional ideals and regulations by competing in intramural sports. Athletes in individual sports also shared their times with women from other universities, competing remotely.

To illustrate the early sentiment towards women's athletics, here is a story told by Chris Plonsky, the University of Texas' director of women's athletics. UT has been a pioneer of women's athletics, not only in the present era of Title IX, but decades before. Anna Hiss was the director of physical training for women from 1921-1956. She too believed that women should be physically fit but not competing. This was especially true because of the violence seen in football at that time. Hiss oversaw the construction of a building specifically for women's physical training and sport. The gym was decisively built too small for competitive sports. The court is not regulation size and there is no

room for spectators. Anna Hiss Gym, as it is not called, still is in use on UT's campus, as a reminder of the earlier era of women's sports (C. Plonsky, personal communication, January 30, 2013).

In 1972 fewer than 32,000 women played sports on college teams and on average women received only 2% of the athletic budgets of schools ("The Next Generation of Title IX: Athletics," 2012). The passage of Title IX in June 1972 led to an immense change in women's athletics. The official language of Title IX reads, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance..." Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

In plain language, Title IX legislation meant that schools receiving federal money could no longer discriminate between men and women (Gavora, 2002). The intentions of the law were to create more opportunities and greater access for women in education, affecting admissions and financial aid policies as well as distribution of resources. However, it is through sport that Title IX has gained most of its attention and publicity. After Title IX was enacted, courts ruled that it also applied to the athletic units of universities, and therefore helped to create athletic opportunities for women (Reich, 2003).

A three-prong compliance test evolved as the measure of Title IX fulfillment. Part one is Substantial Proportionality, described and expanded below. Part two is History and Continuing Practice. This is satisfied when institutions show a history and continuation of program expansions for female athletes. The third part is Effectively

Accommodating Interests and Abilities; satisfied when an institution can provide evidence it is meeting the interests and abilities of female students even though there are disproportionately fewer females participating.

Substantial proportionality is the most famous and scrutinized piece as it compares the participation opportunities for women and men with the enrollment of undergraduate students (Anderson, Cheslock & Ehrenberg, 2006). Most universities fail this measure, often by having a larger percentage of male athletes compared to the higher percentage of female undergraduates (Anderson, Cheslock & Ehrenberg, 2006). When Title IX was enacted in 1972, only 15% of the undergraduate population was female, compared to the current share of about 57%. This increase of female undergraduates proliferates the difficulty for athletic departments in achieving substantial proportionality, as most schools have more males participating in athletics. Few women's sports draw the number of athletes as football, and attempting to balance the numbers by merely adding sports or roster positions for females often does not effectively increase participation (Reich, 2003). Female athletes may not be interested in the sports being added, and finding students to fill those roster spots may be difficult.

Adding sports and facilities can also be a financial burden. Athletic departments are both a source of revenue for institutions and a financial burden. Very few programs are revenue generating, especially women's programs. The easiest way to increase revenue is through successful football and men's basketball teams, but Title IX compliance requires an increase in the number of women in sports (Kennedy, 2007). Because few sports generate the revenue or participants as football, simply spending

money for several new sports to increase the number of female athletes with the goal of meeting compliance is not successful (Kennedy, 2007).

Another way of solving the proportionality problem proposed was to cut men's programs. Wrestling programs were hit hard because of this move towards compliance. Eliminating men's teams often balanced the number of teams sponsored by institutions, but rarely had a large effect on balancing the proportionality of athletes participating. The ramifications of dissolving teams and moving them to intramural status often was devastating to current and former participants, and at some universities cost donor dollars (Schulman, Bowen, Meserve & Schonfeld, 2002).

CURRENT STATE OF COLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

From a legislative standpoint, the same issues of control (faculty, student, athletic department and association), amateurism and commercialism, educational impact, and student eligibility remain prominent issues facing the NCAA. Defining a student-athlete, regulating what student-athletes, coaches and athletic departments can and cannot do, and confronting the commercial aspects of sport continue to be topics of debate among NCAA policymakers. College athletics has evolved into an entertainment industry, an access point for students to higher education, and public relations tool for universities. As a student-athlete you will be required to follow countless rules and regulations, not only through athletics, but also in your academic and social lives. The NCAA rulebook is quite thick, but athletic departments are required to have compliance officers who will help you navigate and keep the integrity of collegiate athletics.

Classifications of the NCAA

Colleges and universities belong to athletic associations that organize, administer, and oversee all areas of intercollegiate athletics (Hastings, 1999). College athletics has grown and is present on most college and university campuses. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the largest governing body of college athletics. According to the 2009-2010 NCAA Sports Sponsorship Participation Rates Report there are 430,300 student-athletes. The NCAA is split into three divisions, separated by institutional requirements and common themes. The following descriptions provide a general sense of the differences.

Most televised athletics are Division I competitions. Schools that compete on this level are usually large, and most of the top athletes receive athletic scholarships. These schools have large fan bases and athletic budgets. Division I has the toughest requirements for institutional membership, bylaws and sanctions.

Division II schools often are smaller and usually have smaller programs with fewer sponsored sports. Student-athletes can be awarded scholarships based on their athletic abilities. NCAA Division II has the fewest number of schools.

Division III is separated from the other divisions mainly by its lack of athletic scholarships. Schools that participate in Division III are usually smaller liberal arts type institutions, many of which are private. Division III schools average around 2,250 students and athletes make up one-fifth to one-third of the student population (Emerson, Brooks & McKenzie, 2009). There are fewer restrictions on student-athletes at this level,

and most embody the true student-athlete persona; students first who compete because they love their sport and school.

Other Governing Bodies

The NCAA is not the only administrative association of collegiate athletics. The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA), and the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) also exist. The NAIA offers scholarships, and member institutions are often smaller schools drawn to the less restrictive institutional rules and policies. The NJCAA is specifically made up of junior colleges, although some athletes transfer and play at NCAA schools after two years.

Choosing Which College to Attend

Deciding which college to attend is one of the biggest decisions you will have to make thus far in your lifetime. The choice is no easy task and there are many factors to consider. The following section will help you in the decision-making process. The first choice to make is whether to continue playing sports competitively. Once made, then you can focus on what types of colleges may fit your ability and personality.

This material is written with the assumption that you have already decided to attend college. Most Americans agree that receiving education beyond high school is important (“The Importance of Higher Education”, 2002). Preparation for jobs and career is often seen as the primary role of higher education, but general life skills such as critical thinking, cooperation, teamwork, writing skills and maturity are also gained. Earning a college degree is an investment in your future, and is often seen as one of the few ways to be competitive in our changing economy (“Why Higher Education Degrees are Important,” 2013; Tinto, 2012).

Ultimately, you should be looking for a school that matches your needs in all these areas; athletic, academic, and cultural. Small concessions may have to be made, but deciding which college to attend should not be solely based on athletic factors. This is especially true for student-athletes because of the threat of injury that can be career ending.

TO PLAY OR NOT TO PLAY

You love your sport. Maybe even more than one. There are numerous reasons why women continue to play and compete while attending college. One of the main

reasons should be because you enjoy playing and competing. There are many other perks that come from participating in collegiate athletics. As an athlete you will have access to many resources on and off campus: free travel and apparel; tutors, strength coaches, medical staff, and counselors. Playing sports offers a unique connection to the campus community. Another reason to participate in collegiate athletics is to satisfy the hunger for a challenge. Successful student athletes are constantly looking for ways to challenge themselves, both on and off the field. If you are someone who is self-driven, competitive, and looking to be successful in multiple capacities, then continuing with sports may be a good fit for you. Physical activity is also good for emotional and physical health, as it has been shown to lower stress and increase positive mood states and self-esteem (Downs & Ashton, 2011).

On the other hand, you may want to focus more on academics and preparing for a career. By not playing you will have more time to focus on academics and to pursue internships and to gain job experience. Collegiate athletics requires dedication of extensive time and effort, and not just when your sport is in-season, but as a year-round commitment. This dedication requires a love and appreciation for the game and sport. The time commitment also competes with the other areas of college life; many holidays and school breaks are spent with the team rather than family and friends. While you gain a social circle in your team, it also cuts into social time with your non-sport peers on campus.

ADDITIONAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER

In making the decision to play sports at the collegiate level you will need to analyze several factors about your understanding of yourself as well as explore attributes of the universities and their athletic programs.

Since you are interested in participating in athletics, the first thing is to assess your own athletic skill. Determine to what level of play you are capable. Very few high school athletes are five-star recruits or highly sought after. It is estimated that only one to three percent of high school athletes receive college athletic scholarships (Koehler, 1996). Most student-athletes have to reach out to schools that interest them in order to get the recruiting process rolling. There are many books and resources out there that explain the recruiting process well. *The Student Athlete's Guide to Getting Recruited* by Stewart Brown (2011) is one example.

While assessing your skills, also be thinking about the type of competition you would like to be playing against. Is reaching for a highly competitive and more publicized team your dream, even if it means sitting on the bench for a few years waiting your turn? Or would you rather play immediately and throughout your college years. Also looking at the program and its recent successes is important. Is being part of a winning team important, or would the experience of a bigger stage, but perhaps less than stellar results satisfy you? Major programs sometimes have tryouts for walk-ons, which can be another way to participate in athletics. While some walk-ons eventually earn a role as a regular player, most walk-ons are “practice players” and see few actual competitions, although they are full members of the team.

The location of the institution is an important consideration for all students, but especially and uniquely for the student-athlete. Do you want to stay close to your hometown, so your parents can see you compete more often? What is the geography of the conference and how will that affect the travel for your sport? Is the climate desirable, especially if you play an outdoor sport? In what type of town is the campus located? Are you a big city girl planning on a college in a small town? The size of the town affects the types of activities available off campus for recreation and relaxation.

Student life should also be considered and investigated. If possible, visit the campuses of the schools you that interest you. Try to talk to as many different students as feasible, not only future teammates and athletes, but non-athletes as well. As best you can, ask and find out how students engage with campus life, and what resources they utilize. Many schools, especially private religious campuses, require all students to participate in campus-wide activities such as weekly or daily chapel. It is important to have some knowledge of the lifestyle of students and determine if the school will be a good fit for you.

Even with all these considerations, we have yet to touch on one of the hallmarks of selecting a college; the academics. Sometimes it is easy to lose focus on the idea that you are attending college to further your education and ultimately earn a degree. The size of the institution may dictate how much individual attention is received from professors and faculty. Class sizes range from hundreds to a handful, and determining which type of learning environment suits you is important to examine. Also, not all majors are open to all students at some schools. Does the school offer a variety of majors? If you are

undecided or want to change your major, are there sufficient resources on campus to help you choose a major? One of the following sections covers academics and career as it relates to female student-athletes while enrolled, but these issues are also important to consider before deciding on a school.

One last piece that should be addressed on choosing a college is the transfer process. Not all students are able to make the best choice for them coming out of high school. Athletic, academic and family situations may change, and many students transfer to different universities. The NCAA and other organizations have specific rules and policies related to the transfer process. As always, these rules can be explored online or through your athletic department. The ultimate goal of collegiate athletics is student success, both in the classroom and on the court. Most institutions will support your efforts to be successful, even if it means leaving their programs.

Aspects of the Student-Athlete Experience

Women's collegiate athletics is a vibrant area for researchers. The following section overviews the literature on how participation in athletics affects female students academic outcomes and health. Sources of stress and coping strategies are also covered, so that as you make the transition to collegiate athlete you are equipped with knowledge about what you may expect from the experience and some tools to help.

ACADEMICS

As introduced earlier, one of the primary, if not the main reason to enroll in college is to get a degree by furthering one's education. Most student-athletes, especially females, choose to attend college for that same reason. While athletics may have had some role in the motivation and decision of which university to attend, you likely wanted to go to college much earlier than when the reality of the opportunity to be a student-athlete arose. This does not prevent the role of "student" in student-athlete from being controversial, especially so for male athletes involved in football and basketball. The reality is that some student-athletes see college as merely a stepping-stone for a professional career. However, the signs point to female student-athletes having a positive academic experience, culminating in higher graduation rates than male athletes (NCAA, 2011). The following section overviews some of the academic successes and challenges of female student-athletes.

The purpose of higher education is to provide additional skills, knowledge and training in order to increase job opportunities. Ideally, this ultimately leads to a degree signifying educational attainment, and students then advance to a career. Graduation

rates are one way to measure success of groups and institutions, and are easily obtainable on the NCAA website if you would like to study them or even compare rates among institutions. In the 2011 NCAA reports of graduation success rates of Division I institutions, 88 percent of female student-athletes enrolling in 2001-2004 graduated. This is a full 15 percentage points higher than their male counterparts (NCAA, 2011). Division II statistics report women are graduating at a rate of 83% and men at 64%. Division III is not federally required to track graduation rates because of its lack of scholarships, but the rates of institutions that self reported in 2011 is 94% for women and 83% for men. These statistics show athletes are graduating at overall higher rates than their non-athlete peers, and female athletes are graduating at a higher rate than male athletes (NCAA, 2011). This points to the overall success of female student-athletes.

The NCAA promotes athletics as a vital component to the educational program, not as an entirely separate entity. This is especially true at Division III institutions where claims for the educational value of athletics are clearly expressed and the positive impact on student-athletes is considered (Emerson, Brooks, & McKenzie, 2009). Athletic departments must also support the institutional mission and goal. Student-athletes are to be held to the same criteria as the student body with respect to admission, academic standing and progress. Furthermore, the NCAA has set forth minimum standards for all student-athletes. Continued eligibility is determined by demonstrating adequate progress towards degree and minimum GPA's. Adequate progress towards degree involves choosing a major by the end of your sophomore year. As discussed in the section on choices, choosing a major is another developmental milestone of early adulthood. The

most important things to consider when choosing a major are your own personal interests and strengths. While becoming an engineer may sound really cool and come with some automatic respect (not to mention career perks such as a higher starting salary), if math and science are not your strengths, majoring in engineering may not be the best choice. Students who are interested and committed to their major are much more likely to be successful. While some student-athletes do have successful professional careers, most will have to support themselves with jobs inside and outside the athletic arena. While major does not always equal career, future career plans should be incorporated into your academic planning. Eligibility benchmarks vary by division and institution. Specific information on the requirements to stay eligible can be found on the NCAA website or through individual athletic department academic compliance staff.

Female student-athletes typically are efficient students, a skill sometimes mastered in high school. The discipline required to be both student and athlete can positively affect academics. Effective time management skills are necessary to judiciously devote time to both sport and studies. Meyer (1990) studied volleyball and basketball players from a Division I university, focusing on academic expectations and experiences, attitudes of self and others, and the role of gender. With regard to time management, student-athletes in her study noted the need for effective time management skills, and when given time to study they were dedicated to their academic pursuits. In the off-season, a time traditionally less devoted to sport, students reported less budgeting of time and a resulting drop in grades (Meyer, 1990). During the season, many student-athletes miss class, and the resulting opportunities for discussion and learning, because of

competition and travel. As a student-athlete you may be able to schedule classes strategically with regard to practice and competition schedules, although this is more difficult for athletes in winter and year-round sports.

Balancing academics and sports can be a challenge. Many support services exist across college campuses for students, and Division I universities are required to have academic support services for athletes. Models for academic support and success have been created to specifically address the unique situations student-athletes face integrating into university environments (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Academic success programs and services have been found to be profoundly influential on student-athlete academic behavior. Student-athletes who frequently utilize tutors and counselors often experience academic success (Brown, 2011). Unfortunately most of the programs offered by athletic departments are aimed only to keep student-athletes academically eligible. Student-athletes, especially females who already show academic success, would benefit from a wider variety of programming. Although services such as career counseling are offered to entire student body populations, the extent that those providers outside athletics will know and understand the pressures of student-athletes will vary.

While the broad academic picture of female student-athletes is bright, there are a few cautions to keep in mind. Despite cumulative and historical evidence of female student-athletes performing well academically, this is not true in all individual cases. Some studies have found differences in GPA between student-athletes and non-athletes (Emerson, Brooks & McKenzie, 2009). In this study, the differences were small, hundredths of a grade point. While some pointed to the time devoted to sports as an

explanation, this was not found to be true when compared to students with heavy extracurricular loads. Stereotype threat, as explained next, was discussed as a possible explanation.

Across college campuses female athletes strive to be seen as students, not merely to remain academically eligible to play (Meyer, 1990). One of the greatest academic pressures student-athletes face stems from the negative stereotype of the “dumb jock” held by faculty, traditional students and administrative personnel (Harrison et al., 2009). Because of these negative attitudes, which can lead to discrimination, female student-athletes are at risk for underperformance due to identity threat, or fear of confirming this negative stereotype (Harrison et al., 2009). The intimidation from being subjected to negative academic stereotypes can create anxiety that influences cognitive performance and ultimately influences academic outcomes (Emerson, Brooks & McKenzie, 2009). Your status as a student-athlete is often visible to professors and academic staff, and there are times it is important to share that you are an athlete. Building relationships with professors, TA’s and other academic contacts is necessary. While your aim is not to gain an unfair advantage because of your student-athletes status, it will serve you well to be open with professors about missing class, completing and making up assignments, and to share your commitment to academic success. Contrary to the negative belief of athletes, female student-athletes have been identified as a population that especially benefits from athletic participation, and is prepared and invested in academic outcomes (Harrison et al, 2009).

Unfortunately for some student-athletes, many personal decisions, especially pertaining to academics, are made by others, namely coaches and athletic academic staff (Coakley, 1990). While this happens most frequently with Division I athletes, having others make decisions can create a sense of dependence and can disrupt the development of academic and career maturity of (Wooten, 1994). However, female student-athletes in Meyer's (1990) reported being active in their educational planning. They collaborated with their academic advisors when choosing classes and were open with them about academic issues. Most surveyed enjoyed their majors and classes and were able to connect academics to their future work. The author suggests that these experiences stem from the realization that academic involvement is crucial to future success (Meyer, 1990). As a female-student athlete you may be under less pressure from athletic departments than your male counterparts to be funneled into certain majors because they may be labeled as easier. Female student-athletes reported higher levels of academic adjustment than males, resulting in higher academic outcomes and more frequent positive academic behaviors than males (Lubker & Etzel, 2007). These findings will hopefully allow you to take control of your academic self and create a path of success that fits with your goals and needs.

Career and developmental theorists have noted the importance of exploration, self-knowledge and fostering positive self-esteem in the career maturity process (Pearson & Pepitas, 1990). Because of their devotion to athletics, many student-athletes do not have the time, nor see the need for exploration that would aid in their career development. One consequence of the NCAA's academic progress rules is the stifling of

academic exploration. Student-athletes are under pressure to complete certain percentages of their degree requirements by their junior and senior years, limiting the number of exploratory and extra courses. The time and commitment required of athletics also prevents student-athletes from joining clubs and organizations where students are able to gain a variety of life experiences and participate in leadership roles outside the athletic realm (Lally & Kerr, 2005).

Many of the lessons and experiences that come from participating in athletics are career transferrable skills. Competing with a team improves communication, leadership skills, toughness, and reliability. Athletics teaches many life lessons, including how to try again after failure, triumph with class, and the advantages of going the extra mile. All of these skills and attributes are valued by employers and can enhance your career.

As supported by the evidence provided, as a female student-athlete you have many positive things going for you academically. Should academic struggles arise you will be well prepared to use resources and get yourself back on track. While not meant to minimize the effort and work involved in pursuing a university education, this section was meant to introduce potential academic challenges and provide supporting evidence that there are many advantages of being a student-athlete.

HEALTH

This section focuses on the health of female student-athletes, both physical and mental. It begins with the performance aspect of a well-functioning and healthy body, followed by concerns about body image and disordered eating that female student-athletes are especially vulnerable towards. The last section focuses on keeping the mind

healthy and sharp. Your health affects performance both on and off the field. Injury, sickness and other health battles may affect you—being prepared and equipped with knowledge is important.

One of the most reported differences between high school and college athletics is the increase in training intensity. While this logically leads to increased performance and competition, this change can impact the health of collegiate student-athletes. The physical and mental stamina required to train harder and more often can have the effect of feeling worn down. Taking care of your whole body and developing habits of a healthy lifestyle are important.

The risk of injury is constant for student-athletes. Coaches work with athletes on proper form to lessen the likelihood of injury. Strength and conditioning staff work to increase muscle and stamina to guard against injury. But as the body wears down from practice and competition, the risk of injury increases. It is always important to consult with the training and medical staff when issues arise as they can help prevent further injury and properly rehabilitate you into peak shape. While it may be hard to sit on the sidelines, knowing that training staff has your long-term health in mind can help.

Muscularity

The physical changes in female student-athletes, especially with the increased amount of training can be mentally problematic. Female athletes must balance the performance benefits of being muscular, or muscularity, with the conflicting societal ideal of femininity and beauty. Athletic performance can be increased by additional muscle mass and a changed physique, often coming at the cost of the feminine standard

of American culture. George (2005) provides a unique perspective on how female student-athletes experience their bodies during their athletic career. As a soccer player, she became a participant researcher of her soccer team at medium sized, private Division I university. Her observations and experiences with her teammates demonstrated the complex connection between athlete and body, and how females navigate their feelings towards their bodies. As the soccer team participated in training, the team members bodies began a muscular transformation that sometimes led to conflict off the field. There is a fine line female student-athletes must tread that can deter them from working to develop to their musculature potential because of social consequences (George, 2005). This can come in the form of being labeled by others as a lesbian by virtue of athletic participation rather than being able to define one's own orientation. These social pressures to conform to the female norms of society sometimes lead to the exaggeration of femininity inside and outside of competition to counter the manly stigma attached to participating in athletics (George, 2005).

While it may be difficult for some to hear about the stereotypes placed on female athletes, it is best to be aware of them. You can then choose whether those attitudes apply to you, and a plan for how to react and process your own feelings. Certain sports and schools have reputations, and raising awareness of what those stereotypes may be is the first step in changing attitudes about student-athletes.

Disordered Eating

Increasing muscle mass and changing physique can lead to weight concerns. The lifestyle change involved in going to college and participating in athletics affects the

health and weight of student-athletes. Female student-athletes are at risk for developing disordered eating patterns. Disordered eating, defined as clinical and subclinical eating disorders and patterns of weight control behaviors are one of the main health concerns for student-athletes. Researchers have attempted to capture the prevalence of clinical eating disorders and disordered eating among female student-athletes; most estimates fall between 14 and 27 percent. These rates are elevated when compared to the overall female student population (Greenleaf, Petrie, Carter & Reel, 2009).

Not only do the social pressures of western culture hold influence, but sport culture also plays a role. Certain sports, notably diving and gymnastics, place competitive value on the body's appearance. Other sports such as volleyball and track have uniforms that can be quite revealing. Team behaviors can also influence patterns of disordered eating. Leadership of the teams can unknowingly set a negative example in the dining halls through their choice in foods. Part of the competitive nature of athletes is their inherent need to compare themselves to others, and often the comparative group is teammates. Teams often eat together due to their similar schedules, which can lead to pressure to eat certain foods, or a certain diet because of the scrutiny of others. Furthermore, if eating in a more public setting, others who may not know the dietary needs of student-athletes may offer less than polite comments or looks. Understanding proper nutrition and aiming to keep the body healthy should be more of a concern than yielding to external pressures.

Nutrition

Nutrition issues often come to light for college athletes because of the lifestyle, housing, and athletic changes of college. Dining halls now become the primary food source, and the increase in training often calls for a change in eating habits. Making more informed food choices with the available food sources might be difficult. Also, student-athletes often require a higher caloric intake than non-athletes, and that can be difficult for some female student-athletes. Comparing food choices athlete and non-athlete peers can lead to patterns of disordered eating. Few people look twice or judge a male with heaping plates of food, but a female probably would get some interesting looks. Utilizing nutrition staff and learning about proper nutrition can help student-athletes build knowledge and raise awareness about healthy eating, body image concerns, and related issues.

Understanding proper nutrition and striving for a healthy body are steps female student-athletes can take to mitigate their propensity for disordered eating. Unfortunately, student-athletes rarely choose the professional and suggested channels of gathering nutritional information from nutritionists, strength and conditioning trainers, or team physicians. Instead, nutritional and health information comes from teammates and families (Froiland, Koszewski, Hingst & Kopecky, 2004). While teammates and families do have the best interests, they often lack the knowledge of student-athlete's specific nutritional needs (Froiland et al 2004).

Female Athlete Triad

One other health issue to become aware of is what the American College of Sports Medicine calls the Female Athlete Triad. The triad consists of three interconnected mechanisms: disordered eating, amenorrhea, and osteoporosis. Amenorrhea is the absence of periods, which can lead to a disturbance in hormone levels that can negatively affect bone health (Kawaguchi, 2008). Osteoporosis is the medical term for weakened bone mass and fragility that can lead to increased fractures. While each piece is detrimental on its own, when combined the risks of injury and even death increase dramatically (Vereeke West, 1998). While literature since the introduction of the female athlete triad in 1992 has been inconclusive in determining rates, or even if the syndrome exists with all three components occurring at the same time, the disorder can be prevented. Evaluations of dietary habits, menstrual patterns and stress fractures are important, as is consuming proper amounts of nutrition (Kawaguchi, 2008). Increased calcium consumption either by adding more skim milk to the diet or supplementation may also help keep bones healthy (Vereeke West, 1998).

Supplementation

The NCAA regulates the use of supplements by student-athletes, banning many substances intended to increase performance. This list includes stimulants, anabolic agents, diuretics, street drugs and hormones (NCAA, 2012). Female student-athletes are likely to use substances to help restrict caloric intake and provide vitamins, especially calcium and iron (Muller, Gorow & Schneider, 2009). Not all supplements are banned, although their use is cautioned because of the lack of regulation in the industry. Positive

drug test can result from the use of supplements not intended to increase athletic performance, and it is the student-athlete's responsibility to follow regulations and check with their athletic departments before using any substance. While drug testing has traditionally focused on elite athletes and at championships, as a student-athlete you can be subject to testing at any time. The spirit of the rules against certain substances is to increase student-athlete safety and to prevent unfair advantage.

Mental Health

College students naturally are a high-risk population for mental health disorders, and many of the chronic mental health disorders have a typical onset during the traditional college years. Female college students have higher rates of depression than males, and overall estimates of depression rates among all college students are as high as 34 percent (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009).

Mental health is gaining in awareness among the public and on college campuses, but athletic staff may not recognize or be adequately informed about mental health issues. Student-athletes are not immune from significant mental health issues. Many student-athletes could benefit from some type of mental health intervention but many are often reluctant to seek help from a counselor or even a sports psychologist (Watson, 2003). Along with student-athlete hesitancy, barriers exist institutionally and within athletic departments that can make it harder for student-athletes to receive services. Seeking help through a counseling or mental health service should be considered when you need assistance with an academic, personal, or emotional concern. Counseling centers are

bound by confidentiality; only in rare, life-threatening circumstances will your visit be reported.

Participating in athletics can be good for not only physical health but mental health as well. Vigorous physical activity has been documented to lower stress, increase positive mood states and improve self-esteem, and can be a protective factor in physical and mental health (Downs & Ashton, 2011). Physical exercise has also been documented as a protective factor of depression (Miller & Hoffman, 2009). This link to reduced rates of depression is notable as depression is increasing in college student populations. Student-athletes are also advantaged because of the social support and connectedness that comes naturally from being part of a team (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009).

The habits and lifestyles student-athletes develop may also lead to long-term benefits. A study completed by Wyshak (2001) surveyed former female student-athletes and non-athletes about their exercise habits, health, and rates of depression. More former student-athletes reported exercising regularly, and they also engaged in exercise activities for more time than those who did not participate in athletics. While fourteen percent of the former student-athletes reported being diagnosed with depression, 21 percent of the non-athletes reported diagnosis of depression. Overall, athletes reported being in a better health than the non-athletes (Wyshak, 2001).

STRESSORS

The transition from high school to college is filled with significant change and adjustment. Student-athletes juggle the challenges traditional students face, such as of increased academic demands, changing social systems, and the adjustment to a new

environment. Added to these potential stressors is the transition into a new athletic system, often with additional pressures. Change can be challenging. Student-athletes have labeled the major sources of stress during the first year of college as being training intensity, performance expectations, interpersonal relationships, being away from home, and academics (Giacobbi et al., 2004).

Time Demands

The amount of personal accountability placed on a collegiate student-athlete can be one of the toughest aspects of the transition (Hynes, 2011). For most students the time devoted to athletics and athletic activities eclipses the time devoted to academics. Most freshman student-athletes take 12-15 hours of classes. The time spent in class per week closely matches the semester-hour total; as a result students are spending significantly less time per week engaged in required school or academic activities than they were in high school. When thinking about only being in class 12 hours a week, it may seem like there is much more free time in one's schedule, however, some of it is taken up with homework and studying, as much more is expected of you out of class than previously. Increased academics, combined with shortened academic face time, increases the study time required outside of class. In addition, the student-athlete is also scheduled for their extensive athletic activities that may include practice, conditioning, sports medicine treatments, film viewing, and study hall. With all the academic and athletic responsibilities, we have yet to touch on other areas. Student-athletes must also schedule in time to eat, rest, and relax to remain well balanced. As you can see, you quickly need

to assume the responsibility of cultivating and practicing time management skills to schedule and use your time wisely.

With the advent of smartphone technology, you are likely to have an interactive planner within reach. Whether you choose to go electronic, or old fashioned with a paper planner, figuring your own style of best use is important. Most students are encouraged to write out all their assignments for the semester sometime during the first week of class, but if you never look at your planer again, it will not be so helpful. It may also be beneficial to use a weekly planning calendar that breaks down each week into the hours, and planning all your activities. Breaking down your time visually can be helpful for some when looking for extra time for studying and other activities.

Homesickness

Being away from home can be challenging. Whether you decide on a school 45 minutes, miles or hours away from home, you will likely experience some form of homesickness. Students may long for the comforts of home; more personal space, home-cooked and favorite meals, and the sense of community, support, and belonging home can provide. Student-athletes are not immune from experiencing homesickness, and many of the athletes in the Giacobbi et al. (2004) study reported homesickness during their freshman year.

Dormitory Living

Another major change faced by college freshman is the experience of sharing a bedroom and living space with another person (Hynes, 2011). For many students this is

the first time having to share a bedroom for an extended amount of time. Even if you have your own bedroom, you are likely to be sharing some space, living areas or bathrooms, with others. The negotiations involved in creating a shared peaceful living arrangement can be difficult, especially if the roommate is a non-athlete. Roommates may not understand or welcome the demanding and regulated lifestyle of the student-athlete. Student-athletes can sometimes be on very different schedules from their non-athlete peers. College students are notorious for being night owls, however athletic commitments may have you rising early in the morning for workouts. Conflict can arise if your roommate wants to be up all night, and you need to sleep. Dormitory staff is well trained in handling conflict between roommates, and can be a resource or serve as a mediator when working out conflicts.

COPING STRATEGIES

Social support is an important coping strategy for helping all students cope with academic, social, and emotional stress during the transition to college (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Social support can be defined as behaviors perceived to enhance well-being and can be tangible or assistive, informational, or emotional. Giacobbi et al. (2004) completed a study of female freshman student-athletes relating to their sources of stress and modes of coping. The participants in their study communicated frequently with their families and valued the support and guidance received (Giacobbi et al., 2004). It is important to continue to utilize current and develop additional social support systems during your college years.

Student-athletes also used support from teammates to cope with various stressors. Social support helps athletes cope with athletic related stressors, and is related to increased satisfaction with the athletic experience, group cohesion, and the ability to adapt to new challenges; all important outcomes of sport (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Hanging out and having fun with teammates is important to the satisfaction, happiness, and well-being of student-athletes. Teammates are especially helpful in normalizing situations and helping student-athletes know that others experience the same challenges (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Teammates are also a valuable resource to help you identify, describe and talk about stressors during the transition to university life. Peer group support has been shown to be an important and effective piece of adjustment for females (Lubker & Etzel, 2007). The benefits from supportive others, both inside and outside of athletics offer emotional, social, and cognitive forms of growth.

Once support networks were established through trusting relationships with teammates and coaches, student-athletes are then able to and often move to more cognitive forms of coping such as reinterpretation, humor and venting (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Perceptions of the sources of stress also change, and student-athletes begin to see the challenges as potential benefits (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Positive reinterpretation is another strategy athletes can use to help cope with stress (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Changing the way athletes view pressure can change the way it is experienced. New systems, especially the change in coaching staff, influences the way athletes experience criticism. For some, realizing that the coaching staff is not mean, but is instead pressuring athletes to reach their potential can change how student-athletes view and

experience criticism. No longer is it a personal attack, but a motivation to do well. Emotional releases such as venting and humor were also used by athletes in the Giacobbi et al. study (2004). Student athletes experience relief of stress when given opportunities to complain, express frustration, or cry with teammates. Others use humor to break the stress during difficult situations.

An additional element that can serve as a protective factor by reducing emotional distress and increasing coping mechanisms is an attachment to the institution (Lubker & Etzel, 2007). Student-athlete status itself provides a ready-made bond to the university; consequently student-athletes are often more engaged in academic and campus activities than non-athletes (Chen, Snyder & Manger, 2010). The outcomes of college are greatly influenced by the engagement of students both in and out of class (Umbach, Palmer, Kuh & Hannah, 2006). However, it is important to remember that as a student-athlete you are a representative of your institution; this instead may be stressful. While you may not be the star quarterback, the public may constantly scrutinize your actions both on and off campus.

Another coping strategy is self-compassion. Neff (2005) describes self-compassion as “being open and aware of one’s own suffering, offering kindness and understanding towards oneself, desiring the self’s well-being, taking a nonjudgmental attitude towards one’s inadequacies and failures, and framing one’s own experience in light of the common human experience” (p. 264). Student-athletes and females are often harder on themselves than others; self-compassion encourages one to extend the same caring and kindness shown to others to themselves (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005).

Participating in athletics can be a highly evaluative process (Mosewich, Kowalski, Sabiston, Sedgwick, & Tracy, 2011). A self-compassionate student-athlete would not judge herself on the outcomes or comparison; she would instead measure her behavior versus potential and act on the results. Cultivating self-compassion can increase student-athlete performance, academic achievement and overall well-being.

Dr. Robert Hynes (2001) sums up the challenge of transitions in the following quote- “Significant life changes press our ability to find new attitudes and behaviors that will enable us to adapt to new life circumstances” (p. 203). Student-athletes have proven to embrace challenge with hard work and determination, one of the things that led them to the opportunity to participate in collegiate athletics. Approaching the transition from high school to college with the proper mindset and ready to take on the challenges can help make you a successful student-athlete.

Every student-athlete finds herself faced with struggles and challenges during their athletic career. Student-athletes are fortunate that they often arrive on campus with vast “safety nets” in place, made up of parents, coaches, friends and teammates (Hynes, 2011). Student-athletes also have access to professionals on campus with experience in helping students and student-athletes, navigate the challenges of college life. Often times this means that through the proper amount of guidance and support, student-athletes emerge from these challenges as resilient, healthy, and adaptive.

Conclusion

Female student-athletes are a special population of students, both at the high school level, and at colleges and universities. Currently about 200,000 females are participating in collegiate athletics (NCAA, 2012). As you make your decision whether or not to join their ranks, this resource aims to help you make more informed decisions.

History is not only a required course for high school and college students. By reflecting on past events, humans can often predict implications for the future. While the goals of Title IX have yet to be universally met, the legislation granted the ability for females to participate in intercollegiate athletics as they are today. Women's sports are gaining in popularity, and while they may never reach the capacities of men's football and basketball, they are equally as important.

The information provided about implications of sports participation on academic and health issues is intended to prepare you for the rigor and issues that female student-athletes face both on and off the field. While the challenges cannot be prevented, being able to recognize them in their early stages and seek appropriate guidance can minimize their impacts. Being armed with coping strategies and mindfulness to create additional support systems upon arrival to campus will also be of benefit once college decisions are made.

College athletics are not for everyone, but all athletes, especially those interested in participating, should consider continuing their athletic careers at the college level. A long history of sport participation and success is not a requirement, and it is possible to join a new sport upon arrival on campus, especially at Division III schools. There are

hundreds of unfilled roster spots in all sports across divisions, and it is up to you to determine which one is the best fit.

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