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The Pre-Collegiate Student-Athlete Performance Camp

David C. Hill

The proposed pilot program would add an emphasis on academic preparedness to existing preseason combines and athletic testing.

In 1992, Reebok, Inc., introduced a new program for high school athletes called the Reebok Preseason Football Combines. They are a series of intense performance testing programs for high school football players. These programs are designed exactly like the pro football prospects. The program began in three sites and has now grown to thirteen in 1995. More than 7,000 high school football played participated in these combines from the Midwest to the East Coast. The Reebok program is unique in that it stresses academic preparation and athletic prowess.

Reebok's approach has the best of intentions. They have managed to attract some of the nation's best high school football talent, of which a disproportionate number are of color. Unfortunately, there are too many young men who arrive chasing the dream of an athletic scholarship. They often arrive with raw athletic talent that is attractive to college coaches at all levels; while their academic and special skills are sometimes less than equal to the task. These are precisely the issues that cause transition into college to be a risk for several student-athletes of color.

I have proposed a pilot program with the Chicago Public, Catholic and Private Schools and Reebok, Inc., to do a one-day, pre-collegiate student-athlete performance camp. The camp will target male and female athletes in their first year to junior year of high school. The student-athletes will continue to be evaluated on their athletic performance. Academic preparation will continue to be stressed. The difference in my proposed program is that for the first time, the female athlete is included. This is a group that has changed the face of intercollegiate athletics forever, yet is often overshadowed by the glamour of men's sports.

Another significant, proposed change in the structure of the current Reebok program is an implicit emphasis on academic and social preparedness. My proposal calls for a morning session and panel presentation for all principals, guidance counselors, athletic directors, college coaches, and college admission representatives. Current and/or former successful, and not-so-successful professional athletes (male and female), name recognized college athletes and athletic professionals (corporate executives, agents, general managers, coaches, financial consultants, etc.) will make up the panel. They can give the kids various perspectives on life before, during, and after college. The morning session will conclude with workshops on financial aid, scholarships and SAT and ACT preparation. I will add my personal workshop on recruitment and the college bound student athlete. The morning will conclude with a college fair, with admission representatives from nine surrounding states in the Midwest.

The afternoon will be reserved strictly for performance testing of the student-athletes.

College coaches from all divisions of the NC and NA are usually present to evaluate their performance.

I have argued for years that academic preparation for athletes of color is the key to success. I now argue that social preparation is yet another important ingredient their livelihood. Pre-collegiate camp addresses both issues with those who earn a living in athletics every day.

It is not always clear to some student-athletes and their parents that academic eligibility in high school or college is not always equal to academic preparedness and success. A student can be academically eligible to compete on the field or court, yet be insufficiently prepared to compete in the classroom. Success in a college classroom is directly linked to the type of academic preparation a student-athlete has received at his/her high school.

The proposal has met the approval of the Chicago Public Schools. If approved by Reebok, this program could become a model for every city across the country.

I am convinced that the program has real merit in that it addresses several fundamental issues. There is a need to recognize the value of socio-academic preparedness and adaptation into the university for the student-athlete of color. It is equally important to provide support to the female athlete, a group that has long been a force in athletics. It also addresses Reebok's corporate objective to compete more vigorously with its main competitor, NIKE. Reebok, however, can benefit immensely from the good publicity generated by empowering young male and female athletes to prepare seriously for their futures.

I wish to share this proposal with participants in this conference and develop a network that will inspire other professionals and nonprofessionals in our field to empower the lives of our young men and women.

PRESENTER

David C. Hill is a Senior Assistant Director of Admission, DePauw's coordinator of athletic recruitment, and a candidate for an advanced degree in sports administration. He has authored his first publication on athletic recruiting entitled, *Admission Counseling for the College Bound Student-Athlete.* As a defensive back for the Penn State Nittany Lions and an experienced football coach and admission officer, Hill is in demand as a speaker and has made presentations for such organizations as the National Association of College Admission Counselors and Reebok, Inc., on a variety of topics affecting student-athletes.