

# 1 THE ENTERTAINMENT PRODUCT

The most refreshing—and honest—person I met while researching this book is Phil Hughes, the associate athletic director for student services at Kansas State University. He clearly has no illusions about his job. And you may not like what he has to say.

“My job is to protect The Entertainment Product,” he stated matter-of-factly. “My job is to make sure that The Entertainment Product goes to class. My job is to make sure that The Entertainment Product studies. My job is to make sure that The Entertainment Product makes adequate academic progress according to NCAA guidelines.”

What he calls “The Entertainment Product,” much of the rest of the world calls “the student-athlete.” The former phrase is brutally honest; the latter part of the phalanx of lies and half-truths that provide the bulwark of the façade of amateurism that falsely cloaks college athletics. Hughes’s characterization may sound harsh, but is, in fact, the reality. Rather than scorn him, we should all be grateful for his candor.

“It’s how I sleep at night,” Hughes said. “It is who and what these kids are. You can hate that, you can hate the system. But at the end of the day, it’s who they are. They’re the raw material in a multibillion-dollar sports and entertainment business. And it’s my job to protect them.”

Once you get past the shock of Hughes’s blunt characterization of the kids he oversees every day, you realize that he’s absolutely right. He’s also an anomaly. That’s because he’s a rare voice of sanity and honesty amid a nationwide army of academic advisers and tutors on campuses across the country who cajole, coddle, and coach these kids, most of whom have

no business being at a serious institution of advanced academic learning. Some of these academic advisers are also fighting their own institutions, which are more concerned with an athlete's academic eligibility and ability to sell tickets than whether or not he or she is passing freshman English.

## **STUDENTS FIRST, ATHLETES SECOND?**

University presidents will tell you that the kids are “students first and athletes second,” but that’s a canard. In reality, most of these kids are, as Hughes calls them, “The Entertainment Product.” They’re the raw material—the talent—that draws millions of avid fans to collegiate stadiums and arenas across the country every week. That is the cold harsh reality of the business of college sports today.

Given that, Phil Hughes is not a monster. He’s a realist.

A 1980 graduate of the University of California, San Diego, Hughes has a master’s degree in counseling psychology from the University of Kentucky. And while he may sound like he’s part of the problem, he is, in fact, just a realist. For better or worse, he accepts his role as a small cog in a very big moneymaking machine.

Hughes has been at this game for a long time. In 2009, he was entering his thirteenth year at Kansas State. Before that, he was at the University of Michigan for seven years, responsible for the athletic department’s student-athlete support program, which includes academic advising, academic compliance, tutorial services, admissions tracking, faculty relations, and something called “academic advocacy.”

Hughes’s office at Kansas State is in the \$1 million Academic Learning Center. It’s part of the Vanier Complex, the \$2 million football facility that Kansas State built in 1992. It includes locker rooms, a 6,500-square-foot weight room, an athletic training room, a players’ lounge, and the Big Eight Room, a plush lounge where Kansas State signs some of its most-promising recruits.

In addition to Hughes, there are six full-time counselors, six assistant counselors and grad assistants, and a tutoring staff of about forty-five serving four hundred athletes. Among the services offered to K-State athletes

are academic advising and counseling; tutoring; assistance with writing skills, time management, goal setting, and computer skills; a faculty mentoring program; and supervised study time. The athletes also have faculty advisers in their chosen major. With the exception of the faculty adviser, there are small-group tutorial aids that are otherwise unavailable to students who aren't scholarship athletes. Remarkably, despite the individual attention, many of these athletes never come close to graduating. But as is the case on hundreds of campuses across the country, Hughes and the administration pretend that is their goal.

"My number one goal is keeping our kids grounded in the business at hand, which is competing successfully in the classroom," Hughes said. "It's a very nuts-and-bolts activity. Kid gets up, feet hit the floor, and that kid has to make progress in their academic commitments and obligations, *that day*. And it's trench work. That's what we talk with our kids about."

While some see these personalized tutoring services as merely another example of the special treatment athletes are accorded their whole lives, Hughes understands the academic quality of the raw material he's been given to work with. These kids may be gifted athletes, but many are sorely lacking in not only academic discipline but the very rudimentary knowledge that a high school education is supposed to provide. That's because many of them have been passed along through the grades from teacher to teacher, all tacitly acknowledging that these kids weren't born to learn, they were born to play.

Recognizing the academic shortcomings of many of his athletes, Hughes does what he can while he has the kids. And although some may see it as special treatment, Hughes takes the very pragmatic view that it would be crueler to bring kids to a university the size and stature of Kansas State and give them all the tools they need to succeed on the playing field but then leave them to fend for themselves in the classroom.

"We put ourselves in close proximity to the athlete to achieve that very singular goal," he said. "And that goal is day-to-day progress in their academic requirements."

Fighting Hughes and his staff all the way—even in non-revenue sports such as equestrianism and rowing—is an army of adults who have only one

thing in mind: winning. This group often includes parents, coaches, mentors, and friends.

“So many of the adults only want to focus on and talk about the next match. Where do they rank?” Hughes said. “That’s what these kids have heard their whole life. We have to be the adults who say, ‘How did you do on that chemistry test?’”

## TWO FULL-TIME JOBS

At Kansas State, the academic advisers try to stress the importance of academics as soon as the athletes arrive on campus. In fact, many incoming freshmen come to school in June or July for minicamps and begin taking classes right away, in hopes that the light load of a summer session will better prepare them for the full course load they’re expected to take in the fall.

“What we tell recruits is that being a student-athlete is like having two full-time jobs,” Hughes said. “We alert them and their parents to the difficulty in choosing this type of pathway.”

The athletes will have three to five hours less per day to study than other students, he continued, “because their second job—sports—commands so much time and energy. Other students can work part-time, arrange their own schedule. These students are told, ‘Here’s what the deal is: Lift at six A.M. Practice from three to six P.M. Go to classes in between. And study group here at seven P.M.’”

Hughes said that his department has to offer student-athletes so many tutorial services because practice and training for their sport takes up so much of their day.

“We tell recruits to look at the kids in their class to the right and left of them. They have five hours more a day to study than you do. How do you compete? That’s what we’re here to help them do.

“We take so much of their mental and physical energy,” he pointed out, referring to the athletic department. “They have to study with us after they’re beat up, tired, or just plain exhausted.

“Like it or not, these kids are elite athletes. “It is the institution that

chooses to be a member of the NCAA. Once you've made that decision, in order to compete athletically or in the entertainment business, you have to support these students so that they can survive and hopefully succeed academically."

How exactly do they do that?

"We make sure that their schedule fits their interests and abilities," Hughes answered. "We will work with them to solve any problems and any distractions that take away from that daily progress. We will monitor their academic standing and their academic performance. We offer tutorial and mentoring services. And we act as advocates with the university."

While some may see that as coddling, Hughes feels that regardless of the help his staff gives to the athletes, at the end of the day it's up to the individual athlete whether or not he or she succeeds in the classroom.

"My program has no academic authority, and that's a good thing," he affirmed. "Academic authority is retained in the university. My signature doesn't mean anything. I don't grant degrees. Student-athletes have to follow the procedures and protocols of every other student."

Maybe so, but they definitely are getting more hands-on attention than many other students. For instance, all new athletes actually have a study partner, someone on Hughes's staff who sits with them and does their homework with them ("but not for them," he insists).

"We do that in order for us to get to know our students," Hughes said. "We need to watch them study. We need to talk with them. How'd you like Spanish? How'd you do in Lit class? We have to gauge their level of motivation, anticipation, and their level of commitment. So we need to be with them."

While Hughes and his staff are available to the athletes twenty-four hours a day, each team sets its own study-time requirements. One team may want athletes to have six hours of required study time per week. Others might only require four. Some student-athletes are self-motivated, whereas others may require significant handholding.

For instance, Kansas State has a program called the Study Table, common at many universities. Not only does it set a rigid schedule of what subject student-athletes will study and for how long, it also checks up on them between classes.

“As we do our initial screening of our student-athletes, we will assign them, based on need, to our daytime program,” Hughes described. “Before class, between class, and after class they meet with tutors or academic mentors, and they get their work done during the day, while they have the energy and the focus to do it.”

In addition to tutoring, Hughes’s staff conducts review sessions, helps athletes prepare for midterm and final exams, and offers one-on-one tutoring sessions.

“We do have tutors available in the evening, and we have tutors on call,” Hughes said. “But again, this is a day-to-day slog. So we’ve found that it works best if the tutoring is done on a regular, scheduled, consistent basis. Our goal is to offer daily tutoring, not end-of-semester cramming.”

All freshmen get tutoring whether they think they need it or not. And it continues, “until they prove to us that they can handle the quality and quantity of work.”

## **ECONOMICS VERSUS ACADEMICS**

While Hughes’s focus is supposed to be on academics, the economics of college athletics are never very far from his mind. They have to be, because that is the world in which the student-athletes live. Moreover, regardless of any legitimate concern Hughes may have for these kids, their ultimate focus, their whole reason for being on campus, is to keep the multibillion-dollar college sports machine running.

“My customers are an Entertainment Product that resides within a seventeen- to twenty-two-year-old person,” Hughes acknowledged. “And that is a crazy proposition.”

The greatest threat to that Entertainment Product is when they get arrested, test positive for steroids or street drugs, or get caught taking money from boosters.

“It’s a very fragile existence for our business and for that youngster,” said Hughes. “The problem at K-State, Ohio State, Michigan is that these young athletes are treated like celebrities by their peers. They are granted great status, and they have great distractions. Many youngsters seventeen to twenty-

two don't handle that type of attention or status very well. Poor social and personal decisions are what make this whole NCAA business really tenuous. And we've constructed this elaborate entertainment industry with this cast of actors and actresses.

"And if you think about the developmental issues of young people in college, regardless of whether or not they're an athlete, those challenges are *huge*, period. Then you throw them in front of seventy-five thousand screaming fans, add in the travel and the intensity of the competition, and prospects of the Olympics or pro sports.

"If you think of the threats to an athletic department, the things that can bring down the house. If you're losing and have to fire the coach, that's part of the equation. That's anticipated and expected. It doesn't kill you. What can kill you is the behavioral decisions of the athlete. Gambling. Sexually assaulting someone."

Going back to his use of the term *Entertainment Product*, Hughes, again, has a very real-world view of the world of college athletics.

"The NCAA entertainment business is really founded on two concepts," he said. "All of these kids are amateurs. So amateurism is the cornerstone of this entertainment business. They're here for the love of the school."

The second is integrity.

"Integrity and amateurism. It's a house of cards," Hughes commented. "All of the NCAA legislation is based on maintaining these two false premises. You have seventeen- to twenty-two-year-old students who don't fit into those parameters and can become a threat."

So how does Phil Hughes, an otherwise upstanding, decent guy, keep his sanity amid this crazy system that says it's about academics but is really about maintaining the economic viability of college athletics?

"You accept it for what it is," he said. "That's all you can do. I'm trying to make an impossible equation work. It's a dogfight every day. I relish when we can make it work."

On the upside, Hughes considers it progress that academic tutoring facilities are now part of the so-called "facilities arms race," in which schools try to outdo each other to build the most luxurious, state-of-the-art sports facilities. The trend, admittedly, is partly fueled by ego—"My stadium is

bigger and nicer than yours.” But mostly these facilities are used in the battle to lure recruits, thus the term *facilities arms race*. Put more simply, if I’m the coach at a school that has a training center with underwater treadmills, the newest sports-medicine treatments and techniques, and a weight room with seventy Nautilus machines, then maybe I can convince a recruit to choose my school over another that has only sixty-five Nautilus machines and no underwater treadmills.

“At one point, I delivered academic support services out of a double-wide trailer,” Hughes said. “I referred to it as our mobile academic unit. The buildings we’re seeing today for academic tutoring are a marked change from what they were just ten years ago.”

In addition to new facilities, Division I schools also are increasingly adding staff, including people like Hughes, who do nothing but make sure that student-athletes are working hard at maintaining their NCAA-mandated academic eligibility. In other words, at almost every college and university across the country, Hughes has a counterpart, worrying about the same problems that he does.

## NOTRE DAME DOES IT BEST

These athletic tutoring programs are not really new, they’ve simply grown in size and stature over the years. Not surprisingly, the University of Notre Dame, one of the few schools where athletes have a higher graduation rate than the general student body, started the first full-fledged student-athlete tutoring center, in 1964.

“Father Joyce saw what was happening with television,” said Mike DeCicco, who started the Notre Dame program and retired as the assistant athletic director for academic advisement in 1995. “He knew that television would not only bring greater exposure to college football, but also greater scrutiny.”

It’s that increased scrutiny, from the NCAA and every once in a while from the media, that has motivated schools to build these lavish academic tutoring centers. That way, when the starting tackle flunks out, the school can point to the million-dollar facility and say, “We gave him every oppor-



tunity.” For the most part, college sports writers are all too willing to accept that explanation and move on. In reality, the few instances of academic fraud that are reported every year are the tip of the iceberg, not examples of the effectiveness of the NCAA’s policing policies or the investigative reporting skills of sycophantic sports writers.

Notre Dame is one of the few exceptions when it comes to big-time Division I athletic programs. Whereas other schools have been dragged kicking and screaming into this new era of academic accountability, Notre Dame has long been committed to the academic success of its student-athletes.

But in 1964, it was a very different world for Mike DeCicco, a Notre Dame grad who’d come back to South Bend to teach mechanical engineering and thermodynamics, and to coach the fencing team. That’s when Father Joyce, the school’s legendary executive vice president, called DeCicco into his office and asked him to set up a program to monitor the academic progress of the football team.

“At most,” DeCicco said, “Father Joyce figured it would take an hour or two a day.”

Unsure of where to start, DeCicco began by calling the athletic directors at the Ivy League and Big Ten schools his fencers competed against.

“I called and asked them if there was someone I could talk to about academic advising for student-athletes,” DeCicco recalled. “Not one of them said they had anyone other than a coach who might work with the admissions office to make sure that their kids would get in. That sort of thing. There was nothing along the line of what Father Joyce had in mind.”

Next, DeCicco called the other conferences. They weren’t any help, either.

“The closest thing I came to what I was looking for was at the University of Texas,” he said. “They had an assistant coach they called ‘The brain coach.’ They said he worked with the admissions office, knew who the coaches wanted to bring in, and made sure that the kids got in and then kept records of them to find out if any of them were flunking out. I talked to him and he didn’t have any academic contact with the student-athletes as far as their majors, grade point average, and so on.”

So DeCicco essentially had to create the Notre Dame athlete-tutoring

program from scratch. He started by calling every football player into his office and asking them a few key questions. What courses were they taking? What was their major? What was their grade-point average?

One football player in particular, an Academic All-American who went on to have a successful NFL and legal career, assured DeCicco that he was passing all his courses.

A week after the interviews was Notre Dame's Mid-Semester Report Day. That's when the school sent out pink slips to every student who was failing a class. DeCicco had reassured Father Joyce that the football players were all doing well in their classes, but he wanted to double-check. So he asked the Registrar's Office to send him copies of the mid-term grades for all the football players. He didn't expect to get them until later in the afternoon, but when he came into his office that morning, sitting on his desk was a stack of pink slips an inch and a half high. On top was the pink-slip report for the football player who'd assured DeCicco that he was passing all his classes. In reality, he had a D and an F in two of his five classes.

"I was so dejected that I simply locked the door to my office and came home," DeCicco said. "I said to my wife, 'Honey, I may be the shortest-tenured academic adviser in Christiandom.'"

When he told his wife what had happened, she said, "Don't ask the kids, ask the teachers."

The next day, DeCicco was called into Father Joyce's office.

"Mike, I thought you had told me that everyone was doing so well," Father Joyce said over the top of his signature half-moon reading glasses.

"It didn't take an intellectual giant to recognize that it was Father Joyce who'd put the stack of pink slips on my desk," DeCicco said.

## **A UNIVERSITY-WIDE EFFORT**

That was the first—and last—time that DeCicco was called into Father Joyce's office about the poor academic performance of any student-athletes. The next day, DeCicco took his wife's advice and began enlisting the help of the Notre Dame faculty in keeping track of student grades. The program was so successful that DeCicco's one-man operation soon ballooned to a

staff of five. Today, Notre Dame is considered the gold standard when it comes to balancing athletics and academics.

“Some kids were flunking because they couldn’t do the work,” DeCicco said. “It wasn’t that they weren’t smart enough, but they were spending so much time memorizing the playbook and practicing and traveling to away games that it was almost impossible to keep up with their school work.”

He said he was lucky enough to have deans and department heads who recommended students who could tutor the athletes.

“We ended up having sixty or seventy tutors, most of them graduate students who were looking for an extra buck or two,” he said. “We had small-group tutoring, as well as one-on-one.”

DeCicco also credits coaches, such as Notre Dame’s Ara Parseghian, for making the academic tutoring program work.

“The success of our program, aside from getting the information we needed and keeping the kids on track, was dependent upon the coaches we had at that time,” DeCicco said. “One of the concerns I had was what kind of cooperation was I going to get from the coaches. I was naïve enough to think that all the kids we recruited and brought in were intellectual giants, as well as good athletes. But that wasn’t the case.”

By the time DeCicco’s first class of tutored athletes graduated, the kid who’d had the two pink slips graduated with honors and was drafted by the Minnesota Vikings. A few years later, he came back to Notre Dame to finish his law degree. He brought two teammates with him from the Vikings who hadn’t completed their undergraduate work at Michigan State. And their first stop was DeCicco’s office.

“They were indicative of what was going on in college football then,” DeCicco said. “Too many young men were finishing their eligibility and had not completed their degree requirements.”

While it’s true that graduation rates are not what they should be for all students, the majority of the problem seems to be with young black kids who shouldn’t have been admitted in the first place. DeCicco deserves credit for starting a program that has been copied in one form or another at every major university across the country.

“We started by telling the kids that they had to go to class,” he said. “We

told them that they had to take courses designed to meet their academic requirements. As a result, we had a very high graduation rate among our athletes. And still do. And it's because of the support Notre Dame gave me. The coaches, the faculty, the administration, and Father Joyce. I had the authority to pull kids off the field."

A few years after he started the athlete tutoring and mentoring program for the football team, DeCicco expanded it to include every varsity sport. When Title IX went into effect in 1972, academic support services were extended to women's teams. It has since been expanded to support staff, such as team managers, trainers, and graduate assistants.

"Every sport had one or two kids who needed tutoring help," DeCicco said. "Even some of my fencers, who overall were pretty smart kids."

Notre Dame also started offering summer-school classes and tutoring to help its student-athletes get up to speed before the start of their freshman semester. But the first year, DeCicco had just six kids sign up.

"They thought summer school was for dummies," he said. "I told them that it wasn't. That given all the time commitments they had to athletics, they needed a leg up, a head start on the other kids. When I explained it that way, they started to come."

Today, summer school is required for Notre Dame pre-med students and others who enter particularly challenging disciplines—whether or not they're athletes. Eventually, the summer tutoring program became so popular that Notre Dame had to cap it.

"Every school needs an academic advising program," said DeCicco. "It just makes sense, no matter how prepared or unprepared the kids are."

Today, Notre Dame's Academic Services for Student-Athletes is housed in the 67,000-square-foot, \$14 million Coleman-Morse Center. The school is ranked second all-time in the number of academic All-Americans it has produced. And virtually every major D-I program in the country has a program just like the one Mike DeCicco started at Notre Dame forty years ago.

Student-athletes at the University of Georgia study in a \$7 million facility funded by and named for Rankin M. Smith, a long-time booster and former owner of the Atlanta Falcons. It's 31,000 square feet, has a 230-seat

study hall, twenty tutoring rooms, sixty computer stations, and a writing lab. It has a nearly \$1 million annual budget to pay for ten full-time staffers and about eighty graduate-assistant tutors.

The University of Michigan recently spent about \$15 million on a new student-athlete academic tutoring center. Texas A&M spent nearly \$10 million. Richard Lapchick, director of the Institute of Diversity and Ethics in Sport at the University of Central Florida, said in the Winter 2004 newsletter for the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education that these centers send “a message to the student-athletes . . . that this is a priority; they’re not just building football facilities. They’re building these centers to help you become intelligent students—not just student-athletes.”

At least that’s the company line.

## NOT THE BEST OF INTENTIONS

Sometimes the tutoring centers are used to cover up academic shortcomings, not cure them. In the early 1980s, when Herschel Walker was breaking SEC and NCAA rushing records at Georgia, the school was also breaking the rules. Instead of having tutors help the student-athletes study, they were actually doing their work for them. The whistleblower was Jan Kemp, a remedial studies teacher who refused to change grades for athletes to maintain their NCAA eligibility. She eventually won a \$2.5 million lawsuit against the university, which fired her for exposing the widespread academic fraud.

What won the case for Kemp was a secret tape she introduced during the trial, which featured her boss, Leroy Ervin, telling staffers, “I know for a fact that these kids would not be here if it were not for their utility to the institution. They are used as a kind of raw material in the production of some goods to be sold as whatever product, and they get nothing in return.”

Vince Dooley, the Bulldogs’ head football coach and athletic director who, despite being at the center of the scandal, kept his job, testified that athletes were admitted with SAT scores of less than 650 out of a possible 1,600.

“In order to be, we think, reasonably competitive, we thought that leeway was necessary,” he said in his own defense.

Fast forward to March 10, 1999, the day before the number seven seed Minnesota Golden Gophers were to open the NCAA Tournament against number ten Gonzaga. The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reported allegations of massive academic fraud in the men's basketball program. Former basketball office manager Jan Gangelhoff went to the paper and claimed that she had written over four hundred papers for at least twenty Gopher men's basketball players. The university suspended players Antoine Broxie, Kevin Clark, Jason Stanford, and Miles Tarver. All allegedly had had papers written for them by Gangelhoff in previous seasons.

The university negotiated a buyout of men's basketball coach Clem Haskins's contract, worth a reported \$1.5 million dollars over three years. A year later, Haskins admitted that he had paid Gangelhoff \$3,000 for tutoring services. He also turned his financial records over to the NCAA. By the time the investigation was completed, it was also learned that Haskins had tampered with transcripts for incoming recruits, given cash payments to players, ignored complaints of sexual harrasment against his players, and tried to convince professors to give his players inflated grades. The University of Minnesota men's basketball team was stripped of all awards and titles dating back to the 1993–94 season. The school lost five scholarships over the next three seasons, had its recruiting limited, and was on NCAA probation for four years. In addition to Haskins, other members of his athletic staff also resigned. The university returned 90 percent (about \$350,000) of the profits earned by the basketball program during its appearances in the NCAA tournament, including the team's 1997 Final Four run.

And, of course, in 2008 we had the Florida State online music quiz scandal. To recap: about thirty Florida State football players, along with non-athletes, cheated on an online, open-book music exam. Graduate assistants who administered the test directed students to a Web site where they could find the answers to all the questions. Ironically, these athletes were barred from going to the Music City Bowl in Nashville, where one of the free giveaways to players was an MP3 player.

## MEDIA DISTORTION

While these schools were clearly cheating and deserved the punishments that were meted out, I think it's also fair to say that there's some media distortion when it comes to these academic scandals. Every minor transgression committed by a student-athlete that is reported is almost guaranteed to receive front-page coverage in the local paper, and is broadcast nationwide by the wire services and the twenty-four-hour all-sports stations. This has two effects. It makes it seem as though there are more scandals than there actually are, and it allows the otherwise fawning sports editors and talking heads to declare that they cover the bad, as well as the good, of athletics.

According to newspaper research, 85 percent of American males open to the sports page first. According to the University of Oregon, about 70 percent of its media mentions were sports-related. The remainder were alumni and faculty obituaries.

It's also important to point out that there are other students on campus besides athletes who receive what could be considered special treatment. The general public usually doesn't read about these kids because the local paper and the national networks don't cover, for example, the Indiana School of Music and Dance as closely as they do Indiana basketball.

A good case in point is Grace McLoughlin, a name that I'm sure doesn't ring any bells with 99 percent of you reading this book. At 5'7" and 120 pounds, she was one of the top recruits in the country in 2008. She's been practicing her discipline since she was four. She has spent nearly every summer at elite camps and has traveled across the country to perform and train. Is she a gymnast? A swimmer? One of the growing number of high-profile women's lacrosse players? No, she's a ballerina.

In early 2008, she was being wooed heavily by the University of Indiana's Jacobs School of Music, one of the most prestigious performance arts programs in the country. Yet while the press corps for the entire state of Indiana was busy writing about the recruiting scandal surrounding Indiana men's basketball coach Kelvin Sampson, what went mostly unnoticed was the hiring of Michael Vernon as chairman of Indiana's ballet department.

Vernon is easily as important to the world of ballet as Sampson is to the world of basketball.

Michael Vernon studied at the Nesta Brooking School of Ballet and the Royal Ballet School in London. Before coming to New York in 1976 to join the Eglevsky Ballet as a ballet master and resident choreographer, he performed regularly with the Royal Ballet, the Royal Opera Ballet, and the London Festival Ballet.

Vernon continues to teach classes at New York–based Steps, works regularly for the Manhattan Dance Project, and is artistic adviser to the Ballet School of Stamford. Since 2000, he has taught and choreographed the ballet company and ballet school at the Chautauqua Institute in western upstate New York. These are some of the camps and companies where Grace McLoughlin has danced for Vernon, and he is the reason she applied to the Jacobs school.

Of course, you didn't read about Ms. McLoughlin or Mr. Vernon on the front page of the *Indianapolis Star* or even the *Bloomington Herald Times*. That's because they don't fill thirty-thousand-seat arenas and generate millions of dollars in television revenue for the school. But looking at what could arguably be conceived as the privileged world that McLoughlin inhabited (she ultimately ended up dancing in Los Angeles), her high school class schedule and the special treatment she received weren't much different than those accorded to star football and basketball players.

She went to the exclusive Performance Children's School on Manhattan's Upper West Side, which is purposely just steps from the Juilliard School of Music and Lincoln Center. She was part of the Guided Study program, which allows gifted performers to have tailor-made schedules to accommodate their practice sessions and performances.

"I can only be in school about three periods a day, and I have six classes," she said. "So a lot of times I take a class and never actually attend class in school. I meet teachers after school, take tests online."

If she were the starting forward for Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn, those revelations alone would be worthy of a front-page expose in the *New York Times*. But because she was a ballerina and not a ballplayer, as a society we're not as appalled.



McLoughlin wasn't alone. The Performance Children's School has dozens of students who are accomplished actors, actresses, dancers, and musicians. And they're all accorded the sort of academic freedom and flexibility that McLoughlin had.

"A lot of the kids are equestrians who leave school from December to May to do the Florida circuit," she said. "They get all their assignments online and turn in their homework by e-mail."

Another one of her classmates composed the score for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

On a typical Monday, McLoughlin went to school for just two periods—Advanced Physics and English—and then walked five blocks to dance for a few hours. She went back to school late in the afternoon to meet with teachers and catch up on her assignments.

When she wasn't dancing in a show with one of the local dance companies, she spent about fifteen hours a week in dance classes outside of school.

"That doesn't include Pilates classes or seminars," she said. "During rehearsals or workshops, I add about two hours a day to my dance schedule and three hours on Saturday."

All of her homework assignments were posted online.

"Sometimes I go in to take a test, but the teachers are pretty great about extensions and giving me as much time as I need," she said.

Again, if McLoughlin were a student-athlete and this story came out, her face would have been plastered on the front of every sports section in the country. The headlines would have read "Only Goes to Half Her Classes" or "Spends More Time Practicing Than in School."

My point is not to dismiss the special treatment that athletes get. The job of starting quarterback or point guard at a major Division I university comes with privileges and special accommodations that every freshman would love to have, including personalized one-on-one tutoring. My point is that for all that is wrong with college athletics today and the star status it gives to its top players, there is a media magnifying glass that inflates every academic transgression by a student-athlete that is uncovered. And often-times, the coverage is disproportionate to the crime. One of the reasons I

think these episodes are so distorted is to give cover to lazy sports reporters who not only don't work very hard at uncovering NCAA academic and recruiting violations but couldn't care less whether or not the student-athletes had the minimal SAT scores and grades that were required of every other student, or are passing remedial English that should have been taught in junior high. In fact, I would argue that many of these sports reporters who are turning a blind eye to corruption and cheating are actually aiding and abetting what's essentially a criminal enterprise. Furthermore, it is the six or ten pages of daily sports coverage in newspapers that is part of the media frenzy that actually helps schools cash such big checks for media rights and endorsement deals.

It's all part of the dysfunctional system of college athletics. And while today the money is bigger and more influential than ever, this atmosphere has been around since the earliest days of college athletics.