

The Positive and Negative Effects of Sports on Student Athletes

Karis Hicks

Liberty University

Abstract

This essay discusses the positive and negative effects of sports on the student athlete at the collegiate level. The focus of this level is going to be the club sport program with a minor focus on ice hockey. This focus on ice hockey will be shown through research. Throughout this essay, one can see that involvement in a college sport both positively and negatively affects the student athlete. Some of these reasons of negative involvement may be seen in exhaustion, stereotyping, and lack of time for academics. Positive involvement can be seen in a boost of self-confidence, stress relief, and an increase in awareness. These positive and negative affects will also be broken down into male and female categories. Depression most commonly affects females and substance abuse most commonly affects males.

The Positive and Negative Effects of Sports on Student Athletes

Introduction

Collegiate sports have both a positive and negative impact on the physical and biological well-being of college student athletes. These impacts vary depending on whether the athlete is male or female, due to biological differences; however, some male and female problems can be similar. Active participation in a collegiate sport can positively affect both male and female athletes physically as well as mentally. Sports positively affect female college student athletes in regard to their mental health as well as their general health. Mentally, female student athletes will have a higher view of self than female non-athletes, especially regarding their body image. Also, female athletes have a higher sense of self-worth than their non-athlete classmates. Furthermore, female athletes often have a higher sense of self-confidence than male athletes (LaFontaine, 2007).

Negative Effects for Females

For females, negative effects of sports at the collegiate level include physical exhaustion as well as various struggles with eating disorders and weight management. Exhaustion will be reached if and when the student athlete attempts to take on too much, does not follow proper nutritional guidelines, or does not gain enough sleep on a daily basis. Under a wide generalization, female college students do not usually follow proper nutritional habits while in school. This is mostly a direct result of adhering to a scattered daily schedule as well as the demand placed on a student. However, research has shown that this lack of proper nutrition has impacts that are far more serious with female students who are athletes considering the amount of strain that serious training places on their diets and their bodies (LaFontaine, 2007).

Another aspect of negative impact for female student athletes at the collegiate level is

that of the high risk for battling with depression. While overall sport involvement at the college level has positive effects on student athletes, research has shown that –especially for females– sport involvement can lead to depression. This could be for many reasons. For instance, while focusing on excelling at playing their sport, college female student athletes are also trying to develop themselves as individuals on top of continuing to strive for excellence in their continued education all while battling performance pressure. Female college student athletes have a strong desire to focus on excelling in their sport, performing to the best of their ability during every shift, practice, and game. Yet alongside of their sport performance, female athletes are also trying to develop themselves as individuals in the world. While this is the case for every female college student, it is more difficult to do for female athletes than for non, due to stereotypes and such rigorous scheduling. This double-development of both the athlete's performance and student's personality can lead to depression as well as role confusion. Female athletes are twice as likely than males to be affected by depression as a result of involvement in their sport. The cause of this could be a direct result of the hormone and chemical balances in women compared to men. Research has also shown that females tend to internalize negativity and stress more than males do. An increase in depression with female athletes could also be a direct result of a decrease in non-sport activities due to the pressure to perform well. This knowledge of how depression affects female student athletes is important to be able to be able to offer support for any athlete struggling as well as to be able to allow the athlete to perform at her best (as one side effect of depression is its impairment of performance). Role confusion occurs when the student loses sight of the fact that she is not simply a student or an athlete separately, but both at the same time. During this sport-identity development, the female student

athlete must also balance one more aspect of the college life, the most important part: her education. Student athletes, especially females, desire to excel in their education, no matter how hard they must work. The demands of athletics coupled with the deadlines of scholastics makes for an interesting see-saw of constant work load balance. Lastly, all the characteristics listed above – sport performance, personal identity, academic excellence – are greatly affected by the pressure to perform well. This pressure is what drives athletes to run just one more lap, take fifty more shots, and complete workout after workout. That pressure to succeed not only in their sport, but also in every other area of life can push female athletes to go above and beyond, yet it can also lead to exhaustion (Jones, Butryn, Furst, & Semerjian, 2013).

Negative Effects for Males

Sports negatively affect male student athletes because the athletic environment creates an atmosphere of higher risk for partaking of and involvement in substance abuse with performance enhancing substances as well as illegal substances. Research has recorded supplements, stimulants, and other substances that are commonly found to affect male athletes' hormones. Athletes involved in using these substances were more prone to experimenting with other substances, such as alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs. Marijuana has become one of the leading substances abused by student athletes. This can lead to a decrease in sport performance, which includes but is not limited to a lack of alertness, reaction, and memory formation. On top of all of that, marijuana also greatly affects muscle recovery and induces muscles fatigue. Lastly, use of marijuana (as well as any other illegal substance) can lead to the end of college athletic careers as well as overall health. Another illegal substance that is commonly abused by male student athletes is that of alcohol. Research has shown that male athletes are more likely to

abuse alcohol than non-athletes, for several different reasons. These reasons include but are not limited to the male athlete's desire for sensation seeking, battles with mood swings, and struggles with adaptation (Wilson, Pritchard, & Schaffer, 2004).

Negative Effects for Both Females and Males

For both male and female student athletes, another factor contributing to exhaustion could be the demand of team travel. Sleeping in a non-familiar setting can decrease your quality of sleep. This happening is called "first night affect" and most often occurs when the brain senses it is in a new environment. This affect creates an uneasiness, alertness, and sometimes anxiety that keeps the brain from fully reaching a completely deep sleep (Tamaki & Sasaki, 2017). Along these same lines, student athletes are often unable to receive the full sleep they need in real beds while traveling for away games. Due to this, they often resort to sleeping on the coach busses in an attempt to "catch up" on sleep. This method of sleeping often leads to increased muscles soreness (due to lack of relaxation and awkward resting position) as well as additional muscle soreness from holding one position for too long. Traveling for away games can also bring out spells of motion sickness, which can dehydrate and exhaust the student athlete in severe forms. Motion sickness has been found to decrease energy levels which then in turn ends up leading to a decrease in the quality of performance. For many athletes, unless they have frequently traveled to the same hotel, road trip accommodations are most often new to the brain. Lastly, traveling for away games increases factors of exhaustion due to the mind set of being on the go for often several days. With homework to keep up with, exams to study for, games to prepare for, as well as the added stresses of everyday life, road trips can be extremely hard on student athletes of both genders.

A negative impact for both male and female student athletes is that of burnout due to sport involvement. Burnout for college student athletes can surface in many ways by affecting emotions, physical energy, and the student's general desire to learn (Dubuc-Charbonneau, Durand-Bush, & Forneris, 2014). Charbonneau, Durand-Bush, & Forneris describe burnout as a being emotionally exhausted, depersonalized, and having a sense of reduced accomplishment (2014). This means that the student athlete has "hit the wall" so to say and does not feel as though he or she can go on any further, either in sports or in academics. The depersonalization comes into play when the student athlete begins to feel less like he or she is making choices and enjoying the game, but rather begins to feel as though he or she is only being used for the success of the athletic program. With this comes a decrease in sport enjoyment as well as an increase in depression and exhaustion. A sense of lack of accomplishment also begins to build, as the student athlete as a result of overwork or too much performance pressure.

Positive Affects for Both Females and Males

Sports positively affect college aged student athletes on an emotional level in regard to their level of confidence. Athletes have displayed higher levels of self-confidence which research has shown is a direct result of involvement in a motivational climate. The motivational climate is anywhere that student athletes can be encouraged in their sport with constructive criticism and support to better the student athlete not only in his or her sport as well as any other area of their lives including academics. This motivational climate can be created by fellow teammates, managers, coaches, as well as team chaplains. It also extends as far out as parents, siblings, and other close family members. However, if any of these displays negative or berating attitudes, this supportive motivational climate will quickly become destructive. What the student athletes were

able to achieve within their sports was also a determining factor for the self-confidence developed. In other words, if the student performed the tasks in his sport well, his self-confidence would rise. Yet if he did not perform well and if he failed, his self-confidence would drop. Along these lines, the aspect of self-perfectionism also may have had an influence in the degree to which athletes showed self-confidence. This self-confidence carries over into academics, personal relationships, and future endeavors, creating a foundation of personal strength for any athlete's future. As the athlete learns to work hard, put in the time, pay attention to small details, and be a positive part of a team, he or she is also learning these skills to one day be applied to his or her future career. (Machida, Ward, & Vealey, 2012).

Negative Emotional Affects

Student athletes face detrimental emotional effects from collegiate sports in a negative way by frequent occurrences of stereotyping. This stereotyping, though sometimes subtle, comes in many different forms. As recorded in research, one way that student athletes feel they are stereotyped is through the assumption that they are merely attending college to participate in athletics and have absolutely no regard for academics. Those involved in the research pose that this assumption comes from a variety of sources, such as classmates, professors, or other people involved in the student athlete's life at college or directly involved in his life in some way. Student athletes, especially girls, face this stereotype from their fellow classmates. Those who do not appreciate or have never participated in sports will often be intimidated by student athletes, even if the athlete is a genuinely kind and outgoing person. On the other hand, fellow athletes also stereotype each other, according to division (NCAA versus Club Sport), sport (football versus ice hockey), and size. In general, student athletes feel that professors and even classmates

hold a negative view of them as students because of their athletic affiliation. Many times, student athletes feel as though they are misjudged as lazy or inattentive in class. The Stereotype Threat theory states that student athletes live up to the beliefs held of them, which could explain why some athletes do not feel the need to take their academics as seriously as their fellow teammates do. This is to say that if some athletes feel as though they are already pre-judged as lazy and unwilling to work, they do not even feel like taking the time and effort to prove their professors and classmates wrong. Instead, they simply poke along through their homework and classes and fall into the classic athletic stereotype that befalls so many student athletes (Feltz, Hwang, Schneider, & Skogsberg, 2013).

Positive Social Affects

Sports very strongly affect the collegiate student athlete's social well-being. Positively, sports influenced relations among peers, authority, and family when those in the athlete's sphere of influence held a healthy involvement in the athlete's life. Healthy involvement constituted financial, emotional, and directional support directed towards the student athlete. Financial involvement could be represented as parents or others in the sphere of influence contributing money for foods, gear or other athletic needs such as team dues and apparel. Emotional involvement can be seen through emotional support of the student athlete. Even if the parents, family members, or others within the sphere of influence cannot be physically present at each game or competition, it is important for the emotional wellbeing of the student athlete that he or she knows that someone is supporting them. This emotional support also increases sport performance and boosts the student athlete's self-confidence. Directional support can come from anyone who aids the student athlete in his or her future endeavors. This could be a parent,

mentor, or coach giving both academic and athletic advice. Such support creates a sense of security as well as hope for the future (Cremadesa, Donlonb & Poczwardowskic, 2013).

Negative Social Affects

Negative effects of sports in reference to social well-being occurred when there was an absence of healthy involvement and a presence of an unhealthy support. Again, this support is most often from those within the student athletes sphere of influence (parents, family, friends, a coach). Unhealthy support was classified as either the lack of support or the existence of over-support, such as pressuring the athlete or keeping firm control over all decision making. Athlete pressure can be seen when the student athlete is pressured to pursue a sport he or she does not have an interest in, or when the student athlete is discouraged from pursuing a certain sport. Also, a negative support environment can be seen when someone (a parent, family member, friend, or coach) pressures the student athlete into following his or her advice on important decisions. This kind of behavior is destructive to the individual not only as an athlete but also as a person. Lack of positive support causes a loss of goals, development, and involvement for the athlete. It creates an almost “what for” attitude as the athlete starts to think that what he is doing does not matter or have a purpose. Development is also hindered as the student athlete begins to lose a sense of pleasure in the sport. Furthermore, lack of involvement can also lead to mild depression and in some cases a resentment of the sport. Lastly, lack of a positive support environment carries from athletics into academics and has a profound impact on the student athlete’s future (Cremadesa, Donlonb & Poczwardowskic, 2013).

Impact on Academics

Student athletes at the collegiate level feel a deep impact of athletic involvement on the academic level (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Positively, sports became an effective coping

method for stress in the athlete's college experience. Research has proven that great amounts of stress are released during enjoyable intense physical activity. Due to the extreme amount of physical activity that is encountered by student athletes on a daily as well as weekly basis, one can recognize the positive impact that sports has on student athletes. Also, the consistent pattern of physical activity offered by sports keeps the brain alert and functioning on an optimal level (Kimball, & Freysinger, 2003). Negatively, sports hindered student athletes' academic performance due to the rigorous amount of time dedicated to the sport. In extreme and demanding sports, this amount of time can be higher than twenty hours each week (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). The involvement in college sports requires an extreme amount of time, which takes away from time that would have normally been dedicated to academic pursuit. This is one of the main reasons that student athletes struggle so much more than those who are not involved in athletics. Lastly, collegiate sports have started commercializing their athletic events more and more, placing added stress on the performance of the student athletes (Comeaux et al., 2011). The stress of marketing, sales, and revenue of higher end athletics is passed down to coaches, who then translate that tension to their assistant coaches and trainers, who also pass that stress and worry onto student athletes. Although they may not realize it to the fullest extent, student athletes have a lot more depending on them than simply performing well in practice, winning games, and clinching championships.

Differences in NCAA and Club Sports

Research shows that there are strong differences between NCAA sports and sports under the banner of college club sports. Three of these differences are presence of scholarship, recruitment, and regulation of weekly hours of sport participation. Scholarship is usually and most often only offered to NCAA athletes (Hartman, 2014). However, club sport student athletes

usually do not receive scholarships and in most divisions must pay to participate. Recruitment is another area that is very different between these two organizations. NCAA athletes have very strict recruitments whereas club sport athletes do not (Covell, Pelosi, & Lemoi, 2013). Lastly, the number of hours spent in sport participation each week is another major difference. First, NCAA athletes are only allowed to practice up to 20 hours each week under “mandatory” practices. This being said, it is not always true that teams stop at twenty hours. Often there are optional practices that are quite critical in determining who is dedicated enough to play. Club sport athletes have much fewer hours, and they are also not regulated as strictly (Bailey, 2017).

Method

A survey will be given to four of Liberty University’s Club Sport collegiate hockey teams, both male and female. Teams participating in the survey are as follows: Division I Men’s, Division I Women’s, Division II Men’s, and Division II Women’s hockey. In addition, data will also come from a similar survey of an equal number (if possible) of collegiate non-athletic students. These students will be those who are not currently participating in any Liberty University Club or NCAA sport. However, this category will not prohibit those who participate in Liberty University intramural sports. This information will be gathered from students around campus. The Institutional Review Board will need to approve this survey, as will the head of Club Sports for the participation of these Liberty University Club Sport student athletes. The identities of these athletes will be kept private, and all information will be recorded as anonymous.

Results

An information spreadsheet and table will analyze the results to organize information into athlete and non-athlete categories. Key patterns to look for will be those of similarity between

athletes and non-athletes, as well as differences and abnormalities. This information will be presented at the Graduate Research Symposium in April of 2018.

Discussion

The discussion will focus on reoccurring data as well as what changes can occur to increase the general experience for the student athlete at the collegiate level. This information will show trends in positive and negative effects of sports on student athletes in comparison to those who do not participate in a collegiate level club sport.

References

- Bailey, S. (2017). A comparison of academic and athletic performance in the NCAA. *College Student Journal*, 51(2), 173.
- Basak, T., Kok, G., Unver, V., & Cevirmez, D. (2014). Effects of the sports activities of female nursing students on their problem-solving skills and academic achievement. *International Journal of Caring Sciences*, 7(2), 583-591.
- Buckman, J., Yusko, D., White, H., & Pandina, R. (2009, November). Risk profile of male college athletes who use performance-enhancing substances. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 70(6), 919.
- Comeaux, E. (2011). Examination of faculty attitudes toward division I college student-athletes. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 30(1), 75-87, 95.
- Comeaux, E., & Harrison, K. (2011). A conceptual model of academic success for student-athletes. *Educational Researcher*, 40(5), 235-245.
- Covell, D. D., Pelosi, M. K., & Lemoi, J. (2013). Joining the team: A case study identifying and assessing critical factors influencing NCAA division III student-athlete matriculation. *Journal of Applied Sport Management*, 5(1).
- Cremadesa, J. G., Donlonb, C. J., & Poczwardowskic, A. (2013). Parental involvement and gender differences in the psychological profile of freshmen collegiate athletes. *Journal of Sport and Health Science*, 2(3).
- Denny, K.G. & Steiner, H. (2009). External and internal factors influencing happiness in elite collegiate athletes. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development* 40(50).

- Dubuc-Charbonneau, N., Durand-Bush, N., & Forneris, T. (2014). Exploring levels of student-athlete burnout at two Canadian universities. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 44*(2), 135-151.
- Feltz, D. L., Hwang, S., Schneider, R., & Skogsberg, N. J. (2013). Predictors of collegiate student-athletes' susceptibility to stereotype threat. *Journal of College Student Development, 54*(2), 184-201.
- Galli, N., Reel, J. J., Petrie, T., Greenleaf, C., & Carter, J. (2011). Preliminary development of the weight pressures in sport scale for male athletes. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 34*(1), 47.
- Gessel, L. M., B.S., Fields, Sarah K., J.D., Ph.D., Collins, C. L., M.A., Dick, Randall W., M.S., F.A.C.S.M., & Comstock, R. D. (2007). Concussions among united states high school and collegiate athletes. *Journal of Athletic Training, 42*(4), 495-503. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/206647321?accountid=12085>
- Hartman, K. L. (2014). "the most evil thing about college sports": The 1-year scholarship and a former NCAA athlete's personal narrative. *International Journal of Sport Communication, 7*(4), 425-440. doi:10.1123/IJSC.2014-0049
- Jones, A. L., Butryn, T. M., Furst, D. M., & Semerjian, T. Z. (2013). Phenomenological examination of depression in female collegiate athletes. *Athletic Insight, 5*(1), 1-19.
- Kimball, A., & Freysinger, V. J. (2003). Leisure, stress, and coping: The sport participation of collegiate student-athletes. *Leisure Sciences, 25*(2/3), 115.
- LaFountaine, J. (2007). Wellness among first year collegiate female athletes. *Women in Sport & Physical Activity Journal, 16*(2), 83.

- Machida, M., Ward, R. M., & Vealey, R. S. (2012). Predictors of sources of self-confidence in collegiate athletes. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *10*(3), 172-185.
- Merkel, D. L. (2013). Youth sport: Positive and negative impact on young athletes. *Open Access Journal of Sports Medicine*, *4*, 151.
- Pascarella, E., Bohr, L., Nora, A., & Terenzini, P. (1995). Intercollegiate athletic participation and freshman-year cognitive outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *66*(4), 369-387.
- Paule, A. L., & Gilson, T. A. (2011). Does athletic participation benefit or hinder academic performance? Non-revenue sport athlete experiences. *Journal of Contemporary Athletics*, *5*(3), 203.
- Routon, P. W., & Walker, J. K. (2015). Student-athletes? The impact of intercollegiate sports participation on academic outcomes. *Eastern Economic Journal*, *41*(4), 592-611.
- Sagar, S., Boardley, I., & Kavussanu, M. (2011). Fear of failure and student athletes' interpersonal antisocial behaviour in education and sport. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *81*(3), 391-408. doi:10.1348/2044-8279.002001
- Tamaki, M. & Sasaki, Y. (2017). How half our brain keeps watch when we sleep in unfamiliar places. Retrieved December 11, 2017, from <http://theconversation.com/how-half-our-brain-keeps-watch-when-we-sleep-in-unfamiliar-places-57975>
- Tomon, J. E., & Ting, S. R. (2010). Effects of team climate on substance use behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes of student-athletes at a large, public university. *Journal of College Student Development*, *51*(2), 162-179.

Varsity or Club? A Profile of the Lives of Two Athletes. (n.d.). Retrieved December 14, 2017,

from <http://sites.jmu.edu/103oconnor-17/2013/04/15/1840/>

Vealey, R. S., & Perritt, N. C. (2015). Hardiness and optimism as predictors of the frequency of flow in collegiate athletes. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 38(3), 321.

Vetter, R. E., & Symonds, M. L. (2010). Correlations between injury, training intensity, and physical and mental exhaustion among college athletes. *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, 24(3), 587-96.

Wilson, G. S., Pritchard, M. E., & Schaffer, J. (2004). Athletic status and drinking behavior in college students: The influence of gender and coping styles. *Journal of American College Health*, 52(6), 269-73. Retrieved from

<http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/213068368?accountid=12085>

Yen, A. C. (2011). Early scholarship offers and the NCAA. *Boston College Law Review*, 52(2), 585.

Yusko, D. A., Buckman, J. F., White, H. R., & Pandinam, R. J. (2008). Risk for excessive alcohol use and drinking-related problems in college student athletes. *Addictive Behaviors* 33(12), 1546–1556.