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High School Sports Eligibility and the Florida Legislature

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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Is it reasonable to expect those who participate in inter-scholastic athletics be bona fide students with a minimal commitment to success in the classroom as well as on the playing field? And should it be the function of the state legislature to guarantee that this is the case?

The simple answers to these questions are "yes" and "no."

These questions have been asked because in the legislative session just concluded a law was passed requiring students in the State of Florida to maintain a "C" average in order to participate in athletics. As one might expect the howling coming from high school coaches and athletic directors has been formidable.

It is sad that this has become a state law. First, state legislators who are elected by pledging to minimize government involvement in our lives should be the last people to involve themselves in the micro-management of the schools and their athletic programs. Second, it is a sad commentary on educational leadership across the state that such requirements were not already in place in more than a few locations. School boards, administrators, and athletic directors should have instituted this minimal standard long ago.

What the law requires is that students maintain a cumulative 2.0 average, a "C" average, in order to participate in athletics. It will also become a graduation requirement for all. This means that athletes who have any ambitions to go on to college to further either their education or their athletic careers must maintain a "C" average, unless of course colleges begin to admit athletes who are not high school graduates, always a possibility.

Currently Orange County students must have a 1.6 average over the previous nine-week period to maintain eligibility for athletic competition over the next nine weeks. So the standard has been raised significantly--from requiring students to be semi-conscious to being fully conscious. Many are in shock.

One local athletic director, whose name will not be used out of charity, announced "I am the archenemy of the cumulative 2.0 in core classes. I'm anticipating as many as 30 percent of my athletes will not be able to participate." Indeed, state figures

showing that 38 percent of state students do not have a "C" average would seem to confirm his estimates.

Others raise a different flag against the law, claiming that sports keep people in school, and that sports are used to motivate students in the classroom.

If sports do keep students in school and they are not maintaining a "C" average, what are they doing in school? Are they getting anything from this experience? Yes, we are told, they are exposed to education and this is good. The rain coat theory of education, expose them to education as an exhibitionist exposes himself to others, has always mystified me. What is to be gained from this exposure, if the exposees are comatose?

If sports do motivate students in the classroom then shouldn't a minimal standard for classroom performance motivate the sports playing student to give this minimal performance in the classroom? I would think so.

What coaches, athletic directors and students tell us is that if students can't play sports they will not go to school. That's all right. Let them drop out. They will have plenty of time to play sports, and maybe the local authorities can organize sports leagues outside the schools, where former students can hone their athletic skills and not have to clutter up the educational system as dead wood, or worse, as disruptive forces.

This could be a major money saver. When you look at what it costs to educate one student as opposed to the costs of a county athletic program, we should rejoice at the prospect of one less student. It could even mean lower taxes.

My only real concern over the new regulation is the pressures that this could bring on teachers to push the grades up to a "C." Those pressures have always been there, because there are always some people who can not meet the standard no matter how low. And that is the point, isn't it? There will always be people who can not meet the standard, if you have a standard, no matter what that standard is.

So why not have a meaningful standard rather than a joke? Would it be the end of world if some students dropped out of high school where they are learning very little anyway? Shouldn't our educational institutions have some meaningful educational standards? I would hope there would be no debate about something

so self-evident, especially within the educational community.
But I know there will be.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you
don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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