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Business Leadership Traits Developed by Participation in College Athletics

When you ask a child what they want to be when they grow up, you will get an endless variety of answers. Some people will tell you they dream of becoming a successful businessman or woman and many will say they want to play professional sports. There is no roadmap to success in the business world and not everyone can become a professional athlete. There are certainly characteristics and qualities that are common factors to success in both these areas. Collegiate athletes undoubtedly develop skills that most of their classmates do not acquire. People believe the skills student-athletes develop in their athletic careers will follow them throughout their entire lives in professional, family and community settings. Sports are a powerful metaphor for the business world. Both environments are characterized by fierce competition, wins or losses by small margins, goal setting, determination and teamwork (Moorehouse, 2012). The purpose of this research is to examine college athletics as a predictor of success in a business environment, to explore the development of leadership behaviors of college athletes and to establish a comprehensive understanding of the common traits needed to be a successful student-athlete and professional.

There are many consistencies in research concerning business and athletics success and leadership. However, it is clear that more exploration is needed in this area to create a more thorough description of leadership in athletes and the development of the behaviors and attitudes through athletics that lead to business career success. The current research will provide more information about current student-athletes own perceptions about the importance of developed qualities as it concerns themselves and their teammates as well as how they believe it will impact their future careers. It also examines how former-student athletes view their own development throughout their careers. The intention of this study is to provide more qualitative information

about the development of business leadership traits through student athletics to help develop the research of this rapidly growing field.

Discussion

The results of the surveys and interviews concluded that the selected traits were of high importance to student-athletes and appeared to be actively developed through college athletic participation. Though this research was conducted very informally, it provides valuable insight into the perceived characteristics that are developed through participation in college athletics. These findings were supported by literary reviews and confirmed in the interviews with business professionals. Further support of this topic exists when looking at the number of CEOs of current Fortune 500 companies were student athletes during their undergraduate college careers including Jimmy Immelt of GE, Edward B. Rust Jr. of State Farm Insurance and Lynn Laverty Elsenhans of Sonoco. These current business leaders, as well as many others, attribute their business successes to skills they developed through college athletics. While there is no precise formula or menu of traits that are developed by every student-athletes that equal business success, there is definitely a trend towards the development of skills and experiences that can lead to career confidence and accomplishment.

The findings of this research support the findings of previous athletic leadership research that state that collegiate student-athletes develop skills and traits that are essential for success and has a positive impact on leadership behavior and interpersonal skills (Pascarella & Smart, 1991). This study determined that student-athletes during and after their collegiate athletic careers understand and appreciate the value of their experience and carry the lessons they have learned with them into their professional careers after graduation.

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