

UGA professor's research shows black athletes exploited physically, neglected academically

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(PhysOrg.com) -- As the wildly popular National Collegiate Athletic Association basketball tournament tips off this week, University of Georgia professor Billy Hawkins says fans should consider several numbers that tell a lot about the current structure of intercollegiate athletics. And it is not a pretty picture.

Since football revenue comes through a separate deal with the Bowl Championship Series, 90 percent of the NCAA's revenue is generated from this tournament through an 11-year, \$6 billion contract with CBS, he said.

But this year, 19 percent of the 64 tournament teams have graduation rates below 40 percent, according to a study released Monday by the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at the University of Central Florida. Across 36 [sports](#) monitored by the NCAA, men's [basketball](#) has the lowest graduation rates, with less than two-thirds of players earning degrees.

These numbers support Hawkins' latest research showing that black [athletes](#) at predominately white NCAA institutions are often physically exploited while being neglected academically.

In his recently published book, *The New Plantation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), Hawkins, a professor of sport management and policy

in the College of Education's department of [kinesiology](#), uses the plantation model to present black male athletic experiences within a broader historical and [social context](#) of people in slavery.

“As we examine the structure of intercollegiate athletics, the athlete is not necessarily the property of the institutions, but the rights to athletes' labor and the profit off of their labor makes the plantation model appropriate in examining the experiences of black male athletes,” said Hawkins.

In 2008, the NCAA reported that the four-year graduation rates for black male athletes participating in football and basketball were 49 percent and 42 percent, respectively. These figures are considerably lower than those of their white teammates, even though black athletes make up the majority of the teams that generate revenue for these institutions.

Meanwhile, NCAA athletics have become increasingly profit-driven, with head coaches' salaries averaging \$950,000 and the highest reaching \$4 million. Commercialization of the programs—multibillion dollar TV contracts and multimillion dollar product endorsements—has triggered the hidden agendas of the institutions, which often leads to the exploitation of the athletes' talents and neglect of their minds, said Hawkins.

“Within this framework, where ‘winning is the only thing,’ academics will be given a ‘lower’ priority unless athletes take full responsibility in obtaining an education,” said Hawkins.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called on the NCAA to ban teams with [graduation rates](#) below 40 percent, in a March 17 Chronicle of Higher Education article.

If the secretary's' proposed cutoff were in place now, 12

teams—including No. 1 seed Kentucky—would be ineligible for this year’s tournament.

Within the current economic configuration, another area to consider is the contribution black male athletes are making toward Title IX sports: those sports that are added to meet gender equity requirements, which are played mostly by white women, he said.

Only 2.7 percent of women receiving scholarships to play all other sports at predominantly white colleges in Division I are black, according to data reported by The Chronicle of Higher Education in the early 2000s. Yet those are precisely the sports—golf, lacrosse and soccer, as well as rowing— that colleges have been adding to comply with Title IX.

“Since Title IX has provided very limited opportunity for black females but additional opportunities for white women to compete and black male athletes make up the greater percentage of the revenue-generating sports that contribute to athletic departments’ revenue, and thus their ability to support these additional sports, a recurring historical relationship between the white female and black male has been resurrected. I refer to this connection as the ‘Driving Miss Daisy’ syndrome,” said Hawkins.

Hawkins’ personal experiences as a black athlete provided him with a unique inside perspective and led him to study the relationship between black athletes and predominantly white institutions. He grew up the late 1960s and early ’70s in the small Southern town of Madison, Fla., where sports were a fundamental part of community life.

“During sporting events, our racially and economically segregated community temporarily transcended its racial and class differences and forged a sense of unity, a communal identity and a common enemy—the opposing team,” said Hawkins.

After serving in the military, Hawkins received a scholarship to play basketball at Webber College, where he began to perceive the incongruous relationship between black athletes and the institutions for which they played.

“In a sporting context black males can be esteemed and glorified, and outside of the arena, [they] are racially profiled and considered menaces to society,” he said.

He hopes his book will inform and help increase the educational success of black athletes by reducing academic neglect and athletic exploitation.

Reform of collegiate athletics should include structural changes in the current configuration of intercollegiate athletics such as evening the amount of time athletes must spend on academic demands versus athletic demands, said Hawkins.

Universities should also increase minority representation in coaching and administrations, as well as on student athlete advisory committees, increase compensation beyond the yearly athletic scholarships, and provide additional stipends to assist with living and travel expenses, he said.

Provided by University of Georgia

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