

# The Athletic Dream and the Black Male Student: Primary Prevention Implications for Counselors

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The athletic dream is a multidimensional set of behaviors and fantasies propelled by the desire to pursue super-stardom and upward mobility through sport participation: the ultimate result is a potential professional athletic career where "the dream" can be lived out. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with the pursuit of the athletic dream, it has become a major liability for a disproportionate number of Black male athletes who are likely to be abused, exploited, and subjected to illegal and unethical practices in sports programs (Cramer, 1986; Underwood, 1980). The liability associated with chasing the dream has been particularly apparent in the high school and college environment where individuals often fail to balance academics and athletics. In both environments, there is the perception that organized sports provide the educational opportunity, status, and visibility necessary to be "discovered," often to the exclusion of all other career pursuits. A similar pursuit of the athletic dream has not been observed in Black female students (Oglesby, 1981; Parmer, 1987).

Unfortunately, many schools have failed to prepare academically the student athlete, who may never achieve the athletic dream. Only recently have institutions attempted to intervene on behalf of the athlete for whom athletics have become a major liability. Counselors who are not aware of the hazards of the pursuits of the

athletic dream at the expense of academics will not see the need to intervene across all levels within educational institutions. Since the initiation of Proposition 48 (Cramer, 1986; Edwards, 1984) and similar guidelines for athletes (Lederman, 1990), however, counselors in colleges and some high schools have become more involved in developing and administering intervention programs to assist the athlete in balancing athletics and academics (Gilley & Hickney, 1986).

There is still a dire need, however, for programs to prevent the academic problems that athletes, especially Black male students, face while pursuing the athletic dream. This is evident because little attention has been paid to the existence of the athletic dream among middle school athletes, where it initially begins. Generally, the major focus has been on interventions at the high school and college levels. The problem, however, begins long before the athlete enters high school. Michener (1976) suggested that the damage begins in junior high school. Edwards (1982) noted that there is the potential for the problem to occur as soon as the family and significant others recognize that a

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youngster has athletic talent, which may be earlier than high school. The purpose of this article is to discuss how a results management model can be used by counselors for initiating primary prevention strategies for middle school athletes.

## THE COUNSELOR AND PREVENTION

To orchestrate proactively in the balancing of academics and athletics, counselors must increase their understanding of the Black student athlete and the role of the athletic dream. Worzbyt and O'Rourke (1989) suggested that successful school counselors must have a vision and must meet the challenge to develop programs that address societal issues. They further noted that counselors must take action with a clear understanding of what their current programs are and what they would like for programs to be in the future. According to Conyne (1983), primary prevention is designed to reduce new incidents of a problem and associated disorders within a target community by providing information prior to problem manifestation. Determining problem manifestation is a major weakness in current efforts to reduce the liability associated with the athletic dream.

Although the athletic dream and the ensuing negative consequences have been the focus of some interventive efforts, counselors' lack of knowledge in several areas may impair the development of primary prevention approaches. First, a review of *The School Counselor* from 1985 to 1990 revealed no articles focusing on providing prevention support services for elementary or middle school athletes. Second, the definitions and intervention methods for primary preventions have not been clearly articulated. Conyne (1983) noted that there are always questions about "how to do primary prevention." Finally, according to several authorities (e.g., Dinkmeyer & Dinkmeyer, 1984; Shaw & Goodyear, 1984), counselors are often more problem oriented and conse-

quently more reactive than proactive. Therefore, they are more likely to remediate rather than develop ongoing prevention programs that are designed to develop human potential and foster social competence within the individual (Albee, 1982).

Although Conyne (1983) identified a prevention framework, there is still a need to develop specific strategies for implementation of programs. Few suggestions are given in the literature on how to actually develop primary prevention programs. Price, Cowen, Lorian, and McKay (1988) examined many well-documented prevention programs. To be an effective program, the intervention must specify (a) behaviors to be prevented with measurable objectives, (b) a rationale with program description and duration, (c) linkage with other groups and degree of generalizability, (d) the role of helping professionals, and (e) an evaluation component.

Primary prevention has been used in various school settings to address social issues that might negatively influence student success (Shaw & Goodyear, 1984). A primary prevention program for middle school students would foster the achievement of human potential by helping students set goals and explore various career opportunities and would assist students in pursuing many dreams, thus helping students avoid many of the pitfalls of chasing only the athlete dream. Lee (1982) noted that one way of facilitating change requires that counselors consider programming that extends beyond the individual Black child into the school, home, and community. In this role, the counselor convenes groups of individuals who are able to assist students in maximizing their human potential by supporting students in the successful pursuit of many dreams.

## PRIMARY PREVENTION STRATEGIES

This section provides a discussion of how the counselor, using the techniques of results management (Terry & Franklin,

1982), can devise effective strategies for middle school athletes. Results management is a system involving a manager and individuals from different organizational levels who convene in a joint work effort to set personal goals and objectives. Expected results guide the process of management, the establishment of objectives, the assignment of responsibility, and the method of performance appraisal. This type of organizational planning is useful because a level of accountability is ensured (e.g., the assigning of responsibility to each participant and the outlining of specific behaviors). The program is appropriate for schools because the components can be easily integrated into a program with the counselor serving as the manager.

As manager, a counselor must expand his or her current role through the integration of new and innovative strategies. The first step involves being informed about athletics and all supporting systems. To obtain a thorough understanding, the counselor-manager must become informed about characteristics of the student athlete from middle school through the periods of postcollege occupation and adult adjustment. These activities may involve the counselor working closely with community facilities where the student is likely to be involved in intramural sports, in conducting a needs assessment on the role of athletics in the school and community, or in evaluating the academic and social performance of the student athlete. Several basic tenets should guide the quest to be informed. Specifically, the counselor must (a) avoid the temptation to segment the problem to one period in the life span of the athlete, (b) realize that depending on how it is handled, the athletic dream can be both a liability and benefit, and (c) that the student as an athlete is a highly motivated and disciplined individual who is guided by the desire to play sports. Each of these understandings and actions is necessary for an

informed counselor to establish a results management program based on goals and expected results.

Second, the counselor considers the process of management and role as a leader. This process involves the counselor's introducing the management concept to student athletes, parents, school personnel, teachers, and community individuals. The counselor explains the structure of the program and provides a rationale for the program and justification for using results management. She or he also emphasizes the importance of an ongoing, year-round program. Although the members of the teams are instrumental in planning, program components are suggested by the counselor. Some of the suggested topics may include life skills management, career development, study skills, and college preparation. Other details are outlined at group meetings and on training dates. In soliciting support it is essential that the management teams realize the importance of closely monitoring the student to ensure expected results.

The third step involves scheduling and convening the results management teams for each student athlete to establish objectives and assign specific task responsibility. The counselor needs to be aware that many individuals contribute to the success or failure of the student athlete. As Edwards (1982) noted, the Black community is the first to reward the athlete for pursuing the athletic dream. Therefore, because the athletic dream for Black male students has community support, it is important not only for the athlete and counselor to be involved in results management but also parents, teachers, coaches, and school personnel. Parents should be involved because very often they do not know how or are too busy with survival issues to manage the education of their children. Coaches are often too consumed with winning and thus focus only on athletics. School personnel and teachers should be involved in the results manage-

ment process because they sometimes make special concessions for the athletic. Adults involved with the athlete in intramural sports often address only athletic performance.

Next, the results management group should be concerned with developing performance objectives and assigning responsibility to team members. Initially, the counselor as the manager may play a leadership role in developing goals and in soliciting others to assist the team in accomplishing objectives. This may involve the counselor building alliances with teachers and support persons to work with the parents, the athlete, and coaches. For example, teachers may be involved in providing training workshops or program development. The student athlete might be taught how to develop time management schedules or how to apply the discipline in athletic performance to academics. Parents might be responsible for assisting the athlete in following a time management schedule or in preparing applications to college. The coach may be responsible for spending a designated amount of time on teaching the athlete life skills or exposing the student to guest speakers involved in various careers. Other objectives may come from the management teams, depending on the results they are attempting to accomplish.

A final step in results management and an essential component of prevention involves periodic appraisal and evaluation. The issue of when and how to evaluate is often difficult. According to Conyne (1983), an effective prevention program should involve evaluation of program outcomes. The most appropriate measure would be a longitudinal study that assesses the post-high-school and college accomplishments of the Black student athlete. Such a measure should determine if a primary prevention program has reduced the incidence of when the athletic dream becomes a liability for Black athletes. The

results management model proposes an ongoing evaluation process measuring actual accomplishments. Because performance objectives were outlined specifying the behavior and conditions for achievement, responsibility, and accountability, this process is easily accomplished. More immediate evaluation measures may involve the counselor's gathering anecdotal data to assess (a) the level of involvement of adults, (b) the degree to which the objectives are met, and (c) improvements in academic productivity by the athlete.

## CONCLUSION

The athletic dream or the desire to pursue super-stardom and mobility through sports has become a major liability for many Black male students. The athletic dream is often cultivated in the school environment. Many schools, however, have failed to academically prepare the Black athlete who is already subjected to educational limitations because of poverty and racism. Counselors have a special responsibility to intervene earlier than in a student's high school and college years to combat many of the associated problems resulting from athletes chasing the athletic dream.

The results management process offers a viable prevention model that can be used by the counselor-manager in convening the school, community, and significant others in working toward the common goal of balancing athletics and academics. The application of the results management process is also important because all of the participants have responsibilities for the achievement of the student and each person is held accountable by an established criterion. This established criterion serves as a continuous evaluation process allowing for the correction of problems before they are out of control. Although the results management model can be used

with any student, the Black male athlete has special needs because of the perception of limited opportunity by traditional means, and that athletics are an easy, and often the only way to achieve upward mobility.

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