

## A PROPOSITION FOR VICTORY

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[Assignment: Choose a current controversial subject, take a stand on it (your thesis), and defend your position. Your research of outside sources should include a variety of materials and your arguments should be supported and focused.]

It's tip-off time for the 1992-93 NCAA basketball championships--the University of Michigan and the University of North Carolina take the court, ready to spring into action. Growing anxiety radiates from the faces of the fans, the coaches, and the ten players on the floor. The whistle blows, the game ball is tossed, and the championship game is underway. In a few short seconds North Carolina makes the first basket.

The scene here is no different from any other big time college basketball game--nine out of the ten starters are black athletes. Fast forward to the final seconds of the game, and the same ratio exists. As any sports buff could explain, the major revenue-generating sports--basketball and football--from any of the universities renowned for the quality of their athletic programs, have a high percentage of black athletes. In fact, out of the approximately 90,000 athletes who participate in college basketball, football, and baseball, at least 50 percent are black (Hill). By contrast, black students in general constitute only four percent of the total enrollment in colleges and universities (Rhoden IA).

The fast-paced, high stakes world of college sports is overflowing with superstars, moments of glory and defeat, and abundant opportunities to make money. A good sports team or superstar could mean thousands--possibly millions--of dollars in gate receipts, television revenues, and free publicity to a university. Unfortunately, many black athletes feel they are being exploited by their universities in order to bring revenue and prestige to their individual schools (Rhoden IA). In other words, they feel that their education is being compromised for their athletic prowess. In 1982, the graduation rate for black athletes was only 25 percent (Hill). Due to these shocking indicators of poor academic performance, the NCAA did something about this problem in 1983. Their solution, Proposition 48, which went into effect in 1986, laid down recruiting guidelines and eligibility standards. It becomes clear that once a university recruits an athlete, the institution needs to promote academic stability in return for the athlete's sporting expertise, and Proposition 48 seems to be an effective answer. In order to fully understand this position, it helps to be knowledgeable about the recruiting methods utilized by universities, the situation of the black athlete, and the in's and out's of Proposition 48.

Recruiting methods that a university may use are limited by the NCAA, but even so, improper techniques are still exercised. Some of these

infractions include the offering of some of the following prohibited incentives:

illegal benefits like low-interest loans, money for travel, profits from the sale of game tickets, jobs for parents and relatives, the use of expensive cars and motel rooms, and in some instances, enough money from boosters and agents to be considered salaried employees. (Lapchick 72)

At the present time, twenty-six universities are under investigation by the NCAA for recruiting violations and/or the distribution of improper benefits to athletes (Lederman 32A).

It is common for athletes who do not meet a university's standards to be accepted into the university anyway, possibly placing them at an academic disadvantage from the beginning. Edward Hill, author of "Pressures on the Black College Athlete," states that some universities, in order to ensure eligibility, design courses especially for athletes that are easier than the regular courses. Also, some athletes, to ensure eligibility, take the "easy" courses which might have nothing to do with their declared major (Hill). Richard Lapchick, director of Northeastern University's Center for the Study of Sport in Society, implies that "a disproportionate number of black athletes were kept on a non-graduating track, so by the time their eligibility expired. . . they may have chosen to drop out because of a lack of hope" (qtd. in Lederman 32A).

What exactly does a black athlete expect to gain from attending a university? According to a recent poll of 4,000 black athletes, "82 percent . . . said their primary ambition was to earn a degree, yet 39 percent of them had grade-point averages of 1.99 [on a 4.0 scale] and below, meaning they were not likely degree candidates" (Rhoden 28D). The same poll shows that "44 percent. . . said they expected to become professional athletes" (Rhoden) when at the same time only *eight percent* of all big time college athletes ever make it to the pros (Hill). To put this in perspective, out of the approximately 45,000 black athletes who participate in collegiate basketball, baseball and football, around 20,300 athletes expect to make it to the pros, but only 3600 will ever become professional athletes. Their dreams are to be accomplished while spending up to sixty hours a week on their sport (during regular season) (Hill), twelve hours in class, and eleven preparing for class (Rhoden 28D). For a college athlete, maintaining a certain GPA has a double meaning--not only does it ensure the preservation of scholarships, but it also maintains athletic eligibility, which is how most athletes acquire their scholarships. And for some, athletic scholarships are their ticket for attending college.

After becoming aware of the plight of the black athlete, the NCAA decided to take action--that action being Proposition 48. Low graduation rates of collegiate athletes were a big factor in producing the proposition. In 1985, the year before Proposition 48 went into effect, the average graduation rate for all athletes was only 45.7 percent--52.3 percent white and 26.6 percent black athletes (Lederman 30A). Douglas Lederman, in a recent article published by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, states that "black athletes who entered Division I colleges in the mid-1980's came in with much weaker academic credentials than

white athletes, and they were half as likely as the whites to graduate within five years of college attendance" (30A).

The NCAA's solution to the low graduation rates and improper handling of student athletes are addressed in Proposition 48, in hopes that it will help bolster the college athlete's overall academic success. The proposition requires all new student athletes to meet the required grade point averages and SAT or ACT test scores as provided by the NCAA's sliding scale. Student athletes must take at least eleven core course credits and maintain a minimum grade point average of 2.0. Those athletes who would like to participate in their respective sports their freshman year must have acquired a C average during their high school careers. All athletes must obtain credits in their declared majors that will lead to a degree, and recruiting methods used by universities are limited by the proposal. One point should be noted: Proposition 48 was not designed solely for black athletes--it effects all college athletes. Although blacks had the lowest graduation rates of all college athletes, the overall percentages were substantially lower.

Many people are opposed to Proposition 48, saying that it would do more harm than good for the black athlete. Opponents to the proposition have two main complaints. First, the opposition feels that "some student-athletes who might otherwise have succeeded academically are ruled ineligible and prevented from receiving a college education" (Berg 30). There is truth behind this argument, as shown in an NCAA survey of how Proposition 48 would have affected the freshman class of 1977. The results show that 11 percent of the white males and 57 percent of the black male athletes would not have met the requirements (29). Rick Berg, author of "The Issue is Academic," states, ". . . of those who would have been ruled ineligible, 34 percent of the black males and 31 percent of the white males either graduated or remained in good academic standing throughout their athletic career" (29).

The second criticism of the opposition to Proposition 48 has to do with discrimination towards blacks. Standardized tests like the SAT and ACT have long been thought culturally biased. Blacks and minorities in general tend to score lower than whites on these tests; therefore, the opposition feels that basing eligibility partially on standardized test scores is discriminatory toward black athletes, causing fewer black athletes to be accepted into universities (Hill). This stand, along with the other concerns of the opposition, is especially addressed and refuted by the proponents of Proposition 48, as will soon be noted.

Those who endorse Proposition 48 acknowledge the opposition's concerns, but have their own reasons for encouraging the rule. The supporters hope that the stricter requirements will push high school athletes to "focus more on their academic performance" (Berg 30) and will cause high schools themselves to upgrade their curriculum in order to better prepare students for college level classes (Hill). Another point offered by Proposition 48 supporters is best stated in the article by Douglas Lederman:

while [standardized tests] are not terribly strong predictors of an athlete's college performance, high-school grade-point averages and standardized-test scores are "the best indicators we have,"

said Jack McArkle, . . . chairman of the NCAA's data-analysis group. (qtd. in Lederman 32A)

Six years after Proposition 48 went into effect, the first results were recently analyzed in a study by the NCAA to determine how the new regulations are working. The report, published in *The NCAA News*, presented positive data. The study compared student graduation rates in the pre-Proposition 48 era (before 1986) and those who entered college in August of 1986. According to the report, the "overall graduation rate jumped from 48.1 percent for student-athletes who entered in 1984 or 1985 to 56.5 percent for those student-athletes who entered in the fall of 1986" (*The NCAA News* 1). Another significant finding showed that the graduation rate for black male athletes also increased substantially, and that the "regulations, therefore, have an indirect effect on graduation rate" (20).

Although Proposition 48 cannot force universities to change the amount of academic support given to black athletes, the rule can make the universities more aware of the need to offer support by counseling, study groups, peer advising, tutoring, and other forms of encouragement. Rules and regulations may be made infinitely, but the deciding force behind all the data gathered is the student--he or she must decide for himself or herself how much effort will be put forth in academic pursuits. Once an athlete is shown that a person can be talented both in and out of the classroom, that student athlete may become better prepared to handle the future if dreams of professional careers are crushed. In fact, the athlete may discover a new direction in life through education and decide to pursue an avenue other than professional sports. After reaching superstar status from the NCAA championships, sophomore Jaleen Rose decided not to enter the NBA draft but to continue his education. Somewhere between the court and the classroom, someone influenced him to discover there is more to life than just sports. Fortunately, this man will be prepared to face the real world and will not end up "a glorified version of the unemployed, undereducated black youth" (Hill).

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