

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
PARTICIPATION IN HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS
AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between high school students' classroom academic achievement during a season of participation in a high school sport and a season on non-participation. Also, it was set up to determine if students are aware of any benefits or limitations on their academic performance while participating in a sport.

Thirty high school students were randomly chosen from a list of students who participate in a fall sport and not in a winter sport. All of these students attended a suburban high school in Monroe County. Seventy four percent of the participants were male and 26% were female.

The study began by gathering each student's first and second quarter five-week averages. The first quarter averages were collected while they participated in a sport and the second quarter averages were collected while they were not participating in a sport. Once the students' Grade Point Averages (G.P.A.'s) were determined for each five week report, a t test was performed to determine if a statistically significant difference occurred in G.P.A.s between the two quarters.

The study continued with a focus group of 19 students. They were given conversation starters to determine if there was awareness among students as to the effects of playing a sport on academic achievement.

The results of the analysis of G.P.A.'s indicated no statistically significant difference exists in academic achievement between a season of participation in a sport and a season of non-participation.

The results of the focus group indicated that most students were aware that sports and participation in extra curricular activities affect academics. Some feel the effects are beneficial while others see them as a hindrance on academics. Overall, the students were able to identify many lessons and benefits obtained from playing a sport.

The findings suggest that academic achievement is not directly affected by participation in sports, but it does suggest that adolescents can learn many important and beneficial life skills.

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CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Many factors influence the development of American adolescents. Peers, family, school, work, sports and other organized activities can make a profound impact on individuals during their adolescent years. The changes that one experiences from these influences may have life long effects.

The value of participation of high school students in Extracurricular Activities (EA) has been an on-going debate for many years. Questions as to the impact and influence of EA, particularly sports, on grades and achievement, have pushed many school districts to enforce "eligibility policies" which often state "No Pass – No Play." Most of these policies are for athletes - not all participants in EA. Is this fair? Do they encourage athletes to strive for better grades? What occurs in schools that don't implement these policies? Are their athletes passing? Keeping in mind that EA can teach a youngster dedication, organization, teamwork, cooperation, and compromise, should students who struggle academically be kept from participating in EA and learning these life lessons?

The other side of the issue suggests that for student-athletes, athletics often move academic importance aside, thus negatively affecting academic achievement. The terms student-athlete describes an individual whose education is combined with athletic participation (Foltz, 1992). Which one of these terms

takes the lead for today's adolescents? Are athletics becoming too much of a focus for today's high school students?

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between high school students' classroom academic achievement during a season of participation in a school sport and a season of non-participation. Also, it was to determine if students were aware of any benefits or limitations of participating in a sport that may have influenced academic performance.

Questions to be Answered

1. Is there a statistically significant change in students' grade point averages (G.P.A.'s) between a season of participation in sports and a season of non-participation?
2. Is there awareness among these student-athletes as to any benefits or limitations of playing a sport in relation to academic achievement?

Need for the Study

Research (Emmons, 1995; Huntsinger, Jose, Shutay, & Boelcke, 1997; Young, Helton, Whitley, & Marilyn, 1997) has shown some positive correlation between participation in EA and achievement in the classroom yet there are still opponents (Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1982) to students' participation in EA. Life long lessons of self-discipline, motivation, organization, and cooperation are part of team sports and EA. In order to keep student-athletes succeeding in the midst of nationwide lows in academic achievement, it is necessary to investigate the correlation between academics and sports.

Students, parents, coaches, teachers, athletic directors, and entire school districts can use the findings of this study. Knowing the correlation between participation in sports and academic achievement will be helpful in deciding whether or not to implement eligibility policies for students participating in activities. It will also be helpful to have this information while formulating such a policy. In addition, gaining insight into the students' views of the impact of sports on their achievement will help teachers to better assist students' time management and academic decisions. Investigating this topic and implementing the findings can increase the students' chances of success in school while learning the values of teamwork, time management, and commitment by participating in school sports.

Definition of Terms

Grade Point Average: $\frac{\text{total of grades in academic classes}}{\text{number of classes}}$

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations to this study. First, no factors other than the participation in school athletics were taken into account when comparing grades. The individuals' personal lives outside of academics and sports were not considered when determining a statistically significant difference in grades between quarters. Some of the students were dealing with different personal and family issues during this study that may have influenced their grades and achievement. These issues were not measured. Because the study did not compare student A to student B but rather student A's first quarter G.P.A. to his/her own second quarter G.P.A., individual study habits were not taken into account.

Finally, due to peer pressure and the presence of a teacher during the focus group discussion, some student answers may have been swayed or influenced. Also, some participants were unwilling to stay after school to participate in the focus group. Therefore, the group consisted of a fraction of the study's participants.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Two Views of Extracurricular Activities

Contradictory views continue to be debated and researched on the topic of the importance of Extracurricular Activities (EA), specifically sports, in public schools. The attitude in the early 1900's was that the purpose of school was solely academic, but by the 1920's, participation in clubs was encouraged and thought to be a contributor to a student's personal development (Gerber, 1996). Presently, both views have been supported. According to Mahoney and Cairns (1997), "American public secondary schools are unique in terms of the number and range of pursuits that they support in the classroom and beyond" (p.241). It is this uniqueness that feeds the debate as to whether too much importance is placed on EA.

The issue of juvenile aggression has been touched on and several variables have been considered including the influence of television and the music industry. One variable which needs to be given further attention is the amount of participation in extracurricular activities, such as sports, during childhood ("A Contrast of Activity Types", 1997). The question is, can this variable raise self-esteem and improve academic achievement?

The Opposing View

Research shows that those who are not advocates of EA feel that adolescent culture places too much value and emphasis on social factors (athletics, material possessions, and popularity) (Gerber, 1996; Mendez, 1984; Stanford, 1985). It is sometimes believed that the time devoted to EA is competition for the time devoted to academics. Due to this competition, "No Pass/No Play" policies have been developed (Emmons, 1995; Gerber, 1996). These policies are similar to the rule made famous by Texas business man, Ross Perot, which requires a student to earn an average of C or better in all courses to participate in cocurricular activities (Bee, 1992). Pressure from businesses, communities, and school boards has been motivating factors for some school districts to create these policies (Huntsinger, Jose, Shutay, & Boelcke, 1997). Because these eligibility policies were widely implemented in the early 1980's, Camp (1990) researched the rationale behind them. It was reported that Milby High School, near Houston, Texas, placed 55% of their students on probation, unable to participate in EA and sports. "We're putting thousands of kids on the streets because of Ross Perot's no-pass, no-play rule" (Emmons, 1995, p.107). Some proponents of the policies have researched and commented on possible explanations for these findings. Studies into the effectiveness of the policy have been adulterated in the past by changes in curricula during the same time periods as the implementation of the eligibility policy (Gerber, 1996).

Those making the decisions about the eligibility policies have made one major assumption. This assumption is that students will spend more time on academics and perform better if they are not allowed to participate in sports (Gerber, 1996). To contradict this assumption, Emmons (1995) found that student-athletes, researched over a four year period, performed as well during season as they did out of season. The question he raised was, don't students need support in school? Would they not benefit from incentives to achieve academically as opposed to rules that exclude participation?

The Supporting View

The other side of the argument supports that student participation in activities, such as sports, is a productive, practical extension of the school curriculum. Although Mahoney and Cairns (1997) found little obvious connection between athletics and academic achievement, it has been supported that non-academic activities are beneficial. Research has supported the idea that EA foster self-discipline and responsibility while increasing academic motivation and a student's sense of involvement (Gerber, 1996). "The impact would be to render school a more meaningful and attractive experience for students who have experienced few successes in academic subjects" (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997, p.241). Young, Helton, Whitley, and Marilyn (1997) went on to find through student interviews that school sponsored EA had a significant impact on academic performance as

did parental involvement. “If teenagers do not find support in school, home, or community, then they will find it with peers, gangs or other means (Young et al., 1997, p.1).

From this research, it seems obvious that schools, administrators, and school boards would support full participation in EA. A serious question that needs to be answered is: When students find self-confidence and success when participating in activities, will the behavior that leads to success carry over to the classroom (Madden, Brueckman, & Littlejohn, 1997)? The answer may lie in the research of Gerber (1996), Mahoney and Cairns (1997), and Huntsinger, Jose, Shutay and Boelcke (1997). All three studies concluded that increased participation in EA was positively related to achievement, and Gerber (1996) went on to find that the participation in school-related activities was more strongly associated with achievement than was participation in activities outside of school (e.g. scouts, church groups, dance classes). “It seems likely that the more experience an adolescent has in a particular domain, the more competent or accepted s/he will feel in that domain” (Huntsinger et al., 1997, p.3).

The PASS Program

The Promoting Achievement in School through Sport (PASS) program is a yearlong high school course that uses sports to enhance academic achievement (“Promoting Achievement: Third Year Study”, 1993). The effectiveness of the

PASS program on academic achievement has been studied in a three year and a four year impact study. In each study the PASS group was compared to a control group which did not receive any extra academic support while participating in a sport. Overall, the PASS student outperformed those in the control group on all measures including G.P.A. and academic eligibility (“Promoting Achievement: Three Year Study”, 1995; “Promoting Achievement: Four Year Study”, 1996).

These studies shed new light on the No Pass/No Play policy. Don't we owe it to our students to assist, nurture, and create an integrated environment that allows both strengths and weaknesses to develop and improve in the classroom? By an integrated curriculum that focuses on developing an individual physically, mentally, and behaviorally the PASS program created successful student-athletes.

What Have Studies Found In Regards To Race and Socioeconomic Status?

It has been noted that very few studies have been conducted involving a wide range of races, ethnic groups, and different socioeconomic groups in relation to EA and academic achievement (Huntsinger et al., 1997). Why is this so when so many of our student athletes are not white middle class individuals? Meiler (1998) mentioned though that those in depressed socioeconomic conditions are

less likely to participate in organized sports but would be the ones to benefit from them the most.

Hawkins (1992) did make some conclusions in regards to African American eighth grade males. Through using a regression analysis, he estimated the direct effect of interscholastic and intramural athletic programs on academics. He stated that "Sports participation is positively associated with black eighth grade male aspirations to enroll in academic or college preparatory programs in high school" (p.1). This pattern was also similar for females in the study. His data also showed a positive link between athletic participation and indicators of pro-academic investment behaviors and attitudes.

On the other hand, Foltz (1992) went on to cite a study by Eitzen in 1987. Eitzen found that black student athletes who are concentrated in high pressure, revenue sports, such as football or basketball, are the least prepared academically and receive the lowest grades in college in comparison to other athletes. Also, he stated that these black athletes are the least likely to graduate of all athletes.

In addition, Mahoney and Cairns (1997) pointed out that only a modest amount of time has been spent on studying the effects of EA on marginal students, and a large amount of time has been spent on the brightest and most privileged. Their study did show though that school dropout rates among at risk students were lower for those who participated in EA compared to those who did not. They also reported that early studies found extra curricular involvement to be closely related

to socioeconomic class status with the exception of sports. Furthermore, Huntsinger et al. (1997) uncovered a link between activity choice and students' self-perceptions among Chinese-Americans and Euro-American students.

The Female Student-Athlete

A number of studies have shown that female student-athletes are clearly better prepared for college and perform better than their male counterparts and that they derive positive benefits from EA and athletic involvement. (Foltz, 1992; Heacock, 1991; Meiler, 1998; Ransome, 1995). Although Lightbody's (1996) study found that girls reported liking friends, teachers, outings, and lessons, while boys reported liking sports and school clubs, she was unable to make a conclusion that academic success varied more with females than males due to these preferences.

Rombokas (1995) found that female participation in his sample showed a greater involvement than male participation in hobby clubs, academic clubs, sports, music, dance, and theater, and that females earned better G.P.A.'s, and received higher grades in English. He therefore went on to conclude; "Participation in sports...does not seem to hinder grades in high school or college academic performance" (p.23). Ransome (1995) supported this idea when he stated that "...sports teach skills that cannot be gained in English or math class, and thus it is important for girls to participate in them as much as boys" (p.11).

Females can learn and experience physical fitness, determination, perseverance, positive self-esteem and confidence, strategic thinking, and interdependence.

Some studies focusing on female athletes have also looked at race as a variable for academic achievement and improved self-perception. Meiler (1998) found a possible relationship between minority girls involved in sports and academic achievement. Sports participation reduced the dropping out of rural Latino athletes along with suburban and rural white athletes but not urban female athletes or African American girls. Also, Meiler (1998) reported that although there were significant differences among the girls based on race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, "A survey of racial and ethnic diversity in girl scouting... reported that an athletic activity made them feel good about themselves" (p.3).

One final interesting fact on gender and race is that women of color represent less than five percent of all coaching, teaching, and sports administrative positions in the U.S. (Meiler, 1998).

Extracurricular Activities and Higher Education

In addition to the research on student participation in EA in high school, there has been further research found on the effects of sports on academics at the college level (Blum, 1995; Foltz, 1992; Gerdy, 1997). George Will, a well known syndicated columnist, expresses one side of the opinion (Foltz, 1992). He believes that high schools ineffectively subject athletes to strict academic

standards allowing them to pass and move through the system making them eligible for college participation. These inefficient academic requirements of high school are breeding grounds for collegiate coaches searching for recruits. The students they are recruiting are not prepared for higher education and have inadequate skills (Foltz, 1992). For example, Foltz reported on an Iowa State University study which revealed that 26 out of the 28 football players in their remedial program read at or below a 10th grade level and three read at less than a 4th grade level.

The issue of collegiate athletes not having skills to achieve academically at a post-secondary level is not new.

The term student-athlete describes an individual whose education is combined with intercollegiate athletic participation. The sequence of the words, however, may not accurately reflect the respective emphasis placed on each in the student-athlete's life... Some in society label student-athletes as not having the capacity to be successful students.

(Lageman, 1984, p.1, as cited by Foltz, 1992, p.10)

Some place the failure of student-athletes on the institution with the thought that winnings and revenues from sports such as football or basketball corrupt higher education, taking the focus from academics and placing it on sports. An especially interesting finding from Blum (1995) showed that student-athletes participating in non-revenue sports had higher academic achievement than student-athletes participating in revenue sports such as football or basket ball. Often times, athletic performance is more important than academic performance to the

institution for financial purposes. On the other hand, Tucker and Amato (1993) went on to examine the effects of academics and athletics on Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores for first-year college students at universities engaged in high revenue intercollegiate sports. They found that academic variables, not athletic variables determined the average SAT scores.

Although society has been prejudice against student-athletes and their endeavors to achieve academically Foltz (1992) stated, "Real academic achievement has been hard to judge and no study has shown that the athlete has been mentally or academically inferior to his or her non-athletic peers" (p. 12). Because so much extra time is spent participating in collegiate sport, these student-athletes often need motivation to stay and play. Foltz (1992) reported on studies by Cady (1978), Bend (1968), and Coakely (1990). They suggested that proportionally more student-athletes survive academically and achieve degrees than their non-athletic classmates do.

A descriptive report by Gerdy (1997) offered a critical analysis of how college athletic programs can contribute to a university in meaningful ways other than just providing revue and entertainment. He suggested that the focus of college athletic programs should not be on the level of funds generated by sports or the number of championships won but on standards that help an institution meet its many challenges and educational goals. Many suggestions are discussed, such as making rules that are student-athlete centered, eliminating the athletic scholarship,

the elimination of freshman eligibility for football and basketball at the varsity level, and recognizing longer typical times-to-degree. These alternatives are brought to light in hopes of assisting universities to create more meaningful academic standards for their student-athletes.

Student Outcomes

It is a fact that the place of EA within public education remains an issue and the examination of the relationships between participation and achievement to other pertinent variables such as gender, socioeconomic status, and type of activity should be studied further, but “The findings suggest that academic achievement is enhanced by student participation and raise questions about the rationale behind rules excluding academically marginal students from participation in extracurricular and co-curricular activities” (Camp, 1990, p.272). While the opponents of EA stress the importance of eligibility policies, the advocates of EA believe that the lessons and ideals learned by participating in EA assist an individual not only in the classroom but later on in life as well (Gerber, 1996). Heacox’s (1991) guide to help underachievers states that “Not all children can or should be straight A students as everyone differs in abilities and interests, but all children have the potential to learn and to personally succeed in school (p. 1).

One final note on a study completed at York University in Ontario, Canada, Chapman (1987) focused on graduates' experiences that may have helped get jobs. A survey from this study showed a minimum of 54% of those York University graduates looking for full-time employment had achieved their objective, but not all graduates had equal chances of a full-time job in the Toronto labor market. These findings suggested that experiences other than formal curriculum helped the students to develop skills and knowledge, which assisted them in the job market. This "student involvement theory" supported, to a degree, that there is a link between student involvement in activities outside the formal curriculum and obtaining full-time employment. Chapman's regression analysis showed 11 variables that had a statistically significant relationship to employment status. The participation in sports was one of these eleven.

Whatever the explanations, it appears that participation in high school extracurricular activities provide some kinds of positive experiences that enhance student academic success and the basic value of achievement ... When students are involved, discipline problems drop, academic achievement of participating students increases, and out of school problems decrease dramatically. (Rombokas, 1995, p.25).

The participation of students in sports, hobby clubs, music, drama, and theater in high school influence, in part, their desire to go to college and appear to positively influence social development, academic success, and college attainment.

CHAPTER III

Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between high school students' classroom academic achievement during a season of participation in a school sport and a season of non-participation. Also, it was set up to determine if students were aware of benefits or limitations from participating in a sport which may influence academic performance.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects consisted of a selected group of 10 females and 20 males from the sophomore, junior, and senior classes of a Monroe County suburban high school. This activity group participated in a sport during the fall season (quarter one) but not during the winter season (quarter two). This high school does not implement a no pass/no play policy.

Materials

A list of students' names, fall sport, and interim grades for the first and second quarters of the 1998-99 school year was compiled. Also, a list of conversation starters and open-ended questions was formulated to initiate the discussions that conveyed the students' awareness of benefits, effort and motivation in and out of season. A video recorder was used to capture their responses for later analysis.

Procedures

Each academic teacher of the participants was notified as to the students in the study. They were asked to fill in a form giving the students' first and second quarter five-week interim grades. The collection of the five-week interim reports was done in October and December. A first quarter and second quarter grade point average (G.P.A.) was determined from the two sets of interim grades for each student. Those two sets of G.P.A.s were then statistically compared through the use of a t-test to identify possible statistically significant differences.

Next, each participant was asked to join a focus group conducted after the second quarter interim grades were collected. Participation in the group was voluntary not mandatory. Therefore, only 19 of the subjects actually took part in the focus group. The group was interviewed all at once in a round table

discussion, by the researcher. This was done in order to probe the awareness of their attitudes and behaviors toward school after they have been part of a sports team. The interviewer asked various questions designed to elicit responses and discussions as to their awareness and beliefs of their efforts and achievement in season and out of season.

Analysis of Data

To answer the first research question, a t test was used to compare the differences between the high school students' grade point averages during a season of participation in a school sport and a season of non-participation.

Data from the focus groups were recorded and transcribed to paper. At that point, the data were analyzed qualitatively. This was done in order to answer the second research question. Was there awareness among students as to the effects of playing a sport on academic achievement?

CHAPTER IV

Findings and Interpretation of Data

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between participation in sports and academic achievement of high school students. The study also examined the students' awareness of the effect of sports on grades along with their ideas and feelings of the impact of extracurricular activities (EA) on academic achievement.

Research Questions

1. Is there a statistically significant change in students' grade point averages (G.P.A.s) between a season of participation in sports and a season of non-participation?
2. Is there awareness among these student-athletes as to any benefits or limitations of playing a sport in relation to academic achievement?

Analysis of Data

A two tailed t test was used for research question one to determine if a statistically significant difference occurred between quarter one G.P.A.s (quarter of participation in a sport) and quarter two G.P.A.s (no participation in a sport). A focus group discussion was used to determine research question two.

Research Question One

The expressed null hypothesis for Question One is: There is no statistically significant change in students' grade point averages between a season of participation in sports and a season of non-participation. The t test indicated that for students participating in a fall sport and not a winter sport there was no statistically significant difference between their G.P.A. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Analysis of High School Students
G.P.A. in Season and out of Season

n	\bar{X}_1	\bar{X}_2	ΣD	ΣD^2	t
30	86.57	87.29	-21.44	489.24	-.414

(\bar{X}_1 illustrates quarter one averages; \bar{X}_2 illustrates quarter two averages.)

For 29 d.f. at the .90 confidence level, the t required is +1.70. For 29 d.f. at the .99 confidence level the t required is +2.76. Therefore, there is not a statistically significant difference between quarter one G.P.A.s and quarter two G.P.A.s.

Research Question 2

A one-time focus group discussion was used to determine the students' awareness and attitudes on the effects of sports on academic achievement. The researcher served as the facilitator and also recorded trends and patterns in the

participants' responses. The group was comprised of 11 males and eight females. The students were asked, not mandated, to participate in the discussion session. While the group was getting settled, three thought questions were put on the board to get the participants on track. These questions were:

1. Do you think there are any effects (positive or negative) on your grades when you play a sport?
2. What benefits are there to playing sports in high school?
3. Do you think there should be an eligibility policy enforced in order to play a sport?

The discussion lasted about 40 minutes with all 19 present participating.

From the discussion, it was obvious that the majority of students felt that sports had an effect on their academic achievement. About half felt the effects were positive, the other negative. The individuals who felt that the sport had negative effects commented that with long hours of practice and games, they did not have the time or the energy to complete their schoolwork. With so many responsibilities to the team, they were not focused on schoolwork and at times simply forgot about it. One participant put it simply when he said, "When we play a sport, it's like working overtime. We lose study time and relaxing time and something has got to give – study time."

The other side of the argument openly felt that athletes owe it to the team to keep up their grades. This group appeared to be comfortable budgeting and

organizing their time in a way that made schoolwork a priority over or at least equal to sports. The point was brought up that having to budget time made them focus more. "We should do as well in school during the season. If it's something we enjoy, we should do all we can to keep it going." said one female participant.

The discussion then moved along to the idea of having an academic eligibility policy in the high school for all athletes at all levels. The pattern observed was that those students who felt that sports had a positive impact on their grades were in support of an eligibility policy where a certain grade point average must be maintained in order to participate. Most of the students felt that it is needed in the school because "School's what's important. Without it we couldn't play. The idea that an athlete should be a role model both on the field and off was brought up by a few outspoken participants, and agreed on by most. Those in favor of the eligibility policy came to consensus that a good education will help with sports, and without school, there would be nothing to fall back on.

One student expressed the idea that an academic policy wasn't needed as much as a drug/alcohol use policy. It was brought up that certain coaches were inconsistent with their athletes when alcohol/ tobacco or illegal drug use had been suspected. In a neighboring town, a student athlete was arrested for possession of marijuana while he was not participating in a sport. By the time he was sentenced to five weekends in jail, it was the fall, and he was participating in varsity

football. He was still able to represent the team as a co-captain and a starter, and he was permitted by his coaches and the district to complete the entire season.

Those few who felt that an academic eligibility policy would not be fair mentioned that those students who try hard and still couldn't succeed would be penalized. Overall, those students who were against the eligibility policy felt that it would not be "fair" to poor students. One participant made a generalization that caused a reaction among those who were in favor of the policy. He said, "Well, most kids won't make that team then." And another stated that if certain athletes were ineligible then the school wouldn't be competitive in the area and the school moral would go down. Do we truly place so much importance on sports in school?

The focus group closed with proof of their awareness as to the positive effects of sports, not only on academics but also on many different aspects of their life. They agreed that participation in sports gave them opportunities to build leadership skills and to learn teamwork, cooperation, and responsibility. Taking part in an organized activity, such as sports, also seems to increase a sense of self-confidence, self-worth, and self-discipline. Finally, the feeling of competition, which does not come from academics, is enjoyable, relieves boredom, and teaches determination. One student did mention that the skills obtained could get students recognized for scholarships and build life long skills.

The results of the focus groups and the emotion of the discussion demonstrated that there was awareness among the students of the effect of sports on their academics.

Summary

The results of the data analysis demonstrated that there was not a statistically significant difference between quarter one grade point averages and quarter two grade point averages (quarter one being the quarter of participation in a sport and quarter two being a quarter of non-participation). The students were no more or less academically successful out of season that they were in season.

The analysis of the data of the focus group answered research question two. The students readily discussed the amount of time sports encompassed and how that usage of time effected their grades. There was awareness among the participants that extracurricular activities could affect academic achievement.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between high school students' classroom academic achievement during a season of participation in a school sport and a season of non-participation. Also, it was to determine if students were aware of any benefits or limitations of participating in a sport that may have influenced academic performance.

Conclusions

This study yielded two major findings. First, participation in high school athletics does not have a significant impact on academic achievement when comparing grade point averages of two quarters. Although, athletics are clearly not the only impact on grades of high school students, it is not the case that athletic participation is detrimental to student academic performance. Overall, the student athletes' G.P.A. went up only .71% between a season of sports participation and a season of non-participation. This is not considered a statistically significant rise.

These findings are in full support of the findings of previous research. Rombokas (1995) and Ransome (1995) both suggested that participation in sports

does not hinder academic achievement, but rather it strengthens life skills that foster positive achievement in school. Consistent with Camp's (1990) indications, the students who participated in this study expressed that the time spent on a team enhanced their self-concept, their ability to work cooperatively, and their sense of dedication and commitment. It is encouraging to note that the skills attained by athletes in previous studies, such as Chapman's (1987) Ontario, Canada study, were consistent the benefits attained through athletics by the students of this study. This is so positive because participants in his study, who developed knowledge and skills in areas in addition to the classroom, were found to have a better chance at obtaining full-time employment in the labor market.

The second finding indicated that the student-athletes are aware that athletics can impact their achievement in school. The participants made it clear that their academics were affected by athletics. Although some students were sure that that their grades would negatively be affected, most expressed the participation in the sport encouraged more academic effort. An interesting observation can be made at this point. Before the study began, the students were asked informally what they thought might happen to their grades between the two quarters. Most students expected their grades to remain about the same.

The participants of the study were randomly selected, yet this sample did not appear to be an accurate sample of the overall school population. Approximately 71% were white males, 26% white females and, 3% black males. This particular

county school has a higher percentage of African American students than sampled in this study. Although this study found there to be little direct impact of athletics on academics, and it is congruent with many of the previous findings, it did not specifically separate the findings by socioeconomic background or race.

Therefore the overall findings are not consistent with previous studies done which concentrated on achievement in regards to race and socioeconomic status. Foltz's (1992) citation of a study by W. Eitzen may lead us to believe that the black student athletes are less prepared academically in comparison to other athletes. Also, the studies of Foltz (1992), Blum (1995), and Gerdy (1997) express academic inefficiencies of collegiate athletes that hinder success in the classroom. These findings were found to be true specifically in groups of African American males.

Also, an observation should be made at this point that the grades of participants of this study seem to be higher than that of the overall school average for athletes. This may be because first and second quarter averages were compared. Overall, these two quarters tend to be higher for students in comparison to quarters three and four.

Finally, the conclusions made by the participants about academic eligibility policies should be addressed. Most of the participants felt that a policy such as the "No Pass/No Play" policy mentioned both by Gerber (1996) and Emmons (1995) should be enforced. The student athletes who took part in this study see

what happens to their teammates first hand during the season. They see things that most coaches, teachers, and parents don't see. They know who puts in the effort and who doesn't, and some feel the frustration, watching those who continually don't try academically, playing more than those who are academically successful. This frustration was expressed and should be addressed formally. As previously stated, this particular high school does not impose an eligibility policy on its athletes. Maybe just this time, we should take the advice of the kids and seriously keep our eye on the actual number of athletes on each team, in each sport, each season who truly squeak by academically and are so continually and positively recognized athletically.

Implications for Further Research

Gerber (1996) studied the effectiveness of eligibility policies with inconclusive results due to the change of curricula during the same time period. Since so many of the student athletes expressed an interest in such policies, it would interesting to test the effectiveness of such policies in surrounding school districts with similar student populations. The assessment of the quality of enforcement and the terms of different policies may be a fascinating eye-opener to many school administrators.

It was previously noted that very few studies have been conducted looking at different socioeconomic groups and race. Generalizations have been made from a

few studies, but for conclusive evidence, further research should be conducted.

Different approaches to this study could be investigated. A study could investigate the relationship of academic achievement between athletes of different races, socioeconomic statuses, and sex. Also, does the sport (high/low profile) or season make a difference on the student's achievement? Or does the level (freshman, junior varsity, or varsity) of the sport being played have an impact as well?

To take this subject a step further, the impact of the coaches on the athletes is an interesting connection. Some further research should be done which focuses not on the athlete's attempts to achieve, but the importance of academic success placed on the athletes by their coaches. Does what the coaches say, do, and stress about academics have an impact on his or her athletes' success?

A study looking at the number of coaches who inquire about student grades and the academic averages of those teams in comparison to the teams whose coaches don't convey a priority on academics would be interesting. Coaches are perceived to be role models and example setters.

Finally, parent involvement on a child's academic career plays a major role on his/her achievement as well. Further research should study the impact of parent involvement on the academic success of the athlete. Many studies have been conducted to assess what athletes gain from participating in sports (Blum, 1995;

Foltz, 1992; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). It is now time to study what athletes gain from coaches and parents who place importance on both academics and sports.

Implications for Schools

First and foremost, schools need to hold students responsible for success. High expectations for all students involved in each and every extra curricular activity are needed. Eligibility policies can only help raise academic standards in public schools.

Incentives by teachers, administrators, and coaches will also initiate and encourage higher academic performance by students. Incentives may include the usual exemption from physical education classes for varsity athletes only if a certain G.P.A. is maintained. If a certain G.P.A. is not maintained, schools should provide remediation classes or athletic study halls for struggling athletes. Also, school wide and community wide recognition of successful student athletes may keep students concerned and success oriented.

Finally, special tutor programs for athletes could be mandated in order to better monitor and encourage student athletes to achieve academically. These tutor programs may include student to student or student to teacher mentoring. The more support they receive and the more the teachers, parents, and coaches show they're concerned, the more successful our athletes will be.

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