

Tertiary Level Education for Athletes

By Dr. Brader Adaleine Brathwaite
Faculty of Medical Sciences, UWI

Unfortunately, a myth has been perpetuated that students in the education system who have not been academic achievers should divert their energy to sports and athletics. With foreign scholarships being offered in sports and athletics, however, many students have defied the myth, demonstrating that they can perform academically as well as in their selected sport.

In the school system in Trinidad and Tobago—at CXC, A'Level, and now CAPE—budding sportsmen and sportswomen are subjected to a culture of absenteeism from classes when they need to attend practice sessions during seasonal inter-collegiate championships. The extent to which these students are compensated with private tuition, and/or academic advising, is unknown. In the case of regional and international cricket, especially with under-19 teams, young athletes miss significant classroom sessions, which in turn hinders their preparation for, and success in, examinations. These students could therefore be disadvantaged when attempting to advance themselves academically.

It happens, therefore, that some athletes leave the secondary school system, having contributed to national and regional leagues, without gaining the necessary academic qualification to attempt tertiary level education. In other cases, graduates from the secondary school choose an alternative area of study over sport, believing themselves incapable of accommodating a dual interest in sport and study. This means that the potential benefits of their intellectual development is lost to their field of prowess.

After an illustrious career in sport, which unwittingly has an age limit, a number of athletes may not possess a suitable education foundation for pursuing another career area. As a small group, the personal problems facing our national athletes, as they relate to accessing education, have not been considered within a world-view. But national athletes are asked to be all things to all people, without being provided with the requisite support, counselling, and treatment that should reside within national associations, leagues, and clubs, which may view them only in the narrow context of the game.

The response by COSTAATT, in offering six scholarships to young cricketers through the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board, is therefore both timely and commendable. The successful candidates have up to an interrupted 7-year period to complete their associate degrees. Until the endorsement impasse, bpTT had quietly sponsored a Self Enhancement Workshop Series, which sought to provide regional WIPA members, primarily, with skills in handling the media. In addition, the players were being channelled through holistic education toward personal goals for their post-cricketing years. New technologies in education, along with innovative arrangements, can now be structured on an ongoing basis to assist our athletes to attain appropriate education at the tertiary level, possibly in

remedial, transitional, and extended modes that can fit comfortably into the athletes' schedules. The example of COSTAATT should therefore be replicated throughout the tertiary level institutions across the English-speaking Caribbean.

Whereas the education of sportsmen is of paramount value to the athlete, and to an intelligent game, the integration of sports and athletic activities into curricula from primary throughout tertiary levels would reap tremendous advantages in the health of the individual and the society. No doubt the so-called brilliant nerd could be converted into a team player who could contribute to private as well as communal enterprises. Degree programmes that train students for careers in the medical sciences, for example, are trying to attract applicants who demonstrate evidence of both team spirit and social conscience.

Innovations like the Tobago Youth Optimist Dinghy Sailing Programme, and swimming programmes appended to the school curriculum, would benefit young persons and remove other myths, for example, that all island people can swim!

School of Education, UWI, St. Augustine