

Athletic IQ

Matching Students to Intercollegiate Athletics

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More than 7 million high school students—half the nation's total—participated in high school athletics in the 2004-2005 school year, according to the National Federation of State High School Associations. But this pipeline narrows precipitously at the college level where a comparatively meager 375,000 student athletes participate in sports for which the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) holds championship competition.

This funnel exposes a new set of concerns related to insufficient access and denied opportunity. Less than 6 percent of interscholastic high school athletes ever see the light of NCAA competition. As a result, thousands upon thousands of aspiring NCAA student athletes end up settling for intramural play—or are compelled to withdraw permanently from competitive athletics.

In other instances, colleges recruit student athletes without any reliable referencing of academic interests or preparedness, which increases the probability of mismatches between student athletes and the institutions where they enroll—mismatches that can lead to splinters from an athletic bench and academic warnings from a professor.

A new initiative known as Athletic IQ has the capacity to significantly increase access to and participation in intercollegiate athletics on all levels. Headquartered in Canton, Mass., Athletic IQ has teamed up with the Indianapolis-based National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association to provide a standardized athletic evaluation system relevant for all student athletes and all intercollegiate athletic programs.

The standardized Athletic IQ test, which evaluates physical performance, as opposed to cerebral capacities, will also generate a comprehensive academic profile for each and every test-taker. Athletic IQ holds the promise of becoming the analog of the SAT and the ACT for college-bound student athletes from coast to coast.

The combination of standardized academic *and* athletic performance data reported by Athletic IQ will make it possible to achieve a better match between students and institutions in every area of competition for Divisions I, II and III. Colleges and universities will be able to identify and recruit the right student athletes.



Maine Model

The University of Maine in 2003 received federal funding to bring together athletic directors, coaches and former athletes in an effort to “describe what healthy sports programs look like,” highlight “out-of-bounds” behaviors and policies and issue recommendations for communities to adopt.



The resulting 2005 report, *Sports Done Right: A Call to Action on Behalf of Maine Student-Athletes*, provides guidelines for communities to encourage competition in a way

that contributes to student learning, discourage conflict among athletes, coaches and spectators, de-emphasize winning at all costs and counter the trend toward excessive specialization among student athletes. As the *Portland Press-Herald* editorialized: “It’s a philosophy that values well-rounded athletes over one-sport wonders, competitiveness over mere victory, fitness as a way of life rather than a seasonal obsession.”

The report is spurring action far beyond Maine’s local schools. This summer, the Georgia High School Association adopted the UMaine guide as a textbook for its coaching eligibility program. Dozens of other states have considered adopting *Sports Done Right* principles.

At home, the program is not without controversy. Some parents, reacting to the idea that all team members should be given a chance to play, derided the program as “Sports Done Light.”

—J.O.H.

Student athletes will be able to search and explore the Athletic IQ college and university database and thereby maximize their prospects for finding the right institutions.

Beyond the issue of access are challenges related to the optimum distribution and placement of student athletes into appropriate levels of competition—and into specific environments where their opportunity for success will be greatest. The Athletic IQ database will be segmented into the specific team and position aspirations of college-bound students, helping enrollment managers and coaches connect with the right students on two levels: in the larger sense of recruiting students with the “double hook” of academic and athletic matching criteria; and in narrower searches to identify and target a handful of essential “position athletes.”

Better academic *and* athletic matches between students and

institutions will produce many benefits, including the following:

- 1) Rosters will be more complete in every sport and on every level. At present, there are many underpopulated teams, particularly at the Division III level.
- 2) Competition will be improved as teams will be more evenly matched.
- 3) The pride and fulfillment of student athletes will be elevated as a result of increased playing time and more realistic competition.
- 4) Retention and graduation rates will be improved. Federal statistics indicate that student athletes who start college immediately after high school, attend full time and enroll continuously in all terms are more likely to earn degrees than those with other attendance patterns. With better matches between students and institutions, this pattern can be bolstered.

The hyper-glorified commercialization of big-time collegiate competition makes it easy to lose sight of the fact that participation in intercollegiate athletics is supposed to be an integral component of the overall academic experience. Opportunities to achieve personal fulfillment, learn self-discipline and build self-esteem, to develop a team mentality, appreciate good sportsmanship and practice leadership skills are just a few examples of what actually belongs on the ultimate scoreboard of NCAA competition.

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