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## Jason Williams and Academics

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE  
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About two weeks ago The Orlando Sentinel ran an interesting story about a young man named Jason Williams who, according to all reports, could become the best point guard in the history of the basketball program at the University of Florida. There is only one small problem: "I hate school. I hate it so much I can't stand it," says Williams. Certainly this is a view that is shared by many young men and women, some of whom for a multitude of reasons end up in classrooms at universities around the country.

A few like Jason Williams end up at a university because they play a sport well, and there seems to be no other road to a professional career except through the university. This is an extremely unfortunate situation and unfair to the athlete, to other students, and to faculty who must deal with these non-student students.

Jason Williams was a star basketball player at Dupont High in Belle, West Virginia, and was West Virginia Player of the Year in 1994. He signed to play at Providence College only to see Coach Rick Barnes leave, and so he tried to petition the NCAA and get out of his commitment. He spent eight days in a Virginia Prep School before dropping out. Then in January of 1995 he transferred to Marshall University to play for Billy Donovan. He would be named Southern Conference Freshman of the Year at Marshall. Unfortunately for Williams, Billy Donovan rode his success at Marshall off to the University of Florida, and again the university tried to prevent Jason from following the coach.

Lawsuits led to settlements and Marshall released Williams to go to Gainesville. The following February while sitting out for a year, Jason announced he was leaving the university to pursue a career in professional basketball. About three weeks into this endeavor Williams called Donovan and asked him if could return to the Gators. Donovan set some difficult terms, and now Williams is being led through the academic jungle by a hoard of tutors and monitors.

He is in the middle of a summer in which he is trying to do the impossible, successfully complete eighteen hours of academic credit to keep him eligible for a fall term in which he must complete an additional twelve hours of upper division credit in a specific degree program. The fact that Jason hates school and has a learning disability means that if he succeeds with this

kind of load, the academic program at the University of Florida will be exposed as something akin to that in a James Thurber or Max Schulmann story.

That however is beside the point. Clearly this young man does not belong in an institution of higher education, has no interest in education, and is never likely to receive an education, let alone a degree. He is there because he can find no other place to develop and showcase his basketball talent. He is there because the intercollegiate athletic programs in American universities are a sham, and have prostituted education on the altar of entertainment.

There are at least two major institutions on which to place the blame. First, the NBA and other professional sports organizations in the United States who fail to provide an alternative minor league system for the development of young talent. If Williams were a baseball player he would have been signed out of high school, sent to an instructional league, and then on through the minor league system. Here he could develop his skills under high caliber instruction, and never once would he find it necessary to enter a classroom. The NBA and NFL, two of the most lucrative and successful professional sports leagues have done nothing to provide such an alternative.

Second, the University itself has fallen into the larger social pattern. Because football and basketball have become major businesses at the intercollegiate level, and because they offer the allure of big dollars and major publicity to their institutions, the leaders of American higher education are willing to turn the other way and wink at the abandonment of all pretense while academic standards are trampled to death in the hope of winning. Non-students and anti-students, are recruited, pampered, and provided with all the help that money can buy. Not to educate, but to produce a winning program.

All this is happening while the State of Florida is scrambling to try to determine how it will educate all those students who want in the doors of the institutions of higher learning in the next few years. Educational rationing is the future of higher education for the students of Florida, unless, of course, they can bounce a ball or run to daylight.

Perhaps worse, when the winning begins the cheering never stops. State legislators and Regents are feted to lavish trips to bowl games, the public worries about who is really number one, and the students of the state are told they must get through their

degree programs in four years, as only athletes can spend five or six years on campus. This is the real scandal.

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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