

Coaching Student-Athletes: Old School Coaches and Players Coaches

By Dr. Tredell Dorsey

For more than twelve years, I've coached on the collegiate level and have seen every aspect of student athlete: from short to tall, fast to slow, small to large, and needy to motivated. In each instance, every student-athlete needed to be coached whether they knew it or not. Coaching student-athletes is only difficult when you don't know who you're coaching or if you don't know your own coaching style.

One of the most challenging aspect of coaching student-athletes is being aware that all people mature differently. Over the course of a student's academic career, he matures at his own rate based on his physiological make-up and background. It is a cumulative process, meaning what happens before and after an athlete arrives on campus will determine what type of person he will grow into.

From my perspective, it seems that each year student-athletes get more demanding, entitled, and needy for glory. In the defense of athletes and students in general, their behavior is indicative of the current state of our society. Adults are the same way, but we had the benefit of living in a time when demanding what you wanted only got you ignored. We learned early on that you must earn everything you get because no one owes you anything.



This generation of student athletes grew up in the microwave age and hasn't had to wait for anything. Everything is delivered quickly—which takes away from the ability to keep working while you wait for results. Think about it. Today's technology enables immediate feedback, which in many cases affirms or strokes egos. If you do something good once, it goes viral, and you've arrived—even if you don't have the tenacity, talent, or work ethic to do it again.

The result of this phenomenon is evident on the field and in the weight-room. You may ask what has happened, and how has this become such a problem so fast. I can't speak on what others may

think, but I'm going to share what I believe has happened over the past 10 years with the maturation and overall development of the student-athlete and the coach. I bet you weren't expecting me to write "coach" since I'm one.

I believe the exodus of old school coaches from the profession due to retirement is having a direct impact on how student-athletes perform on and off the field. All industries will continue to face these challenges as baby boomers retire. These coaches are the epitome of firm beliefs and integrity. They are the ones who understood the importance of how great leadership breeds loyalty and influences student-athletes to earn their degrees because of the belief that the student always comes before the athlete. The greatest thing about these coaches is that they could manage all of this while knowing that at the end of the day, collegiate sports is a business.

Many of these coaches weren't necessarily likable, but they were respected. They set standards and could not care less what others thought about them. They understood that coaching student-athletes is more than a job—it is a responsibility. They took that responsibility seriously because every athlete who came through the program was a direct reflection on the coach. Not only did they want championship caliber teams, they also wanted championship worthy athletes. They chased a complete win while building whole student-athletes.

Who is Coaching Student-Athletes Now?

While there aren't many old school coaches now, we do have coaches who care. There are hybrid coaches who employ both old school coaching tactics as well as the players' coach's tactics. A players' coach is one who wants to be liked and who is in the know of what's going on in the world of 18-21 year-olds. These coaches are respected in a totally different way, which in most cases, causes a problem when it comes to discipline.

These coaches cater to the student-athlete. They, too, play loud, generational music, choose the coolest uniforms to wear, use slogans and slang from music, or even allow student-athletes to wear earrings or full beards because all that matters is "W" on the field.

Student-Athletes look at these types of coaches as cool, but when it comes to respect, it's a long journey. Now don't get me wrong. This style of coaching works for some student-athletes by way of motivating and inspiring. However, I believe it's more of a handicap to the development of the overall person because of the lack of structure and discipline in the lives of the student-athlete as their minds are still being developed.

Student-athletes on sport scholarships are provided three meals per day, snacks, housing, clothes, shoes, and travel. They are even provided with *cost of attendance*, which in my opinion ruins it for a lot of athletes.

Imagine having every one of your needs met as a college student and then having someone give you an additional \$3,000 – \$5,000 per year that is disbursed monthly, each semester, or all at once. Instead of focusing on academics and their field of play, student-athletes are focused on when and how much money they will receive. In some cases, they don't even use the money, but rather they send it home to their parents.

So now the coaches and the student athletes are focused on a check instead of a win. They don't have to work hard because they have everything they need... for the next four years. From the student-athlete's perspective, they have everything they need RIGHT NOW. It is short sighted, but this is how an undeveloped mind works. Life, however, is so much more than what we need today or tomorrow. Why not help student-athletes play to win academically and in their field of play? The long-term results can last a life-time.

The old school, hybrid, or players' coach can make this happen with a sound program that involves values and integrity. Never try to be something you aren't or hide behind someone you're not. Be yourself and coach because you love the game and care about the well-being and development of each student-athlete.