

## **Education First, Athletics Second**

### **The Time for a National Discussion is Upon Us**

#### **Introduction**

If we could send a reasonable yet unmistakable signal that intercollegiate athletics prioritizes education over athletics, why would we not do so? If we could clearly distinguish the collegiate model from the professional model by illuminating two clear paths—an educational path and a professional path—particularly for athletes who have high expectations of playing their sports professionally, should we not do so? If we needed to take action to ensure that the young people to whom we provide educational opportunities through sport have the opportunity to have meaningful experiences as both students and athletes, are we not obligated by our core purpose to do so?

We are at a critical moment in the evolution of intercollegiate athletics. Intense pressure has been brought to bear by media scrutiny, Congressional scrutiny, litigation, and unionization efforts. Central to much of the criticism is the notion, particularly in the sports of football and men's basketball, that the purported educational mission of intercollegiate athletics is a façade—that the true mission is to make money off the efforts of players who “get nothing” and serve as minor leagues for the NFL and NBA.

Disagree as we may with such an assertion, the importance of the criticism cannot be overstated. If we cannot defend—through an examination of actions and results as opposed to words—that education is the paramount factor in our decision-making process (rivaled only by the health and safety of our student-athletes), then the enterprise stands as a house of cards. Accordingly, the more educationally sound the collegiate experience, the more sustainable intercollegiate athletics becomes.

We can rightfully claim improvements over the years—notable examples include increasing core course requirements for initial eligibility and aligning continuing eligibility standards with a progression towards degree completion within five years of enrollment. In addition, graduation rates are climbing, and tying postseason eligibility to a team's Academic Progress Rate (APR) reinforces the commitment to education. Such advances notwithstanding, concerns continue to surround, in particular, the sports of football and men's basketball.

Football and men's basketball are uniquely situated within intercollegiate athletics. In terms of national popularity—based upon metrics such as attendance, television coverage, and media attention—they stand alone among college sports (incidentally they also bear the scrutiny that accompanies such popularity). They generate more revenue than any other sports, and while they may fund all other sports, they receive more resources than all other sports. Although football and men's basketball stand alone in certain ways, they are not severable from the fabric of intercollegiate athletics; in fact, they are vital—not just because of the opportunities they provide, but candidly, because of the opportunities that exist through other sports that are sustained by revenue generated by football and men's basketball. Accordingly, if those two sports are not healthy, then the collegiate model is not healthy.

Regardless of attendance, television ratings, or any other manner in which football and men's basketball may be thriving, if the educational experience for football and men's basketball student-athletes is not healthy,

then those sports are not healthy. Consequently, we must be concerned that despite the resources, despite the visibility, and again candidly, despite their importance relative to the sustainability of a broad-based intercollegiate athletics model, there is—or at the very least appears to be—an imbalance in those two sports within the context of intercollegiate athletics and the idea of what a true “student-athlete” should be.

There are, without a doubt, examples of exceptional students who have also excelled at the highest levels of college football and basketball. There are also football and men’s basketball teams that regularly demonstrate high levels of academic performance. On the whole, however, there is evidence to suggest that there is an imbalance between the “student” side and “athlete” side of the “student-athlete” equation, with the “athlete” side carrying the day. To illustrate, football and men’s basketball student-athletes have remarkably high expectations that they will be able to compete professionally, they spend more time on their sports than student-athletes in other sports, yet in a variety of academic metrics, they lag behind all other sports—not by a little, but by a lot. Consequently, we have no choice but to view the individuals and teams that are academic high achievers not as the norm but as outliers. Further, we have no choice but to worry about the health of the educational experience (i.e., the “student” side of the equation) in those two sports.

We are dealing with a systemic challenge, and therefore, we must think in terms of systemic solutions. There should be no limit to the scope of ideas that could be employed to firmly establish education as the primary guiding priority within the collegiate model. Any idea, alone or in conjunction with other measures, should be on the table. Examples of ideas to explore could be familiar (e.g., higher initial eligibility standards, financial and/or competitive incentives/disincentives tied to academic performance, playing-and-practice-season reform), or we could explore an unconventional idea such as commissioning the development of a standardized academic competency test that mitigates cultural biases to a greater degree than current standardized tests. Ideas may—and should—vary, but the most important thing at this point is to start a national dialogue about reform in this area. The dialogue ought to be honest and engage those impacted as well as the many individuals and groups who have the responsibility and authority for the academic wellbeing of not only the participants but the institutions they represent.

In an effort to begin this serious discussion, this paper presents the idea of requiring a year of readiness for all football and men’s basketball student-athletes as a means—without reducing opportunities—to change the current trajectory and address the imbalance observed in those two sports. That said, the paper should not be misinterpreted as a proposal for a year of readiness in football and men’s basketball. It may be that requiring a year of readiness is not the answer. What is most important at this point is to call attention to the imbalance and the manner in which it jeopardizes the model of broad-based intercollegiate athletics. In that regard, the true purpose of the paper is to serve as a launching pad for a national discussion of ideas that would clearly establish that education comes first and athletics come second in all sports in the collegiate model.

### **A Model Worth Saving**

Despite its flaws, and despite what seems to be the prevailing narrative, there is immense goodness in the enterprise of intercollegiate athletics. Most notably, and perhaps most importantly, the enterprise provides vast numbers of opportunities for young people to earn college degrees when but for their athletics ability, they may not be attending college. This is particularly true in the sports of football and men’s basketball, but it is also true in all the other sports, which in many cases are largely sustained through revenue generated by

football and men's basketball. NCAA research has even shown that as many as 20 percent of student-athletes across the entire association are first-generation college students. The benefits inherent in these opportunities include individual growth, education, and social development, but there is so much more than that—the opportunities provided by intercollegiate athletics can extend beyond the individual to change the trajectory of an entire family. Consequently, the intercollegiate athletics model, rooted firmly in a commitment to a quality educational experience, must be preserved.

It is critical, however, that the student-athletes are not short-changed. The educational opportunities that they are provided must be legitimate and must be sufficient to prepare the student-athletes for success beyond college and beyond sport. It is also critical that we do not set student-athletes up for failure by putting them into environments for which they are not prepared to succeed. Using student-athletes for competitive gain while not optimizing chances for success in college and/or providing a meaningful educational experience is exploitative. Again, the opportunities are important, but opportunity alone is not enough—the experience must be legitimate and substantive. In the world of intercollegiate athletics, the view must be—from the perspectives of both the institution and the student-athlete—that opportunity without education is exploitation.

#### **A Case for Change— Stabilizing the “Student-Athlete” Equation in the Sports of Football and Men’s Basketball**

If we are going to use the term “student-athlete,” we have to be committed to it in all sports. Consequently, if there is an imbalance, we must adjust to bring both sides of the phrase closer to equilibrium—the “athlete” side cannot outweigh (much less vastly outweigh) the “student” side. In football and men's basketball, however, there is evidence that such an imbalance exists.

Anecdotal evidence supports such an imbalance. Notably, Ed O'Bannon, former men's basketball player at UCLA and lead plaintiff in the landmark case against the NCAA, and Kain Colter, former football player at Northwestern and leader in the effort to unionize football student-athletes, have both asserted under oath that academics were subordinate to participating in sports. These were student-athletes at two highly respected institutions. Additionally, the University of North Carolina, another highly respected institution, recently released the results of a review that revealed an 18-year history of academic malfeasance arguably done for the purpose of maintaining athletic eligibility. Two former student-athletes at UNC, including a former football player, have now sued the NCAA and UNC asserting that schools, conferences, and the NCAA are “subverting the educational mission in the service of the big business of college athletics.”

There is more than anecdotal evidence. The reality is that those who suggest college football and men's basketball are already more commercial than educational can find facts to support their argument. From an entertainment perspective, football and men's basketball at the Division-I level are unquestionably popular. In 2013, the average football attendance for each of the five “power” conferences—which include 64 football-playing institutions—ranged from nearly 50,000 to 75,000 fans per game (Notre Dame, which is independent in football, averaged nearly 81,000). In comparison, the 32 teams of the NFL averaged around 68,000. Similar comparisons can be made in men's basketball, where during the 2013-14 season, the 30 teams of the NBA averaged over 17,000 fans per game while the top 30 teams in attendance in Division-I averaged over 15,000 fans per game.

Television and multi-platform media coverage is also ubiquitous at both the college and professional level in these sports. In fact, there are now even numerous college-specific networks, which are anchored by football and men's basketball programming. The inaugural College Football Playoff (CFP) set ratings records for cable programming, and that event seems destined to be every bit the national spectacle that the Final Four has already become. Popularity in and of itself is not problematic or a reason for change; however, popularity should not be cover or justification for a sub-optimal educational experience—regardless of a sport's popularity, the “student” part of the equation must be honored, respected, and asserted.

Another similarity between the college and professional levels in these sports lies in coaches' salaries. Due in no small part to the television interest described above (and the revenue that interest generates), coaches' salaries at the highest levels of college football and basketball are comparable to football and basketball coaches in the professional ranks. There are even a few instances of college coaches making more than coaches of professional teams. The flip side, of course, is that college football and men's basketball coaches have much less job security as compared to coaches in other college sports, but that reality furthers the comparison to coaches of professional football and basketball teams. In the context of such a high-stakes environment, where coaches are compensated, hired, and fired on the basis of athletic success, we must make sure we do what is necessary to send a clear and unambiguous message about the primacy of the student-athletes' academic experience.

A final comparison, which gets right at the heart of the question of whether academics are truly prioritized over athletics, is the amount of time college football and men's basketball players spend on their sport. From a time-demand perspective, surveys have shown that college football and men's basketball players spend close to 40 hours per week or more on their sport, more than what student-athletes reported in any other sport besides baseball. It is now also permissible for football and men's basketball student-athletes to participate in required workouts with their coaches during the summer. The length of the seasons and even numbers of games are comparable, too.

The college football season probably provides the closest approximation of any sport as to what a professional season would be like. In college, teams report to preseason camp in early August and play 12 regular-season games between late August/ early September and late November/ early December. Some teams will play in a conference championship game and roughly half of all Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) teams will play in a bowl game, which will be played in late December or early January. In the NFL, teams report to preseason camp in late July and play 16 regular-season games, ending in late December. The NFL playoffs are then conducted in early-to-mid January. The two teams that played in the CFP championship game, Ohio State and Oregon, played in 15 games over the course of the season, or in other words, one fewer game than the 20 NFL teams that did not make the NFL Playoffs.

As compared to football, there is a greater disparity between the number of games played in college basketball vis-à-vis NBA basketball, but the seasons are still similar. The NBA regular season starts in late October/ early November and ends in mid-April. The Division-I regular season starts in mid-November and ends in early March. The NBA's 82-game season is slightly more than double the number of games a Division-I team would play (the NBA Developmental League's (NBDL) 50-game season is much closer), but the frequency of games is comparable. NBA teams typically play 3-4 games per week while Division-I teams typically play 2-3 games per week. It is interesting to note that while the NBA's 82-game schedule has remained static since the 1967-68 season, the number of games in college basketball has increased by one-

third since then. The average number of games played by the NCAA champion in the 10 years that preceded freshmen eligibility in basketball (1963-1972) was 30.1. The average number of games played by the past 10 NCAA champions is 39.7. To illustrate perfectly, UCLA won the NCAA championship in 1972-73, finishing 30-0; if Kentucky had gone undefeated this year, they would have finished 40-0.

Football and men's basketball student-athletes have exceedingly high expectations that they will play professionally. Fifty-eight percent of football players at the FBS level believe that it is at least "somewhat likely" that they will play professionally while an incredible 76% of men's basketball players believe that they will play professionally. While aspiring to play professional sports is not inherently bad, it is instructive of how the student-athletes in these sports may prioritize the balance between academics and athletics. If student-athletes with high aspirations of playing professionally are capably balancing athletic and academic performance we should applaud them. However, if the evidence suggests a disproportionate focus on athletics at the expense of academic performance, then it is incumbent upon the collegiate model to take steps to correct that imbalance.

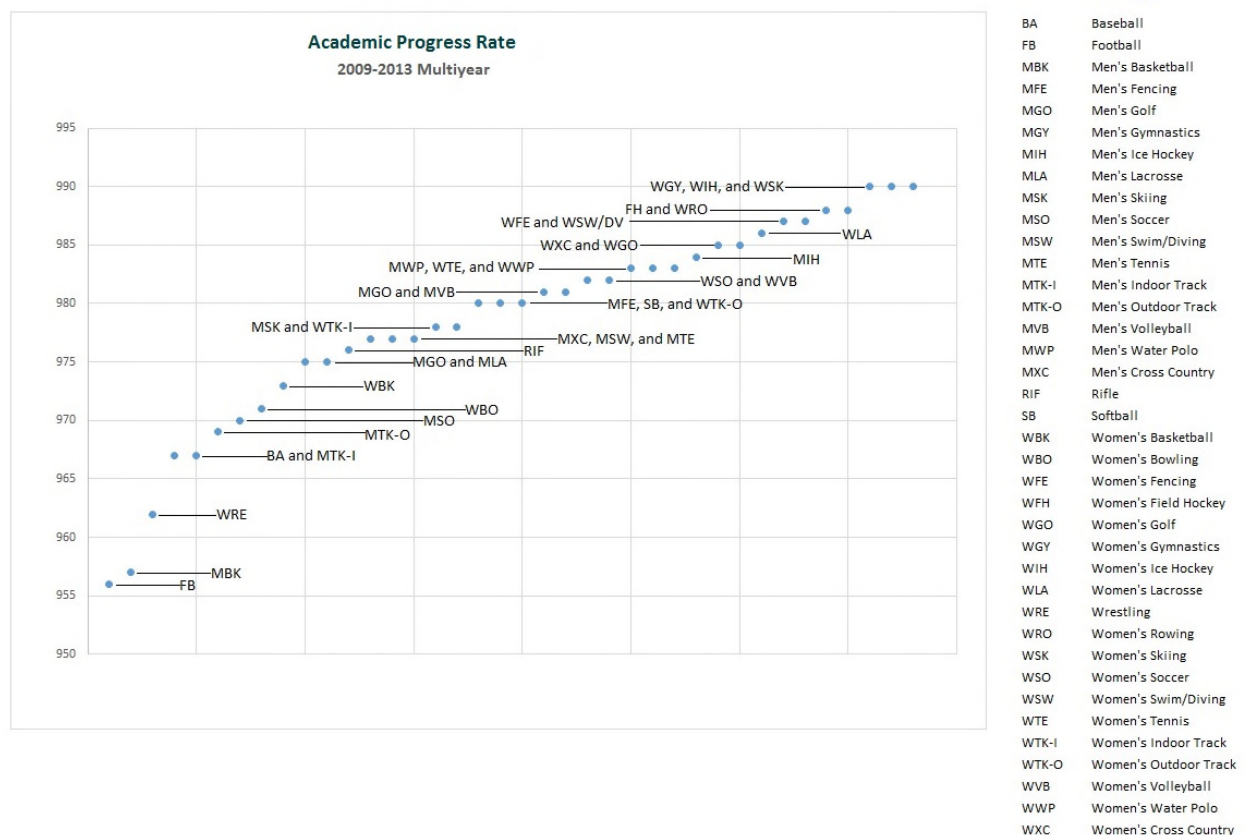
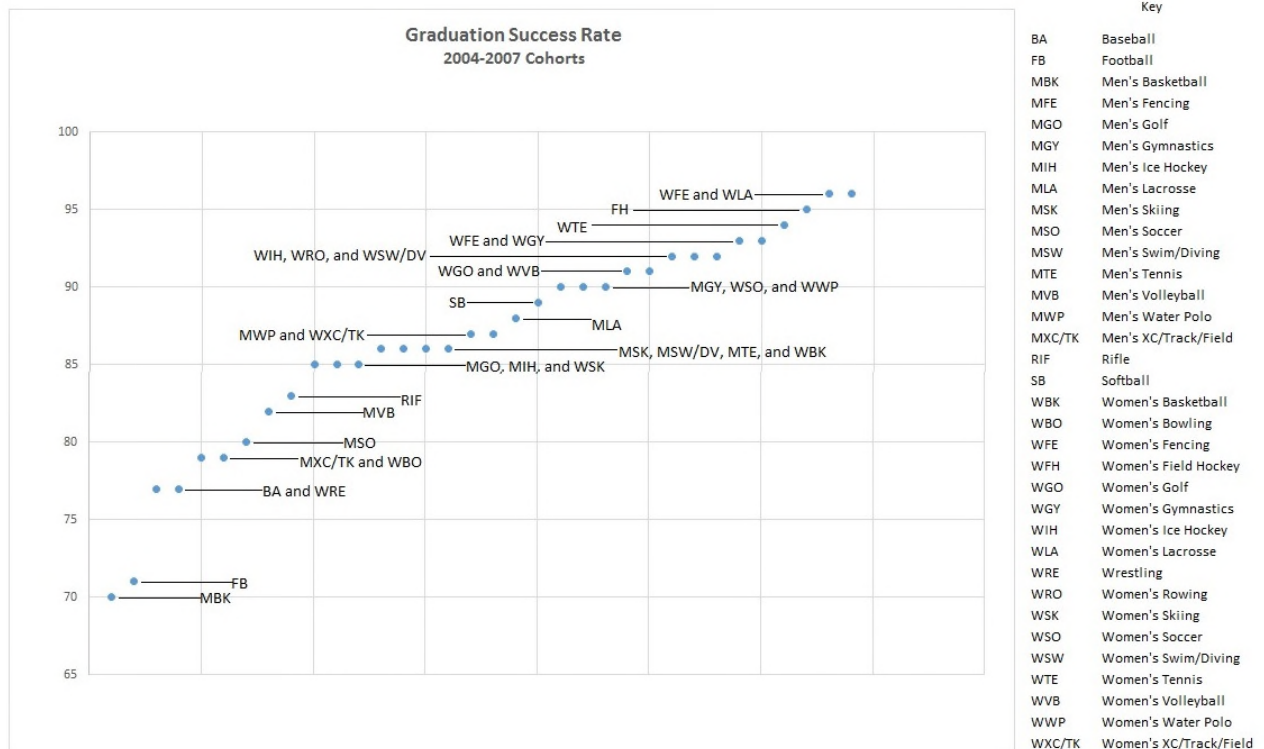
Academic performance in the sports of football and men's basketball suggests that such an imbalance exists. Upon arrival to our campuses, student-athletes in the sports of football and men's basketball are less prepared (on average) relative to meeting initial eligibility standards than student-athletes in any other sport. After arrival, student-athletes in these sports continue to lag behind all other sports, as the following data illustrate:

- Among the 34 sports listed in the most recent Graduation Success Rate\* (GSR) data, football and men's basketball are last.
- Among the 38 sports listed in the most recent Academic Progress Rate\*\* (APR) data, football and men's basketball are last.

The below charts illustrate not only the rankings in these two metrics among all sports but also the gap that exists between those two sports and all other sports. (The GSR chart is Division-I Football Bowl Subdivision, i.e. FBS; The APR chart is all of Division-I except football, which is FBS only.)

*\*The Graduation Success Rate is a metric developed and adopted by the NCAA as an alternative to the Federal Graduation Rate. The GSR is designed to more accurately capture the rate at which student-athletes are graduating by including the success of transfer student-athletes in the assessment.*

*\*\*The Academic Progress Rate is a metric developed and adopted by the NCAA that is designed to track the academic performance of each team. The APR reflects a term-by-term accounting of the eligibility and retention of individual members of a team.*



Aside from the above data, there are other trends that suggest an inappropriate level of stress on the academic side of the equation. In football, there has been an upward trend of early enrollment by student-athletes who enroll midyear after having attended only three and a half years of high school. There has also been a proliferation of questionable secondary institutions (primarily in men's basketball but now in both sports), which supply an increasing number of student-athletes in both sports. A telling indication of the stress on the academic side of the equation lies in major infractions data. Of the 37 major infractions cases involving academic fraud over the past 20 years, all but five (i.e., 32 of the 37) involve either football, men's basketball, or both. Of the 20 academic investigations currently being conducted by the NCAA enforcement staff, 14 involve either football, men's basketball, or both. To put into context, although football and men's basketball account for fewer than 19% of all participants in Division I, over 80% of academic infractions cases—past or pending—involve these two sports. In a competitive environment, pressure and the temptation to take shortcuts can be a powerful combination. Better positioning student-athletes to meet academic challenges through better preparation and a better transition to college can help mitigate the risk created through the combination of such pressure and temptation.

Statistically speaking, the one-and-done phenomenon in men's basketball, where a student-athlete minimally needs to meet eligibility standards for one term to receive one full year of athletic development before leaving the institution, is an exceedingly infrequent occurrence. Nevertheless, the fact that it occurs undermines the notion that such student-athletes are choosing to play in college because of the educational experience.

If any of the issues described above were taken in isolation, a conclusion that radical change is needed would be unlikely. When the issues are viewed in the aggregate, however, such a conclusion is at a minimum defensible and at most blatantly obvious. When you take the factors above that suggest an over-emphasis on athletics or consider the ways in which football and men's basketball on the collegiate level resemble football and men's basketball on the professional level, couple them with the academic concerns, then for good measure, consider the ability of the 18-year-old mind to handle all of these things (balance the athletics pressure, the exposure, the scrutiny, and perform well academically even when academically underprepared) what we do now really makes very little sense, particularly within the context of what the collegiate model—an educational model—really should be. In its worst form, it could be argued that we are bringing young people in with promises of a meaningful educational experience then setting them up to fail—not just at our institutions, but more importantly, after they leave our institutions.

### **Exploring a Year of Readiness**

The idea of a year of readiness may have shortcomings, but it has its virtues, too. It did, after all, exist in all sports for three-quarters of a century. Legendary basketball coach Dean Smith, who in his recent passing was regarded as much for his emphasis on education and off-the-court development as he was for his many on-court successes, advocated publicly for returning to a year of readiness.

A year of readiness is responsive to the issues that are not purely academic in nature. First and foremost, requiring a year of readiness would make clear to prospects that they have a choice. On one hand, they would be free to pursue their sport as a vocation, where development in the sport is their primary—if not sole—objective. To the extent such avenues are limited in the sports of football and men's basketball, it is

the responsibility of the professional leagues in those sports to provide such opportunities. It is not the responsibility of intercollegiate athletics to serve as professional minor leagues in any sport.

On the other hand, prospects would be free to choose intercollegiate athletics with the understanding that participation in athletics is incidental to a long-term educational commitment, not the primary purpose for attending college. Specifically, the year of readiness would allow student-athletes to have a year of assimilation to campus life before worrying about competition and the pressures and scrutiny that would follow. Provided the year of readiness were accompanied by corresponding limitations on required athletically related activities (e.g., no travel to away contests), it would provide an opportunity for these individuals to be students before being asked to compete.

A year of readiness also makes sense for academic reasons. When the NCAA adopted freshman eligibility in all sports in 1972, it did so for financial rather than academic reasons, as institutions lamented the cost of providing scholarships to individuals who did not compete. Since that time, the NCAA has engaged in what has essentially been a continuous effort to solve the dilemma of ensuring freshmen student-athletes are minimally prepared to succeed academically. This pursuit has manifested itself in the adoption and repeated modification of initial eligibility standards. The first attempt was simply requiring that freshmen graduate from high school with a cumulative 2.0 GPA. “Prop 48” was then adopted in 1983 (implemented in 1986), to require student-athletes to meet both a minimum GPA of 2.0 in 11 core courses and a minimum standardized test score in order to be eligible as freshmen.

The initial eligibility standards created by Prop 48 have been adjusted on numerous occasions over the past 20 years, and student-athletes now must present at least a 2.0 GPA in 16 core courses and a minimum test score, set forth on a sliding scale, that corresponds with the student-athlete’s core-course GPA. Adjustments continue, as beginning in 2016, freshmen student-athletes will need to present a minimum 2.3 GPA, and the core courses will have to be earned in a specific sequence throughout the course of high-school enrollment. Despite these efforts, football and men’s basketball continue to lag behind other sports in terms of academic performance. Rather than continue chasing the right initial eligibility equation in an attempt to ensure that football and men’s basketball student-athletes are prepared, perhaps it is time to try a different approach. A year of readiness would allow for remediation where needed, mitigate time demands during the critical first year, and otherwise provide an opportunity to adjust to the rigors of college while developing habits necessary for success in the classroom.

Under the approach contemplated, student-athletes who choose to participate in Division-I football and men’s basketball could practice and receive athletics aid in their first year of enrollment, and they would still retain four years of eligibility. It is possible that initial eligibility standards could even be eliminated in these sports. Current continuing eligibility rules could remain the same, in which case second-year eligibility would be achieved by meeting current standards (e.g., 6, 18, and 24-hour rules with a 1.8 GPA).

### **Acknowledgement of Potential Objections**

There is no doubt that requiring a year of readiness for football and men’s basketball student-athletes would be controversial. Some of the likely objections are addressed below, along with possible responses.



### *Financial Impact*

When freshman eligibility was adopted in all sports in 1972, the driving factor was cost. Specifically, institutions that supported freshman eligibility expressed concerns over spending money on scholarships for individuals who were not competing. It is expected that those same concerns would exist now. Moreover, to account for freshmen not competing from a roster-management perspective, scholarship limits would need to be increased in the sports of football and men's basketball, and those increases would in turn need to be balanced by increases in women's sports.

The below figures provide an example of what costs could be from an aggregate perspective\*:

7 additional football scholarships x 120 FBS programs x \$25,000 per full grant = \$21MM  
3 additional men's basketball scholarships x 350 D-1 programs x \$25,000 per full grant = \$26.25MM  
5.4\*\* additional women's scholarships x 350 D-1 institutions x \$25,000 per full grant = \$47.25MM  
\$21MM (Football) + \$26.25MM (Men's Basketball) + \$47.25MM (Women's Sports) = \$94.5MM in  
additional scholarship funding for 3,780 new full-scholarship opportunities

*\*Note that these numbers are placeholders and are provided only as ballpark estimates to illustrate what aggregate costs could be.*

*\*\*Using the variables in this example, it would take 5.4 additional women's scholarships across 350 institutions to offset the \$47.25MM in new men's scholarships. Note again that this is an aggregate assessment; in reality, institutions that sponsor both football and men's basketball would need to add more women's scholarships; institutions that sponsor only men's basketball would need to add fewer.*

As a possible source of funding for these increased scholarship costs, money could be provided by off-the-top allocations from television revenue from both the NCAA men's basketball tournament and College Football Playoff. This approach would allow money generated by institutions of high market value and competitive success to be distributed across all of Division I for investment in new scholarship opportunities. In this regard, it should be noted that the sample figure above (\$94.5MM) represents less than ten percent of postseason football and men's basketball revenue distribution; if regular-season revenues are included, the figure would drop to less than five percent. This would be a modest commitment of resources to ensure the viability of the collegiate experience while adding thousands of new scholarship opportunities for men and women.

### *Impact on African-American Student-Athletes and Male Student-Athletes*

Within Division-I, African-American student-athletes represent the highest percentage of participants in both football (47%) and men's basketball (58%). Consequently, requiring a year of readiness in those sports would, as a matter of fact, impact a higher percentage of African-Americans than any other group within those sports. In addition, limiting a required year of readiness to the sports of football and men's basketball would exclusively—with only rare exception (e.g., female kicker in football)—impact male student-athletes.

In sports, as in any context, a risk in treating some people differently than others is that those treated differently can become labeled—explicitly or implicitly—in a negative way. We should all make great efforts to avoid labeling anyone in a negative way. Therefore, we want to be clear as to what the purpose of

requiring a year of readiness in football and men's basketball would and would not be. The purpose would not be to label football and men's basketball student-athletes; it would be to mitigate, if not eliminate, the likelihood of providing competitive opportunities in those sports without simultaneously providing a meaningful educational experience. Further, we do not believe that a year of readiness should be adopted if it were not accompanied by an increase in the number of opportunities provided in these two sports. We also want to be clear that this would be a delay of eligibility, not a denial of eligibility, as student-athletes in these two sports would still possess four seasons of competition and five years of aid that would make participating in four seasons of competition following a year readiness possible. Finally, there would be clear choices for those who desire early professional opportunities.

Despite the good intentions, it must be acknowledged that a shortcoming of adopting a year of readiness in football and men's basketball is that to do so would treat student-athletes in those sports differently than student-athletes in other sports. Notwithstanding the fact that there already are eligibility rules that treat football and men's basketball student-athletes differently than student-athletes in other sports (9-hour rule in football; transfer restrictions in both sports), such an eventuality would have to be acknowledged when considering any idea for addressing the imbalance present in football and men's basketball. At the same time, any shortcoming associated with maintaining the status quo must also be acknowledged. If we are comfortable that the current system is providing an adequate educational experience to student-athletes in football and men's basketball at a level commensurate with what is being asked of them athletically, we should not change course. On the other hand, if maintaining the status quo presents a greater risk, then we should be open to changing course, even if it requires treating football and men's basketball differently than other sports.

### *Competitive Impact*

It is unquestionable, particularly in the sport of men's basketball, that some student-athletes are capable of competing at the highest level upon arrival to college. Indeed, but for the NBA's rule that prohibits this from happening, there are some college freshmen who would have been drafted to play in the NBA directly out of high school. Incidentally, this is where choice comes into play—individuals who are capable and want to do nothing but engage in athletic development should be free to make the choice to do so, and the relevant professional leagues should provide those opportunities. In contrast, a year of readiness for those who would choose college would be about educational development. That does not mean, however, that an individual cannot develop athletically while also receiving an education.

From an individual perspective, it is not uncommon for student-athletes who stand to benefit from additional physical and skill development in their sport to redshirt. Taking this additional year does not hinder their athletic development and when they return to competition, they commonly are better than they were previously. This is especially true in football, where the disparity in the speed and strength of college players as compared to high-school players is played out in the context of an extremely physical contact sport. From the perspective of a team, a year of readiness would allow student-athletes ample time to integrate within a team, learn playing styles and systems, and demonstrate ability. It could be argued that a year of readiness would improve quality of play in both sports.

### *In-Season vs. Out-of-Season Academic Performance*

Conventional wisdom seems to suggest that a student-athlete's academic performance is better while in season than it is when the student-athlete is not in season. Such an assertion is presumably based on studies showing that college students with structured time demands such as part-time jobs or extracurricular activities perform better academically than college students without such time demands. The problem with conventional wisdom in this case is two-fold. First, although there is data to support improved academic performance for students who work a limited amount of hours per week, studies also show that there is a point where spending too much time on a part-time job has a detrimental effect on academic performance. Second, the NCAA research staff studied the very issue—in-season vs. out-of-season academic performance—several years ago and found that performance was generally better outside of the season. Moreover, the findings, which were shared in a 2008 paper on the issue, indicated that there was a greater negative impact on sports with high in-season time demands and also on student-athletes who entered college less prepared academically.

A year of readiness arguably strikes at a middle ground. The benefits of some extracurricular time demands could be derived from participating in practice. At the same time, cutting back on time demands such as travel in conjunction with away contests could help improve the likelihood of academic success in the critical first year of enrollment. Even if the ultimate determination is that a year of readiness is not the answer, athletically related time demands—from the number of contests, to the timing of contests, to the length of seasons, to methods of regulation—should be looked upon as fertile ground for finding solutions for rebalancing the “student-athlete” equation.

### *Impact on Academically Prepared Student-Athletes*

Arguably the strongest objection to a required year of readiness is the impact such a rule would have on student-athletes who present academic credentials that clearly suggest a level of preparedness that would translate to success in college. Although that eventuality is certain to occur, if enough student-athletes in these sports were prepared at such a level, the academic performance in these sports would be much better and measures to rectify the present imbalance would be unnecessary. Furthermore, while a student-athlete with sterling academic credentials may not need academic remediation, he can still benefit from a year of assimilation to college life, as even good students can struggle with the transition from high school to college. Finally, as mentioned above, such student-athletes still will have the opportunity—under the approach contemplated—to receive athletically related aid and engage in four seasons of competition, so they would be “disadvantaged” only in the sense that they would have to wait a year to compete. Millions of student-athletes experienced a year of readiness from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century through 1972. It is worth revisiting the past to see if we can restore greater balance for the participants and sponsoring institutions in these two sports, or for that matter, any sport that may demonstrate a comparable imbalance.

### **Conclusion**

If we cannot defend the educational value of the student-athlete experience in the sports of football and men's basketball, then we cannot defend the model as educational; if we cannot defend the model as educational, then we cannot defend the model. If the model were healthy, there would not be evidence of

an imbalance between athletic priorities and academic priorities in any sport. What we have seen, however, is that in a variety of ways, such an imbalance exists within the sports of football and men's basketball.

The time is upon us to have a serious conversation about restoring the health of the collegiate model—about establishing unequivocally that in all sports, education comes first and athletics come second. Requiring a year of readiness in football and men's basketball is one of what will hopefully be numerous ideas offered for consideration that would achieve such an objective. As for this particular idea, it would provide a year of academic preparation and assimilation to campus life while signaling that the primary purpose of intercollegiate football and men's basketball is not to serve as minor leagues to the NFL and NBA. Finally, the year of readiness contemplated would accomplish all of the previously described benefits while creating thousands of new opportunities for men and women, which could be funded directly from television revenues. Let the national discussion begin.