

EDITORIAL

View from the bleachers

Kwame Dawes

While it is unusual for me to indulge in a debate with one of our regular sports columnists, I find it beyond me to resist the urge to challenge some of Mark Savoie's assertions about sports scholarships in his "View From the Cheap Seats" published in last week's issue. Savoie made it clear that he found sports scholarships to be an unnecessary feature of university life and lauded the Canadian system for its unwillingness to encourage the introduction of sports scholarships.

At the basis of Mr. Savoie's argument is an assumption that sports are at best extra-curricular and cannot be deemed professional disciplines that require a university degree. He also argues that those on sports scholarship most often ignore academic study and literally leach on the good will of the universities that bring them in. Apart from being a grossly unfair generalization, there is a failure to appreciate the role of scholarships in the development of the education of many underprivileged communities in North America and in the developing countries of the world.

If, in fact, all students who attended high school were granted an equal education complete with all the needs for academic development, perhaps my argument would be futile. However, this is not the case. For many, high school existence is at best a struggle to survive and any opportunity to get out of that zoo and into a college is deemed a great benefit. Very often, the only way such students can access a higher education is through a sports scholarship for they come out of communities in which the only way towards self-respect and public credibility is through excellence on the sports field. That many of these students enter university and succeed academically should be enough of an argument to encourage the existence of sports scholarships. However, these students also assist the colleges they attend by helping to raise the schools' public profile and by enhancing what has now become a multi-million dollar entertainment industry. The scholarship is certainly not payment for these efforts, but it should be seen as a recognition of the needs of these students who would have no other means of entering these institutions.

On the most part, scholarships were introduced because students who showed a remarkable skill in the field of sports were usually unable to pay for tuition etc. at the larger, more expensive institutions. In Jamaica, many young men and women have managed to establish careers with the help of sports scholarships to study in the United States. Few of them become professional athletes, but most of them who manage to complete the studies are blessed with a college education that they would otherwise not have had. As far as I am concerned the stories of each of these individuals are arguments in favour of the system.

It must not be forgotten, also, that implicit in Mr. Savoie's arguments is the suggestion that sports in themselves are nothing more than leisure activities. In other words, while it is acceptable to allow a chemistry student to get a scholarship based on their academic prowess, an excellent basketball player who may in fact go on to be a great professional and coach, should not be granted a scholarship based on her skills as an athlete. There is an inherent snobbery here that has failed to appreciate the pragmatics of modern society. A sports scholarship allows an athlete to participate in a sporting discipline that they are skilled in and yet get a chance to gain a education. Athletes may become coaches and teachers or they may simply retire after years of professional experience. When they are finished entertaining us and making some money in the process, many of them will have to have something to fall back on. With an education as the foundation of their careers there is usually something to fall back on.

I must state, though, that I appreciate Mr. Savoie's skepticism about the abuses of the system. I maintain that scholarship athletes must maintain their scholarships by showing good grades in school and excelling on the sports field. If it is apparent that they are not getting an education then surely, they should be booted from the schools. Perhaps Canada is not ready for sports scholarships and maybe Canada has not recognized in its inner cities the social dilemmas that have made scholarships a ray of hope for many young people.

So, I disagree with Mr. Savoie. Sports scholarships are as valid a means of entry into college as any other means. The bottom line is excellence and discipline. When some of my schoolmates got sporting scholarships to go abroad and study, I was happy for them. They had worked hard at their game, as hard as I worked on my academics and they were rewarded for it. One is an overweight successful accountant, another is a lawyer who coaches youth soccer, and another is an engineer with the telephone company. They are now all gainfully employed largely because of sports scholarships. There must be something to that.

Thanks to all our writers and staff for their work this term. We appreciate the consistent work. We encourage new people to come in next term and help us get the paper out. *The Brunswickan* Staff would like to wish all our readers and very meaningful and enjoyable Christmas. We also thank the two Marlenes upstairs for all their help. All the best on the exams, folks.

In last week's Opinion a reference was made to the Conflict Studies Department at UNB which was inaccurate. Now, while we maintain a distance from the views of our opinion writers, we feel it necessary to apologise for any damage the statement may have done to the faculty and students of Conflict Studies Department. To my knowledge the department has shown itself to be above being labeled racist. Again, we apologise.

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