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# Multimedia Presentation Featuring a Case Study of a Black Athlete in a Predominantly White University Competing in Sport while Battling Disability and Discrimination Affecting Family and Career

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# **Multimedia Presentation Featuring a Case Study of a Black Athlete in a Predominantly White University Competing in Sport while Battling Disability and Discrimination Affecting Family and Career**

**Wesley E. Sime**

University of Nebraska

**Shirley Trout**

Trout Communications

**Presenters will share perspectives from an athlete who is deaf and dealing with the pressures of the media and discrimination of society regarding race and disability.**

Walter (a pseudonym) was recruited to play football at a Division I NCAA school in the Midwest. His history became well-known to the public because he was one of the first deaf athletes to compete successfully in this sport. His reflections about his college and professional life throughout a 10-year period is recorded on videotape together with comments from his wife, who shares her perspective as a partner in a mixed marriage with Walter's stepson, who also is deaf.

Walter's experience with college was extremely frustrating, especially during the first four years while he struggled to find his identity in a sport among athletes and coaches who couldn't fully accommodate his hearing loss and in academics among students/professors who were naive about the appropriate expectations and accommodations. During his fifth year in college, he achieved All-American honors and was eventually drafted to play professional football in the National Football League. Amidst the affluence and popularity of professional sport, he was unduly influenced by the attention and the public appearances.

His primary social support came from his friend, whom he later married. He adopted his wife's son (by a previous relationship) who was born deaf; he and his wife now also have two other children of their own. Walter's wife is very outspoken (on videotape) about her own experience dealing with the pressures of the media and discrimination of society regarding race and disability. After a two-year career with a professional team whose coach accommodated Walter's hearing loss, he was cut from the same team under the leadership of new coach. Following months of frustration due to mysterious disinterest in his potential as an athlete, Walter and his wife filed a discrimination suit on the basis of the Americans with Disabilities Act. During the years that followed, Walter and his family suffered severe economic loss and emotional strain due to the loss of his job and personal identity as a high-profile professional athlete. Walter was able to complete his bachelor's degree while struggling to work in menial jobs and in a low-profile athletic career. The marital relationship was strained because of financial problems and the frustration of dealing with organizations that discriminate inadvertently or intentionally. The impact of the ADA law was significant, as Walter's case was settled out of court for

an undisclosed amount of money. Walter and his wife have always been willing to provide inspiration to help in the education of students and teachers about the most appropriate methods to interact effectively with persons of diversity and/or disability.

The counselor who reports this case study served in the role as a university-based sport psychologist initially. In later years, he volunteered time and effort to assist with the adjustment to normal life in the absence of affluence and publicity. The counselor will summarize the perspective of this complicated history of discrimination from three viewpoints—athlete, spouse, and counselor/observer—using videotape clips and interpretive commentary in a qualitative analysis triangulating information into a meaningful synopsis of events, thoughts, and feelings.

## **PRESENTERS**

**Wesley E. Sime** is Professor of Health and Human Performance at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. His specialization is in health psychology and sport psychology. He has conducted studies on the impact of sports competition on the health and well-being of athletes. In addition, he has worked with numerous athletes in various settings where race and communication are issues involving conflict and threats to effective performance.

Sime is the counselor featured in the described presentation. With the permission of the client, Sime has created several learning opportunities for students and faculty in regard to the successful application of stress management and problem-solving in a difficult circumstance involving persons of color or disability in a predominantly White institution.

**Shirley Trout** received a bachelor's degree in journalism in 1988 and a master's degree in education in 1994, both from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. While in her master's program, she served as a graduate assistant to the Dean of Teachers College. In this capacity, she developed news releases, printed materials, and videotapes that promoted numerous Scholar-Practitioner Model activities of Teachers College.

Trout has owned a business, Trout Communications, since 1989. This business engages Trout as a professional speaker/educator in the field of humor studies. She also has designed, authored, and edited innovative curriculum, primarily in natural resources education. Her curriculum approach is highly interactive and engages students in interdisciplinary explorations.