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I am submitting herewithin a dissertation written by Gerald R. Kaforey, Jr. entitled "The Young, The Restless, The Content: Early Entry in the NFL." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Patricia A. Beitel

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We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

THE YOUNG, THE RESTLESS, THE CONTENT:

EARLY ENTRY IN THE NFL

A Dissertation

Presented For The

Doctor Of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Gerald Richard Kaforey, Jr.

May, 1997

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Gerald and Judy Kaforey, whose love, support and many sacrifices made my dream come true. My parents have always been the cornerstone of my achievements. They allowed me to dream and believe in myself. They provided me with the vision to set goals and the strength to accomplish them through desire and hard work. Thank you Mom and Dad.

In addition to my parents, I also would like to dedicate this dissertation to my two loving sisters, Debbie and Suzanne, and their families: Scott, Matthew, Christian, and Caitland. Because of their constant encouragement and love, they made this journey a lot easier.

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ABSTRACT

Every year there has been an increase in the number of athletes in high school and college that are coming out early to make a living in professional sport. In some sports like baseball, basketball, and hockey, athletes are getting drafted right out of high school to play professional sport. The lure and the temptation of big contracts have played a major impact in some of the athletes' decisions in the past. For years football set itself apart from the rest of the professional leagues' in not enticing athletes into the pro game. Professional football not only discouraged young athletes from entering the draft, but set up rules and agreements with the NCAA to reinforce the importance of the athlete spending four or five years in college to mature. However, in 1989 Barry Sanders petitioned the NFL to allow him to enter his name in the draft because of "hardship" reasons. The NFL granted his request thus opening the doors for others to follow in Sanders' path. In 1990 the NFL agreed to allow all juniors to petition their right to enter the NFL draft due to legal proceedings that could have been costly to the NFL. Since the inception of the early entry petition 271 juniors have declared themselves eligible for the draft yet only 170 have been selected, thus creating an uncertainty in the mind of potential petitioners whether to stay in college or to try and leave early. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the factors that affect intercollegiate football player's decisions to enter the professional draft or to stay in school. Eight collegiate student-athletes were interviewed for this study based on their decision to leave early or to stay. Four participants decided to leave early and four participants decided to stay in college

and finish their degree. The results of the information from the transcripts suggest there were many factors that contributed to each athlete's decision. Confidence, relationships, pressure, and fear were the four themes that emerged from the transcripts which related to decision making. Each theme was discussed in terms of the factors that contributed to its strength. The ability to draw upon past experiences in life and make important decisions with self-assurance emerged within the confidence theme . Associated with the themes of relationships and pressure, were some participants' desires for wanting a professional sport career and the opportunities it could provide. The athletes who stayed in college believed getting an education was more important to them and to their families. The four participants who stayed agreed that receiving a degree would be more important to them in the future, and that the NFL could wait one more year. In the theme concerning fear, losing money and marketability due to injury was a concern for the participants who left early. And for those participants who stayed, wanting to remain and finish something they had started was more important than an NFL career. All participants believed maturity was a valuable factor in deciding whether to enter the professional draft or to stay in college. However, each participant made their decision without outside influences, claimed ownership to their decision, and made their decision without regret. Implications for future research, athletes, support persons, and sport-related personnel are provided.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It's April and for most people in society it's just the fourth month of the current year. However, if you are a college football player it could be the most memorable, or the most dreadful time of your young life. Every third week of April, many athletic dreams are fulfilled and many go by the wayside. This particular Saturday was no different; NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue calmly walked to the podium and announced that the Cincinnati Bengals had selected Ki-Jana Carter of Penn State with the first pick of the draft. Carter was an underclassman, just one of twelve that would be selected in the first round. For players such as Brandell Jackson, a junior running back from Baylor, it was a nightmare. Tim Layden (1995) described Jackson's experience of receiving phone calls from two professional teams wanting to know his whereabouts during the draft days, but two days later there were no phone calls. Jackson replied, "By the end, it was killing me."

In the 1995 professional football draft, 12 of the first 32 draft picks were underclassmen, a remarkable 37.5 percent. The average age was 21 years, and the ages ranged from 20 to 24 years. The average age of the entire 32 players was 22 years. In previous years some athletes were 19 years of age just turning 20, thus demonstrating the youth of the athletes coming out early. In the 1995 professional basketball draft, the Minnesota Timberwolves of the National Basketball Association selected an eighteen year old player directly out of high school. In contrast to football, baseball and hockey

have consistently held amateur drafts allowing high school players to play professional sport. The implications surrounding the participation of these precocious athletes playing in professional sport has received little attention.

In 1996, the NFL draft was no different from previous years. Forty-seven underclassmen petitioned for early entry into the NFL. The days prior to the draft are times of stress, trepidation, and long hours of training and trying to prove your value to the many NFL scouts. The 1996 draft was again held in April and lasted two days with 244 selections. As a result, 21 of the 47 underclassmen who petitioned were drafted, a 44% ratio. Of the 21 selected, eight were drafted in the first round, and three were drafted in the second round.

For 21 people, dreams of playing in the NFL were realized, and for the rest, the only hope they have of playing professional football is to sign a free-agent contract with an NFL team, or play professional football in another league. If those options do not materialize, they may choose to finish their college degree, without the benefits of an athletic scholarship, or find a different career.

Since Barry Sanders, All-Pro running back for the Detroit Lions, led the way six years ago, 224 underclassmen have declared themselves eligible for the NFL draft. Of those, 149 have been drafted (66%), and just 28 have been selected in the top ten positions of the first round (Layden, 1995). Layden (1995) has remarked that, "those who have entered the draft early have proved to be a fabulously unreliable lot, rich with Hall of Fame material at the very top but bloated with misguided hopes through the ranks" (p.

106).

For many players, early entry into the draft is not an opportunity but an escape from the turmoil of college. Hate the coaching staff? Flunking out of school? Declare yourself eligible for the draft. Unfortunately, such a decision may be more damaging to a player than remaining with their college team. If a player is good, he believes he can play in the NFL. However, many can't. The result is a generation of disillusioned athletes, without eligibility, without a degree, without a job, and steadfastly convinced that someone in the NFL made a mistake.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the factors that affect intercollegiate football players' decisions to enter the professional draft or to stay in school. The college athlete is faced with many important decisions during their athletic career. One critical decision that elite football athletes face is dealing with when they should enter the professional draft. As a junior in college, athletes have the right to enter the professional draft, thus foregoing their athletic eligibility. This research was conducted in an attempt to gain insight into the experiences of those junior athletes who either made the decision to enter the professional draft or decided to stay and compete at the college level in their final year of eligibility. To achieve this purpose a qualitative methodology was utilized.

Definitions

The following terms are defined to provide a better understanding of the literature which presents the theoretical framework for this research.

Decision Making: The process of selecting an alternative from among many choices to achieve a desired end (Chelladuri, 1993).

Eligibility: The number of years the athlete has to complete their athletic scholarship.

Factors: Any of the conditions that bring about a result (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1987, p. 220).

Generalizability: The ability for the reader to evaluate findings and apply them to their own situation (Locke, 1989).

Intercollegiate Player: Division I-A NCAA football player who is athletically of junior eligibility.

Interviews: A technique used to gain insight into another person's experience (Kvale, 1983).

NFL Draft: A selection process where collegiate athletes are chosen by an NFL team to play for them. The 1996 draft was held in the third week in April, and there were 244 selections.

a. Combines: Organized evaluation sessions in which collegiate football players are invited to a designated location where they perform and are rated by NFL teams on various measures such as the, 40-yard dash, strength, vertical jump, quickness, and intelligence. The combines are held in February, prior to the NFL draft.

b. Sleepers: Unknown players who perform well at the combines, or less talked about players who get drafted in the lower rounds of the NFL draft and perform well for their NFL team.

c. Busts: Players who are rated high by the NFL and get drafted in the first round, but do not perform to their potential or perform poorly in the professional ranks.

Phenomenology: A psychological discipline that seeks to explicate the essence, structure, or form of both the human experience and human behavior as revealed through essentially descriptive techniques including disciplined reflection (Valle & Halling, 1989 p. 6).

Qualitative Research: The process of gathering data in the natural setting through methods such as case studies, ethnography, and narrative reports (Thomas & Nelson, 1990).

Theme Redundancy: The replication of data elicited by qualitative interviewing.

Triangulation: The use of multiple sources of data to substantiate a researcher's conclusion (Thomas & Nelson, 1990).

Validity: "Truth," an accurate representation of a social phenomena (Silverman, 1993).

a. External: Refers to the extent to which scientific observations and measurements are authentic representations of some reality (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

b. Internal: Refers to the degree to which such representations can be compared legitimately across groups (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions were made for this study:

1. The intercollegiate athletes who participated in this study were able to articulate their experiences relating to decision making.

2. The interview was a valid method of eliciting information about subjective experiences.

3. The time period allowed for retrospection provided more valuable information to the body of knowledge.

4. The participants in this study honestly reported their feelings, cognitive processes, and perceptions concerning their experience.

Scope of the Study

Qualitative research involves the adoption of a point of view that seeks insight into the meaning of the subject matter rather than a passive accumulation of pertinent facts. The explication of meaning involves expansive amounts of interpretive thinking, and in the case of human experiences, reflection.

This was a qualitative research study. Therefore, the results are not generalizable to the total population. The generalizability, or widespread application of qualitative research is limited because of its intense and specific focus. Thus, generalizing is left to those individuals who can transfer the findings to their own personal situation.

It is appropriate to remember that this was a study of a small group of individuals, with the desire to present as much insight into their subjective experience as possible.

The objective of this qualitative study was to enrich and expand the body of knowledge, and allow the readers to make their own generalizations.

Significance of the Study

In the realm of sport, decisions are made daily by athletes. These decisions may have an immediate impact in the life of the athlete, or may not affect them until later. At times, decisions are made with considerable deliberation. At other times, such as during a sport event, decisions may require an immediate psychomotor response. At a very young age, athletes are encouraged to make decisions that affect their lives by choosing a university that meets their needs. Thereafter, they continue to make important decisions that will affect their lives athletically, personally, and financially. One of those decisions is whether to enter the professional draft as a junior, an early entree, or to stay in school for their final year of eligibility. This is not an easy decision and many athletes struggle to find the right answer for themselves. Unfortunately, extraneous influences enter the decision-making equation, thereby making the decision more difficult.

The significance of this study, and other studies like it, is that it may provide insight into the decision-making process. This study is directed to future athletes who may find themselves sharing a similar experience, as well as to coaches and sport psychology consultants. Concomitantly, this study may provide valuable information to the families, friends, and institutions in the life of the young athlete.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sport and decision making are salient topics that have been discussed in research to explain human behavior in social settings, and in laboratory settings. Much of the research has concentrated on areas of skill acquisition and the time it takes to process information and make a decision. However, the purpose of this study was to gain insight into the factors that affect athlete's decisions to enter the professional draft or to stay in school. The existing literature contains limited information about decision making and how certain factors affect the decision-making process.

In this chapter a review of the literature and research pertinent to the purpose of this study is presented. The topical areas covered include: (a) the history of the NFL draft, (b) specific court cases in the NCAA, (c) a review of past juniors who decided to leave early, (d) sociology of sport, (e) decision making, and (d) the rationale for selection and development of methodology.

History of the NFL Draft

In 1982, Christi and Langenkamp, both sport writers for the Green Bay Press-Gazette, wrote a book on the behind- the- scenes story of the National Football League (NFL) draft. In their book they discussed everything that occurs from draft day to the combines, from the senior bowl to the "sleepers" and "busts," and the history of the draft.

The NFL draft was the brain child of Bert Bell, one of the league's most famous

pioneers. Long before Bert Bell became commissioner of the NFL, he was owner of the financially beleaguered Philadelphia Eagles. During the depression era, the New York Giants and Chicago Bears dominated the league with superior players on the field, and superior management. Both teams, along with the Green Bay Packers forged a powerful triumvirate that ruled the NFL. Frustrated by the prospects of another losing season, Bell devised a plan to inaugurate an annual draft with the weaker teams picking first. When the league owners met in May 1935, Bell presented his plan and it was greeted with a great deal of support and enthusiasm (Christi & Langenkamp, 1982).

The first draft, which was held on February 8, 1936 at the Philadelphia Ritz Carlton, was no more than a gathering of a few old friends who loved football. Those owners present included notables such as Bert Bell, George Preston Marshall, George Halas, Art Rooney, Curly Lambeau, and Tim Mara, along with a few others. These men agreed they had to formulate an equitable system of distributing college talent. The plan was that each team drafted five players from a list, thus putting a stop on bidding wars between players and owners. At times the bidding wars skyrocketed to an astronomical sum of $175 per game, up to $1,000 that 1935 Heisman Trophy winner Jay Berwanger sought, but never received (Christi & Langenkamp, 1982).

Years after the inception of the draft, the talent identification process was still in the beginning stages. There were no scouts, no combines, and the only information teams relied on came from magazines and newspapers. About the only scouting done involved sending assistant coaches to college games, or obtaining information from

players who came from prominent schools with large numbers of alumni. Thus, scouting and draft selection remained unsophisticated until the end of World War II. During the first decade of the NFL draft, player selection was very tentative, and mired in guesswork.

The following decades produced more sophisticated means of scouting talent and determining whether a college player was going to be a star or bust. But everything was not always glorious. The 1960's produced the infamous wars between the stable NFL and the upstart American Football League (AFL). It was during the beginning years, that the AFL cut deep inroads into the talent previously monopolized by the NFL (Christi & Langenkamp, 1982). Until the AFL, the NFL was in a tranquil period where salaries were reasonable and television was beginning to recognize the rise of football in the American culture. But, in 1959, the battle lines were drawn and the tranquility that the NFL had experienced quickly dissipated. For six long years the war lasted between the two leagues. The AFL, at the start, had only eight teams and drafted anyone they could. Because of the need for stars, AFL teams were willing to pay top dollar to get college players to play in their new league. If this meant exposing the NFL and their unscrupulous methods, it was done. Christi and Langenkamp (1982) suggest that while the AFL remained a decided underdog, it had certain weapons the NFL did not have. The AFL marketed exposure, instant seniority, and the fact that they had only eight teams. In addition, the AFL had the resources to draft more players.

The relations between the two leagues would remain strained until the merger.

Until then they were involved in constant battles trying to outdo each other, or trying to gain the advantage. The wars got so ugly that it started to affect the relationship of professional football with the NCAA. Rules were established regarding the drafting of college players while still in season, but as quickly as the rules were established, they were broken. It was not until the first common draft in 1967 that the fiery competitiveness between the two leagues was dissipated. Christi and Langenkamp (1982) have concluded that the modern era of professional football has produced many significant memories and many paths that have produced a winning tradition. This era showed, above all else, that the draft was a nebulous thing that can take many shapes and forms. And, when draft day is completed, there are teams who will have drafted sleepers, busts, and franchise makers.

The Courts and the NCAA

In 1990, the NFL, threatened by the possibility of legal attack, agreed to permit third year college juniors to enter the draft. While the NFL had made specific exemptions for cases of extreme hardship, such as Barry Sanders, the league now opened its doors to all juniors as long as they renounced their remaining year of collegiate football eligibility. Under the NCAA Bylaws, once a student-athlete puts his name on a professional draft list, that player loses all remaining collegiate eligibility for that particular sport. Similarly, if a student-athlete consents orally, or in writing to be represented by an agent, that player loses all remaining eligibility (McCarthy & Kettle, 1993). By opening up the gates of its draft, along with the successes of early entry

players like Barry Sanders, Junior Seau, and Mark Carrier, the NFL has increased the attraction for other players to come out early. However, this attraction does not increase the player's chances of being drafted by a professional team, nor does it increase his chances of making a career in professional sport.

Prior to 1990, the NFL had in place what it called the four-or-five year rule, whereby an athlete could not be drafted by an NFL team unless one of three requirements were met. Specifically, a prospective player must have: (a) exhausted their eligibility for college football, (b) had five years pass since the player first attended an institution of higher education, and (c) received a baccalaureate degree from an institution of higher education. This rule was initially enacted to provide for competitive balance among the NFL teams, to encourage college players to complete their education, and to provide safety considerations for players who were not yet fully matured (McCarthy & Kettle, 1993). The NFL's contention was,

> What the league has sought to avoid is a policy whereunder its clubs engage in the efforts to induce college players to abandon both their education and their college careers for little more than a shot at making an NFL squad. The educational opportunities offered by college football scholarships should not be dismissed lightly. Professional football rarely makes possible more than a temporary career (McCarthy & Kettle, 1993, p. 623).

It should be noted that this rule did not bar athletes from entering the professional arena. Rather, it gave them other options to pursue.

Two landmark federal cases, *Banks vs NCAA,* and *Gaines vs NCAA*, addressed the issue of whether the NCAA requirements violated the Sherman Act. Farnsworth

(1982) offers a description of the Sherman Act, and of these two federal cases. Excerpts from Farnsworth's work are provided in the following sections.

Sherman Act

The notion that each person should be free in his trade or undertakings took root during medieval times (Farnsworth, 1982). Initially, all contracts in restraint of trade were considered to be injurious to the public as well as to the individuals who made them. The courts found such restraints to be unlawful and voidable, without regard to the surrounding circumstances. In 1890, Congress passed what is known as the Sherman Act. Read literally, this statute prohibits every contract, combination, or conspiracy in restraint of trade. The courts, however, have been reluctant to apply the literal meaning of the Sherman Act and, as a direct result, two interpretations have developed. The first, the Supreme Court has stated that it should be construed in light of reason and, as such, it only prohibits unreasonable restraints of trade. In the second, the Supreme Court ruled that,

> Certain agreements or practices which, because of their pernicious effect on completion and lack of any redeeming virtue are conclusively presumed to be unreasonable and therefore illegal without elaborate inquiry as to the precise harm they have caused, or the business excuse for their use (Farnsworth, 1982, p. 608).

The Sherman Act suggests the punishment of certain activities which restrain interstate trade or commerce such as monopolies, attempts to monopolize, or conspiracy with another to monopolize. The following three elements must be present for an activity to be punishable under the Sherman Act. First, it must be shown that the activity alleged to

have a restraining effect on interstate trade of commerce, in fact does have that effect. Second, it must be shown that the activity is in fact an unreasonable restraint. Third, it must be shown that the activity is not exempt from antitrust laws.

Banks v. NCAA

Braxton Lee Banks attended and participated in football at the University of Notre Dame from 1987 to 1989. Following the 1989 college football season, Banks declared himself eligible for the 1990 NFL draft, with a year remaining of college eligibility. By applying for the NFL draft, Braxton Banks forfeited his final year playing for Notre Dame (McCarthy & Kettle, 1993).

Banks played in all eleven games as a true freshman at Notre Dame, and started in five games. In his sophomore year he injured his knee and played in only seven games. His knee injury limited his playing time the following year and he played in only seven games. At the end of his junior season, Banks decided to take a medical redshirt year to help recover his knee fully. At the end of his medical redshirt year, Banks decided that he would enter his name into the professional draft (Ross, 1992 ; McCarthy & Kettle, 1993).

Unsure about the condition of his knee and the reactions of the NFL teams, Banks sought assurance from a scouting service that rated him as a potential player to be drafted by an NFL team. After entering his name in the draft, Banks contacted Everett Glenn, a sport attorney, and had Glenn market his services to NFL teams. Although no money was exchanged in either direction, by agreeing to have Glenn market his services to NFL

teams, Banks violated the NCAA "no agent rule." General Rule 12.3.1 states that

> An individual shall be ineligible for participation in an inter collegiate sport if he or she has ever agreed (orally or in writing) to be represented by an agent for the purposes of marketing his or her athletic ability or reputation in that sport. Further, an agency contract not specifically limited in writing to a sport or particular sports shall be deemed applicable to all sports and the individual shall be ineligible to participate in any sport (NCAA Manual, 1995, p. 74; McCarthy & Kettle, 1993, p. 295).

In anticipation of the NFL draft, Banks was invited to an NFL combine in Indianapolis where his performance was disappointing. As feared, many teams shied away from him and he went undrafted. Free to negotiate with any team, only the Pittsburgh Steelers gave him a tryout, but they released him prior to the season. Banks who graduated from Notre Dame in the summer of 1990 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, decided to challenge both the NCAA's "no draft" and "no agent" rule in an attempt to have his college eligibility reinstated. In other words, Banks filed suit for preliminary injunction to allow him to play college football in 1990. In his lawsuit, Banks' attorney theorized that the NCAA Bylaws violated separate sections of the Sherman Act (Ross, 1992 ; McCarthy & Kettle, 1993).

In Banks v. NCAA, the district court assumed that the Sherman Act applied. The court found that the NCAA demonstrated significant procompetitive effects and purposes for the issues that were challenged. Furthermore, the courts found that Banks was unable to show a reasonable likelihood of demonstrating either a greater anticompetitive effect or a significant harm to consumer welfare. Therefore, his claim failed to demonstrate that the "no agent" and "no draft" bylaws of the NCAA violated the Sherman Act, and

the court denied Bank's application for injunctive relief (Ross, 1992; McCarthy & Kettle, 1993). Banks, who was disappointed with the decision said, "I'm resigned to the fact that my life will now go on without football" (Reynolds, 1990, p. 8).

Gaines v. NCAA

Bradford Gaines' story paralleled that of Braxton Banks' perfectly, except that Gaines played at State U. University, rather than for a powerhouse program like Notre Dame. Gaines, like Banks, declared himself eligible for the 1990 NFL draft and had an agent market his services. Like Banks, Gaines neither received nor paid money for his agent's services. However, both Banks and Gaines violated the "no agent" and "no draft" rule established by the NCAA. Gaines was not drafted nor did he sign with an NFL team as a free agent. Following the NCAA's refusal to reinstate him, Gaines contacted a lawyer and filed a suit seeking injunctive relief. Gaines contended that the Bylaws of the NCAA violated Section 2 of the Sherman Act.

For Gaines, the district court held that the Sherman Act did not apply to NCAA Bylaws which regulated noneconomic activities such as athletic eligibility. Furthermore, the court held that if the Act did apply, the NCAA maintained a legitimate-business justification for the Bylaws at issue because the goal of the eligibility rules was to preserve amateurism (McCarthy & Kettle, 1993).

The Bank's and Gaines' decisions left unanswered the questions concerning whether the courts may limit the NCAA's regulation of college athletes. In both the Bank's and Gaines' cases, the courts categorized the NCAA eligibility rules as

noncommercial. While the decisions of the court proved similar, the results were rendered for different reasons. In the Bank's decision, the court found that the Sherman Act applied to the NCAA eligibility rules promoting amateurism. Accordingly, it was not exempt from antitrust scrutiny. The NCAA's eligibility regulations have an anticompetitive effect upon college and professional markets. Specifically, the "no draft" rule prohibits athletes from testing the waters. The courts reasoned that the "no agent" and "no draft" rules preserve amateurism and promote education. In addition, the courts found that demanding amateur status among college athletes increases the quality and marketability of all college programs. In the Gaines' decision, it was concluded that the NCAA regulations of noncommercial activities are exempt from antitrust scrutiny. The antitrust laws applied to commercial objectives such as the broadcasting and the promotion of college football. However, it was ruled that the goal of the NCAA was to promote education and amateurism, and to meet this goal the two rules were implemented to prevent the commercialism of college athletes (McCarthy & Kettle, 1993).

In conclusion, it was reasoned that if the antitrust laws do apply, the eligibility rules maintain immunity from the Sherman Act. From a legal standpoint, the pursuit of education and amateurism outweigh any anticompetitive effects of regulations. The courts' decision established a precedent for the "no draft" and "no agent" rules (McCarthy & Kettle, 1993).

Coming out Party

In 1982, Herschel Walker played his first year for the University of Georgia and was "all world." Prior to his senior year at Georgia he set the NCAA freshman rushing record of 1616 yards, finished third in the Heisman Trophy voting, and was the first freshman to be voted a consensus All-American in this century. During his sophomore year, Walker rushed for more than 1,900 yards, scored 22 touchdowns, and again was named to the All-American team. In his junior year, Walker's achievement were equally impressive and he was awarded the Heisman Trophy. At the end of his junior year, NFL agents and scouts listed Walker as the number one player in the country, making the lure to the NFL for him overwhelming. However, because of the NFL's four or five year rule, Herschel Walker was unable to enter his name in the professional draft without legal proceedings (Prugh, 1983; Farnsworth, 1982). Enter the newly formed United States Football League (USFL) which had no rules of eligibility and which sought the best players in the country to play for their teams. With owners like Donald Trump, teams in the USFL were willing to give million dollar contracts to players who would provide talent and be an attraction to the fans. Herschel Walker was one such player and attraction. Because the four or five year rule was not in place, and there was no verbal agreement with the NFL, or the NCAA, it was an easy decision for Herschel to forfeit his final year of college eligibility and sign with the USFL. The signing of Herschel Walker paved the way for others to come out early, use the league to gain high salaries, and perhaps create a path to the NFL (Looney, 1985; Prugh, 1983).

Shortly thereafter, because of the mismanagement of funds, large salaries, and the lack of talent, the USFL folded. The NFL quickly bought the rights of those players with talent and signed them to a contract. Those players who did not have the talent to play in the NFL, probably wondered what happened. Herschel Walker, the most talented player in the USFL, was signed by the Dallas Cowboys (Prugh, 1983).

In the modern-day era of college football, Herschel Walker became the first college football player to leave after his junior year, his third year in college, and enter the professional draft. Although he did not initially play in the NFL, his career paved the way for other juniors who would later come out early.

The first third-year junior to come out early under the existing NFL four or five year rule was Barry Sanders. While other players had attempted to leave early, they met the criteria of the four or five year rule and failed. William Nack, an editor for Sports Illustrated, wrote the story and events leading up to Sanders' decision in 1989. Barry Sanders was a junior running back at Oklahoma State University and the 1988 Heisman Trophy winner. During his junior year, he rushed for more yards (2,628) and scored more touchdowns (39) in a single season than had any player in NCAA history. After weeks of deliberation, and constant battles with his father, Sanders drove to Denver and announced his decision.

> I've come to the conclusion that it would be in my best interests and my family's best interests to renounce my last year of eligibility and pursue a career in professional football. This decision was based in part upon the financial hardship that my family and I are faced with, and I just wanted to relieve some of those

pressures (Nack, 1989, p.24).

Money was not the only factor that contributed to Barry's decision to leave early. In January, Oklahoma State was placed on NCAA probation, the whole starting offensive line was graduating, and Sanders had encountered academic problems because of the Heisman trophy hoopla. He stated that he was still trying to finish exams from his first semester. But the major factor, or distraction, came from his fathers' relentless pressure for his son to leave the school he believed was just out to make money from him. In fact, Sanders' father, William, was quoted as saying this about Pat Jones the head football coach, "If Pat Jones thought anything about Barry Sanders, he would escort him out of that school and back to Wichita, because he knows that all Barry can do is hurt his stock by going back another year" (Nack, 1989, p. 31).

Weeks prior to his son's decision, William had a men-only family meeting to discuss Barry's future. William came from all directions, most of the time angrily. He told Barry to get his *ass* away from that school because they did not care about him, and he asked him if he wanted to be a professional football player. William importuned his son to act now, not next year, and to start thinking about what was best for Barry and his family. William also implored Barry to hire a black agent and to grab some signing bonus money so that he and his sons could start their own business. William's main argument was money. He told Barry that with a stroke of a pen the family could have money for generations to come.

The Sanders' women held a more conservative viewpoint and encouraged Barry

to stay in school and finish his education. Now it became obvious why the women were not invited to the men-only meeting. William believed his wife and daughters would influence Barry enough to stay in school. In fact, William attacked all suggestions that his son should stay and not leave. When William asked his youngest daughter, Krista , her opinion, she said, "Money's not the most important factor to Barry." William harshly replied, "If money is not an important factor, he shouldn't go to college. You go to college to get a good job and make a decent living. That's the purpose of going" (Nack, 1989, p. 31). William then sarcastically commented that his family was afraid of having money and that they enjoyed being broke. Barry's sister Lynn, 15, said, "But it's Barry's money, not ours. You're trying to influence him too much."

In the end, Sanders decided to turn pro, and his father got want he wanted. Barry hired two black agents, signed a million dollar contract with a large signing bonus and William and his sons opened a family business (Nack, 1989). It is important to remember that Barry Sanders is a rare athlete, and for every Barry Sanders there are at least eight to ten Braxton Banks and Bradford Gaines.

The month and year was February 1990, and the NFL had just announced it would allow college players with eligibility left to enter their name in the professional draft. One of those players was Keith McCants from the University of Alabama. McCants, a third year junior, headed a group of thirty-eight juniors who decided to leave early that particular year (Hoffer, 1990). According to McCants, who grew up poor in Orange

Grove, Alabama, he decided to turn pro for one simple reason, he wanted to. In addition to that, McCants was going to make millions of dollars in contracts and signing bonuses. Because of McCants' decision, many feathers inside the professional arena as well as the NCAA were ruffled. Hoffer (1990) was concerned about where the blame should be placed. Should it be directed at the NFL who wants the best talent, or should it be directed at the colleges and college coaches for not being able to keep their players? Try telling a kid who sees greener pastures that staying in college is the best thing for them to do. McCants stated, "Don't you go to college so you can get a good job. And isn't a job with a nearly $700,000 a year starting salary, by definition a good job...especially if it's something you dreamed of doing" (Hoffer, 1990, p. 43)?

According to Telander (1990), the NFL was very leery of underclassmen making the giant leap of faith to the next level. Professional coaches agreed that these young athletes may not be mature enough to handle the pressure and expectations NFL teams place on their players, especially if the player is drafted in the first few rounds. But the agents on the other hand, pump these athletes full of false hope regarding how good they are, and how much money they will make by coming out early.

In 1990, 11 of the 38 juniors who entered the professional draft went in the first two rounds, but only seven were taken in the last ten rounds. Two conclusions emerged from this draft: (a) the best players will always be picked high, whether they're seniors or juniors; and (b) petitioning for early entry is a very risky business for marginal juniors. Even though leaving school paid off for five juniors who were selected in the first seven

selections, it did not pay off for the rest. Twenty juniors, just more than half, had their dreams taken away from them and, without the option of going back to school to play collegiate football and having their education paid for, this was a serious gamble.

Two years had passed when the NFL announced that juniors would be eligible to enter their name in the professional draft. Sports Illustrated editor, Rick Telander, suggested that for years there was a gentlemen's agreement that the NFL would not draft underclassmen. In return, the colleges were expected to develop these players for four years and then let the NFL poke, probe, weigh, time, and measure them for the upcoming draft (Telander, 1992).

The system worked reasonably well for 54 years except for one glitch, no one expected these underclassmen would challenge for their rights and that their skills would be coveted by the pros (Telander, 1992). When the NFL made their announcement, two things were expected to happen, half-witted juniors and sophomores would swarm to petition for early entry and chaos would run rampant in Division I football programs. However, since the inception of early entry in the NFL, and through the 1992 season, only 105 underclassmen have petitioned for the draft. Of these, only 62 were drafted, and not all of them made their respective teams. The myth that underclass athletes are not ready was dispelled when players like Emmitt Smith, Junior Seau, and Mark Carrier were drafted and became overnight successes. According to Telander (1992), the NFL is about talent and not age or grades. The bottom line is what these players can do athletically to help their team reach the Super Bowl and win. If there is any unfairness, it

lies on the shoulders of the NCAA's refusal to allow undrafted players to reenter college. For those who decry underclassmen leaving early should be reminded that people attend college to land a job, it's just that the jobs these athletes are taking pay millions of dollars (Telander, 1992).

Since 1990, when the first junior players entered the professional draft, a total of 271 juniors have declared themselves eligible, 170 were drafted (62%), including 34(20%) in the top ten selections. The 170 juniors selected in the seven drafts, does not include those who did not make the team nor does it reflect the number of free-agents. The numbers do suggest that juniors will continue to be a mainstay in future drafts and that it is risky for them to come out early.

Sociology of Sport

The sociology of sport represents an application of sociological concepts, theories, and principles to sporting contexts. Sport sociologists attempt to describe, explain, and analyze sport as part of the social order. The sociological perspective of society is a special form of consciousness that sometimes makes us strangers in a familiar world (Leonard, 1993). This vantage point allows us to see things that appear familiar and to provide us with a new perspective.

Most people would agree that sport is a reflection of society. What this means is that sport often acts as a microcosm of the society in which it is embedded. Sport is an institution that provides a means to examine values, socialization, stratification, and a number of structures and processes that exist at the sociological level. The types of

games people play, the rules they establish, and the participants that play these games, all make up this system of sport. In the following pages two main topics will be discussed, children in sport and social mobility.

Children in Sport

Today, the number of children entering competitive sport is dramatically increasing. There are approximately 2.5 million children (ages 8-12) playing in Little League Baseball alone. Adding other organized competitive sports such as basketball, ballet, football, gymnastics, soccer, and softball for both boys and girls, this figure is dramatically compounded (Kaforey & McKnight, 1996). Competitive youth programs offer children ways to develop skills and fitness, make new friends, experience thrill and excitement, and develop psychological characteristics such as positive self-esteem and stress-coping strategies (Weiss & Petlichkoff, 1989).

According to Werner (1991) competitive youth programs are becoming more elaborate and are enlisting younger participants each year. There is a well organized outlet for any child who wants to participate, or who has any interest in sport. Parents enroll their children in age-group programs like baseball, football, gymnastics, and many more, just to give them a start in sport (Werner, 1991). The major forces behind the creation of these programs have been parents and laypersons, while educators and psychologists have been skeptical about the positive outcomes of early sport experiences. Unfortunately, when dealing with many different people, with different objectives, the outcome is not always positive.

Mantel and Vander Velden (1974) discussed the professionalization of sport with adolescent sport competitors. They discovered a relationship between the age of the participant and the value placed on winning and success, compared to the value placed on fair play. Younger competitors seemed to find value in fair play, whereas older competitors placed a higher value on winning (Mantel & Vander Velden, 1974).

Winning, for most, is more satisfying than losing and typically is the immediate goal of most coaches and teams in sport contests. Winning is viewed as the primary reason for athletic participation and developing motor skills is secondary. When sports become highly organized under adult supervision, winning championships is what is expected. The evil usually begins with adults who place too much value on winning and then want to live their dreams vicariously through their children, and in doing so, pervert the normal experience of the game (Michener, 1976; Kaforey & McKnight, 1996). When winning becomes more important than the game, the children with lesser skills tend to suffer the most. They receive less attention from coaches and players, they get chastised for making mistakes, and are placed in positions that are commonly away from the action of the game. Playing sport for fun is overshadowed by the negative experience they have, thus creating a negative self-evaluation.

Winning is viewed negatively, because that is all people focus on. However, this does not need to be the case. In one sense, the lessons of life are replete with victories as well as defeats (Leonard, 1993). Leonard (1993) has suggested that children need to learn to enjoy the processes of sport participation and the mastery of skills like running,

jumping, throwing, hitting, and kicking. Children's abilities to perform these motor skills depend on their level of social, physical, and intellectual development. Children that mature quicker excel in these activities, while those who mature later are often characterized and labeled "nonathletic." As a consequence, some children fail to learn to enjoy sports, and later in life, they become angered spectators or sport misanthropes (Orlick & Botterill, 1979; Marten, 1980; Leonard, 1993).

It is unfair to criticize sports without reporting the values they have in society. Margenau (1990) has listed seven important values that come from youth participation in sport. His book was written for parents, coaches, and athletes in order to enhance their intrinsic awareness of sport. According to Margenau, sport participation: (a) helps a child's overall physical development, (b) gives the child the opportunity to become familiar with his/her body and to learn the body's needs and limitations, (c) is social as well as physical and thus teaches young athletes how to interact with his/her peers, (d) teaches cooperation, teamwork, and how to follow rules, (e) helps the child learn for him/herself if winning or losing is important, (f) gives parents the opportunity of offering the child unqualified support, and (g) helps the child gain acceptance and credibility among his/her peers (Margenau, 1990).

In addition to understanding the positive and negative effects sport offers children who participate, it is important to understand why children get involved in sport. It is also important to understand the differences between races regarding attitudes toward

sport participation. Kenyon and Grogg (1970) studied antecedent factors that were important to the socialization of athletes. The outcome of the study produced two significant results. Of the many possible socializing agents such as parents, educators, coaches, and counselor, parents emerged as the most significant socializing agent, and the impact of their influence occurred later in life at the high school and college levels. The second significant result was that the influence of these agents varied across sports during their pre-high school years (Kenyon & Grogg, 1970).

Not surprisingly, adolescent and adult participation contributes to early childhood successes in sport. The longer participants play and have fun within the experience, the more they value the success that follows. This in turn leads to the continuation in that particular sport, as well as in other sports. The Miller Lite Report (1983) suggested that 62% of children, in their sample population participated in youth programs, 75% of the parents encouraged their children to engage in sports, and only 6% encouraged their children to spend less time playing sport. These results, as compared to those studied from the mid 1990's, demonstrated the influence parents have in encouraging their children to play sports, and the magnitude of the influx of children into sport.

Children tend to emulate and adopt the values of their parents. When parents reward their children for their acquisition of motor skill and development, they promote the socialization of children into sport. Parental influence appears to occur when the parents themselves have participated in sport and, as a result, encourages youth participation. When these influences are positive, then the influence becomes more

productive and also positive. Parker (1989) has suggested that, when parents themselves have engaged in sport, this in turn influences their children to participate in sport. She suggests that parents are the most salient social agents in encouraging children's participation, but this does not guarantee sustained participation. Many other factors such as fun, and positive experiences help maintain a child's involvement (Parker, 1989).

Although parents have received much attention for their contributions to the child's involvement in sport, little is known about the specific contribution each parent makes. In an early article by Snyder and Spreitzer (1973), they suggested that parental sport interests, particularly those of the father, positively correlated with sport involvement for both male and female children. Moreover, opposite sex parents influenced children more in academics, whereas same sex parents influenced children in sport (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1973). Lewko and Greendorfer (1994) found similar results suggesting that same-sex parents have a greater influence on their children's sport involvement than do opposite-sex parents. They also suggested that fathers' sport interests were more strongly related to both male and female children's involvement than were mothers' interests (Lewko & Greendorfer, 1994).

In a paper presented at the North American Sociology of Sport Society, Sailes (1985) discussed sport socialization across gender and race. He suggested that there is a difference across ethnic minority groups, especially African-Americans regarding sport socialization. Moreover, he found that white athletes were influenced to a greater degree by their parents, whereas, African-American athletes were more influenced by others

outside the family, such as friends and people in the community. These findings are congruent with the findings of Harris (1994) suggesting that African-Americans receive encouragement to participate in sport from those in the larger black community or other socializing agents, rather than from those in the family. Sailes (1985) also suggested that sport opportunities were more available to whites than to African-Americans, but that African-Americans showed a greater interest in sport and had predominately black role models. This view is consistent with Brower's (1974) role model hypothesis. Brower interviewed 23 white and 20 black athletes and found that 90% of the black athletes had exclusively black role models, whereas white athletes had role models from both races.

Although millions of children are participating in youth sport programs, and are influenced by many different people, the research suggests that by the time they are 13 years old, one third will drop out (May, 1994; Eitzen & Sage, 1997). According to May (1994) and Eitzen & Sage (1997) 70% of children drop out of organized sport by the age of 13 years for various reasons. These reasons include lack of playing time, poor officiating, and threat of being chastised by parents and coaches (May, 1994; Eitzen & Sage, 1997). Comparable to these findings, Lumpkin, Stoll, & Bellar (1994) reported that children discontinued sport involvement for the following 10 reasons: (a) lost interest, (b) were not having fun, (c) it took too much time, (d) the coach was a poor teacher, (e) too much pressure, (f) they wanted a nonsport activity, (g) they were tired of it, (h) they needed more study time, (I) the coach played favorites, and (j) it was boring.

In a comparative study, Klint and Weiss (1986) examined childrens' motives for

participating and discontinuing sport, using participants from competitive and recreational gymnastics. Their results indicated that children continued to participate in sport for reasons such as competence, fitness, and fun. It was also found that children discontinued sport for reasons such as having other things to do, injuries, pressure, not having fun, and too much time (Klint & Weiss, 1986). Sport psychologist, Daniel Gould (1987), summed up the reasons for childrens' withdrawal from youth sport programs.

> Former youth sport participants cite a number of varied personal and situational reasons for sport withdrawal. These include such diverse motives as interest in other activities, conflicts of interest, lack of playing time, lack of success, little skill improvement, lack of fun, boredom, and injury. Conflicts of interest and interest in other activities have been found to be the most consistently cited motives for sport withdrawal. Other more negative motives such as a lack of playing time, overemphasis on competition, boredom, competitive stress, dislike of the coach, and no fun have been rated as major motives for sport withdrawal by a smaller number of former participants. Some evidence reveals that these more negative motives play a more important role in the discontinuation of younger as compared to older dropouts (p. 66-67).

Social Mobility

According to Eitzen and Sage (1997), sport has generally been described as an egalitarian and meritocratic institution. Sport is egalitarian because it promotes interaction across social classes and racial lines and it transcends social boundaries. Sport is meritocratic because within each person, regardless of race and gender, it allows upwardly mobility. The examination of sport often reflects the larger society, and demonstrates how stratified it has become. Like society, sport reinforces the present structure of social inequality, however, there are a few exceptions to the rule (Eitzen & Sage, 1997).

Loy (1969) critically analyzed past research regarding social mobility across race and gender. He proposed four channels through which involvement in sport could facilitate social mobility. Loy suggested that: (a) sport participation may foster the development of athletic prowess permitting a direct way into professional sports with minimal formal education, (b) sport participation may directly or indirectly enhance educational achievement, (c) sport may lead to occupational sponsorship, and (d) sport involvement may nurture attitudes and behaviors conducive to success in other occupations. Loy further points out that participation in school sports may: (a) foster better grades, (b) increase the probability of graduation, and (c) lead to the offer of a scholarship from an institution of higher learning (Loy, 1969).

Loy (1969) suggested that children who participate in sport, regardless of race and gender, develop skill acquisition, thus increasing their potential to have a career in professional sport. He cited boxing as a prime example of social mobility without obtaining a degree from a formal institution of higher education. However, for those participants who desire an opportunity to increase their education, sport also offers a reliable avenue. Loy(1969) also suggested that through sport participation, athletes increased their opportunities through education such as increases in academic performance, and they increased their job opportunities when their sport career was over.

Although Loy's (1969) work may be dated, it suggests the direct benefits of sport as it influences social mobility. Athletes continue to enter professional sport regardless of race and social background. Male as well as female athletes, are getting equal

opportunities to enter higher institutions of learning on scholarships, and are receiving more endorsement deals with the rise of companies such as Nike and Reebok that sponsor athletes and athletic programs (Wenner,1994).

There are several tendencies concerning sport participation by children regarding race and economic backgrounds. Poor children are more likely than affluent children to participate in sports (Greendofer & Ewing, 1979; Harrison, 1995). They are more likely to participate in physical contact sports, that emphasize physical strength and toughness. They are more likely to participate in sports that require less equipment or that are community funded, such as basketball. According to Harrison (1995), each year there appears to be an increase in the number of poor children, especially African American children, participating in sport programs that meet their needs and those of the community.

Harry Edwards has been a leader in sport sociology and a major advocate of raising African-American consciousness to the pros and cons of sport. In a national forum, Edwards (1982) stated:

> Because Black society had not yet learned to deal with it intellectually, sport loomed like a fog-shrouded minefield for the overwhelming majority of Black athletes. It has been a treadmill to oblivion rather than an escalator to wealth and glory it was believed to be. There is today disturbingly consistent evidence that the Black athlete who blindly sets out to fill the shoes of Dr. J., Reggie J., Kareem Abdul J., or OJ is destined to end up with no J-no job whatsoever that he is qualified to do in our modern, technologically sophisticated society. At the end of his sports career, he is not running or flying through airports like O.J. He is much more likely to be sweeping up airports-if he has the good fortune to land the job (p. 20).

Edwards (1982) also stated:

> I do not advocate that Black society discourage its youths from sport participation. To the contrary, I am thoroughly convinced that Black achievements in sports have benefited Afro-American society in many ways. On a spiritual level, the performance of outstanding black athletes have bolstered Black pride and self-esteem. On a practical level, sport have been means to higher-educational opportunities for many Black youths.. Who have moved on to establish productive careers in other fields. Further, by virtue of their enormous accomplishments in sports, Black athletes have demonstrated the greatest obstacle to Black achievement in all areas of American life has not been lack of capability or competitiveness, but a lack of opportunity. By every measure, therefore, I believe that Black involvement in sport is as legitimate as Black pursuit of career opportunities in any other field-law, medicine, science, education,...and therefore is to be encouraged. But as with all careers, Blacks pursuing sports career must approach the task intelligently. And first, foremost, and above all else, this means recognizing that sport inevitably recapitulates society and that, therefore, it would be as impossible for a substantially racist society to have a substantially non-racist sport institution as it would be for a chicken to lay a duck egg (Edwards, 1982, p. 22).

In a recent article Anderson (1996) stated that the black culture may add to the problem of promoting athletic success in the black community, especially to its youths. Black families promote athletic success as a way toward real success without giving consideration to the alternatives if athletic success does not materialize. Anderson (1996) suggested four reasons why athletics become a focal point in the black culture: (a) racism has kept blacks from the same opportunities as whites in employment, thus causing them to hone their athletic skills, (b) there is a lack of black role models in fields other than sport and entertainment, (c) the black family overemphasizes athletic success at an early age, and (d) sport is used as a way for black males to prove their

manhood. Anderson also argues that the media plays a significant role in this problem. The African-Americans who are portrayed in the media as success stories are predominately athletes. Since a large number of African-Americans are involved in sport, the dream of becoming a professional athlete seems more feasible than that of becoming a lawyer, doctor, or educator. Due to this image created in their culture and perpetuated by the media, many black males view sport as the way to get out of the ghetto, particularly professional sport (Anderson, 1996; Harris, 1994).

The myth of the rags to riches through sport is so pervasive in the black community, that many find the road to ruin more quickly than they do the road to stardom. Although African-Americans comprise 80% of professional basketball players and 60% of professional football players, these numbers are illusory. Only a small percentage of African-American males who play sports in high school, i.e., one tenth of one percent will make it to the pros (Leonard and Reyman, 1988). As Harry Edwards (1979) says, "Statistically, you have a better chance of getting hit by a meteorite in the next ten years than getting work as a professional athlete" (p. 32).

Whether one is White, African-American, male or female, the chances of making a living as a professional athlete are very small. Additionally, professional sport careers are notoriously short, averaging five years in the major sports of baseball, basketball, football, and hockey (Leonard & Reyman, 1988). Although some racial and ethnic barriers have been eliminated, certain sports are still dominated by white athletes while

other sports are dominated by minorities.

In spite of the cold, hard fact, the ideas and tales of athletic success still encourage the notion of upward mobility. These tales stir the spirit but distort the truth about countless others who failed to live their dream. Social mobility research should sober one against becoming overly optimistic about the American dream of hard work and lofty ideas inscribed in social realities. Ironically, the few who do reach fame and fortune promote this belief system, but really represent exceptions rather than the rule (Riess, 1990).

Typically, the successful athletes in some part must have attended both high school and college. Only in this way, are they provided with opportunities to attain chances of success in professional sport, not to mention the world outside sport. Athletes at the college level, particularly those from low economic backgrounds, will almost automatically surpass the educational level of their parents. However, this does not mean they will graduate with a degree. In fact, the results indicate that very few professional athletes graduate from college. For example, only one-fifth of the current athletes from the NBA, one-third from the NFL, and even lower percentages from professional baseball and hockey have graduated from college (Eitzen & Sage, 1997). As a whole, graduation rates are even lower when the data are analyzed by sport and race. For all groups of athletes, women have higher graduation rates than men, regardless of race. White males have higher graduation rates than males of minority races. But when athletic minorities are compared to minorities who are not athletes, graduation rates are similar (Eitzen &

Sage, 1997; Padilla & Boumer, 1994).

There are a number of barriers to graduation for all athletes, despite their race or gender. One obvious problem is the inordinate demand on their time and energy for practice, meetings, travel, and other sport-related activities (Sack and Thiel, 1985). According to the authors, athletes from commercialized programs have trouble reconciling the roles associated with their dual status as athletes and students.

Peter and Patricia Adler (1985) conducted a study investigating a Division I basketball program from 1980 to 1984. The participants of the study were male athletes from the ages of 18-22 during the five year period. They found that the pressures of big-time sport and academic pressure resulted in a gradual disengagement by athletes from their academic roles. Most athletes entered college feeling optimistic about academic success and had high expectations for graduation. This idealism lasted until the end of their first year and was replaced with cynicism as they realized how difficult it was to manage two roles (Adler & Adler, 1985). Shortly, they began to emphasize their athletic role, isolated themselves from the general student body, interacted primarily with other athletes or friends from home, and were intimidated by their class work.

Adler and Adler (1985) concluded that this trend was most evident for African-Americans because of the lack of preparedness from their early years in education, and the immediate stereotype of "dumb jock." In fact, the authors stated that athletes eventually concluded, "To be safe, it was better not to try than to try and not succeed." (Adler & Adler, 1985, p. 247)

Decision Making

The current state of decision making represents a blend of approaches. Since the late 1940's, decision making has been studied by investigators from a diverse array of disciplines including fields such as mathematics, economics, medicine, marketing, and the social sciences. From a historical perspective, Langenheder (1975) discussed three independent directions of development within the decision-making domain: (a) decision-and-game theoretical approaches, which have a close relationship to economics and applied mathematics; (b) psychological approaches, which focus on individual motivation and learning processes; and (c) social-psychological and sociological approaches, which attempt to explain human behavior in social situations.

One of the most robust findings in decision-making theory is that the same individual often uses diverse strategies to make decisions, contingent on task demands (Bettman, Johnson, Luce, & Payne, 1993). Specifically, people attempt to use all relevant information and make trade-offs between the good and bad aspects of each alternative. These processes are important in the normative processes of choice, of which the most common is the weighted-additive decision rule. This rule suggests that there are differences in values and these differences are resolved usually by compromise or trade-offs (Bettman, Johnson, Luce, & Payne, 1993).

The various approaches to decision making have two interrelated facets, normative and descriptive. Central to normative theories is the concept of optimality, which is associated with rationality. Normative theories are concerned with prescribing

courses of action that are based on a series of rational postulates, and that closely conform to the actor's belief system (Tenenbaum & Bar-Eli, 1993). These courses of action are set to optimally maximize gain and minimize loss.

Descriptive approaches stem from the discipline of psychology. Whereas economists continually try to model rational behavior, psychologists have demonstrated that human decisions depart significantly from the prescriptions of formal theory (Tenenbaum & Bar-Eli, 1993). Descriptive approaches: (a) examine the differences between normative and real decision-making behavior, and (b) identify causes in terms of individual beliefs, expectations, and preferences. Pitz and Sachs (1984) viewed decision making as a central element of human information processing and part of the larger fields of cognitive and social psychology.

According to Pitz and Sach (1984) decision making is characterized either by the uncertainty of information or outcome, or by a concern for a person's preferences. They stated there is no scientific formula for determining whether a decision is correct, since decisions are based on personal opinions or preferences.

Rationale for Selection and Development of Methodology

The theoretical frameworks, philosophies, or ways of knowing that researchers bring to their studies guide the type of research questions that they ask as well as the particular methodology they choose for data analysis. In the case of the present study the research question is: What are the factors that affect junior intercollegiate football player's decisions to enter the professional draft or to stay in school and complete their

athletic eligibility?

Wilson (1977) has suggested that human behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs; thus it is imperative for researchers to study behavior in various situations. The physical setting as well as internalized notions of norms, traditions, and values are crucial contextual variables that must be studied in their proper setting. Previous quantitative research methods have not been able to effectively measure and derive meaning from individual experiences. The experimental research methods can significantly affect findings, thus, the methods of inquiry have been subjected to change by the research community (Wilson, 1977). Participants exposed to the scientific method are either suspicious and wary, or they are aware of what the researchers want, and try to please them. In addition, Wilson (1977) has suggested that participants often are not conscious of their own feelings, so they find it difficult to articulate them in questionnaires. It is extremely difficult to understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which participants interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Valuable data are often overlooked by "objective" researchers who impose the structure of their own world on their participants through coding schemes and standardization.

Qualitative research on the other hand offers the opportunity to explore and develop the understanding of individual experiences, as well as the subjective framework within which these experiences occur. It is vital that biases and assumptions be explored at the beginning of the research endeavor. To understand the pre-existing assumptions of

this research setting, it is necessary to differentiate between two paradigms of knowing in the social sciences: (a) Postpositivism, and (b) Constructivism.

Postpositivism

According to Guba (1990) Postpositivism is best characterized by implementing some aspect of Positivism while incorporating new ideas of thought. The aim of science is to discover truths, therefore, the ultimate aim of Postpositivism follows the empirical rationale of prediction and control. What remains implicitly constant with both paradigms, Positivism and Postpositivism, is the central concept of realism. However, the latter paradigm has advanced this position by incorporating effects of human nature into the theory. Postpositivists have coined their position "critical realism." This term acknowledges that the world is driven by natural causes, even though it is impossible for humans to perceive it because of their imperfections. Guba (1990) suggests, therefore, that inquirers need to be critical of their work because of human imperfections and frailties.

Postpositivism recognizes the difficulties researchers have when trying to keep their own personal biases and predispositions in balance while conducting inquiry. To overcome this problem, researchers must remain as objective as possible, even though true objectivity may never be reached. However, objectivity can be reasonably achieved by the researcher striving to remain neutral so that the readers can make their own interpretations without predisposed biases. According to Guba (1990), research should always be subject to inquiry by the "critical community," that is, referees of journals,

editors, and the general population.

The methodological approach of Postpositivism follows the ideas established by Thomas Cook. Cook (1985) coined the term "critical multiplism" which aimed to "approximate the ultimately unknowable truth through the use of processes that critically triangulate from a variety of perspectives on what is worth knowing and what is known" (Cook, 1985, p. 57). The theory is rooted in the methodological ideas of multiple operationalism and method triangulation. Cook (1985) proposed that his theory of multiplism is best served through multiple analyses of the same data set.

In the quest to achieve realistic and objective inquiry, many imbalances may emerge (Guba, 1990). Postpositivists have tried to identify these imbalances and the possible ways of reducing them. These include the ideas that: (a) the imbalance between rigor and relevance suggests the need to do more research in more natural settings, (b) the imbalance between precision and richness suggests the need to do more qualitative studies, (c) the imbalance between elegance and applicability suggests conducting the inquiry so that the theory is the product rather than the precursor of inquiry, and (d) the imbalance between discovery and verification suggests defining a continuum of inquiry ranging from pure verification to pure discovery (Guba, 1990).

Constructivism

It is believed by the Constructionists that paradigms of both Postpositivism and Critical Theory are seriously flawed on their positions and must be replaced. Guba and Lincoln (1985, 1989) argue that if empirical tests are valid theories of inquiry, then it is

essential that theoretical and observational language be independent. The collected facts must be separated from their theoretical statements. Constructionists believes that theory can never fully be tested because of the problem of induction. There may be many theories that could explain a single body of facts, but no unequivocal explanation is possible. Guba (1990) suggested that reality as a whole is seen through a window of theory, either implicitly or explicitly. Within this window of theory, inquiry cannot be value free. Individuals bring with them a set of values that leads to many possible constructions. Additionally, inquiry is shaped by the interaction between individuals and their intimate interconnectedness. Knowledge is thus the outcome of human activity, never rendered as ultimately true but ever evolving (Guba, 1990).

The fundamental belief of Constructionism is that reality is a social and multiple construction. There is no single tangible form of reality, but rather reality exists as a set of holistic constructions that are both intra- and interpersonally conflicting, as well as dialectic in nature. The aim of science is to create ideographic knowledge expressed in the form of pattern theories and generated into working hypotheses.

The epistemological position of Constructionism is that of interactive monism. The interactivity between the individuals involved in the research must be recognized and must be utilized in the process. The values that are inherent in the interaction must be explored and explained in the final process. The theory of symbolic interaction assumes the same position as in Constructionism; that meanings are constructed through interactions with others and self. Meaning becomes ever evolving and is a reflection of

self and shared experiences (Taylor, Haley, Wells, & Pardun, 1995).

Methodologically, Constructionists believes that inquiry must be moved away from laboratory settings and into natural settings. This process creates naturally occurring "experiments," and captures realities holistically. In addition, their methodological intentions are neither to predict nor control the real world. The aim is to identify individual constructions that are elicited and refined hermeneutically and dialectically. The theoretical notion of hermeneutics is ontological rather than methodological. It seeks to throw light on the fundamental conditions that underlie the phenomenon of understanding (Gadamer, 1976). For philosophical hermeneutics, the question is not what we do or what we should do, but what happens beyond our willing and doing. The dialectic approaches consist of comparing and contrasting individual constructions. These existing constructions along with other constructions become a baseline of inquiry for the individual.

Theoretical Framework

This study of inquiry will be guided by an interpretist framework. This is a general term that encompasses many theoretical philosophies such as Symbolic Interactionism and Existential Phenomenology. The research question posed for this dissertation stems from this interpretist framework, and will seek knowledge based on the participants' perceptions and their explanation of their first-hand experiences. Common with all qualitative research, the purpose is not to generalize the findings, but to describe the experiences of a small population in a way that will increase the body of

knowledge.

There are many possible ways of doing a qualitative interview. Some ways are better suited and more applicable than others, depending upon the research question. Typically, qualitative interviews are more like conversations than rigid, structured interviews. The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant's meaning, but respects how the participant frames and structures their responses. A fundamental assumption of qualitative research is that the participant's perspective should unfold as they view it, not as the researcher views it (Marshall & Rossman, 1990). In this study, a phenomenological interview technique was employed to obtain information from each participant.

Phenomenological Interviewing

The phenomenological philosophy refocuses inquiry, concentrating not on descriptions of worldly objects but on descriptions of experiences. This approach requires an openness in the researcher's attitude. Questions about the existence and character of the objects that are experienced are put in abeyance, while the researcher attends to what is present or given in awareness, a state of mental consciousness (Polkinghorne, 1989). In awareness, objects appear as something. That is, things appear as "tables," "chairs," and so forth. The realm of experience on the one hand, is a reality that results from the openness of human awareness to the world, and it cannot be reduced to either the sphere of the mental or the sphere of the physical (Polkinghorne, 1989).

The phenomenological interview is perceived as a discourse or conversation

(Mishler, 1986). It involves an interpersonal engagement in which the participants are encouraged to share details of their experience. To this end, the participant is viewed as the expert and is given control of the course of the interview.

Kvale (1983) outlined aspects of the phenomenological interview. The focus of the interview is on the life-world or experiences of the participants and is theme-oriented, not person-oriented. The interview seeks descriptions of the experience itself without interpretation of the participant. Rather than seeking general opinions from the participants, the interview focuses on specific situations and action sequences that are instances of a theme so that the essence of the theme emerges and shows itself. If and when information becomes ambiguous, the researcher must seek clarification. Kvale (1983) concludes that the interview is a temporal process, thus descriptions may become richer and clearer as the interview process continues.

The objective of using the phenomenological interview is to gain an understanding of each person's experience in making decisions. A phenomenological question for this study was: "Tell me what it was like making your decision to either stay in college or enter the professional draft." With this approach it leaves the participant in control of what experiences they choose to disclose.

Conclusion

Since the end of the 1980's there has been an increase in the numbers of junior collegiate football players deciding to leave college early and enter the professional draft. However, there is a lack of research that discusses the bases of decisions to leave early or

to stay and finish school, or the factors that influence athletes' decision. Articles from Sports-illustrated have briefly discussed the global idea of leaving early, but have rarely addressed the important factors that contributed to athletes' decision (Reynolds, 1990; Telander, 1990; & Telander, 1992). Nack (1989) presented an inside perspective about Barry Sanders and his decision to leave early. This is the first and only article that has discussed factors that may have contributed to an athletes' decision to stay in school or leave early. Nack's (1989) article uncovered the factors that included family, especially the influence of the father, and the fact that Sanders' university was being placed on probation the following year. Money has been perceived by many to be the main motivator for athletes to come out early, however, in the article by Hoffer (1990) Keith McCants asserted that he came out early simply because he wanted to. The road to the NFL is long and hard, and the main objective for all organizations is to produce winning teams with the best talent available, including college juniors who decide to come out early.

The importance of childhood sport experiences is addressed in research, especially when they are positive experiences (Gould & Horn, 1984; Werner, 1991; Weiss, 1995). As a result of these positive experiences there is a greater chance that athletes will continue to engage in sport of some kind. This may include competitive sports or recreational sports. There also appears to race and gender differences regarding sport participation, influence, and accessibility. Sailes (1985) and Harris (1994) suggested there are racial differences regarding attitudes about sport participation.

African-Americans are influenced at an early age to participate in sport, and often times they view it as their way out from the ghetto (Anderson, 1996). According to Edwards (1982) he believes this view point held by African-American youths perpetuates a problem in black culture, and sustains black suppression. Not only do African-American children see sport as a ticket to the promised land, but they override the value of an education on the way.

The myth of stardom through sport is heightened by the media and the relatively few success stories of exceptional athletes. But, for every Barry Sanders, Michael Jordan, and Magic Johnson, there are thousands of athletes who dream of playing professional sport but never will. I believe it is important for scholars, educators and family members to come to terms with this dilemma or disillusionment in society and emphasize the importance of education.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this investigation was to gain insight into the decision making processes of intercollegiate football players as they determine when to enter the professional draft. What follows is a description of the methodology.

Description of the Research Process

In the previous chapter, the theoretical framework of this research project was clearly established, and the foundation for the research question was set. The following sections include separate descriptions of: (a) pilot testing, (b) bias exploration, (c) identification of participants, (d) interviewing participants, (e) interview schedule, and (f) data analysis.

Pilot Testing

Because little research has been completed in this area of sport psychology, it was necessary to incorporate pilot testing in the research process as a measure of investigation and preparation for conducting interviews. Pilot testing was used for the researcher to further develop appropriate skills that would facilitate conversation from the participant rather than hinder it, plus to help the researcher gain knowledge and understanding in this specific topic area. Finally, pilot testing helped in the development of research questions based on emerging themes that evolved from these studies. The pilot study along with the literature review led to a methodology that examined the individual's phenomenological experience as well as other perspectives gathered from the

interview.

A single pilot study was conducted that facilitated a refining of the methodological approach to the study as well as the completion of the discussion guide. A single interview was conducted that examined the phenomenological experience of an athlete who, prior to this year, had to make a decision regarding whether to enter the professional draft or complete his playing eligibility. The first interview lasted 1 hour and 20 minutes where multiple questions were asked regarding his personal experiences. After the interview was completed, the audio tape was evaluated for detail, transcribed, then evaluated again to check the accuracy of the transcript. The transcription was then given to the participant to read and check for validity. Two weeks after the first interview, another interview session was scheduled. During the second interview, clarification and the participant's feedback regarding the discussion guide were obtained. The participant clarified ambiguous information, then proceeded to discuss which questions seemed more relevant to the topic of study.

After the completion of the second interview, all questions from the discussion guide were reviewed and thoroughly screened for content, validity, and relevance to the theoretical question. From the original guide, some questions were modified or removed, thus forming the final discussion guide (Appendix A).

Bias Exploration

In qualitative research the researcher begins the study with their own assumptions and presuppositions. It is impossible to avoid one's commitments and biases toward their

research (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In actuality, bias exploration should be a continuous process throughout the data gathering and data analysis procedures. Therefore, it is not uncommon that the researcher submit to a series of interviews to uncover their own perspectives, logic, and assumptions. Prior to interviewing participants, a skilled qualitative interviewer, who was a doctoral candidate at the University of Tennessee, conducted a single interview with me about my assumptions and biases. The purpose of the interview was to utilize this information so that I could determine the nature of my assumptions and biases. As a result, I became aware of my assumptions and biases and was able to reduce their effects on the study.

The debriefing interview lasted approximately two hours and was conducted in a manner foreign to my own expectations. Prior to the interview, I prepared myself to discuss material regarding methodology, participants, and my motivation behind the query of this research. However, the interviewer asked questions similar to those in my discussion guide, questions that examined my own experiences in making decisions, whether they were sport related or personal life experiences. No questions of race were asked during the interview, nor discussed after the interview was finished. During the flow of the interview I was so perplexed by the questions I stated, "When are we going to talk about my research topic." The interviewer replied, "We are."

After the interview session was completed we discussed our perceptions of the interview and the emerging biases that could affect the research. We concluded that my emerging biases from the interview were: (a) given prior experiences with significant

others, there were strong biases in favor of athletes entering the professional draft, (b) there were strong biases regarding family and an individual's responsibilities to assist in taking care of the family, and (c) there were strong biases regarding the influence money has in the decision making process.

Both the interviewer and I agreed that this was an important beginning before I started interviewing, and that the information we obtained would only help me conduct more efficient, less biased interviews. Overall, this debriefing interview allowed me to see how the research question was a strong and important aspect in my life and, prior to my interviews, I needed to become aware of, reflect on, and understand my own biases.

Identification of Participants

The participants in this study were eight NCAA Division I junior intercollegiate football players geographically located in the Midwest and Southern regions of the United States. Along with the criteria of playing eligibility, they were in the process of, or already had made the decision to enter the professional draft or to stay in college. The participants were divided into two groups; four were junior athletes that decided to enter the draft and, four were junior athletes that decided to finish their athletic eligibility. Every attempt was made to obtain participants from a variety of universities, cultural backgrounds, sociological backgrounds, playing experiences, and positions on the team. No participants came from the same university, nor did any of the participants come from the same state or same family background. In fact, only two of the participants played the same position on their university team.

The following are reasons this sport population was selected. First and foremost, both basketball and baseball athletes have the opportunity to enter the professional draft directly out of high school, thereby simplifying the decision to stay in school. For those athletes their decision would include reasons to go to college compared to reasons for entering the professional draft. Second, NCAA rules and regulations allow basketball players to petition for the professional draft. Then, if they do not like their draft selection or do not get drafted, they have thirty days to re-enter school, as long as they do not sign with an agent. This is not true for college football players who lose their rights to re-enter school and play for their universities when they enter their name in the draft. Last, athletes who participate in football programs in college have a larger population base compared to those of baseball and basketball. The selection from a larger population allows participants to have a wider range of variation in the phenomenon, settings, and people under study (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

To obtain my research population, representatives of men's athletic departments were contacted by letter or via telephone to gather information regarding possible participants (Appendix B). From this information and following the coach's consent to approach the athlete, each athlete was contacted via the telephone or personally. Once participants were selected, the research process was explained to them both verbally and via the Informed Consent Statement (Appendix C). If the participant wished to continue, interview times were set at their convenience. One week prior to the interview sessions a telephone call was made to confirm the meeting.

Interviewing Participants

There are many qualitative techniques available to the researcher, but one technique suited to obtaining an understanding of human experience and perception is the interview. Kvale (1983) stated that the interview may be the most effective and powerful technique for gaining insight into another person's experience.

The interviews were audio recorded for accuracy and validity purposes. Because of the nature of this research, the accuracy of the report was absolutely essential and could not be achieved without the use of audio tapes. Participants were advised (Appendix C) that the interviews would be taped, and they were given the opportunity to refuse this procedure. If they agreed to audio taping, a written statement of informed consent (Appendix C) was given to them to be read and signed. Participants were assured that all information regarding this research, and their personal information, would be kept under lock and key. They were also told that they would be identified on the tapes and transcripts only by a self-selected pseudonym. Access to all raw data was limited to me and my advisor, plus the transcriptions were available to the scholarly community for validation purposes. Transcription of the tapes was completed by a hired transcriber.

Interview Schedule

The initial plan was to interview each participant on three separate occasions, with each session lasting anywhere from 45 minutes to 1 ½ hours. However, because of time constraints and the availability of all of the participants, two interview sessions

were conducted.

Interview sessions were conducted in a professional manner that provided and protected confidentiality. The purposes of the two interview sessions were to allow the participants the opportunity to discuss their decision-making experiences and to have their experiences accurately reported by me. The timing of the interviews for this research project was essential. The interviewing of athletes who decided to enter the draft occurred prior to the NFL draft day. This reduced any effects that the outcome of the draft may have had in their decision and on their accuracy of reporting of their experiences.

Prior to the first interview, a discussion guide (Appendix A) was developed as a way to facilitate the conversation and keep it flowing. The initial step in developing the discussion guide was to create a list of potential discussion topics. Upon review, the list was narrowed down from 56 items to 23 items. After another review, facilitated by the pilot study, nine topic (lead) questions were chosen for the discussion guide. Along with the nine lead questions, a list of probing questions was included to facilitate the interview process (Appendix A). The probing questions were important because they helped the participant discuss information that they may not otherwise have shared, and they helped the interviewer obtain relevant and supporting information in the interview.

The first interview began by devoting five to ten minutes toward answering any questions about the nature of the study, and trying to help the participant feel relaxed with general non-obtrusive conversation. At this time formal information was explained

and the Informed Consent (Appendix C) form was signed. The first interview included an explanation of confidentiality followed by the phenomenological questions (Appendix A). When the interview was completed, I listened carefully to the audio tapes making notes concerning any data that needed to be clarified, and then I developed questions that helped facilitate the next interview with that participant. Thereafter, the tapes were transcribed by a paid transcriber. When the transcriptions of data were completed, the data were read and re-read for errors and accuracy. After the participant's interviews had been transcribed, he was sent a copy of the data to review for accuracy of content. Shortly after the participants received their transcripts, a second interview was scheduled.

The second interview served as a debriefing interview where clarification and reflection were the main focus. This session also provided an internal validity check to assure data precision. Although the specific time frame of each participant's interviews was not identical, every step was taken to accommodate their needs.

Data Analysis

The movement from a collection of protocols to an accurate, clear, and informative structural description can be a complex process. Because a whole protocol or a collection of protocols cannot be analyzed simultaneously, they must be broken down into units and a process of sequential steps must be delineated that can assist the researcher in developing general structural descriptions (Polkinghorne, 1989). Thus, data analysis was an on-going process throughout the study. As information was gathered, it

was transcribed. Then the transcription was read and re-read many times in order to synthesize and analyze the data.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggest that analytic procedures fall into five modes: (a) organizing data, (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns, (c) testing emergent hypotheses against the data, (d) searching for alternative explanations of the data, and (e) writing the report. Each phase entails data reduction and is brought into manageable chunks so the researcher can: (a) interpret meaning and insight based on participants' words and acts of the study, and (b) subsequently check validity of interpretation with the participant.

Data analysis for this study was conducted according to standard qualitative procedures. Sources of information in the data analysis included transcripts, post-interview field notes, and triangulation sources. Triangulation of the data came from both primary and secondary research sources. Interview transcripts were read first for errors, then read many times for deeper content. From the transcripts, themes emerged and were coded in a systematic manner. As more data were collected and more themes emerged, the existing coding system was altered to allow for the new data. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) specifically instruct that, "You should be careful not to force your data into someone else's framework. If concepts fit your data, do not be afraid to borrow them. If they do not, forget about them"(pg. 39).

Validity

The qualitative researcher needs to be concerned throughout the investigative

process with whether the findings are ***valid***; that is, whether or not the findings can be trusted and used as the basis for actions and policy decisions (Valle & Halle, 1989). The term validity is often referred to as being well-grounded and well-supported, thus producing a degree of confidence. Validity is also cited as truth, "the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers" (Silverman, 1993, p. 149).

From a Phenomenological perspective, validity is viewed as a conclusion that inspires confidence because the argument has been persuasive in support of the point being made. Valle and Halle (1989) reported that validity depends on the power of its presentation to convince the reader that the findings are accurate. Phenomenologically, validity is determined when the structural descriptions accurately portray common features in the data collected.

In the empirical framework, experimental laboratory research is often depicted as being the epitome of internal validity; that is, the extent to which scientific observations and measurements are authentic representations of some reality. However, some researchers contend that qualitative research is also high in internal validity (Thomas & Nelson, 1990). To assure the level of internal validity in the interviews, I used both peer (three doctoral students with a qualitative research background) and respondent validation. These forms of validation required both peers and respondents to check the data to assure it is accurate and represented their reality. If errors occurred, the information was clarified then corrected.

The purpose of the peer group was to confirm the validity of the emerging themes developed from the transcripts. Three doctoral students, the chairperson, and I discussed and evaluated the interpretation of themes. Each person read the transcripts prior to the meeting, then discussed and compared what they believed were emerging themes against my interpretation of emerging themes from the transcripts. Four themes were consistent among the group, and these themes are presented in the following chapters.

In most qualitative research, the strictures required for statistical generalization may be difficult to apply. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) believe that threats to external validity consist of those effects that obstruct or reduce comparability and translatability. Comparability refers to the degree to which the components of a study are sufficiently well described and defined so other researchers can use the results of the study in comparison to related issues. Translatability, on the other hand, suggests that theoretical frames, definitions, and research techniques are accessible to and understood by other researchers in related disciplines (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). The authors conclude that the lack of comparability and translatability reduces the usefulness of the study to interesting, but unscientific, reading.

A term closely associated with external validity is generalizability. This term within qualitative research has often been questioned because of the small sample sizes typically used and the lack of random sampling. In previous studies researchers have tried to meet this criterion with multi-case or cross-case methods. However, generalizability is left to the reader to evaluate the findings of a carefully described study

and apply the findings to their own situation(s). Locke (1989) stated that, given the rich contextual descriptions, most readers can easily recognize which situations apply to their own experience and that the strong recognition of application by the reader is in no way an inferior measure of external validity.

It is, in summary, not the researcher's task to provide an index of generalizability. It is their responsibility to provide an accurate data base that makes generalizability possible on the part of potential readers.

CHAPTER 4

IDENTIFICATION OF PARTICIPANTS

The world is a looking glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face. - Thackeray

The main purpose of this chapter is to inform the reader about the participants in this study through a description of the eight participants as a group, followed by individual descriptions. It should be noted that all personal names utilized from this point forward are self-selected pseudonyms. In addition, the names used for family members, friends, and coaches are pseudonyms. The generic name of State U. is substituted for whichever university each participant attended, i.e., State U. is used to designate all participants' home university. At the end of the chapter a brief description of the emerging themes will be presented, thus setting up the presentation of data.

The Bob Hope Team of All-Americans

The eight participants in this study were selected from a variety of universities across the Midwest and Southern regions. Every attempt was made to include as much diversity as possible including culture, socioeconomic background, playing experience, and team/player position (Table 1). The participants in this study were divided into two groups; four were junior athletes that decided to enter the professional draft, and four were junior athletes that decided to finish their collegiate eligibility. Six African-Americans and two Caucasians were interviewed for this study. Four participants played positions on offense, and four played on defense.

Table 1. Demographics

	Early Entry in the NFL				
Name	**Race**	**Region**	**Socio-economics**	**Team Position**	**Honors**
David Heisman Jim Mark	3 African American 1 Caucasian	1 South 1 Southeast 1 Midwest	3 Poor 1 Middle-class	3 Offense 1 Defense	4 All-Conference 3 All-Americans

	Athletes Who Stayed in College				
Name	**Race**	**Region**	**Socio-economics**	**Team Position**	**Honors**
Jack Ricky Robert Wesley	4 African American 1 Caucasian	2 South 1 Southeast 1 Midwest	2 Poor 2 Middle-class	1 Offense 3 Defense	4 All-Conference 2 All-Americans

Four participants were UPI and AP All-Americans, and all eight were All-Conference players. Of the eight participants, four started as "true freshmen", one was redshirted as a freshman, and one played junior college football prior to enrolling at State U. All participants completed a minimum of three years playing eligibility and were making a decision prior to their fourth season of eligibility.

The educational pursuit of the participants differed across region, family, and degree of choice. All participants, at the time of the interviews, were still pursuing their undergraduate degree. One participant graduated in May, four stated their degree program would be completed by the following winter or spring, and the remaining three were still taking classes. Their degree programs were in the areas of business, computer science, physical education, pre-medicine, psychology, and sociology.

Socioeconomically, two members grew up in families that they considered middle class, while the remaining six grew up in poor households, or as they indicated a "bad neighborhood." These neighborhoods were engulfed with crime, gangs, and often marred by death. On more than one occasion, the participants talked about seeing friends die on the street, selling drugs, or being invited to join a gang. Five of the participants grew up in broken homes where the mother and father were separated, and the remaining three grew up in intact homes. Some participants had large families such as Wesley, who was one of eight children, while others grew up in moderate to small sized families.

The Cast of Characters

Heisman

Heisman was my first interview for this study and probably the most memorable. Simply, Heisman was a man of direction and extreme presence. He knew what he wanted in life, had established goals, and knew how to achieve them.

> Initially, I'm very goal oriented, and I've always had my life structured out on a timetable, if you will, and right now I'm just at one of the phases you know, on my timetable, you know. I planned to go to college, I plan to do pretty well in college and go on to the next level in my life, either in business or, you know, I never really thought about going into professional, if you really want to know the truth about it . (Heisman)

Heisman reiterated his point again by stating, "You know I want to work for myself and start businesses here and there and, you know, and get myself in a position where I can be happy."

Heisman's personality was one that could easily be misunderstood or perceived as arrogant or cocky. But he projected a level of confidence that was needed to succeed in life, especially in the area of business he wanted to pursue.

> I'm a very confident person, I think it comes across as being cocky and arrogant a lot of times, I think I'm misunderstood, in that way I have been, um, you know throughout my life. Because I am such a confident person. (Heisman)

He was the youngest child in his family, and the first to attend college. Both parents continued to work to provide for their family, and have remained married. He described his parents as "strict," especially his father. He considered his father to be his "hero" in life, and looked up to him for guidance and support. Heisman grew up in the Southeast

region of the United States. His hometown environment was what most people would consider to be poor, corrupted with crime, violence, and drugs. To avoid these elements in his life, Heisman focused on athletics and education. He talked about the importance of education and how he would come home from school, do his homework with either parent, then go outside and play.

> The main thing that was a concern in my house is, you better get your books, do your school work. That's the most important thing. I had to come home, and I had this up until junior high, you do homework, then you can go play. (Heisman)

After a stellar high school career, Heisman was recruited to attend State U. He was red-shirted in his first year, then played three years before declaring himself eligible for the NFL Draft. Heisman was not drafted, but decided to enter an NFL camp as a free-agent.

David

If looks are deceiving then David could possibly deceive many people. He was without question the largest of all the participants. He was physically imposing, a giant of sorts, but he was soft spoken and kind. He was incredibly polite before, during, and after our interview, which is a testament to his family upbringing.

David grew up in an urban region of the northeast where hard work was the ethic of the community. Violence and crime were not a prominent factor in his life, getting into trouble meant rough housing with his siblings. David grew up playing sports with a family that shared these simple pleasures. Watching games on TV, attending sporting events, and playing backyard pickup games were all commonplace in his life.

> My family was big in sports. We would watch it on TV, go to games, everything. They were fanatics. I guess you could say sports was in my blood. I think most kids growing up in my neighborhood was like that, sports was everything. (David)

The necessity of sports were, and continue to be, a major part of David's life. He grew up idolizing sport heros such as Julius Erving and Walter Payton, not only because of their outstanding athletic prowess, but primarily because of their contribution to society.

Academics were always stressed throughout his life, and it was taken very seriously. His parents were influential in his academic development, always stressing the importance of an education. When asked about his academics, David replied,

> Mom. She always stressed academics no matter what. It was "hit the books or you can't play." She gave me good habits to start college with. Plus, watching my bothers and sisters, they studied a lot too. Mom wanted us to get a good education. (David)

Growing up, David's athletic abilities were obvious at a young age. He was always bigger and stronger than most, which was an obvious advantage. As a high school freshman, David was a starter on the football team as well as the track team. By the time he finished his high school career, he received numerous letters and honors, locally and nationally. He decided to attend State U. because it "felt right" and because it had "good football and academics." Coming to State U. David was able to play early, earning accolades as a true freshman. The following two years brought similar conference honors and national honors. At the end of his junior year, David decided to enter his name in the professional draft. In April 1996, David was drafted to play professional football.

Mark

Emerson wrote, "Nothing great ever was achieved without enthusiasm." Well, Mark has enthusiasm to burn, along with his 4.3 second speed in the forty. Behind his self-assured persona lies a very proud man, rich in family history and courage. Mark has seen and been through more than the average person, and survived it all. He has seen family and friends die, people shot, but still lives life "large" and with an abundance of confidence.

Mark grew up in a very poor part of town in the South where the struggles of life and survival were the norm. His family was different than most folks'. His parents never married. Seldom did he spend time with his father; and his mother, whom he loves and respects, did the best she could to provide for her family. During the interview Mark honored his mother by stating,

> Mom, was a great lady, without her I wouldn't be here today. She has always encouraged me to do better for myself and to go someplace. I remember growing up and watching her struggle at times. It used to hurt me and it still does. Maybe because seeing all her pain makes me want to achieve more for myself. (Mark)

By the time Mark was in high school he was living with another family. His "new family" showed him a different way of life, away from the streets and violence, away from drugs, and a way to educational development. As explained by Mark, "They got me off the streets and made me really who I am today."

Upon finishing his high school career, Mark decided to attend State U. After signing his letter of intent, personal tragedy in his family kept him away for his first

semester. During the spring, Mark ran track and earned honors. This helped him maintain his speed for football. For the next three years, Mark continued to perform well in both sports and received many honors. Prior to our first interview, Mark had recently been tested at the NFL combines and was anticipating the outcome of all his hard work. In April, Mark's hard work paid off as he was drafted. He now plans to make his "mark" in the NFL.

Jim

Jim is the quintessential over-achiever. All his life people told Jim he couldn't do this, he couldn't do that. Jim, on the other hand, set his mind to prove all his doubters wrong. In the modern era of the NFL, speed, quickness, and strength are the attributes needed to compete, Jim will someday be an All-Pro.

His life is laid out in front of him, circled around his family, his friends, and his career. There was no doubt in Jim's mind that he would "make it" in the NFL. He has done everything told to him, everything expected of him, and he has done it in a fashion typical of his character.

> Uh, they're pumping me up pretty good. I had a good combine, matter of fact, an excellent combine. Um...they're definitely telling me I should make an, be an impact player in the NFL in the next two years. I don't know if I'll be tearing up the league next year, but uh, they did say they did plan on me being an impact player, so I've crossed my fingers. Let's hope it'll happen. (Jim)

Like many of the participants, Jim grew up in a small impoverished neighborhood in the Southeast. All the bad elements were there, ready to lead him to a path of destruction. What kept Jim away from that path was sport. Jim decided to use sports to

stay away from all the negative influences on the streets.

> Well...it was pretty tough. Living where I lived, man, it was a lot of trouble all around. Gangs and shit. But, I had a lot of great friends. Still do, by the way. Most of my friends that I've had since I was, uh, 7, 8 years old, I still do. Just great buddies. Um, far as um, my family didn't send me out working right off the bat, so, I did a lot of sports that ran into each other. (Jim)

Jim's family also contributed to his survival. He described his family as close, especially the relationship he has with his brother.

> It was pretty neat. Uh...it was easier for my mom and dad to come pick us up. But, uh, no...it was very interesting. I always looked up to him, 'course his abilities were a little better, him being 9 years old. So, uh, it was always, uh, trying to catch the old mouse..as far as ability-wise. But, it was nice playing with him, and the family would come out and watch us. You don't really think too much at that age about, you know, playing with your brother. You just take it for granted I guess. (Jim)

Jim also described both parents as typical people, nothing out of the ordinary.

After Jim's high school days were over, he entered State U. without being highly recruited. His impact on the football field was felt early. After a series of injuries to teammates, he entered the starting lineup and played very well. He spoke of the first time he played, "Yeah. And uh, I got in there and the first couple of plays I had a sack and then I uh, an interception and from there on out it was kinda smooth sailing."

The next two years Jim continued to play well and impress others. He received All-Conference as well All-American honors. He did so even though he played while injured during his third year of playing eligibility. But, Jim proved his doubters wrong; he is currently playing in the NFL and is well on his way to becoming an All-Pro.

Wesley

There are few people in this world that have as big a heart as Wesley. As a young male, very few people are placed into a position to assume many family responsibilities. He was the most honorable, quiet, and unassuming person I have met in all my years. He walks proud and with confidence, but never does he come across as arrogant or cocky. Wesley became a man when most of us were still boys.

Wesley grew up in a poor community in the South and had to overcome the struggles of everyday life on the streets. Never was Wesley involved in drugs or gangs, but he had seen many friends who were, and they paid the price for their involvement.

> The neighborhood life was rough on me in a sense of peer pressure, growing up with guys dying, friends dying. It's just a matter of survival. There were a lot of gangs and violence in our neighborhood. The typical inner city crime that happens daily. But I tried to stay away. My upbringing, my mom would not tolerate us getting involved in things like that. (Wesley)

As the first child of six, Wesley described his mother as hard working and courageous. He admired his mother for supporting and providing for her family the best way she could. She oftentimes worked 12-14 hour days, and held two jobs.

> She was definitely a big influence. She showed me what was right and what was wrong. I respected her for her hard work and for all that she tried to do for my family and I. She worked two jobs just to keep us together and to keep us from not wanting. We were poor, but it never seemed like it. Mom was the best woman in the world and I owe a lot to her. (Wesley)

Wesley always valued the importance of an education and the rewards that came with a college degree. He attended a private school in the South and wanted to attend a college that also valued the importance of education, especially for their athletes. Not

thinking he was heavily recruited, Wesley decided to attend State U. and has never looked back.

> I had a chance to go to a lot of places, a lot of big schools, but I don't think I was this athlete that everyone wanted. Sure people and coaches thought I was good, but some schools recruited me to play defense, and I want to play offense.
>
> I just felt ready for school. I felt prepared. I was also ahead of a few people and this academic background I had prepared me for that.
>
> Lots of memories here. I think there will be memories here forever. (Wesley)

In 1997, barring any misfortune, we will watch Wesley in the NFL. He will continue to show all of us the human side of life and the respectful side of humanity, and he will continue to provide for and support his family.

Ricky

To persevere, according to Webster, is "to continue a course of action, etc. in spite of difficulty, opposition" (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1987). This word automatically came into my mind as I interviewed Ricky, and days later when I listened to his tape. Ricky has endured life, and beat the odds against the background he faced.

Growing up in a small, poor town in the Southeast, Ricky survived many of the struggles we read about for young people across this country. At a young age he was solicited to join a gang, he sold drugs, and was getting emersed into a life-style that potentially would lead to destruction. However, Ricky was able to ***persevere*** with the encouragement of his family, friends, and participation in athletics.

> I grew up in a poor town where drugs, gangs were all around. I got caught up in some of that...like selling drugs. I'll admit to that...It was stupid, but because of

> my friends and family... I got out of that quickly. I knew it wasn't the life I wanted to have... to let my family down in a way that could be harmful. I thank God that he took me away from that stuff. It helped that I began playing sports, because of it I was able to do something different...I was able to show some talent on the football field and everyone began to notice me. It became my way out. (Ricky)

Ricky, a soft-spoken man, is one of five children in his family. He is the first to attend college and wants his family and others to use him as a positive role model in their lives.

> At first I really never wanted to attend college, but I heard my [high school coach] talking one day after a game... I'm usually the first in and the last to leave...and he said that I had a chance to make it big. From then on I knew I wanted to play college ball and get an education. I'm the first in my family to go to college and I want to be the first to get a degree. I want my brothers and sisters to look up to me and to be proud... and see me as someone who did it. I go back home and a lot of people come up to me and say good job, we're proud of you for going to college and getting your education. It makes me happy to see young kids wanting to use me as their role model, and to get an education. (Ricky)

Ricky spoke at great lengths about his family and the love and warmth they have for each other.

> I can't wait to get home to see my family. We're all pretty close to each other. When I do get home it's good to see everyone and just hang out. We all get along fine...we just like being with each other as a group and do things together. It will be awhile before I go home again, but when I do... it always makes me happy. (Ricky)

He specifically spoke about his mother and the bond they shared that goes beyond the typical mother and son relationship.

> Man...I smile every time I think about her or hear her name. I consider my mother to be my best friend in the world... she's a special person. She's the one person I can go to and tell everything. She knows me like a book and can tell when things are going bad for me... like at school, or at football. We don't get the chance to speak on the phone a lot, or for her to come up and watch. We do write each other, I get a letter every week and I try to send one back as soon as possible.

I look forward to when I have the time to go home and spend with my family and my mother. (Ricky)

Academic pursuits were not a major concern for Ricky growing up. Neither of his parents attended college, but they tried to stress the value of an education to all their children. Ricky continually struggled with academics until he entered college; until ***he*** realized the importance of an education. Not playing his first two years of college, Ricky was able to get ahead in his studies, and now looks forward to graduating in May, 1997.

August, 1996 was the beginning of Ricky's final year playing collegiate football. Like the majority of men playing college football, Ricky has dreams of playing on Sunday. However, first things first, he wants to be the best position player in the conference and in the nation. Ricky stated, "I want to be the best in the conference, I believe I am the best." Something tells me Ricky will ***persevere*** and realize both his dreams in the near future.

Jack

They say strength comes in numbers, if numbers are what you want, then Jack has the numbers to get to the NFL. He runs a 4.6 second time in the forty, has a 36 inch vertical leap, and bench presses 225 pounds 35 times. Needless to say, with all these impressive numbers, Jack prefers to "ball-up" and let his play impress others. He may not be the largest person on the playing field, but few will hit you harder and love it more at the same time.

When I asked Jack to describe himself, he said that he was more comfortable

being by himself. He liked certain hobbies like basketball and weight lifting but enjoyed the time he could spend alone.

> Basically, I don't do too much; just sit back, relax; I don't hang out as much as I should, I just feel more comfortable with being by myself. But as far as I like playing basketball; I play football, of course; lifting weights. I like lifting weights. Basically, that's just about it. I just stay to myself. (Jack)

Jack's laid back personality was evident during our meeting. He was soft spoken and very relaxed.. He had a certainty about him, as if he knew how his life would turn out, or maybe it was his care-free attitude.

Jack grew up in the suburbs of a large city in the South and lived in, "a nice little house on the east side of town." Both his father and mother worked as he grew up, and they have stayed married for 30 years, thus earning his respect.

> My mom and dad they stayed together; and raised three children; I respect my dad for being with my mom this long, because, if you think about it, not too many people's parents, white or black, are still together. Mom and Dad are still together. I respect him for that, as same as my mom, so having raising three children, with two of them already graduated; I graduate, hopefully, in the spring. If not, then it will be in the summer. (Jack)

Jack talked about the importance of education in his family. Both his brother and his sister were college graduates, and he plans to graduate within the next year. While growing up, Jack spoke of his aptitude in high school, how he was ranked in the top quarter of his graduating class. He considered himself to be smart, but he believed he is more street smart than anything.

In a sport of uncertainty and unpredictability, it is certain that Jack will be content with his future. He is not guaranteed to be drafted next year, or to sign a million dollar

contract, he is not guaranteed the day will come when he will play in the NFL, but Jack will do everything he can to make all possibilities happen and to earn the respect of others.

Robert

"Little minds are tamed and subdued by misfortune, but great minds rise above it." This quote from Irving represents my reflective thoughts about Robert. He was far and above the most intelligent of all of the participants. Not to question the other's intelligence, but Robert spoke with an air of confidence that distinguished him as intelligent.

Robert grew up in an affluent part of town in the Midwest. Both parents were highly educated, and worked in areas that promoted academics. This was something Robert and his family grew up with and took very seriously.

> There were people in my life that showed me values of education; showed me valuable information and showed me really interesting ways of learning new things and interesting ways of educating myself. And you know, like I said, education was always important and it's something I enjoy doing. (Robert)

Probably not the most athletically gifted of all the participants, Robert has been able to get the most from his abilities due to the fire and tenacity he displays on and off the football field. The luxury Robert has that some of the other participants do not share, is knowing whichever opportunity comes his way, either academics or professional football, he will become successful. With all due respect, Robert is an excellent football player, receiving many football honors, but he realizes that football is a dream, one that

may not come true. It would not be far fetched to describe Robert as a realist. After all, he knows the odds are stacked against players making it in the NFL, plus, he values the power of education.

> Players that I've seen come in, all they concern themselves with is football; they think that's "okay, I come to this big university, I'm going to play football and that's my career. After I get done, I'm going to the pros and make a big living." But, they try to tell them that the chances of you going to the pros are slim, less than one percent. You need to get an education and still some of these people are not listening; they don't get it; they don't do what they have to do to get an education and they get stuck. When football is over, they have a hard time surviving in the real world. (Robert)

Whatever road Robert decides to travel, whether it is the long hard journey of continuous education, or the grueling days on the gridiron, Robert will become a success in life. He will choose the life he wants to lead with a sound mind and body. His life is self directed and has purpose.

Presentation of Data

In the following chapters, the emerging themes of the participant interviews are reported. The findings center around four themes with factors that reflect a picture of the data as it relates to the decision making of these eight participants (Figure 1). The four themes are: (a) confidence, (b) relationships, (c) pressure, and (d) fear. Each theme along with the factors supporting the themes is presented as a separate chapter in the following pages. The first theme is Confidence, which has five supporting factors included in the text; they are early successes, role models, dreams, glory days, and no regrets. The second theme, Relationships, also has five supporting factors that include

family, friends, trust, coaches, and the university. Pressure, the third theme, has three factors that contribute to its strength; they are transition to college, social mobility, and a need to prove self. The last theme Fear, has two supporting factors losing something and maturity.

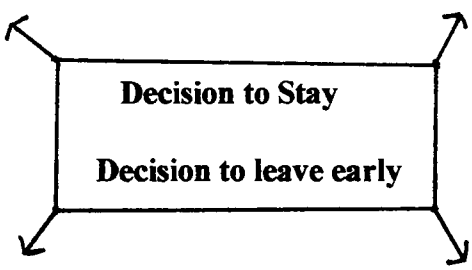
Figure 1. Themes

Confidence

1. Early Success
2. Role Models
3. Dreams
4. Glory Days
5. No Regrets

Relationships

1. Family
2. Friends
3. Trust
4. Coaches
5. University



Pressure

1. Transition to College
2. Social Mobility
   a. Academics
   b. A way out of the streets
3. Need to Prove Self

Fear

1. Losing Something
   a. Money
   b. Injury
2. Maturity

CHAPTER 5

CONFIDENCE

Our todays and yesterdays are the blocks with which we build. -Longfellow

To better understand the experiences of the participants and how they related to confidence, it is important to learn more about the factors that contributed to confidence. The following pages explain five factors, early successful experiences, role models, dreams, glory days in high school, and no regrets. At the end of the chapter is a summary of the role of confidence in decision-making.

Early Successful Experiences

Traditionally, when we acknowledge that someone has confidence we see them as self-assured, reliant, and having a strong belief in their abilities. For the participants in this study, confidence was something they began to develop from the time they first started playing sports in a structured league or in the backyard, to the time when they made their decision to enter the professional draft or continue in college. Gaining confidence is something that does not happen over night; it takes time and needs to be developed through continuous, successful experiences. Success breeds confidence and the more successful experiences one is likely to have, the greater are the chances that they will continue to play in a particular sport, or continue to develop skills in other areas. These eight participants experienced high levels of success early, and success continued throughout their career. Through this cultivation process, with high levels of

confidence and self assurance these athletes made important decisions in their life.

Competitive sport offers children ways to develop skill, make new friends, experience thrill and excitement, and develop positive psychological characteristics. All eight of the participants began playing sport as a youth, and were always considered to be the best athlete on the field. They all played in structured sport programs, as well as in "pick up games" in the back yard or in the park; thus began their development of confidence (Table 2). Comparatively, Robert and David talked about the many different sports they played growing up with their friends and with their family. They shared their experiences playing ball at a young age and playing catch with their fathers.

> I think I began playing sports when I was young; as a young kid. I grew up, especially where we grew up, playing back yard football, basketball, baseball. And then you progress into your organized sports and I played those up until middle school and high school. Yeah, it started when I was young, 3 or 4 years old. In the back yard playing catch with Dad. And trying to hit a baseball, trying to throw a basketball in the hoop; and then it progressed into organized sports. (Robert)

> Growing up I played all the sports. I liked basketball growing up, especially the (pro team) they were my favorite team. I started playing at a young age just like all kids do. My father helped me out a lot. He would play catch with me, throw the football around, shoot hoops, and I used to play with others. My family was big in sports. We would watch it on TV, go to games, and everything. They were fanatics. I guess you could say sports was in my blood. I think most kids growing up in my neighborhood was like that, sports was everything. (David)

No participant felt forced or influenced into playing sports by family or friends, and were only encouraged to play if they wanted to continue. Jim stated this point the best, "Growing up watching it all the time was encouragement enough. My parents never

Table 2. Early Sport Experiences

Participant	Comments
	Early Entry in the NFL
David	I started playing at a young age just like all kids do. My father helped me out a lot. He would play catch with me, throw the football around, shoot hoops, and I used to play with others.
Heisman	I think it's just...something to do...where I come from. I mean, to play sports, to get involved, and going through public school, you know...that's something that every public school child, young man or woman, athlete has, is pretty much introduced to and that you pretty much just fall into just by, being, going through public school.
Jim	Let's see. I was about 8 years old. It was baseball at the time...actually I was 7. Um...my brother played on the team and he was older than me.
Mark	Playing little league baseball and Pop Warner football. I started when I was, I think seven, yeah that sounds right. It was a blast, playing with and even against your friends. I think then I knew I wanted to play professional ball of some sort. It just turned out to be football. I was always one the best players on the team.

Participant	Comments
	Those Who Stayed in College
Jack	I was in first grade as a matter of fact. I started playing football at the YMCA and just; my coach told me that as soon as you get the ball, you run the other way; he said take the ball and score; right then and there I knew how to play football. Run all the way and don't let the other team take your flags off you. I got the ball and I scored a touchdown the very first play when I started playing football. So right then and there I knew I could play some football.
Ricky	I began playing sports when I was a young kid, probably in the fourth, fifth grade. We would go in the back yard and play football or baseball, or any game. Around then I started playing in leagues, Pop Warner football, I was good, better than most of the kids there. I had fun then, it was simple.
Robert	I think I began playing sports when I was young; as a young kid. I grew up, especially where we grew up, playing back yard football, basketball, baseball. And then you progress into your organized sports and I played those up until middle school and high school. Yeah, it started when I was young, 3 or 4 years old. In the back yard playing catch with Dad.
Wesley	I started when I was nine. I played football. I just felt I should

pushed anything on us. If we wanted to do something they said 'just give it your best effort'." When each participant began speaking about their first sport experience their affect began to change, also the tone of their voice changed. There were noticeable differences in pitch level and excitement in their voices, as reflected by their stories. All participants spoke about positive sport experiences, reflecting on times when they "played catch with their dad", or like Jack, "scored a touchdown the very first play when I started playing football." They talked about "always the best athletes on the field," and how things naturally came to them. These were truly special moments in their lives when they could "just play" and experience the purity of sport. When Mark began talking about his early sport experiences his eyes enlarged, and you could see it in his face, the memories that were resurfacing. For him these were times when playing, "was a blast." These were also times when the biggest decision they had to make might have been choosing sides for the pick up game, or when they were going home for supper.

Heisman and Wesley were quiet and soft spoken about their memories. Both were the "best athletes on the field" and both felt it was something they should do. Although play was not expected of them, they both had early success and wanted to continue.

Role Models

Confidence and success are not just fixed entities in sport, they can also be developed and fostered through role models. A role model is a person someone looks up

to and wants to emulate. Seven of the eight participants were able to talk about a person, either in sport or out of sport, they looked up to and wanted to emulate. The selection of each role model usually occurred early in their lives, and influenced them in sport as well as out of sport. The majority of the role models were successful sport heroes and played the same position as the interviewee. As a young budding star, comparisons are drawn between other successful athletes, usually professional athletes. These comparisons give the young athlete confidence in their playing abilities, as well as other abilities outside of sport. Of the seven participants who were able to talk about their role model, only two mentioned non-sport idols and one of the two included both non-sport and sport idols (Table 3). Jack was the only athlete who was unable to describe a role model in his life, sport or non sport. What were the characteristics of a role model to these athletes? Someone who not only was successful in their sport, but someone who worked in the community giving their time to help others.

Wesley loved to watch Tony Dorsett run, and Tony did it very well. When Wesley talked about his idol, he drew comparisons between Tony and himself. It was not only Tony being a great athlete, but it was one person with whom Wesley could identify.

> Right. I loved to watch him play and I wanted to always run like he did. We are about the same size and speed. So when people compare me to him, it is a real honor and thrill to me. I can only hope I accomplish as much as he did in his football career and in life. (Wesley)

When Jim spoke about his role model, again it was a sport figure and someone he

Table 3. Role Models

Participant	Comments
	Early Entry in the NFL
David	I'm not sure there was one particular person, there were a few people I liked in different sports. There were many great athletes, Walter Payton, Julius Erving, these were great people because they contributed a lot to their sport, and you never heard any crap about them in the paper.
Heisman	And, uh, if you want to talk about heroes, even here, here at State U., you know people ask me, who do you look up to? Who's your hero? And, this and that. And I think it's sad, because a lot, a lot of kids don't have this person who should be their hero in their lives, and that's my father.
Jim	Wanted to be like Hugh Green or L.T . I liked the way he ran over people, his speed, he was the best outside linebacker ever. He had game and attitude. Yeah.
Mark	I remember liking this one guy from the Chargers, John Jefferson, him and Willie Gault. Both were fast and could catch the ball anywhere. If you threw the ball up, they were so fast they could run it down.

Participant	Comments
	Those Who Stayed in College
Jack	Not really, I like a lot of players; Some quarterbacks, receivers, running backs, defensive backs, the whole line really. I just didn't have any particular idol. I don't know why I didn't; if they are good, I'll give them their due.
Ricky	I want my brothers and sisters to look up to me and to be proud... and see me as someone who did it. I go back home and a lot of people come up to me and say good job, we're proud of you for going to college and getting your education. It makes me happy to see young kids wanting to use me as their role model, and to get an education.
Robert	I don't think I really had an idol or someone who I really wanted to emulate, but I admired some people and I think that's a difference. Probably one person I admired more than anyone, was my father. My father was a beacon in my life; someone I probably looked up to outside of sports.
Wesley	Right. I loved to watch him play and I wanted to always run like he did. We are about the same size and speed. So when people compare me to him, it is a real honor and thrill to me. I can only hope I accomplish as much as he did in his football career and in life.

wanted to play like because of his athletic presence. He spoke of "wanting to be like Hugh Green or L.T. I liked the way he [L.T] ran over people, his speed, he was the best outside linebacker in the game."

Heisman was one of the few athletes that spoke about his father as his idol, and gave no response to a sport figure. He spoke at great lengths about his father, and talked about stories that still affect his life and the decisions he makes. Heisman looked up to and respected his father, and he had this to say about him.

> And, uh, if you want to talk about heros, even here, here at State U., you know people ask me, who do you look up to? Who's your hero? And, this and that. And I think it's sad, because a lot, a lot of kids don't have this person who should be their hero in their lives, and that's my father. You know. Not because he's some great athlete, and, uh, this and that, when he was in high school, but just coming from my neighborhood, one of the only kids that *had* a father. And home, you know, he became my hero. I always tried to, he raised me in such a way that I've always tried to mold myself after him. And I want to raise my kids hopefully the same way that he raised me.

Similarly, when Robert and David spoke about who their idols were, they spoke of athletes who not only excelled in their particular sport, but gave more to the community and the people around them. David stated,

> I'm not sure there was one particular person, there were a few people I liked in different sports. There were many great athletes, Walter Payton, Julius Erving, these were great people because they contributed a lot to their sport, and you never heard any crap about them in the paper. (David)

And Robert had this to say about the people he looked up to and admired because of their equal value outside the sporting arena,

> I watched the Browns and the Steelers and you looked up to players on those teams; players like Chip Banks, Clay Matthews, a player on the Steelers like Jack

> Lambert and players that really had great impact on their team; a great impact in society. Clay Matthews is an incredible family person, good family values, did a lot for the community; so I looked up to those kind of players. I don't think I really had an idol or someone who I really wanted to emulate, but I admired some people and I think that's a difference. (Robert)

Robert also spoke about his father as an important figure in his life stating that, if there was one person he wanted to be like or emulate, it would be him.

When Mark, Heisman, and Ricky spoke about themselves as role models in the community, they spoke about the "pressure and the responsibility" that goes along with being a role model. It is something that most public figures have to deal with sometime in their life, and each participant handled it differently.

> Sometimes people look up to me as if I'm their hope to get out. I guess if you see one brother makin' it, then it makes you believe you can too. I felt that way growing up. I see people leave and do things, go to college and then say, man that can be me some day. So now if I could be an inspiration to someone else, then that's something that makes me proud to do. Fuck those people who don't think you're a role model. There's a lot of people who envy you and look up at you, especially when you are in a high profile position, like a football player. (Mark)

Is that a responsibility you enjoy having, being a role model? (Jerry)

> It's something that goes with the territory. No, I don't particularly like it, it is a lot of pressure for one person to have. Doing what I do is a lot of pressure, don't let anyone kid you. But when you add those others, kids, peers, and adults looking up to you it's more than a lot of people could handle. I won't run away from this responsibility, and I will try my best to let others see me in a good light. I made promises to myself and others not to screw up and I want to keep my word. Without your word, you ain't nothing. (Mark)

Ricky explained that being a role model meant a lot to him. He believed it was his duty and responsibility to help others and encourage them to do better. He talked

about going home and "having people come up to me and say good job, we're proud of you for going to college and getting your education." Ricky continued by stating, "It makes me happy to see young kids wanting to use me as their role model and to get an education." For Ricky it was important that he was a role model to others, especially his family. He was the first person to attend college and he wanted to set a good example for the rest of his family.

Heisman spoke more about the negativity of being a role model and how kids just look at the successful parts of a person's life and not the essence of the person. It's not so much being a recognized athlete, it's getting stereotyped into that role that troubled Heisman.

> I wholeheartedly agree with Charles Barkley...you know, I don't want to be a role model. But I do, I accept that responsibility, because I know that there are so many that do look up to me. When I go speak at schools, and talk to kids, they are amazed. They are amazed. You know, I constantly go to schools and sit down and have autograph signings, and talk to kids. Because that's all they see, and that disheartens me.

Dreams

We all have dreams in our lives, something that we would like to accomplish, something that we want to obtain, something we can stand up and say, "I did it." Some people find pride and accomplishment in the work they do, or in being the best person or parent they can be, and some find accomplishment in finishing a project. These eight athletes found pride and a sense of accomplishment from various sources in life. It does not matter where or what the source is, as long as it inspires you to do your best at a

given moment. These eight athletes were driven by a sense of completion, pride in themselves, and wanting others to be proud of them. For each, their dreams began at an early age, playing sports and wanting to be someone else, their hero. Their dreams were kindled by their family, friends, and their belief in themselves. It is not uncommon for young people to dream about what they want to do in life, but only a few actually make their dreams become a reality. The realism for these eight athletes is a serene understanding that whatever they had done in life, whatever decisions they had made, it was because of a dream they had to follow and the confidence they had in themselves to see their dreams through.

How often have we thought about being a fireman, a policemen, a nurse, or even a doctor or a lawyer? For these participants their dream was either to become a professional athlete, or to get a college education. Dreams are important in our lives because they provide us with motivation to accomplish something that we believe. Heisman talked about his thoughts of education and going to the NFL, "there is not so much chance that this kind of kid is going to go to the NFL.... OK...so...education was definitely my key goal." He also stated, "it was always a dream and a thought, I'd love to play pro football."

David reiterated Heisman's point that most college players or kids dream of someday playing on Sunday. The hard part is convincing these football players that only a few will make it to the professional level. But it does not stop them from dreaming.

I think every player has that dream to make it to the pro's. I'm no different. If

> you ask every player on the team, 99% percent would say they dreamt of going to the pros at some time or they believe they will be there some day. Hell, its every kid's dream! (David)

After getting drafted David had this to say about his opportunity in the NFL, "This is a dream come true and right now I'm trying to live out one of the most important things or dreams, in my life." And when the time came for Jim to make his decision, he received quality advice from his girlfriend. She told Jim, "follow your dreams, and if those dreams lead to the NFL, then do it."

When I spoke with Mark, he believed all along he had a chance to play professional football. What he needed was to get a few breaks in life, so his dream could someday become a reality. He was able to get his breaks in life, and Mark made the most of them. Mark is not cocky, but you could say he is very confident about his ability on the football field and his making it to the NFL

> It's a dream I had and a dream Coach had. He knew I had all the talent in the world, I just needed a chance and needed some good breaks, so to speak. Going to State U. was a good break. So then I knew I could live out this dream and make it. Sure this dream is mine, but it's also his and Mom's. Kinda for the kids in the street who can look up to someone and say he made it, so can I. (Mark)

Ricky and Jack reminisced when they were little kids playing football in the backyard. They both said, "I used to dream about playing professional football," then they would both envision one of their favorite athletes and pretend. Most kids do what Jack and Ricky had done when they were growing up, they pretend. The last game of the world series, two strikes, and you hit the game winning homerun. In their case, it was to score the winning touchdown in the Superbowl. Wesley and Robert did not discuss their

dreams. However, Robert spoke about wanting to become a doctor, and, if professional football did not turn out, he would pursue that avenue.

> I'll graduate with my degree and if I don't go to the pros, then I will go to med school. I still want to be a doctor, I still plan on going to med school; it's something I've worked hard and it's something I think I would be disappointed if I didn't . (Robert)

The Glory Days of High School

When the participants began playing high school sports, they already had confidence in their ability from their successes as a youth. These athletes loved high school. High school was fun! These were the days of loud cheers from family and friends, days when they played their in-state rivals, and the days when they made their first big decisions in life. The decisions they made early continued to affect later decisions. All the athletes in this study were local heroes or "stars," and enjoyed the days when you could just "buckle up the chin strap and play your heart out", and not have to worry about the "extra's" that are present in college football (Jack). They all played several sports in high school, earned multiple sport letters, state and local honors, and were recruited by the best college programs in the nation. Along with the many amenities that came from playing football, each participant was able to describe at least one fond memory. Jack spoke of one memory in particular which he played in front of a large crowd and threw the winning touchdown pass. His excitement rose as he shared his story and reiterated, "it was nice."

> I'll say when we beat our rival South High. It was 7 seconds until the end of the game and the score was like 20 to 14, I really don't remember the exact score. I

> threw a fade route to my best friend and he caught it and we won the game. You just had to be there just to see it, because that was the biggest game ever in County history. That football game and it was something. It was nice. It wasn't even the state championship game; it was North High and South High, our top rival, a district game and, just a district game and there was 20,000 people at that game; this is high school you know; it was pretty nice. It was a lot of people. (Jack)

David had a very similar perspective stating, "Playing back then was fun.... the people.... the fans.... it's different than in college, maybe the expectations are different, you know what I mean. Too much hype." Ricky shared the same perspective as David stating, "High school was fun, you just went out there and played." Heisman spoke about the sport programs in high school and the number of championships they won. He felt "very fortunate" he went to a high school that had a strong winning tradition and thus provided him with many opportunities.

In high school, well before the conclusion of their senior year, these athletes were being heavily recruited by all the major universities in the country. At this time they began to develop processes that would help them make their decision with confidence, and these processes carried over into college. For all, the recruiting process began soon after their sophomore or junior years when letters began arriving at their homes. Then the courtesy phone calls from the coaches, the visits, and the repeated promises until a decision was made. And if you are a two-star athlete, as was the case for four of the participants, the recruiting process is doubled and made even harder. Sometime before or during their senior year, each participant narrowed their prospective universities to a

handful. As part of the recruiting process, each participant traveled to their selected universities to visit the school and learn more about the program. This part of the recruiting process was fun, it was an all-expense-paid trip to where they wanted to go, and it was a time when many athletes visited places and cities they wanted to see. Shortly thereafter, they signed a letter of intent to enroll and play for State U. The whole recruiting process is at times confusing for the athlete and is looked upon with great trepidation. The pressure of not wanting to make a mistake, or a poor decision, plays heavily in the minds of the young athlete.

> It was tough. Uh, you just, you didn't know who was being honest. You have everyone, everyday talking to ya, uh, come here, come there, come here. A lot of times it got real confusing. It was...you didn't know who was being on the up and up and you didn't know which way to go. And also you're afraid of making mistakes, so you just kind of ...hold out and see which one comes around. (Jim)

However, for some it is an easy process, and an easy decision because they know they have control over the decisions they make in life .

> My story is probably no different then everyone else's. I was recruited to go other places but chose this school instead. I started getting letters when I was a sophomore and it didn't end until after I made my decision. What a joke recruiting was. But you use the opportunities when you can, and people want you, you listen. There were a few other schools I looked at, but I knew I wanted to come here and play. If you want to play big time football, you go to a big time program. Simple as that. My trip here was great, meet the coaches and things felt right, like a perfect match. Other schools didn't give me the same feeling. I felt comfortable here not elsewhere. (David)

Their decision to enroll at State U. varied for each participant. Like David, most entered their university because it was a "perfect match" or as Wesley stated, "because of the environment and because it reminds me of home." Jim stated his number one reason

was the coach. Robert and Mark grew up watching their schools play and always wanted to play for them. Mark stated, "Growing up in [State] you always wanted to play for this school. There's a long tradition here and you want to continue with that tradition." Robert shared his thought about State U., "I always wanted to play for State U. It was the team that I watched. It was a school that I knew and felt comfortable with." For whatever reason they chose to go to State U., all the participants mentioned that playing football at a big time university was important to them and, for some, getting an education was equally important.

No Regrets

As the participants made their transition from high school to college, for some there were periods of time when life appeared unsure. That is something most incoming freshmen face; however, these were not just any incoming freshmen. They had pressures and expectations placed on them that most of us will never have, either in sport or out of sport. This concept of pressure is discussed fully in a later chapter, but is introduced now because it demonstrates how these participants' confidence helped them through these times. As they continued to play sport and gain accolades from their peers, there was a continuous rise of confidence that permeated all aspects of life, especially their abilities in football. They believed in themselves and believed they could do anything they wanted to do on the field. The four participants who decided to stay in college had shared confidence on the field and their playing ability as well as in the classroom and their academics. Because of this, they were able to make their decision to stay without

hesitation, and without regret. They knew they did the right thing in life. The four participants who decided to enter the professional draft, David, Heisman, Jim, and Mark, spoke about having no regrets leaving their university, their teammates, and entering the professional draft. In David's second interview, immediately after the draft, he gave mixed messages about his decision. Initially he spoke about the disappointment of being a middle-round selection, and how he needed the support of his family to get over the "disappointment of being drafted where I didn't expect it." Then, later in the interview, he did something I did not expect, he espoused his confidence by stating "best thing I ever did," as a reflective thought on his decision to leave early. Because of David's initial disappointment, I believe, when he was drafted, it clouded his judgement for a moment when, all this time he knew he made the right decision. At least, it was the right decision for David. With an air of confidence, Mark and Jim agreed they made the right decision to leave early and expressed no regrets. Mark evaluated extensively the other athletes coming out for the draft that played his position and believed he was one of the top two or three. After comparing himself with other entering athletes, after his projection of what round he would be drafted, and with his confidence in his abilities, Mark made his decision to leave and never looked back.

> Sure, I wouldn't come out if I thought I was going to be a third or fourth round pick. It would've been a mistake. Sure, I don't know now, but all indication shows I'll be in the first round. Not too many people drop from one to four/five unless you get injured. I feel pretty safe about my position and feel confident I made the right choice. No regrets one bit. (Mark)

Jim knew all along that this is what he was going to do in life; that his destiny, his dream, was to play professional football. In Jim's case, considering his economic condition, entering the draft was inevitable, and his reaction was obvious. He stated, "I feel pretty strong about my decision. I'm ready to step it up another level. Keep excelling." When Jim made his decision he was out riding in his car, he looked at one of his family members, and knew he needed to provide for them, right now!

Of all the participants who could have questioned their decision, Heisman would have been the likely candidate. Not getting drafted ***did not*** cause Heisman to question his decision, either before or after the draft. He remained solid in his decision and when asked, he replied, "Hell no!" Like David, he was disappointed, but planned to use this setback and "filter it into desire and make someone's team."

For the remaining four participants, they did not talk about "regrets," but spoke with great confidence regarding the decision they had made to stay in school. They did not hesitate, nor did they confuse the power and intent of their statement. What they said came out with sheer force and direction. Wesley, who made promises to his mother and to himself about getting an education had this to say about his decision, "I was just trying to get an education and that's my goal right now. Hopefully I can get my degree in April. I have another semester and I don't think it will be a bad decision so I'll be that much closer and wiser in the real world." Again, Wesley's decision was based on wanting to finish something he started regarding his education, and wanting to take his team to a national title. Likewise, Robert's comments were strong and meaningful. He

talked to others about his decision and told them this is what he wanted and this is what he was going to do. This comes as no surprise because of his strong personality and because of strong affiliation he has with his university, one that developed as a youth. Robert stated:

> Again, I talked to my mom and dad about it; I talked to my friends about it. Ultimately the decision was mine. And I told them that this is what I was thinking and this is what I am going to do; you know scouts and things of that nature saying that you can come out, but I made my decision to stay and I think my mom and dad were proud of that decision. They were happy to see me stay because of the things I wanted to do. (Robert)

Jack's decision to stay was motivated by wanting to play again, and changing the negativity surrounding his good name. Although Jack's athletic performances had been stellar on the field, his off the field antics had gotten him into trouble on numerous occasions. Jack's comments were "I wanted to clean my name up, and I wanted to come back and play again. I have all the confidence in the world about my decision, it was the best thing for me and my future." This was the right decision for Jack, because the NFL looks negatively at athletes who get into trouble off the field, and even though you are as talented as Jack, your stock could fall in a tail spin. Ricky, like the rest, wanted to come back and play for his university and obtain his degree. His confidence was evident when he spoke about pursuing his degree, and especially the pride his family would have when he did finish.

> I made my decision because I wanted to play again for my university, but most of all I want to finish my degree. It will make my family happy to see me get it, and because of that, I had no trouble deciding what was right for me to do. I know if I left now, I would most likely not finish, so now is the time... do it while I can, and

still here. I know what I did was right, it will help me out in the future, I'm sure of that. (Ricky)

Summary

The best decisions we make in our lives are the kind we can make with confidence and self assurance, and in the end, without regrets. The participants in this study were able to draw upon past experiences in their lives, successful experiences as a youth and an adult, and make an important decision to help them through their years. Confidence in self is not something everyone has, and is not always there when personal decisions in life need to be made. The early successes of these participants helped build a foundation of self confidence for later successes. It became a cycle as they transitioned from one aspect of their life to the next. As mentioned previously in this chapter, success breeds confidence. Confidence gave the participants a solid foundation to rise above any speculation and adversity, and to make a lifelong commitment to their professional careers. Confidence was something none of them lacked. In fact, it was evident in their decisions in high school when they chose a college, to now when they were deciding what was best for them in their lives. With all the success each participant had throughout their years, the likelihood of future successes is great.

As young children, it was important for each participant to have dreams they wanted to accomplish. These dreams for some were academics and receiving a college degree and for others it was a professional career in sport. Their dreams did not haphazardly appear, they were slowly developed during the course of their lives through

people they met and through their experiences in and out of sport. Their dreams helped each participant decide what was best for them, either to stay and finish their college education, or to enter the professional draft. For some, their dreams still needed to be completed and that was one factor in their decision to stay, and for the others, they wanted to make their dreams a reality and that was one factor in their decision to leave early.

CHAPTER 6

RELATIONSHIPS

Be courteous to all, but intimate with few, and let those few be well tried before you give them your confidence. True friendship is a plant of slow growth, and must undergo and withstand the shocks of adversity before it is entitled to the appellation.
-George Washington

In this chapter the importance of relationships in the participants' lives as they related to their decision is discussed. These relationships stem from family, friends, and personal relationships, to the relationships they had with their coaches and the university. Not all relationships were good, some manifested tremendous amounts of pressure and stress on people. In these cases, the best remedies were to get away from those pressures and stressors and to move forward. In general, the participants were able to describe positive relationships in their lives, the kind that provided love and support, and of people who unconditionally accepted them for who they were, and not for what they represented to the community or university. As patterns developed across all participants, one factor was obvious as a measure of a successful relationship and that was trust. Without trust, these participants closed off their world to others and to their university. Just like the old saying goes, "If I can't trust you, I don't want to be with you." As these participants decided their destiny, trust was one factor that influenced those participants who entered the professional draft and influenced those participants who stayed.

In the following pages excerpts of the athletes' comments about these issues of

relationships, support, and trust are provided. The participants shared their emotions and feelings regarding these issues, they evaluated their life in comparison to others, and in comparison to society as a whole. They dismantled their own beliefs and subjected it to the criticism of society and the scholarly world. The major theme of this chapter is relationships and the five factors that had a direct influence in the participants' decisions. These factors were: (a) family, (b) friends, (c) coaches, (d) trust, and (e) the university.

Family

The family was one of the most important influences in these athletes' lives. The family provided the primary social environment where the athlete could develop this identity, self-esteem, and healthy relationships. Most successful athletes describe their families as providing them with encouragement, discipline, and most of all, love and support. In this study, all eight athletes talked about the love and support they received from their families, especially from their moms when important decisions needed to be made. (Table 4). These decisions included what college to attend or whether or not they should enter the professional draft. The family support they received was incredible. Not only did the families provide the necessary support, but not one participant said that their parents told them what they had to do with their lives. They gave each participant complete control and independence to make their decisions, and whatever that decision was, the family supported it.

Four of the eight participants, half, came from what is considered non-traditional

Table. 4 Family

Participant	Comments
	Early Entry to the NFL
David	Well I come from basically a good home, both parents that are very supportive of me and my doings. My other family members are like my parents, well I guess we are all. My parents are great people who raised me and my family well.
Heisman	Oh, my family, um, there's just me and my brother, me and my brother and my mother and father, there's four of us. That's my immediate family, we're real close to each other.. And, uh, my brother is married, has two kids--one adopted.
Jim	Yeah most important part of my life. My family, my son. I don't want to be some bad father who don't take care of their son, so I spend time with him and provide for him. Yeah, we spend a lot of family time together. We were real tight.
Mark	With my father and mother not being married, it was hard on her and the rest of the family. We grew up close to each other and had to depend on each other for help. Without my family, Man... it would've been rougher.

Participant	Comments
	Those Who Stayed in College
Jack	My mom and dad they stay together; and raised three children; I respect my dad for being with my mom this long, because if you think about it, not too many people's parents, white or black, are still together. Mom and Dad are still together. I think my family is a typical family, but we have our downfalls as far as attitudes and mood swings and stuff like, but I think our family is pretty good.
Ricky	I have brothers and a sister and we are really close. We give each other support when we need it. Mom and Dad are supportive too, when it comes to us doing things. Family is and has always been really important to me. I miss my family when I don't see them for awhile, especially during the season.
Robert	I'd say we have a good relationship. You know, growing up, you fought, you played, you played hard, we did things; we did crazy stupid things but we had a good time; no one got hurt. Yeah, I'm close with my family. I think we are a close knit group.
Wesley	I think we're a pretty tight family. We get along. It's tough at times but we survive.

homes. They were raised by their mother, and whether the father was in the picture, was different across each family. Mark was initially raised by his mother and grandmother, but had seen his father a few times while he was a child. When I asked Mark to talk about his father he said, "I don't see him anymore," and he could only remember spending time with him when he was young. Heisman's father was always in the picture and was a big influence in his life. He referred to him as his "idol and role-model in life," and appreciated the lessons in life his father gave him. Wesley on the other hand, had no father in his life. His main support came from his mother and his grandmother. They were both influential people in his life, they showed him direction and appropriate paths to follow. "Mom was the best woman in the world and I owe a lot to her. She showed me the right paths in life to take, and I chose to take them because I did not want to disappoint her."

For the remaining athletes, family was also important, and having both parents meant something special. Ricky grew up with both parents in his life, but still had some troubles with his father, because he wasn't around as much as Ricky would have liked

> My mother and father are still married, but my father was never always around. He had a job that required him to travel a lot, and that took him away from us. I do respect them for staying together and all, it was important to me to have both parents in my life, at some point. My father showed me things my mother couldn't. Maybe he wasn't like most fathers, or what I wanted him to be like, but still he was there when I needed him. (Ricky)

Then there was Jack. He was proud to have both parents who were still together, and honored them for their long lasting relationship.

> My mom and dad, they stayed together and raised three children; I respect my dad for being with my mom this long, because if you think about it, not too many people's parents, white or black, are still together. Mom and Dad are still together. I think my family is a typical family, but we have our downfalls as far as attitudes and mood swings and stuff like that, but I think our family is pretty good. (Jack)

For all participants, having a parental figure in their life was comforting. Each spoke highly about one parent that gave them comfort, support, and personal interaction when they needed to survive in their world. They were without question a direct positive influence in their lives, and some decisions were made because of family. When Ricky, David, and Robert decided to attend their universities, an important factor was the proximity of their parents in relation to the university. It was evident and very important to the participants that their families be able to attend their college games. It was also important that their family was close enough so they could go home and visit. Robert used his family as an escape from dormitory life so he could get his studying done. David, like Robert, wanted to share his college years with his family and wanted his family close enough to attend the games.

Interestingly enough, when the participants of this study wanted to get support and needed to talk to someone in their family, "good ol' mom" was always there. Mothers were the quintessential backbone of support and knew the right things to say. Like most mothers, these participants' moms encouraged their sons to continue playing sports and to get their education. David said:

> Well, like I said, both Mom and Dad were very supportive, but if I really had a problem or needed sound advice, I would go to my mother. She just knew things.

> My dad he knew things too, but not like Mom. She had just a better way of talking and explaining things that would make things clear.

Mark's mother was a pillar of strength. She did everything humanly possible to raise her children and give them the encouragement they all needed.

> Mom, was a great lady, without her I wouldn't be here today. She has always encouraged me to do better for myself and to go someplace. I remember growing up and watching her struggle at times. It used to hurt me and it still does. Maybe because seeing all her pain makes me want to achieve more for myself. With my father and her not being married, it was hard on her and the rest of the family. We grew up close to each other and had to depend on each other for help. Without my family.... man... it would've been rougher. But Mom... shit... she tried to do what was right, but things didn't work out. I wouldn't trade her in for all the money in the world. She was a hard working lady..... that's where I get my work ethic from..... her..... and all the stuff she did trying to keep this family together. (Mark)

Wesley 's mother was similar to Mark's, hard-working and dedicated to her family. Wesley did not have the luxury of having a father at home, so his mother played both roles, and did it very well.

> She was definitely a big influence. She showed me what was right and what was wrong. I respected her for her hard work and for all that she tried to do for my family and I. She worked two jobs just to keep us together and to keep us from not wanting. We were poor, but it never seemed like it. Mom was the best woman in the world and I owe a lot to her. She showed me the right paths in life to take, and I chose to take them because I did not want to disappoint her. (Wesley)

And, to all the mothers who believe their sons have nothing nice to say about them they should listen to what Ricky said. Every time I read Ricky's quote it makes me reflect on my relationship with my mother, and it brings tears to my eyes.

> Man...I smile every time I think about her or hear her name. I consider my mother to be my best friend in the world...she's a special person. She's the one

person I can go to and tell everything. She knows me like a book and can tell when things are going bad for me... like at school, or at football. We don't get the chance to speak on the phone a lot, or for her to come up and watch. We do write each other, I get a letter every week and I try to send one back as soon as possible. I look forward to when I have the time to go home and spend with my family and my mother. (Ricky).

Friends

Samuel Paterson wrote, "Books like friends should be few and well chosen." This quote addresses the selectivity these athletes had when they chose their friends. All eight of the participants talked about the long-term friendships they developed as a youth, and the need to sustain them through the years. For each athlete, their long-term friendships provided them with support and encouragement during times when they needed it most. For Wesley, his closest friends were those with whom he had grown up, who had stood the test of time. When Wesley was going through some difficult times with his family, he said it "was especially comforting to have my friends and family to support me." Reminiscing, Jack recalled his friendship with Charlie, and how they used to play football while growing up together. Even though Charlie was at another university, Jack still kept in touch with him during the semester and during breaks. Jack said, "Charlie, who's my closest friend....he's from home. That's probably my best friend right there." Jack, like Wesley, agreed that the closest friends they had were the friends they grew up with over the years.

Ricky and Mark grew up in the streets where friendships were hard to establish, especially meaningful and lasting friendships. For both, trust was an important

characteristic of friendship which they valued highly. Living in the streets, people are taught not to trust anyone, or at least not too many people. Without the element of trust, both Mark and Ricky had found friendships hard to develop.

> They're pretty cool and all, people I trust and that's hard to do. I've always been told not to trust anyone, or at least too many people. My friends, probably most of my friends are friends I've had back home. Friends that I had for a long time. Friends I grew up with going to grade school and high school. And naturally, I'm gonna have some friends here too, but most of the time, the friends are pretty much the friends I've kept for a long time. (Mark)

> I wouldn't say I have a lot of friends, but most of them I grew up with in the streets, and we've been together for a long time. Probably my best friend is Joe, he's playing ball in the pro's and we still stay in touch. We've been friends for 12 years now. He's a great person and someone I can trust. I don't trust too many people because they always want something from you. (Ricky)

Because friendships were hard to develop for theses athletes, the ones they valued the most were not only long lasting but unconditional (Table 5). David and Robert talked about how important it was to just hang out with their friends and not have them expect anything in return as far as sports were concerned.

> Well that would be my best friend ..... We grew up together playing ball and just hanging out. He goes to another school but we still maintain some contact. When I get home during breaks and all, we hang out together. He's one person I trust, he's never screwed me over before and doesn't want a thing from me. I'll ask him if he wants anything, and he says, "no give it to someone else." He doesn't look at me like a football hero as others do. To him I'm just the big punk he grew up with and went to school with. (David)

> Well for instance, a very good friend I've had for at least 10 or 15 years now, he's been with me for a long time, actually he goes to school here, we hang out together all the time and we do a lot of things together. He doesn't ask for much and that's one thing I appreciate from him. Heck, he knew me when I was a nothing, so to him, that's all I'll ever be. (Robert)

Table 5. Friends

Participant	Comments
	Early Entry in the NFL
David	Well that would be my best friend ..... We grew up together playing ball and just hanging out. He goes to another school but we still maintain some contact. When I get home during breaks and all, we hang out together. He's one person I trust, he's never screwed me over before and doesn't want a thing from me.
Heisman	My friends. I try to keep friends at a distance. Um, I had a lot of past history of people wanting to be my friend, and then stabbing me in the back, so friends I don't have a lot of and I try to keep 'em at a distance.
Jim	I had a lot of great friends. Still do, by the way. Most of my friends that I've had since I was, uh, 7, 8 years old I still do. Just great buddies.
Mark	They're pretty cool and all, people I trust and that's hard to do. I've always been told not to trust anyone, or at least too many people. Some are from the streets back home and some are people I met here on campus. There's a good mix of people I know. I have some good friends back home, friends that I grew up with in school and on the streets.

Participant	Comments
	Those Who Stayed in College
Jack	I've got some pretty good friends. I'll just call them associates or whatever. I've got one good friend, Charlie, who's my closest friend ...a closer friend at State University, he's from home. That's probably my best friend right there. But as far as friends; as far as a lot of associates, I really don't tell a lot of people a lot of personal things.
Ricky	I wouldn't say I have a lot of friends, but most of them I grew up with in the streets, and we've been together for a long time. Probably my best friend is Joe, he's playing ball in the pro's and we still stay in touch. We've been friends for 12 years now. He's a great person and someone I can trust. I don't trust too many people because they always want something from you.
Robert	My friends; probably of most my friends are friends I've had back home. Friends that I had for a long time. Friends I grew up with going to grade school and high school. And naturally, I'm gonna have some friends here too, but most of the time, the friends are pretty much the friends I've kept for a long time.
Wesley	Right. I have some good friends back home, some of my better friends have been with me for a long time, and some are older than I. When things got bad for me and my family, it was especially comforting to have my friends and family to support us.

Bang! I watched my hommie go down

Living in or near the inner city, five of the eight participants spoke about the violence that occurred on the streets. No matter what they had tried to do to escape the inequity in their environment, the shadows of death loomed ever large. Living in the inner city as explained by Mark, was cruel and very tough. It becomes a way of life, a life they knew and had to deal with everyday. But for some, there was a chance, and that chance usually came from friends and sports. Mark talked about his experiences back home and living in the streets

> I have some good friends back home, friends that I grew up with in school and on the streets. I've seen some of my friends get shot and killed on the streets and that's not a pretty thing to see. When that happens all you think about is what if that was me? There's a tendency to evaluate your life for a moment. In the end, you realize it's just another day in this world we live in, pretty damn cruel at times. Especially when someone 18,19 years old dies, and all you think about is "why, why does this have to be." One of my best friends, he tells me "Mark, you gonna make it and represent the people down here." Sometimes people look up to me as if I'm their hope to get out. I guess if you see one brother makin' it, then it makes you believe you can too. I felt that way growing up. I see people leave and do things, go to college, and then say, "Man, that can be me someday." (Mark)

Wesley spoke about growing up in an environment where "a lot of things were going on," and seeing death was never a pleasant experience but it was something out of his control. He stated, "I did not like seeing friends die, or get shot, but I had no control over that. I can only control what Wesley does, not anyone else."

Ricky's life in the streets was a little different because of his involvement. Ricky talked about seeing his friends die, seeing good people fall because of the gangs and

selling drugs. It was a life he needed to get out of and stay away from, and to develop something that would help his future.

> I watched a good many of my hommies go down because of the things they did. They used to sell drugs to the kids on the street, or they would try to get them in their gang. Gangs are something I never did because of the friends I seen die. I was with one friend and Bang! I watched him go down. He was no less than two feet away. Man it was close, and too close for my comfort. It could've been me, I could've been killed in that moment. But it's the life they chose and they know going in anything can happen. I sold drugs at one time, but I quickly got out of that. Too much shit happening for me to ruin my life over. (Ricky)

The streets of the inner city were rough and often led to destruction of life. For these athletes, seeing friends and family die was strenuous and overwhelming, but they have survived and have done better for themselves. Getting away was the first step, the second step was not returning to that life.

Developing new friendships was hard for all participants, whether they were classmates or teammates. As athletes, they were automatically associated with a group of people with whom they might or might not share common values and beliefs. With ninety athletes on a football team, it was hard to develop friendships with all of them, but there is one thing that did bond them together, and that was being part of a team with specific goals. Some athletes call their team a "fraternity" and expect the relationships to develop and last. However, only one athlete, Robert, shared comments about a close friend, a teammate, that developed in college. This friendship began in the dorms where they were roommates and continued throughout their years in school and playing football.

> My roommate, we'll call him Dan, he was a football player too, and he was a freshman. We were both freshmen, and we thought, "Gosh! This is bad!" But, it was good. We hung out together and we grew, became good friends, actually he was my best friend here; my best friend on the team, too. It was good because we survived those years. We were able to get through those years. (Robert)

The remaining seven spoke about casual relationships they may have formed at the university, but those people tended to be more associates than anything.

Be straight up with me Coach!

One factor that all participants spoke about, to various degrees, were the relationships they had with their coaches, either in high school or in college. The participants described their coaches as either a very positive supportive coach, a players' coach, or the hard-nosed X's-and-O's coach. The impersonal, business nature of college football and the pressure that is felt to win, plays a very important role in the coach/player relationship. When the pressure of winning is the number one objective for college coaches, that pressure can filter down to the players and the relationships with them. In high school, winning is still the number one objective; however, millions of dollars are not won or lost because of the outcome of the season. In high school coaches may be fired because they do not produce, but the impact is not of the same magnitude as in major college football, such as the programs for which these participants played. Wesley, Mark, and Jim shared their thoughts about the relationships they had with their high school coach, because their relationships with their college coaches were not that positive. They described their coaches as positive father-figures, at times, and how they had played an influential part in their lives. These coaches took care of their players and

their families, and they were described as honest, empathetic, and nurturing.

> Coach was there for me and for my family, he helped me get through some tough times. He gave me guidance when I needed it, but never did he try to tell me what I had to do. I tried my best and if I needed to turn to someone, I could always count on him. (Wesley)

> Coach was more a father to me than anyone else. He's helped me out a lot with athletics and with things in life. He's shown me things that others couldn't... things on the street... things that happened to him..... his mistakes. He'd always tell me not to make the same mistakes he made. (Mark)

> We had a..we had a coach as much like, Vince Lombardi, you looked up to him, you didn't want to do anything wrong in front of him. He was a real good coach as far as that goes. He made it real fun, and you wanted to win for the guy. (Jim)

In college the relationships with coaches were described as impersonal and at times very distant, which had a direct influence on Heisman's and Mark's decision to leave early. The participants believed they had a stronger relationship with their position coach as compared to the head coach. There was a real sense of uncertainty about their relationship with the head coach, some described their relationship as okay, and others said it was distant. The main thing all participants wanted from their coaches was that they did not "bull shit" them, and, that they were "straight up" regarding their decisions that concerned all players on the team. Jack's perception of his college coaches was very negative; he considered them to be fake and did not want to talk to them.

> Coaches and stuff like that; it's all fake; this week we had a rough practice and the coaches is over there just tripping and they don't care about you. I guess this is expected, but they really showed their real colors this week. I'm not from State U. I ain't with all this tradition and all that. I'm from another part of the country and we do things differently . As far as State U. and the program, I know that it's a team effort; especially with the guys; the guys are cool. But, as far as the coaches, I don't talk to them. (Jack)

Heisman had trouble from day one with his coaches. He believed promises were made regarding his playing time, but they never materialized, and he was red-shirted his first year. His relationship with his coaches reached a point that he was considering transferring to another university.

> We was in a meeting one day..and our coach goes... "Hey, we got this new play, you know, I uh, thought it up myself and nobody's ever seen this before." And he drew the play up and he talked about it, and I'm thinking to myself, now I seen that play somewhere. As a matter of fact, I know a team that runs it *all* the time. And I said that to him. And he got so *pissed* that I had blew his little play up and, and, "Oh, are you trying to say I'm lying?" And I didn't....no, I've seen that play before. And so the next day at practice, I go from the first team to the scout team...over that one little disagreement. We didn't talk after that. (Heisman)

Robert and Mark talked about their relationships with their college coaches as very positive and rewarding. They described both as players' coaches who were very encouraging and supportive, and very straight up. They spoke of respect for their coaches because of their ability to coach, and because of the way each ran their program.

> I think honestly one of the reasons I came to State U. because of the coaching staff. In particular [Coach], if he wasn't here, then most likely I would probably still come here, but he makes it a better atmosphere. He's not one of these Vince Lombardi type of coaches where win, win, win is everything. He encourages us, he wants us to do well. He shows us things in life that are important; he tells us things in life that are important and he's a good man. He's really gotten some bad raps because of certain games and he's been on the hot seat for a couple of years. You know, the man knows how to win. He knows how to get his team ready, he knows how to prepare you, and he's someone that you can go to and talk to. His door's always open, open door policy. He's a good man. He's a real good man and I respect him. I like him a lot, and each year I've been here it's been a better year and I think it's been more reinforcing to me in regards to my decision coming here to State U. and playing for this team. (Robert)

> My coaches were pretty cool.... remember we had a new staff come in this year and that changed a lot of stuff. The old staff was pretty open about doing things on and off the field. We had a bunch of players getting in trouble, some things that was on the news and some that was kept in-house. You know what that's like. Don't want to ruin the precious program or the coach's rep. So in that sense, it was a little wild, on the field they were okay. But, I don't want to talk bad about the coaching staff, because that's not the way I like to do things. This new staff, a lot different. It was fun this year because we opened up our offense a lot. We had some big horses come in and take the pressure off some of the other guys and that helped open things up. Coach, he's a straight up kinda guy. I talked to a friend of mine who played under him at State U. and he said "man don't get in his dog house, because it is hard to get out." So I made sure from day one not to, and I think it worked out pretty well. He respected my ability and what I've done in the past, and I respected the fact he wanted to turn things around here and bring things back to a winning tradition. (Mark)

It is my belief the pressure on college coaches is unfairly astronomical. They are expected to manage a multi-million dollar industry as well as play the role of media lover, alumni supporter, and on top of that, meet the needs of 90 plus players on a team. Oh yeah, don't forget about the families who send their children to his program to be nurtured and made a "man ". Coaches cannot be everything to everybody, they do their best, it may not always be what someone likes, but give them credit for doing something most people could not dream about doing. In the end, when decisions were made, all four of the players who entered the draft, at some point consulted with their coach. Whether it was in the forefront or at the end of the decision-making process, they all went to their coaches and discussed their thoughts regarding their decision. The meetings were not held to find answers to questions, but were held as a courtesy to the coaching staff and the program. Mark's meeting with his coach was a time of confirmation and examination of other talent.

> I talked to Coach while I was thinking about it and he told me he thought I was ready and if it was something I felt strong about then I should do it. He told me that there's always a chance of injury coming back one more year, and that my age was a factor. We also talked about the other receivers coming out for the draft and measured myself up against them, and decided it was the time. (Mark)

David and Jim said they talked to their coaches at the end of the year, after they talked to their families, and after their decision was made. Both coaches said the players could handle it, and felt the players were ready to move on to the next level. Heisman's meeting was different because it was the first year under the new coaching staff, and he was just getting familiar with them. His meeting was held with the rest of his teammates, and telling them he would not be back. He also talked to his position coach who did encourage him to enter the draft.

Trust

The athletes' world is a unique world in which many people want to give them things, take them places, and just be associated with them. The athlete in turn, must be very cautious about who he "hangs out with" because, like so many things in this world, people who give, usually want something back in return. All eight of the participants talked about trusting others, or the lack of trust they felt toward people, and, for some, their university. For these eight people, trusting others was very difficult, and for the four participants who decided to leave early, trust was an important issue in their decision. If you cannot trust those people around you and your surroundings, changing environments is a more viable option. All participants were suspicious regarding other people's motivation, and because of that, their tendencies were things to keep to

themselves. Jack, who is very relaxed and quiet, talked about just wanting to be by himself, " I just like being by myself basically. I don't know why, I'm just like that, I guess." Wesley spoke about not wanting to worry about his life, so he spends most of his days at home. He is a self proclaimed "loner" and enjoys sitting around the house spending time by himself. Unfortunately, when you spend time by yourself, this means staying away from classmates, alumni, media, and even some teammates.

For these eight participants, trust developed over time, and came directly from relationships with family and life-long friends. Listening to the athletes speak you could hear the bitterness in their voices. Even Heisman, who is very talkative and gregarious, spoke cautiously about his friends, "within that group there's only a select few that I would trust with my life." For the most part these athletes talked about wanting to be left alone, getting away from the hassles of others, and wanting to be like everyone else. As a star athlete the luxury of just being like everyone else does not fit into the equation. The downfall typically means no privacy and a lack of trust. The cruel reality of their world is that they are not like others because they are visible in the community, and people are always wanting things from them. Robert said, "People think you are some big man on campus, they try to pick fights with you all the time, they try to get in your face and prove a point to their girlfriends." David and Mark explained their concern regarding college athletics and all of the people who want to befriend you, such as agents, classmates, and alumni.

Just because you are a football player from a school like this one, people always

> want to get next to you, say that they know you, when you don't know them from Adam. I like to keep to myself because of all the crap that goes on at the university. People and trust, that's hard to do at any level, especially here. If they don't want anything from you and treat you regular, that's important, not when they want you to get them this or that. I had one person ask me for tickets and football stuff just because I sat beside him in class. What a joke! That's what I'm talking about when it comes to people and trust. I guess I don't trust too many people. Some of my teammates, and my family and friends back home. I think that's all. (David)

> Trust, and not to trust very many people. There's people in this world that will be your friend simply to be your friend, and that's cool. But there is others who want your friendship because of who you are, and what you do. So in that sense, it's important to be cautious when it comes time to trust others. At the University in particular, many people come up to you and promise you the world. Here I got this for you, I got that. There's no morals behind what they do. They talk about football being so corrupt, look at the alumni, they're the one's who make it that way. How many 18-19 year kids are going to turn down money, clothes, when they don't have it, never will while in school, and bleed their hearts out for the small amount we get. (Mark)

If the picture that I present sounds harsh, well it is. These eight athletes felt they had been lied to, misled, and mishandled by some of the coaches, alumni, and the university. Four of the participants decided to stay in college because they believed they could handle it, or it wasn't as bad for them as compared to others. However, the four that decided to leave felt that mistrust, while not the most critical factor in their decision, did have an influence. Jim described it as a difficult time for him, because he could not tell "who was being honest, and who was on the up and up." To understand their point of view more clearly, the athletes believed university policies did not always give them an equal chance in their academic pursuits. Ricky spoke about professors at his university who took a strong negative stance against athletes, giving them a rough time, and not

helping them when special arrangements were needed.

> I remember this one class I had last year, and it was a required course I needed for my major. I knew going in that the teacher had a bad reputation for giving athletes a hard time, but what can you do if he is the only one that teaches the course. Well, I remember it was prior to a game, and we had to travel, and we had a test. I asked if I could make it up sometime before or after we get back. Man... he gave me attitude like you wouldn't believe. He said, "it was not his policy to give make-up exams to anyone, and that I needed to be here." Shit, I told him I couldn't because of the game. He said, "All you athletes are alike, you just want special treatment." (Ricky)

While all institutions may not be like the ones being described by the participants, there is a prevailing misconception about athletes, which in turn makes them guarded and hesitant to open up to a lot of people.

I'll use the university to get what I want

You could easily say the relationship these participants had with their universities was, "You use me, I'll use you." For seven of the participants, the only way to college was through sport. Not because they didn't have the intelligence to go, but money was scarce in their family, and getting an education was going to be difficult. So, they used their bodies, their blood, their sweat, and their tears, to get from the university something that could never be taken away, an education. These seven athletes knew that was the only way, so why not sacrifice a little to get a lot. "If the university plans on using me to generate revenue, it will cost them at least that much, my education," Jack remarked. Heisman stated during our interview how he used athletics to achieve his goal in life and that goal was getting a college degree. To him, a degree meant power, bargaining power for future avenues he decided to pursue, whether it was playing pro football or opening

his own business:

> Most definitely. I definitely used, I used... I saw in the 10th grade that football was going to be *my* ticket no matter how smart I was to get in a great institution without my parents having to pay anything. You know, because if I had to rely on financial backing, I wouldn't get to go to the school I wanted to go to. So I worked harder, so I could get a scholarship. Not to go pro, but to get into a good school, to get into a school that *I* wanted to go to. I wanted to be able to pick and choose my school, you know. (Heisman)

> You *gotta...get..that..degree.* 'Cause let me tell you something. That degree is bargaining power with the NFL. Believe that or not. (Heisman)

Heisman talked about his meaning of bargaining power. He said the NFL did not want players who were "stupid." Because he had his college degree the NFL would consider him to be an asset and a role model for other players and children. What the NFL is trying to promote is the importance of an education and finishing a college degree. Wesley would encourage any youth to participate in sports, because it does produce opportunities in life that may not have developed elsewhere.

> I'm satisfied and happy. I think sports and my playing them has given me chances that others may not have had. In all they have been good. I would encourage any young child to play, if that's what they want to do. It has led me here, and because of the sports, I am able to get a good education and help others. (Wesley)

David talked about the harsh realities and pitfalls of college football programs and the bad reputation athletes get because of the constant battle between academics and athletics.

> Athletics is the number one reason why some people come to this school, whether you are an athlete, or a student. The money that athletics make, it's unreal. Do you think the science department makes as much money as football. Do you think "x" amount of people are going to a science fair, or an English reading.

> Hell, no! That's why some professors are upset with the athletic program, because we make tons of money for the university, and tons of people come out every weekend to watch. It's professional jealousy when it comes down to it, good old fashioned professional jealousy. But you know what stinks, it's that those people who are doing this, making it tough on others, have really no reason whatsoever. Sure there are some people on this football team that don't give three licks about their education, but that's not everyone. It's not me, and because of others and the reputation that football has, it makes it difficult on most of the people who do care. I didn't come to this school to be a rocket scientist, I came to get an education and to play football, hoping someday I could play in the NFL. As a football player you must learn to use the system for what you want. Not everyone of my teammates are going to make it to the league, most say they will, but the numbers are against you. So while you are here, use the system, get the free education, and get to know the alumni. Those are the people who can help you out later in life, they make things happen. (David)

Finally, Ricky talked about his struggles at home and his perceived cruelness of the university (Table 6). So when his football career is over, Ricky believes, no one is going to care anymore, he is expendable.

> I knew right away that if I didn't take this scholarship I couldn't go to college. So I said to my mom that I was going to State U. And she was really proud of me. I know that I'm using the university to get an education, without it, there was no way my parents could pay for four or five years, it's too costly. So I'll go out there everyday and work hard for the coaches and my teammates, but in the end, I'll get my degree. If I make it to the pro's even better, if not, I still bettered myself in life. You know the sad thing is that at the end of my career, most likely this university won't care about me, I'll be another athlete to them. They have no ties to me, but they will use my body while I am here, I'm a slave to their greedy business. (Ricky)

Summary

How important are relationships? If you ask these eight participants they will tell you they are important to have, because they provide strength, support, and love when needed. When the eight participants were in the process of making their decision to

Table 6. Using the University for Academics

	Comments Participant
	Athletes Who Stayed and Athletes Who Left
David	So while you are here, use the system, get the free education
Heisman	Most definitely. I definitely used, I used, I saw, I saw in the 10th grade that football was going to be *my* ticket no matter how smart I was to get in a great institution without my parents having to pay anything.
Jim	They did a great job recruiting me, they fulfilled my needs with education
Jack	If the university plans on using me to generate revenue, it will cost them at least that much, my education
Ricky	I know that I'm using the university to get an education, without it, there was no way my parents could pay for four or five years, it's too costly. So I'll go out there everyday and work hard for the coaches and my teammates, but in the end, I'll get my degree.
Robert	You need to get an education and still some of these people are not listening; they don't get out; they don't do what they have to do to get an education and they get stuck. When football is over, they have a hard time surviving in the real world.
Wesley	I'm satisfied and happy. I think sports and my playing them has given me chances that others may not have had. In all they have been good. I would encourage any young child to play, if that's what they want to do. It has led me here, and because of the sports, I am able to get a good education and help others.

enter the professional draft or to stay in school, it was extremely important to have their family and friends to give them encouragement and support, whichever decision was made. The family relations and the long lasting friendships were not only a comfort, but they were elements in their lives they could trust, and trust for these athletes was hard to develop.

When the participants evaluated their relationships with their coaches and their university, they were related to their decision to stay or leave. The four participants who decided to leave had mixed feelings about their coaches, university, and the people around them. In fact, you could say their relationships with their coaches were at times distant, and business like. The four participants who decided to stay, felt that their relationships with their coaches were good enough to make them decide to stay one more year.

In regard to the university, the participants believed they were lied to and misled, they believed they could not trust the university and believed they were used. They felt that their bodies became tokens of finance as the university sold them to gain a profit, and when their career was finished they were expendable. Even though all participants did not share this feeling, there were consistencies among the majority of the participants, especially those who stayed. They strongly believed they could handle playing one more year, because they wanted to get their education.

CHAPTER 7

PRESSURE

Happiness, eternal or temporal, is not the reward that mankind seeks. Happinesses are but his wayside companions. His soul is his journey and in the struggle. -Stevenson

The pressure for the athlete to perform is a constant battle within himself and the external world. The difference between elite athletes, like these eight participants, and the rest of us, is an understanding and knowledge of how to use specific resources to overcome this struggle. Pressure for athletes can begin early, from the time they just learn a sport, to the time they decide to end their career. As the level of competition becomes more rigorous and demanding, so does the pressure to perform. These eight participants talked about feeling no pressure in the beginning of their athletic careers when they were playing in youth programs and their first years of high school. However, at the end of their junior year of high school, or even earlier, college recruiters came knocking on their doors, and the pressure of making right decisions and performing at higher levels appeared. This in turn trickled over into college and playing for a major university. Additional pressure came from a sense of responsibility to their family who may have been counting on them to be the first to get a college education, or, a way out of the streets. And so they made their decision, based on what was best for themselves. They decided to stay and finish their education, or to leave and enter professional life in the NFL. Does the pressure stop? According to these eight participants, it's always a constant battle of doing the right thing, and proving yourself to others. This chapter

identifies the pressure these participants felt: (a) as they made their transition to college, (b) as it related to social mobility, and (c) by their need to prove themselves.

Transition to College

Entering college as a new freshman is a difficult process to endure for any student, whether you are a local resident of your university, whether your family is in close proximity, or whether you are new to the community and environment. For these young athletes adjusting to the rigors of a new environment or new town and the rigors of academics and scheduling was compounded by the rigors of football. Twenty plus hours a week playing and practicing football, going to mandatory meetings, lifting weights, going to the training room and nightly study hall meetings. For some of the participants this was an easy transition because of their background. For the rest, the transition was more difficult (Table 7). Wesley, believed his background and previous schooling helped him make a smooth transition stating, " I felt ready for school. I felt prepared. I was also ahead of a few people, and this academic background I had prepared me for that." Robert, on the other hand, described his experience differently.

> Wow! It was different. You went to a parochial school; even in high school, it was an all male school. And then bang, you are in the largest university in the state, a huge campus. Sometimes you feel lost. A little fish, not even a pond, you feel like a little fish in the ocean; there's so many people out and running around and doing things. Yeah, sure, the campus is spread out and big, which makes it probably even worse, but still the numbers are overwhelming. (Robert)

Table 7. Transition to College

Participant	Comments
	Early Entry in the NFL
David	Man it was big. I knew going in, it was a big school, but nothing prepared me for this. There were so many kids, everyone looked as if they knew what they were doing, where they were going, except me. Kinda felt lost. I know others feel that way but when you are in it, you feel like you are the only one on the boat and it's sinking.
Heisman	My first....semester...was *hard*. It was difficult.
Jim	It was a *mess*. I was lost. I missed the first three classes.
Mark	It wasn't what I expected, I remember coming here on my visit and things seemed small, but that first day things appeared larger. Classes were larger than expected and the people didn't care who you were. In high school teachers treated you with special gloves because they wanted to either get rid of you or see you go to college. Here, some teachers don't give a shit about who you are. To them you're just another nigger in their class.

Participant	Comments
	Those Who Stayed in College
Jack	I was ready to go home. I mean it was all right but I felt it was something I had to do; regardless of where I was going to school somewhere, I was a little homesick
Ricky	I had a hard time leaving home, missing my family and friends. It was hard to leave my girlfriend back home. The classes were tough at first, but I was able to adjust to the large classes.
Robert	Wow! It was different. You went to a parochial school; even in high school, it was an all male school. And then bang, you are in the largest university in the state, a huge campus. Sometimes you feel lost. A little fish, not even a pond, you feel like a little fish in the ocean
Wesley	I felt ready for school. I felt prepared. I was also ahead of a few people and this academic background I had prepared me for that.

Heisman spoke earnestly about his experience as a culture shock, and the message was guided with racial overtones of ambivalence. To some degree, Heisman felt alone at the university, not having people from the same background as he, to share in his experiences. When Heisman went on his tour of the campus, his guide spoke of diversity but Heisman wondered where it was in regard to the university setting and the people attending the university.

> My first....semester...was *hard.* It was difficult. You know, it reminds me, this reminds me, they give guided tours, you know. And Monday I was walking to class, and this tour guide was like, oh I just loooove State U.! In that valley girl sort of way...I just love State U., it's so beautiful, we have this, this, and this...and the best part of it is, it's so *diverse.* And I thought to myself..diverse? Where? Does diversity mean that you get to see different white people from across the country just like you, they just from another part of the country? Is that diversity? I mean, I was just floored by that comment that she made. It is *so* diverse. You know, I was like, what the fuck is she talking about? *Where*? You know, I might have been the only black person they saw that day! (he laughs) (Heisman)

Ricky talked about the difficult time he had leaving home, missing his family, friends, and his girlfriend. Ricky sat out his first year playing, so he had the chance to concentrate on academics, which at first proved difficult. Later, Ricky believed it was the best thing to happen because, "it got me way ahead of everyone else coming in, a head start to my degree." Jack, "was ready to go home" after his first days, and Jim, said "It was a mess. I was lost."

Their transition into football and playing the "big game" was a more positive experience for all participants. Six of the eight participants started as true freshmen, and the other two did not play until their sophomore season. Each participant, except Jack,

spoke about the excitement, the fan frenzy, and the overwhelming feeling he had within himself, and the shared feeling with teammates. They spoke about performing and trying to prove to others they belonged. Wesley talked about "feeling nervous, and wanting to prove other people wrong." He talked about just "paying attention and going out there and performing." In contrast, both Mark and David spoke about the energy and excitement they felt playing in their first college game.

> Never been so nervous and equally pumped up in my entire life. It was weird.. It was the greatest feeling I had in the world. Playing in front of these people, having my parents watch me. It was a dream come true. If that makes any sense to you. Man, I remember standing there looking at [teammate] then the next thing I know I'm running out on the field and thousands of fans are screaming, the band is playing. It was as if I could hear everything, everyone in the crowd. I got goose pimples on my body. I still feel that way now, but not like the first time. It's a weird feeling, you feel strong like you can do anything in this world, almost like you're superman. People are looking at you, you're on stage and you want to give them the best show you can. (David)

> Man it was wild. I forget how much excitement went on here. It was crazy out there our first home game. There's no better fan than the ones here at State U. I got to play a lot that game. I remember catching my first pass, running back punts and kickoffs. So really it was a good time. Everything I dreamed about. (Mark)

The participants talked about the pressure of playing for a "big time program" and wanting to produce and do so immediately. Not only did they feel pressure from themselves, but being in programs that expected to win, and playing for conference and national titles every year. Pressure also came from those around them, the community at large. The fans, the alumni, and the media whose expectations on them were enormous. Each participant was able to survive the pressures of being a student as well as an athlete,

and to do so in honorable fashion. But when all was said and the day was done, these eight athletes played because they had "fun."

Social Mobility

The archetypical rags to riches story is that of Abraham Lincoln. From the log cabins of Illinois to the White House he ascended. There are many more like Lincoln who began their life in poverty and later became millionaires. These success stories have become countless in our society, but the fact that others have failed despite their spirit and lofty ideas remains the reality. So, where does one go today to get rich? On the surface, one could argue that professional sport offers a viable solution. Since the minimum professional sport salary is in the middle to lower six figures, who could pass that up? But, don't tell the future professional athlete that getting to the pros is as likely as winning the lottery. A small percentage (around or less than 2%) of college athletes, across all sports, makes it to the "show." Where does education come into play ? Does anyone care anymore? Does the value of an education have any significance in the uphill battle of social mobility ?

During the course of his interview, Robert stated his perceptions of the reality of the major college football player. Robert believed in the continuity between athletics and academics, and what a student-athlete should be like.

> They saw that I was a well-rounded individual instead of someone who was just one directional, like a lot of the players that you see coming in. Players that I've seen come in, all they concern themselves with is football; they think that's okay I come to this big university, I'm going to play football and that's my career.

> After I get done, I'm going to the pros and make a big living. But, they try to tell them that the chances of you going to the pros are slim, less than one percent. You need to get an education, and still some of these people are not listening; they don't get out; they don't do what they have to do to get an education and they get stuck. When football is over, they have a hard time surviving in the real world. (Robert)

The following pages will discuss social mobility as it related to the interplay of academics and sport, and the pursuit to climb the social ladder.

Education

From the time these eight athletes were little boys just beginning school, academics were constantly being stressed by one or both parents. To get an education was important for the development of the person; athletics on the other hand, is fleeting and an uncertainty. The value of education was something they knew and understood, and it was something they tried to carry through high school and on to college. Not that they always appreciated education or all became 4.0 students, some encountered problems on the way, but they continued to improve academically and strive for better things. By the end of all interviews, one participant had graduated in May, four had stated their degree would be completed by the next year, and the remaining three were actively pursuing their degree.

Heisman spoke about the value of education in his household and about hitting the books being as important as playing athletics. In his household you could not do the latter without the former.

> The main thing that was a concern in my house is, you better get your books, do your school work. That's the most important thing. I had to come home and I

had this up until junior high, "you do homework, *then* you can go play." You know, so that's always been my deal.

Similar to Heisman's remarks, David and Robert talked about the influence their mothers had toward their academic pursuits. Because of their mothers' strengths and the values they placed on academics, both David and Robert were able to go to college with good habits.

> One word, Mom. She always stressed academics no matter what. It was "hit the books or you can't play." She gave me good habits to start college with. Plus watching my brothers and sisters, they studied a lot too. Mom wanted us to get a good education. (David)

Robert spoke about the influence his mother had on his education:

> My mother on the other hand, she's always tough on me regarding my academics She always stressed academics. That's probably why I am where I am today because of her. And my father too. Naturally he's an administrator and has gone through school himself. He understands and he wants all of us to do well. Yeah, but mom, yeah she is tough. She would always say, "you have to do this, you have to do your reading and math before you go out and play." It was always like that, always. You always have to do reading and math before you go out and play. Couldn't come home and go to the ball field, couldn't do anything. I had to sit down and do my homework. (Robert)

Jack's mother who was a school teacher always talked about education in the family. Jack, the third in his family to go to college, had this to say about education, "it's what you are supposed to do, really." That's the feeling I got as he continued to talk about education, it wasn't forced, it wasn't that he could not go outside and play because his homework was not finished, because it would get done.

Mark and Jim agreed that education was important in their lives, but it was something they struggled with at times. Their encouragement came from other people

outside their families. Mark said that he was not an "A" student but considered himself to be average. He knew he wasn't going to be a brain surgeon, so the effort he put in education was originally lacking. But, when he moved in with his "new family," things began to change and his perspective changed.

> I wasn't going to be a brain surgeon so I didn't put the effort I could. I'm smart but more street smart and athlete smart But when I was living with Coach and his family I had to study or I couldn't play ball or run track. They were tough on me for that, but I guess that was cool, in the long run it helped out. (Mark)

Jim said he was an "average student," but didn't excel because of always playing sports. He did talk about one teacher who changed his life when she told him he needed to get an education. She simply put it, "you don't want to be a loser, just go out there and get your education so you can get a job later in life."

At times we all fight the demons around us. For Ricky and Wesley this meant fighting the expectations people had regarding their academics. Both had people around them that questioned their abilities and questioned their desire to go to college and get a degree. Wesley believed he "needed to prove others wrong and had to change my ideas about education in high school." When I asked what he changed and who for, he replied, "I don't know. Just a lot of things going on and people will count on you." Ricky also needed to prove to others he had the abilities to get an education. As referred to before, Ricky needed to prove to family he could do it, to set an example for the rest, and to the community at large. To quote Ricky, "it was important to me, my education."

The participants in this study truly considered themselves to be "student-

athletes." For such a long time, and even today, the idea of a student-athlete seemed to be impossible, oximoronic in nature. But for two athletes in particular, Robert and Heisman, it was incredibly important to them, as well as to others, that they be viewed first a student then as an athlete. During their entire interview, both Robert and Heisman spoke passionately about their educational dreams, much more than their football careers. To them, education was the epitome of achievement, a highlight in their life of learning. Robert spoke about wanting to learn something new everyday, because he enjoyed it, the challenge, and to better himself. He spoke about what was important to him when he was choosing an academic program:

> State U. has a long history of good players coming in and has a long history of academic success. That was important. When I made my decision, I was not going to go to a school that was not strong in academics, and was not going to offer a lot for me. I think one of the things that impacted me a lot was knowing that I wanted to go into pre-med. I also was watching the career of Bobby. He went to State U., he was pre-med and he comes in here and sits out a year, because he wanted and needed to take some classes. Then he came back the next year and excelled. To me I thought WOW, that's neat, being able to sit out the year, take the classes, having the university honor that and then come back. Sure there was a lot of gruff and a lot of stuff written up in the newspapers about why he sat out. But you know, the university honored his scholarship; the university was...they were, excited.....they encouraged him to do his school work; they encouraged him to take pre-med classes; they encouraged him to be a doctor and actually encouraged him to do whatever he wanted to do in life, and that was important. I didn't want to go to a school that would say, okay, I want you to take basket weaving and take all these other remedial classes just so you can get through. I wanted to challenge myself and I wanted to challenge my abilities in school and education, and State U. was going to allow me to do that. (Robert)

In the end, Robert profoundly stated, " I'm an athlete, yeah, but I'm also a student. And I do them both very well. And I take offense to people who don't see that."

Heisman spoke about the cultural and racial environment at State U. and the lack of diversity the campus offered the student population. What disheartened Heisman the most was seeing young black children walking around campus and not having anyone to model. His concern was to be as far removed from the role of "athlete," and try to perpetuate education in the black community.

> I think very few young black men, I'm gonna say that because I'm black, because I'm a black man, share that. And had that thought, and I've seen it too many times. It discourages me and it disheartens me that when little kids come over to State U., that all they see as far as black, are athletes, and grounds keepers. You know. And they think, there's only two ways that you're gonna get to go to State U., either as an athlete, or be a grounds keeper. And they, and it disheartens me. When I walk on campus, I try to be as far away from an athlete as I possibly can. I may see a young black kid, and I see them all the time, and when they ask me, do I play football? I say no. They say, well, what do you do? I say, I'm just a student. And it just blows their mind, and a lot of my fraternity brothers, we, you know, we talk about this a lot too, because we try to do things in the black community to change this, this thought process among young kids. You know, it blows their mind. You have no worth to young blacks today, unless you are an athlete. I mean, think about it. Go out and you try that theory. You ask them. Who are the important people? (Heisman)

I chose to come back to finish something I started.

So, you say take the money and run. Well obviously someone did not tell these four athletes. They completely fooled many people who believe athletes are just in it for the money and do not value education. There was a special quality about Jack, Ricky, Robert, and Wesley that many people do not have, that's loyalty and honor to their university (Table 8). There was a sense of duty and honor in Robert and this came out in his interview when he talked about why he chose to come back to play and to finish his education. Robert said he wanted to "honor" his scholarship, and wanted to come back

because of his "strong affiliation to the school." He also mentioned his desire to finish his education and to win a national championship with his teammates.

> The bottom line was I wanted to get my education, I wanted to be part of this team again. I wanted to reach more goals. I'm sure I could have probably come out, been a first or second or third round draft pick, who knows; but there were things here in school that I wanted to accomplish. I want to get my degree; I want to go back and take this team to win a national championship. Last year, you got a taste of it and now you want to take the whole thing; you want to bite into it and to me, that was important. You just want to have a strong affiliation to the school. When I signed my scholarship, it was for four years, and I feel that I need to honor that scholarship. It was important to me. I felt that if I didn't honor it, I was doing the school an injustice. (Robert)

Table 8. Finishing Something I Started

Participant	Comments
	Those who Stayed in College
Jack	I wanted to prove to others that I could come back and finish school, earn my degree, and play one more year. So I thought it would be in my best interest to come on back and get back in school and try to graduate and play my last year out
Ricky	I want to finish things I started both academically and athletically.
Robert	The bottom line was I wanted to get my education, I wanted to be part of this team again. I wanted to reach more goals.
Wesley	I chose to come back to school to finish something I started plus I didn't want to do anything someone else told me to or my family was in a certain predicament. My thing is I have to satisfy Wesley. That's all I wanted to do. My options didn't weigh on the coaches or anyone else. I did the work I wanted to do. I was just trying to get an education and that's my goal right now.

As for the others, Wesley has been asked this question over and over again, and "to sum that up real quick," his desire was to "finish something I started." The bottom line for Wesley was not to do what others wanted him to do, or what others expected him to do, but to do what would satisfy Wesley. "That's all I wanted to do, I was just trying to get an education," Wesley stated.

> I can sum that up real quick. I've been asked this so many times this last six months. I chose to do something I wanted to do. I chose to come back to school to finish something I started, plus I didn't want to do anything someone else told me to or my family was in a certain predicament. My thing is I have to satisfy Wesley. That's all I wanted to do. My options didn't weigh on the coaches or anyone else. I did the work I wanted to do. I was just trying to get an education and that's my goal right now. Hopefully, I can get my degree in April. I have another semester and I don't think it will be a bad decision so I'll be that much closer and wiser in the real world. I've been poor all my life, so for me to come out early and take the money was never a major concern. What's one more year. Plus, I know my mother is proud of me. She always wanted her children to have a good education, and that's what I am getting. (Wesley)

Ricky's perspective was similar to Robert's. Both came from strong football programs that had a good chance to compete for regional and national championships. Ricky, earlier, talked about how important it was to get his education so others could be proud of him and follow in his footsteps. But, the main reason as Ricky said, "I wanted to come back and be the best position player in the conference and in the nation, I want to help this team win a conference championship and a national championship." He also stated, "I want to finish things I started both academically and athletically."

Jack looked to his family for support and advice when he was making his decision, and he got just that. His family, parents and siblings alike, thought it would be

in Jack's best interest to come back and finish his last year and not enter his name in the NFL draft. At first, Jack struggled with the idea because of his relationship with his coaches, and because he was too far away from his family. In the end, education won over the pro's, at least for one more year. Like the rest, Jack stated:

> I thought about it a lot but my mom and dad had a suggestion for me, and they were like it is important to finish something you started. I wanted to prove to others that I could come back and finish school, earn my degree, and play one more year. So I thought it would be in my best interest to come on back and get back in school and try to graduate and play my last year out. My mom and dad played a big factor in it; and my brother and also my sister. They thought it would be my best bet to come on back here and finish up. (Jack)

Man without sports I don't know where I would be!

The fame, the fortune, wanting to be the next Michael Jordan, or the next Deion Sanders is why many young athletes become involved in sport. National TV exposure, million dollar contracts, million dollar endorsement deals are the "hoop dreams" for young children. But, reality paints an ugly picture not visible in the eyes of the hopeful athlete. In the city and in the suburbs, you may have two options, drugs or sports. It is obvious for most which one brings less pain, less trouble, and more satisfying rewards. Sport, for all intents and purposes, is perceived as a "way up" the economical strata. This group of participants was no different in their view of how sports could affect their futures. Growing up in the inner city and in troubled neighborhoods, the only encouragement some of the participants had was through the window of opportunity that sport allowed them. So, when it came time for them to make their decision, wanting to get out influenced their decision, especially Jim, Heisman, and Mark. They saw it as a

way to get out of the streets and into a better life (Table 9).

Heisman stated what he believed other athletes have done in past NFL drafts, and how children perceive sport in society.

> Look at the drafts in the past. How many do you think have a degree? Sports is a ticket away from the bad life. Kids know that. So they start dreaming about it early. Either drugs or sports. That's the black kids' life and way out. Not too many times are education pushed, I was lucky. I had people who pushed me and I wanted it to better myself. Most kids don't. They see the big dollars athletes get, so they want to be like them. They don't realize how hard it is. (Heisman)

Of the five participants who spoke about sport as a way out, Mark spoke more often and more convincingly than anyone. His situation was different from the rest, he grew up incredibly poor and needed to get away from the streets that had caused him so much pain and trouble.

> Playing ball with my boys. Down here that's all you got at times. Either play ball or hang out in the streets. The streets are cool, you learn things you could never imagine. But if you want to get away from the streets, you have to play ball. Basketball, football, you name it, we played it. (Mark)

> Like I said, you played because it was a way to get away from the streets and possibly better your life. My mother and all mothers knew this. Sports are never discouraged growing up where I did. People know it can help. So my mother, just like the rest, said do it and if it helps you get some place in life, great. Just give it your best effort and something will happen good, and it has. Man without sports I don't know where I would be; probably in the correctional center or jail. At one time I was on that path. I'm not doctor material or anything like that, I do sport better than most and that's my gift. Your gift may be becoming a doctor and teaching others, mine is running track and playing football. You just have to accept the gifts you get and do something with them. (Mark)

In fact, for Mark, playing sport was encouraged by his parents and others in the community. As explained by Mark and others, it was obvious that most people in the

Table 9. A Way out of the Streets

Participant	Comments
	Athletes Who Left and Athletes Who Stayed
Heisman	Sports is a ticket away from the bad life. Kids know that. So they start dreaming about it early. Either drugs or sports. That's the black kids life and way out. Not too many times are education pushed, I was lucky. I had people who pushed me and I wanted it to better myself. Most kids don't. They see the big dollars athletes get, so they want to be like them. They don't realize how hard it is.
Jack	Playing sports and all has led me down some straight paths, it got me away from the streets, the crime and all that.... Because of football I know I can better myself and my family. We can get out from where we are and do better for ourselves.
Mark	Like I said you played because it was a way to get away from the streets and possibly better your life. My mother and all mothers knew this. Sports are never discouraged growing up were I did. People know it can help. So my mother just like the rest said do it and if it helps you get some-place in life, great.
Ricky	It helped that I began playing sports, because of it I was able to do something different...I was able to show some talent on the football field and everyone began to notice me. It became my way out. It was my way out of the city life that brought me down. Sport has given me the chance to do good for myself and my family. And maybe someday I can give my family the things they need, and out of this small town.
Wesley	I think sports and my playing them has given me chances that others may not have had.

inner city acknowledge sport as an acceptable way of getting out and a quick way to riches.

Wesley and Jack shared similar perspectives stating that sport has helped them get away from a life they wanted to leave and has provided them with opportunities not otherwise given to them. As a product of the inner city, Ricky sold drugs, and was solicited to join gangs. He realized at a later time in life how sports could offer a way to "get out."

> I grew up in a poor town where drugs, gangs were all around. I got caught up in some of that...like selling drugs. I'll admit to that...it was stupid. But because of my friends and family... I got out of that quickly. I knew it wasn't the life I wanted to have... to let my family down in a way that could be harmful. I thank God that he took me away from that stuff. It helped that I began playing sports, because of it I was able to do something different...I was able to show some talent on the football field and everyone began to notice me. It became my way out. It was my way out of the city life that brought me down. Sport has given me the chance to do good for myself and my family. And maybe someday I can give my family the things they need and out of this small town. (Ricky)

<u>You need to prove yourself</u>

You might think that once these four players entered their name in the professional draft they would no longer feel the pressure to go out and prove themselves and perform, again. But actually they felt it was just the beginning. First, there were the professional combines. These were special examinations where the top athletes coming out were asked to perform various skills, both physical and mental. All four of the athletes were invited to the combines to once again showcase their skills in front of hundreds of people, i.e., scouts, coaches, and front office administrators. David shared

his thoughts on the combines and the how they are used by the NFL.

> Yeah, but some of that stuff is a bunch of crap. They measure you, test you on all these skills and agility tests, but nothing ever is a true predictor of how you are going to play in the next level. Look at some of the past first-rounders, some of them haven't amounted to crap and on their way out. I don't like the setup, but you gotta play their game, perform. Sure it's a measuring stick and most everyone goes through it, I seen some outstanding players get hurt because of one bad day at the combines. Their stock drops and the next thing you know they are getting drafted in the later rounds, fourth, fifth. But, there are times when some kid from nowhere college comes in and blows people's minds away and he gets drafted early. I guess it works both ways. (David)

Mark also stated a very negative opinion about the combines, " Sometimes they look too much at these combine numbers and not at other factors." Like David, Mark believed they do help the athletes from smaller unknown schools, but in the end, "They can hurt you more than they can help you."

Jim described a different viewpoint from that of Mark and David. Coming out early there was speculation about Jim's "numbers" and how well he stacked up against other college players entering the draft and how well he fit the prototypical player in the NFL. Afterwards, he believed that his combine probably helped him more than hurt him, so his view was very positive. Jim stated, "They're pumping me up pretty good. I had a good combine, matter of fact, an excellent combine. Whether the combine is viewed in a positive or negative manner, it is there to measure the "worth" of the players coming out.

After the combines and the draft were over, all four participants talked about the need to prove themselves to the world, and most importantly, to their new team (Table 10). This is an honor bestowed on all rookies who enter the NFL either as a first round

pick or a free-agent. In Mark's second interview, after he was drafted, he had this to say, "I just want to get out there and show people what I can do. Make my keep and make the organization damn glad they took me. They must think I have skills, so I need to show them this wasn't a bad investment and that I can play in the NFL." What Jim talked about was the pressure of performing and proving his worth

> There always is some degree of pressure. Whether you feel it or not or whether you let it get to you. As a rookie the vets always want to get their licks in and see what the newcomers have. I expect that going in, and I expect to dish it out in return. No one or no thing intimidates me, I try to intimidate others. (Jim)

Table 10. Proving Myself to Others

Participant	Comments
	Early Entry in the NFL
David	Simple, All rookies need to prove their worth and value. Plus coming out early I think there is a greater responsibility to do so. You need to prove that it wasn't a mistake to leave early,
Heisman	I proved them all wrong by, one, getting my degree.
Jim	Hell the pro's are going to pay me market value and that's a lot compared to other professions. So I feel the need to prove my worth.
Mark	I just want to get out there and show people what I can do.

And David... he felt the pressure immediately after getting drafted, especially as a middle round selection. He believed the pressure to perform was greater for him because his chances of making the team were less. In the NFL system there are no guarantees you will play just because you got drafted. So, in David's situation, his selection in the middle rounds meant he needed to work just as hard to make the team as he would have if he did not get drafted and was a free agent.

> Simple. All rookies need to prove their worth and value. Plus, coming out early I think there is a greater responsibility to do so. You need to prove that it wasn't a mistake to leave early, so no one can come back at you and say, see you should've stayed. As a middle round selection the chances of making the team become less and less, so again there is a need to prove that you belong and can play at this level. Nothing comes easy in this world, so you gotta go in there and plan to work hard, and hope for the best outcome. Hope you get a chance to play and show you can do the job. That's the bottom line, getting the job done. If you don't, you get cut or waived, or lose your job. Simple as that. Things are pretty cut and dry. (David)

Unlike the other three, Heisman was not drafted by any teams and had to enter camp through the free-agent market. At the time of our second interview, he talked about a few teams that had called his agent and had shown interest in him. Proving his worth to other teams wasn't as important to him, however, he did consider it to be a "stepping stone." His proof was *in the pudding* and that meant proving others wrong when he walked down the aisle to get his diploma. Heisman proudly said, "I proved them all wrong by, one, getting my degree, and, two, by sticking it out here and playing well enough to get into someone's camp."

Summary

Unless we can walk a mile in the shoes of these participants we will never understand the pressure they place on themselves and the pressure they have to endure from others. From the moment they stepped foot on the university grounds, they were expected to perform on the field as well as off the field. It is hard enough to be a student and maintain acceptable grades, let alone be a star athlete at a major university. These eight participants handled the pressure differently and that characterized their uniqueness and individuality. For the most part, they walked into the situation with their eyes open and knowing what to expect. There were times when the pressure became difficult, especially time management in a day, let alone a year. When it came time to make their decisions, they did not allow the pressure from others or their environment to have a direct influence, the final decision was their own.

Four of the eight participants decided that their education and wanting to get a diploma, plus a strong affiliation to their team was a factor in the overall scheme of their decision making process. For those four participants, it was unfinished business, or just wanting to complete something they believed and bought into, that being their university, a conference or national championship, and their college degrees. In contrast, the four participants who decided to leave, wanted to play professional football and they wanted to have their chance now! They did not fall prey to the pressures of college or college football, because they knew the pressure of playing and performing at the professional

level would be even greater. They realized when they were drafted by their respective teams that they would need to go out and prove themselves all over again. For these participants pressure was something they lived with all their lives from playing sports and being in the media, so when it came time to make their decisions, pressure did not have the same impact as other themes. The impact pressure had in the decision-making process was influenced by the other factors that contributed to its strength, such as academics and wanting to get out from the life they previously lived. These two factors alone played a significant role in their decision making process.

Five of the eight participants talked about using sport as a way out of the street. For three of the five participants who decided to leave early, Heisman, Mark and Jim, sports provided them a window of opportunity to better themselves as well as their families during a time when they believed they needed it the most. For these three athletes, a chance to earn a living as a professional football player provided them opportunities they might not have received otherwise. They understood a professional sport career could provide them with monetary gain to support their families as well as future endeavors in their life. Education also provided these participants another method to enhance their mobility. The three participants who decided to stay cherished their education because they knew it would have been difficult to attend a university without an athletic scholarship. With this in mind, when they made their decision, they decided that an education would be worth more to them later in life, than a professional career in football would be in the present

CHAPTER 8

FEAR

Look not mournfully into the Past. It comes not back again. Wisely improve the Present. It is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy Future, without fear, and with a manly heart. - Longfellow

The fear of losing something or someone in our life is never a pleasant thought and is usually held quiet. It is something that most people do not talk about, because that's when something usually happens. With these eight participants, and making million dollar decisions, the idea of fear was omnipresent, and was a significant factor in their decision to stay or to leave early. The participants did not walk in this world with fear on their minds, and they played with reckless abandon. But knowing they could lose everything they worked for in one millisecond made them think. Money, injury, and maturity were ideas associated with fear, and its relation to the participants' decision. There was a perceived direct relationship between money and injury. If a player was to get injured, then the money would be gone; but if he could remain injury free, the money would be there. This idea was shared by all participants regardless of their decision. Maturity was seen as a measuring stick concerning when a player could or should enter the professional arena, whether they were in high school or college. This chapter will discuss money, injury, and maturity as they related to fear and the participants' decision.

Money

During this year's college basketball final, an informal poll was taken outside the arena asking people "if you could sign a multi-million dollar contract right now, would

they go to college?" The results were that 73% said yes. Is that a surprise? If a young athlete such as six of these participants, grew up in the inner city, poor as poor can get, and the only thing they can think of is getting out of this dump and providing for their family, should they be blamed? At twenty years old and knowing college was not their "thing" and that they had the chance to earn a living, it would be important to find a job that paid well. If these participants were a business major in college and Bill Gates from Microsoft said, "Hey, we have this marketing position for you, the starting salary is one million dollars per year," would they take the job and quit college or wait until next year? These are all legitimate questions that are constantly raised when we think about these young athletes making a career decision. In fact, it ***is*** a career decision, the only difference is the extra zero's in their pay check.

The participants in this study discussed their ideas and the influence money had as they were making their decision. Jim was the only participant who actually said that money was the main reason why he left school early and entered the draft. Money had a direct influence on his decision because he knew his first contract would provide for his family and that their financial worries would be over.

> I was weighing out the options, and um, and I decided I better go with it. Again, I checked with my family, and uh, they totally said it was up to me in this situation. They wanted to make sure that I wasn't doing it for them, so they could get a piece of the pie also as far as the money. They're just not that type of people. But um, personally, it's tough living as a college athlete on the amount of money that you receive and needing to take care of your family. (Jim)

When asked if money was a contributing factor, Jim replied, "Oh, that ***is*** the factor."

Both David and Mark talked about knowing "when it's time to go, there's no point staying around any longer." Both believed they did everything they wanted to do at their universities and they accomplished all their goals. At the end of David's interview, he talked about the influence of money. David said, "I'd be lying if I said the money wasn't appealing. Anyone telling you different is not being straight with you. Money is always a factor in most anything you do in life." Mark's decision was based on his desire to take care of others and on his age, especially because he was older than most juniors coming out early. Like David, he thought he had accomplished everything he could at the college level, and money, even though it was an important factor, did not play an immediate impact on his decision. As a result of leaving early, Mark acknowledged the fact that money does allow him to do the things he wanted to do for his family.

> Sure, I left for my own reasons, but wanting to take care of them and my friends is a big reason I decided to leave school. They took me in when things were bad for me and now it is time to pay them back. To give them everything they want. (Mark)

Then there was Heisman. Money was no influence at all, at least that's what he said in the beginning . Deep down in his mind, Heisman, a self-proclaimed business man, knew if he got drafted he could make enough money to help him start one of his many business ideas. However, his main reason was simple, "I just wanted out of State U., no matter how I had to get out of there. It had gotten to the point where I was... State U. hadn't treated me right at all."

Jack, Ricky, Robert, and Wesley said the same thing regarding money as an

influence, "it will be there." In addition, Jack talked about how he never grew up with money and how he was "not with all this money thing." He did mention the high paying salaries that go along with being a top draft choice. Jack said "I would like to have that money." Ricky, like so many of the participants grew up poor and when you never have money, "it's something you don't miss." In Ricky's life, things were always meant to be simple. You worked hard and you earned an honest living. The money that you received for your labor, was more money than you had, if you did not work. Later, Ricky did say, "sure I would like to get drafted and provide for my family, and the money you make in the NFL can do that for you, but I'll wait, it will be there." Robert was more like Heisman than anyone else, it must have been their strong academic backgrounds and their strong desire to accomplish just as much off the field as on the field.. Like Heisman, Robert did not mention money as a reason in his decision to stay. In passing, the only thing Robert said, "The money, it will be there."

At the end of the season there was a lot of speculation regarding Wesley and his decision to turn pro. Many considered him to be one of the most heralded and talented young players who could have entered the draft. Some people, the so called analysts, predicted Wesley would come out and take the money to provide for his family. Obviously, Wesley fooled them all by staying. When Wesley talked about his decision and not taking the money, he simply said, "I've been poor all my life, so for me to come out early and take the money was never a major concern. What's one more year."

For these four participants who decided to stay, waiting one more year could have

a profound effect on their future and potential marketability, meaning money. Having a good senior year, along with a solid combine, could propel anyone of these athletes into the top rounds of the NFL draft, which would mean six to seven figure contracts. A bad year could very easily place them in the lower rounds, which would mean struggling to make the squad, besides a loss of income. So waiting one year could have its price, but if you are as talented as these four, it would be just dollars and cents.

Injury

One major fear of any athlete is the chance of having a career-ending injury. But to think about injury, to ruminate over it, will most likely cause one. Robert talked about putting himself in the "proper position" at all times thus reducing the chances of injury. However, when they have 260 pound linemen pushing them all over the place or wanting to take their heads off, injuries may occur. It is a natural part of the game, and each athlete assumes the risk going into each contest. At any moment, in a split second, your career could be over. So when these eight athletes talked about injury, they talked about not being afraid, they talked about respecting fear and they talked about how an injury could mean losing money in the future. For four of the participants this was a great risk and the fear of injury was one factor that helped them make their decision to enter the professional draft.

The four athletes who decided to stay, Jack, Robert, Ricky, and Wesley, had the most to lose by coming back and playing their final year in college. If an injury would happen, especially a serious one, their "stock" would drop as quickly as it rose. For these

young athletes, injury was never a concern when they made their decision nor did they fear getting injured. There was a healthy respect, and they talked about a divine intervention that would guide and protect them. Wesley's comments about injury were, "I can't go out there and worry if I'm going to get hurt. If it's going to happen, it's going to happen. I feel God is on my side and hopefully he's going to protect me." Ricky shared with me a similar statement,

> I don't fear injury, if I did I couldn't play at the level I do. I believe it's God's intention for me to play without injury, it always has been. When I decided to stay, I never concerned myself about losing my career because of something I can't control. There is more to my life than football. (Ricky)

As hard as Jack plays and hits others, he is always running the risk of getting injured. Like the others, Jack has no fear, but instead a healthy respect for his body and the damage that could be done.

> If you think about it; if you think about getting injured, you're going to get hurt. You've just got to go out there full of speed and just play, because if it happens it happens. I guess it wasn't meant to be. It's God's will, and I believe he is protecting me. (Jack)

As an adolescent Robert had what most people would consider a career threatening injury. He was not supposed to play again, but he did. So for him, injury was always a possibility, but something he respected. Injury as he stated, " is out of your control."

> Well, injury is always in the back of your mind, but it's something you respect. When you play reckless, there's always a possibility of getting injured. Football, it's a tough sport. It's a high contact sport and any time you go out there and step on the field, any second you can get injured. But you don't think about it, whether you get injured this year, next year, it's all the same. You take care of

> yourself and you do things that you need to do. You put yourself in good positions and just hope for the best that it doesn't happen. It's not up to me if I get injured, a higher power controls that. (Robert)

Three of the four participants that decided to enter the professional draft said injury was something they didn't fear, at least while playing. But, they did fear the long term effects of being injured as it related to losing money. Mark stated, "You got to get the goods while you can, and still remain healthy." Mark also elaborated that not having the chance to play in the NFL because of an injury would be crushing, because it was something he had dreamed and he would be cheated out of something he believed just started.

> The last thing you want to happen is get an injury in your final year of school and all your dreams could be lost. Sure you can take out an insurance policy but that's not the same as making it to the NFL. You know how many people make it... how many people have the chance to make it... not many. I want to be one of them, healthy when I go. The last thing I would need is a career-ending injury before I got started. (Mark)

In contrast, Mark's perspective was flavored with money and personal achievement, Jim's perspective was reality hitting. To Jim, injury meant losing his marketability, losing his draft selection, and losing money. The bottom line was that nobody would want him if he was injured. Injury played a large role in Jim's decision to leave early. It solidified his decision.

> A person like myself who has marketability, that's the word I hear all the time, needs to protect themself from injury and things that could ruin their future. At the time I was thinking about my turning pro, I thought a lot about injury and what would happen. Sure I could recover, but would I be the same and would my value go down. This game is about what you can do for me now! Not what you can do for me while you recover from an injury. Once an injury happens,

> depending on the type, you get tagged, blacklisted, and possibly drop rounds. Look what happened to [Sam] a few years back. Great athlete, but a few injuries kept him out of the first two rounds. I didn't want to be like him. So now was the time, and I'm glad I did what I had to do. (Jim)

David's thoughts about injury paralleled Jim's to perfection. David and Jim would agree that the fear of injury was a "huge factor" in their decision to leave early. And as David said, "it can affect your whole career." David also reiterated Jim's and Mark's points about nobody wanting someone who is injured. David made an interesting analogy, comparing himself to a product that people buy, like a car, or a piece of fruit or vegetable. He said, "I'm a product and nobody wants to buy damaged goods, that's the facts of life, and football is no different." Heisman had very little to say about injury as it related to his decision to enter the professional draft or how he played football. In fact, Heisman did not talk about his playing days at State U. or his accomplishments on the field. He was silent about that era in his life, which was evident when he talked about wanting to leave. The only time Heisman mentioned anything about injury was his final comment about young kids needing to get their education because "football can end in one play."

Maturity: Youth is Served

In today's sporting arena it is not uncommon to hear about a high school kid wanting to make a living as a professional athlete. Hey, just look at Kevin Garnett, or Kobie Bryant, just fresh from the high school graduating halls to the halls of the NBA. In the past there were Moses Malone and Darryl Dawkins. But these were prodigies or

were they? The astute critic will say basketball and baseball are different from football and I would agree. Like David said, " they're different sports that require different levels of physical ability." The NFL also understands that and will not allow a player to enter the draft until at least three years after high school. However, there are still young men entering the NFL who are nineteen or twenty years old. Do these young athletes, or men if you will, have the right to skip college, the golden years of their life, and enter the hard grueling life of professional sport? The opinions differ. Some may say "yes, if he needs to take care of his family;" they call that hardship. Some may say "no, because they need college experience, time to ***mature***." These eight participants were no different in their opinions. If the four participants who left said "no, don't go," then they would be considered hypocrites. If the participants who stayed said "yes," they too, would be considered hypocrites. All in all, it's a tough call to make and that was what I learned from these eight participants. The bottom line was, it varied across individuals and situations (Table 11).

With the participants in the study, when they talked about young athletes coming out early, this is how they responded. Wesley, Heisman, Robert, and Jim said "no, they're not mature enough." The four agreed that these athletes were too young to come out early, and they needed time to mature and develop socially and physically. The best atmosphere to accomplish this was college when there are people around who are similar in age and maturity. Ricky and Jack said "yes, go ahead and do what you have to do." If you think you have the talent, and some do, then try the waters, but understand

Table 11. Youth

Participant	Comments
	Early Entry in the NFL
David	They have no business doing so... they are way too young. I know some grew up poor, not like myself, but poor. I know they want to do better for themselves and their family.
Heisman	These young kids coming out of high school and playing pro ball have no business doing so, they're not ready. Sure they think they are, everyone is telling them to go, but mature wise, they're still kids trying to play in a man's world.
Jim	Man those punks are way too young, who are they foolin?
Mark	I know they want to do better for themselves and their family. Can you blame them?

Participant	Comments
	Those Who Stayed in College
Jack	If you got the talent, you can start off real young. If you got it you might as well display it.
Ricky	Go ahead and do what you have to do
Robert	Obviously, I don't agree with it because of the decision I made. You just aren't ready for it.
Wesley	I don't think these kids are mature enough to play in the pros. There is too much going on and too much to get caught up into.

you may sink. If you are a hardship case, then it is honorable wanting to take care of your family. The other two, David and Mark were neutral, understanding both sides. Their responses varied from, " I know they want to do better for themselves and their family. Can you blame them?" (Mark), to, "they have no business doing so.. they are way too young " (David). Ironically, half of the participants who decided to stay said it was okay to leave, and all the participants who left early, to some degree, said they were too immature and needed to stay.

Summary

When all eight participants were deciding whether to stay, or to leave early, the fear of losing money, and the fear of injury influenced their decision. Marketability, is a word often used in professional sport to measure an athletes' revenue potential. For these athletes' marketability meant the potential to earn top dollar for doing something they loved, and had always dreamed about doing. The money that comes with a professional contract, possibly millions of dollars, would allow all of these participants the opportunities to provide for their families and to provide for the people they care about. For a few, they decided that was the best option, and, do it now! For Wesley, Jack, Ricky, and Robert, their decision was not based on money, or wanting to fill their pockets, but their need to come back and finish something they started three or four years before. Like they all said, "The money will be there."

The fear of injury is never the primary focus of great athletes. They know when they start thinking about injuries the more likely they will happen. The participants talked about playing hard, with reckless abandon, and not worrying if things happened. Injury is something they believed was out of their control. Injury, as it related to their decision, had a direct relationship to money. "Nobody wants to buy damaged goods," David stated. And the NFL is no different from any other consumer buying a product. If any of these participants were injured, their marketability would go down, which would mean a substantial loss of money. For the four participants that decided to leave early, the time was right, they all were injury free and ready to determine their worth.

The participants viewed maturity as a measuring stick into the professional arena, and whether or not they, or someone else, was ready. Interestingly, the participants who stayed said it was okay to leave, if a player thought he had the skills and believed in himself. The four participants who left early, said it was okay, but believed college offered athletes a safe place to grow up and gain precious experience. When it was time for these eight participants to make their decision, they looked at themselves and determined whether they were mature enough to handle a professional career in sport. This participants had to decide whether they could handle the pressure playing in the professional league along with all the outside pressures that are included. All the participants had played at least three years of college football, and personally, they all handled this experience with maturity and sage beyond their years.

CHAPTER 9

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the factors that affect intercollegiate football players' decisions to enter the professional draft or to stay in school. College athletes are faced with many important decisions during their athletic career, from the time they begin playing in youth programs, to the time they decide to attend a university. One critical decision elite athletes face is when to enter the professional draft. As a junior in college, athletes have the right to enter the professional draft, thus foregoing their athletic eligibility.

In this research an attempt was made to gain insight into those factors that influenced the decisions of athletes who currently made the decision to enter the professional draft, and those athletes who made the decision to stay and compete at the college level for their final year of eligibility. There were four emerging themes presented in the preceding chapters that contained factors that affected the participants' decisions to either leave early, or stay in college. Each of the four themes were presented with the factors that contributed to their overall strength. The four emerging themes were: (a) confidence, (b) relationships, (c) pressure, and (d) fear.

The four themes were presented as separate entities without discussing the inter relationships and patterns developed across the themes. The purpose of this chapter is: (a) to discuss the relationships and patterns among themes, (b) the relationships of themes to existing literature, and (c) the methodological limitations and strengths of the

study.

Relationships and Patterns among the Themes

In the previous four chapters the themes were presented separately and were related to the participants' decision to either leave early and enter the professional draft or to stay in college. At the end of each chapter a summary was provided to discuss the inter-relationships with the theme and the contributing factors. These relationships were developed across all themes and factors separately, but now they are compared across themes and factors. In the end, the discussion indicates how some themes were positively related to each other, and how some themes were negatively related to each other. All in all, each theme contributed to other themes in the schematics of the decisions these participants made.

Confidence and Relationships

In the presentation of data, there appeared to be a symbiotic relationship between the two themes of confidence and relationships. Confidence and relationships worked together to help form the foundation of the participants' decision-making processes. As the participants began playing sports in various youth programs, it was extremely important for their family, friends, and coaches to encourage and support their efforts in a positive direction. As they continued to have successes and gain confidence in their career, both in sport and out of sport, it was evident that the people around them continued to foster their development with the support they needed. When the time came for them to make their decision to leave or stay in college, these athletes looked at the

relationships they had with family, friends, and others to help decide with confidence what was going to be best for them. If there were bad relationships in their life, either from their college coach(es), or the university, the athletes decided to leave that environment and move toward the future in the NFL. However, if the relationships were good, then they decided to stay. Each participant was able to make their decision based on the relationships in the past and present, with confidence and with no regrets.

Confidence and Pressure

In the area of sport psychology and performance enhancement, the inverted- U hypothesis is well explained. This phenomenon explains many relationships, such as the relationship between arousal from pressure and the confidence in decisions from performance levels. When arousal increases beyond an optimal level, performance goes down. This phenomenon, the inverted-U hypothesis, was apparent in the relationship between confidence and pressure. When the participants were able to play and have fun, as in their youth and high school days, their confidence rose. As long as the pressure stayed at an optimal level for each participant, a level with which they felt comfortable, they were able to make decisions with a high degree of confidence and self-assurance.

Pressure for these eight participants came from various sources. The main source came from the pressure they put on themselves to succeed in sport and in education, as well as the pressure they put on themselves to make the right decision. All of the participants developed high levels of confidence, and as a result, they were able to overcome the internal, as well as the external pressures. Without question, the most

difficult pressure came from wanting to do the right thing, meaning to make the right decision. For many of the participants they came from poor backgrounds, or lived in bad communities where drugs and gangs were the norm. To get out of the streets, to get their families away from that environment was a great source of pressure for a young man to endure, especially when they may only be nineteen or twenty years old. Each participant handled it differently. Mark, Jim and Heisman used the opportunities and chances given to them, and decided to leave early because they wanted to help their families and wanted a different lifestyle. Beside other factors, this was extremely important to them; knowing their career could give their families a better life. The others who grew up in impoverished areas also acknowledged the need to get out, but they decided they could wait one more year, plus it was important to them to finish something they had started.

Confidence and Fear

By appearance alone these two themes seemed to have no direct inter-relationship and were polar opposites. At first, I did too, but looking at them more intensely the relationship became increasingly obvious. The decision to leave or stay was enhanced by these two themes and the factors that contributed to their power. Fear means to be afraid of something, and usually when this occurs, there is a tendency to lose confidence in ourself and our abilities. These participants feared losing money that would help their families in the future, and they feared letting others down if they did not return to their college programs. This fear may have stemmed from family members, friends, or teammates and may have hindered decisions that needed to be made. All participants

spoke about the fear of injury, even though they had no fear of being hurt, they did have an athletic respect for the possibility that it could happen. But with the control these participants displayed on and off the field, fear was just a minor piece of a larger decision-making puzzle. Even though these participants had fears, their confidence and self-assurance helped them go beyond their trepidations, and move forward in a positive direction.

Relationships and Pressure

There is a push-pull relationship between these two themes. When families, friends, and others began to apply pressure, the athlete had a tendency to pull away and establish a distance between him and the object of pressure. The most healthy relationships were those in which no pressure was applied, but when encouragement and support were provided. From the time the participants began playing sports and getting an education, all the families encouraged each participant to do their very best. And for these eight participants, their very best provided them many opportunities in sport and in education. The external pressures from others, such as coaches and the university, were the hardest to control and the most difficult to handle.

As student-athletes, these participants had many expectations other students did not have. There were expectations within their sport environment, such as competing for playing time and performing at a high level, and there were expectations outside sport, such as maintaining academic progress, positively representing oneself, team, and university to the community that is critically watching. How can all the outside

influences expect the student-athlete to manage and maintain a sense of self ? It was hard for these participants to manage all these expectations, but when they succeeded their family and friends were there to congratulate them. If they failed, who would be there to criticize them? Everyone else. So when these participants looked at the total picture, they made their decision based on what were the best relationships they had, and the relationships that were without pressures. Sure they still had pressure, especially the participants who left early. But with the support they had received from family and friends, they felt they would be just fine.

Existing Literature

The Draft

The current state of the National Football League is that juniors are allowed to enter the draft and be selected by existing teams. The history of the draft proved otherwise. There were rules against early entry, such as the four or five year rule, and there was an agreement with the NCAA and colleges not to allow players of junior status to turn professional. However, there were always blankets of the truth and, on occasion, juniors were allowed to turn pro based on what the NFL and the NCAA called "hardship". However, the first junior to leave early after his third year was Barry Sanders who's early success paved the way for others to make a risky decision . And a risky decision is just what it is. Telander (1990) wrote that coaches, scouts, and administrators do not like the idea that these young men are coming out early because they believe they are not mature enough to handle the pressures and responsibilities of the NFL and society

at large. However, these eight participants were mature and they made mature decisions. When they discussed maturity as it related to leaving early or staying, their opinions differed. Some of the participants said it was okay to leave early, while others said it was best to stay and to gain valuable experience in college. When we look at maturity and the potential problems we just need to look at the misfortunes in the NBA to see how that has developed. For every Barry Sanders there are two or three Braxton Banks or Chris Washburns. Washburn was a past NBA player who came out early, at the age of nineteen, and he never lived up to his potential. Drugs and the pressure to be someone different were his demise. The league is getting younger and younger each year, and what the NFL had originally set out to accomplish is not the end result. In the past two years the average age of the NFL draft selections has been 21 years old. What was once considered to be a ***man's game***, is now turning into a game of young men. But each year the NFL keeps up with their policy not to interfere with the rights of these young people wanting to come out early. Based on the legal history from other leagues, it would prove too costly for the NFL if they tried to refuse early entry. The bottom line is that the NFL and team owners want talented players in the league to make the teams competitive, make the games interesting for the fans, and most importantly, earn revenue. With the NFL wanting to expand in the near future as it did two years ago with the Charlotte and Jacksonville franchises, this may entice younger players to come out early as it did in the past with the AFL league.

Children in Sport

Competitive youth programs in sport can offer children many positive experiences as well as many negative experiences depending upon specific situations and people involved. Warner (1991) suggested that parents enroll their children in sport because it gives them a head start in sport socialization. This means that sport will provide children the chance to learn individual sport skills and interpersonal skills as well. Sport provides young children a chance to work and play in society. This research supports Warner's (1991) finding that the participants in study increased their level of skill because of sport. However, six participants, as young children, were already immersed in their community and the elements surrounding their lives. For the six participants, drugs, gangs, and death were parts of their life and their world. Sport provided these children with opportunities to get away from that life and provided opportunities for the future. These children were young when they started their sport programs, but they started for reasons not often discussed in the literature, a way to escape the crime and the violence.

Across race, the research is consistent with the findings by Parker (1989) and Sailes (1985) suggesting differences in ethnic groups regarding sport participation and influences in sport. Parker (1989) suggested that children are generally encouraged to participate in sport by their parents and they continued to sustain sport involvement because they had fun. All of the participants in the study, regardless of race talked about who influenced their early participation, and they all said it was either their mother or

father. Sailes (1985) suggested that African-Americans are influenced to a greater degree by outside forces instead of their parents. The six African-American participants in this study stated that they were influenced by their parents as well as the community and wanting to get away from the crime and drugs. For them the community was a greater influence to participate in sport and maintain participation. However, the present study suggests that the degree of influence in sport participation is a direct result of both parents and community. The parents of these participants, regardless of ethnicity, encouraged their sons to play and did not force them to play. The environment in which the participants lived in was also a key factor in their decisions to participate in sport. As stated previously, six of these participants grew up in poor neighborhoods and crime was prevalent. Their choices in life were either joining a gang or a joining a sport team. These eight participants chose the latter because of the parental influence in their lives, plus wanting to stay away from the bad elements the street had to offer.

Social Mobility

Each person describes social mobility differently. For some it may be moving up the economic ladder because of employment, while others may seek social mobility through education. The results of this research demonstrated that social mobility was achieved by the participants of this study in various forms; athletically, educationally, economically, and environmentally. For these participants social mobility was individualized and based on many factors that contributed to that phenomenon.

Loy (1969) suggested that social mobility was postulated to follow four channels,

all of which were conclusive in this research. The participants in the study used sport to increase their mobility economically and academically. There were no distinct athletic boundaries that separated the participants in this study, but socially and racially, there were more impoverished African-American participants in this study compared to Caucasian participants. However, as a group and without racial and social differences, each participant made their decision to either to stay in school and use sport to help facilitate their academic pursuits, or enter the professional draft and use sport to help them facilitate a professional career. As a result of their sport participation, each athlete moved forward in their lives academically and athletically. With the exception of Heisman who graduated, those participants that decided to leave early were able to further develop and extend their academic careers beyond what they may have without sport and without an athletic scholarship.

Social mobility for the African-American participants was not always congruent with the results suggested by Anderson (1996) and Edwards (1982). Both authors agreed that there was a potential problem in that the African-American community promoted athletics over education. However, in this study, five of the participants who were African-American were scheduled to receive their college degree, and one already had received his degree. So, in fact, academics were promoted by the family and the community along with athletics. Each participant knew that, without athletics, their chances of going to college were minimal, but through athletics they could achieve something they wanted, a college degree. This study was conducted using elite athletes

from Division I college programs, therefore this may not be true for athletes coming from smaller schools at the Division II or Division III level where athletic scholarships are not commonplace. In these institutions academics are supposedly favored over athletics and encouraged.

Anderson (1996) suggested that parents not only play a significant role in sport participation, but the media also perpetuate childrens' desire to play sport because of the star status given to high profile athletes. In regard to this study, parents played a significant role in their son's participation along with other factors that did not always include media. Some of the athletes stated they looked up to other athletes in sport, but no one said they wanted to emulate them or assume their sport role in society. If that was the case, then all would have decided to leave early and assume their role in sport and not continue their education.

Edwards (1982) gave mixed messages regarding sport participation for African-Americans. He suggested they need to worry less about becoming the next superstar and worry more about landing a good job. He then suggested that sport does promote black pride and self esteem, educational and economic gains, but should be approached cautiously. In regard to this research, not one participant, black or white, jumped blindly into their decision, but proceeded cautiously and with great wisdom. Even though the participants in this study were chosen because of their athletic skill, a career in the NFL is not promised nor an absolute. The African-Americans in this study as well as the Caucasians made their decisions based on what was best for them and their families.

The bottom line of the study regarding social mobility was that each participant's decision was motivated by many factors. Some of the participants wanted to better themselves through academics and the opportunity to earn a college degree, and the others chose a professional sport career. Those participants that decided to leave early wanted to take care of their families, they wanted to get away from the streets where they grew up, and they believed they were ready and needed to move forward. The participants who stayed believed that receiving an education and a college degree would help secure their future career, if a career in professional sport did not develop.

Decision Making

Decision making in sport has transcended from looking at the decisions athletes make when performing a motor function to how athletes make decisions. The latter is the core of this research. Tenenbaum and Bar-Eli (1993) suggested two forms of decision-making processes, normative and descriptive. Normative approaches in decision making are based on the concepts of optimality and rational thought processes. These concepts closely conform to the individual's own belief system thus allowing them to make the best decision. In this study the participants used the normative approach to decision making in which they had chosen a path based on their own beliefs about sport, family, and education, then decided based on their beliefs what would be most beneficial.

Pitz and Sach (1984) suggested that there was no scientific method for determining whether a decision is correct because of individual preferences. This study

agrees with Pitz and Sach (1984) that there are individual differences in decision making. However, the results of this study suggest that regret is a key component in determining whether a decision is good or bad. All the participants discussed their feelings about making their decision either to leave early or to stay, and no one stated any regrets about their decision. Therefore, it could be concluded that the best decisions are made with: (a) ample information prior to making a decision, (b) support from others, (c) confidence in self, and (d) assurance that, when the decision is made, it will be without regret.

Limitations and Strengths

There are a few limitations that need to be taken into consideration when the reader interprets the present data. In spite of rigorous procedures, the results must be viewed tentatively due to the small sample size. The results of this qualitative study were based on theme redundancy and this occurred after interviewing the eight participants. The sample population represented a small portion of athletes who left early and entered the professional draft and who stayed and continued their college education. For the reader and research community, the presentation of data can be only transferred according to the interpretation and evaluation of the data as it relates to their own experiences and circumstances. The participants interviewed for this study came from the Midwest and the South, therefore, the group of participants may not be representative of the general collegiate population as a whole. The participants in this study do represent, in a small number, elite athletes who made a decision to enter the professional draft or stay in college.

Because there is a lack of research dealing with this subject matter, triangulation of the data was very difficult. Therefore, validity of the research may come to question. However, other steps of validation were inscribed into the procedures to secure a relatively high level of internal validity. These methods included a participant validation interview, validation and accuracy of the transcripts, and a qualitative peer review of the emerging themes from the data in the transcripts.

The strength of this study lies in the procedures and steps taken to achieve a diverse group of participants. Also, this was the first research study in this particular area, dealing with this specific athletic population. An additional strength of the study was the investigator's prior background and skill in interviewing, thus allowing a more complete set of data that were analyzed into themes. And finally, in regard to the participants in the study, their backgrounds and their football abilities proved to be the best a researcher could want.

CHAPTER 10

IMPLICATIONS

The importance of this study is not so much in the agreement that it finds with previous sport studies, but to open the windows of possibilities for future research and practical applications. What follows is a discussion of possible new directions and perspectives directed to all readers, and to readers from a variety of populations.

The Research Community

It is extremely difficult to understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which people interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Qualitative research has the opportunity to explore and develop understanding of individual experiences, as well as the subjective framework within which the experience occurs. To gain a better understanding of the athletes' world, it is vital to be part of their world and see, feel, and hear the things around them. This study makes clear the importance of the qualitative approach to research in the research community.

This study acknowledges the important findings from the participants' experiences, and suggests further research related to understanding athletes and the important decisions in their lives. The dynamics of football are incredibly powerful at both the NFL and the collegiate levels. The infrastructure of both businesses contains the same aim; to produce winning teams and make money. Athletes are caught in a web not knowing who to trust and where to turn without getting hurt. This dilemma provides a forum for investigating issues involving trust and values. Also, this type of qualitative

research is wide open to study junior college athletes who made the decision to enter the professional draft, but did not get drafted by an organization and have no way to return to college and finish their education. This may provide an understanding between elite athletes and non-elite athletes as it relates to decision making and entering the professional draft.

Implications for Counselors and Sport Consultants

The population for this study consisted of six African- American athletes and therefore, as Counselors and Sport Psychologists cultural diversity issues need to be addressed. Lee and Rotella (1991) have discussed special concerns and considerations that should be acknowledged when working with African-American athletes. They suggested that the consultant should examine their background prior to working with an athlete from another race. It was also important for the consultant to realize cultural differences from each person's belief system, values, and behaviors. Lee and Rotella recommended that the consultant should appreciate these differences and not be afraid or avoid working with culturally diverse populations. As a consultant, it is suggested that one should try to understand the diversity of many cultures and learn about their individual characteristics (Lee & Rotella, 1991). This includes understanding the expressiveness and emotions used to communicate, the truthfulness or "tell it like it is" interactions with others, and their creative ways of developing their personalities.

It is also suggested that, as a consultant, it is extremely important to develop trust, with African-Americans, as well as other races. When the relationship is approached

with honesty and sensitivity, then a healthy perspective may be obtained. It is extremely important to be yourself when doing research or consulting with athletes, because they can see right through any façade you created. The athlete will close off their world to you and will hold back important information valuable to your work, either in research or consulting.

Furthermore, it is important to understand the social structures within each person's life, whether they come from traditional families, non-traditional families, or, whether they live in the city or the suburbs. Social mobility either through sport or education is important to understand, regardless of race. As a consultant, getting a wholistic perspective, or looking at all dimensions in a persons' life is the best approach to use when working with athletes and trying to understand their framework and their world.

Implication for Coaches

When I first began this research I was afraid of the possible outcome, because the usefulness for coaches and administrators could have large scale implications to the athlete and his family. They could gain a better understanding of how athletes in this situation make decisions and the factors that are involved in the decision-making process. In turn, they could use this information to help convince the athlete to stay or leave the university whichever benefits them and their program the most. So, what does this research tell the coach who has an athlete deciding what to do? Athletes are human beings with great amounts of pressure on them to do the right thing, not only for their

future, but for the future of their families. It may be important to strip away the "old style" of coaching, the school of hard knocks, and enter into the "new age" where sensitivity and encouragement are more the pattern of success. Some athletes may only be 19 or 20 years old and, even though many people consider them to be men, they are still young and inexperienced in life when decisions need to be made. It would be helpful for coaches to listen to athletes' reasons for leaving or staying and encourage them to do what is best for ***them***, not for their family, and not for the university.

In the 1990's of college athletics, coaches are having a harder time to recruit great athletes fearing they may stay only two or three years in a college program. How can a coach build a successful program when this occurs every year? Recruiting is a delicate process, and for all intents and purposes, I do not understand everything that is involved. As a coach it is important to look at ***all*** factors in the life of the prospect. Find out what their dreams are, discuss their future in education, and what their ambitions are as an athlete. If their only thoughts are directed toward a professional career, most likely they will do everything they can to pursue that dream. If that means leaving early, they will do so.

At the time the athlete begins to think about this important decision, again be supportive, and tell them no lies, athletes do not like the "run around," and want people to be "straight up" with them. If they have the chance to go into professional sport, but are not mature, it is important for them to know. If they want to go and are no less than a second or third round pick, provide them the support they need. College is the time for

young athletes to mature, and prepare for the future, either in athletics or academics. Therefore, coaches, must make sure these years provide enough support on and off the playing field.

ations for Athletes

decisions in their life that will potentially affect
e from the choices they make in education, such
, or, they may come from the playing field. This
n from eight athletes who experienced the same
ion based on reasons he believed were important
o other athletes or it may not. What these athletes
ion and understanding regarding their personal
mature decision. They presented reasons such as
m, they talked about the importance of continuing
r degree, and they talked about chasing their
ams had no time frame. They may have wanted a
alued other things in life. Remember, very few
al sport and even if they are among the select, the ride is often short. For the majority of young athletes, it is important not to "put all your eggs in one basket," fill many baskets up with life experiences and enjoy the time being young. Money is not everything, at least four of these athletes believed it could wait. But if your mind is set, make sure you try to get as much support as you can from family

and friends. It is important to remember what these eight athletes said, trust is something difficult to attain and to maintain, thus you should be very careful about the people who want to be part of your life.

Implications for Family and Friends

What these athletes valued was support and encouragement before and after they made their decision. It was important for these participants to have ownership of their decision, and although family and friends may want to help, the athlete must decide for themself. I remember reading an article from Sports Illustrated, *Barry Breaks Away,1989,* written by William Mack. In the text of the article, Barry's father, William, was deliberate in his persuasion for his son to take the money and run. Many family meetings were held to discuss Barry's future and for William to press his point home to Barry and to his family. Barry's money was going to take William away from work and into a better life. William believed no person would look out for Barry's future better than he, even if it meant dividing his family regarding whether Barry should stay and get his degree or go for the money. One day during a family discussion, William remarked, 'I don't think my family wants to see money in the family." Then one of Barry's sisters said so poetically, "But it's Barry's money, not ours, you're trying to influence him too much." The rest of the story is well known. For the sake of the athlete and others that are involved in this decision making process, try not to be another William!

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The following are lead questions and probe questions used to gather background information for each participant. The time of response to these questions is designed to last no longer than 30 minutes in the initial session.

1. Tell me about yourself

a. What is important to you?
b. Who are your friends?
c. How do you distinguish between friends and acquaintances?
d. What is a typical day in your life?
e. What hobbies do you have?

2. Tell me about your family

a. How many family members do you have?
b. Describe your family relations.
c. What was it like growing up in your home?
d. With whom do you share the closest relationship?
e. When you have concerns, or just want to share your ideas, with whom do you talk?

3. Tell me about your first organized sport experience

a. When did you begin playing sports?
b. Who encouraged you to play sports, if anyone?
c. Have they always encouraged your sport playing?
d. What is your favorite sport?
e. Describe a good sport experience growing up?
f. Who was your first sport idol?
g. Who was your favorite coach growing up?

4. Tell me about your early school experiences

a. Did you have many friends in school?
b. What type of student were you in school?
c. What was your favorite subject in school?
d. Who was your favorite teacher in school?

5. Talk about high school

a. What sports did you play?
b. How did you manage time between sport and academics?
c. Who were you friends?
d. What did you do when you were not playing sports?
e. Describe your relations with your coaches.
f. How did you decide to come to State College?
g. Who did you discuss your decision with?

6. **Now that you entered college, describe your first days as a freshmen**
    a. How did you feel about your classes?
    b. How did you feel in a new environment?
    c. Describe your living conditions.

7. **Talk about your first sport experience in college**
    a. How was the transition from high school to college?
    b. How were you treated?
    c. Talk about your first playing experience.
    d. What type of relations do you have with the coaches?

8. **Now that you have been in school for x years, describe your college experiences, both academically and athletically**

9. **Talk about the decision you made to stay in school or enter the professional draft**
    a. When did you begin thinking about this decision?
    b. Who did you first discuss these thoughts with?
    c. What influenced your decision?
    d. Did your family background influence your decision?
    e. Did any one person(s) influence your decision?

In addition to the following questions, possible probing questions will be used to gather more information from each participant regarding the phenomenological research question.

a. Tell me more about your experience.
b. Clarify your last statement.
c. Elaborate more on that statement.
d. What does that mean to you?
e. How does that feel?
d. Discuss the relationship between.... and .....

APPENDIX B

COACHES INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Gerald Kaforey and I am doing a qualitative research study for my doctoral dissertation at The University of Tennessee. The purpose of the study is to gain insight into the reasons why junior intercollegiate football players decide to enter the professional draft or to complete their athletic eligibility. The participants in this study will be Division I junior intercollegiate football players geographically located in the Midwest and Southeast regions. Every attempt will be made to obtain participants from a variety of cultural backgrounds, sociological backgrounds, playing experiences, as well as positions on the team. I would like to have your consent to include a number of your athletes in this research project. If you agree your athletes would be approached, receive an explanation of the study, and sign informed consent statements. Each athlete would participant in two to three interviews (depending on their time frame) that provides them the opportunity to discuss their decision making experiences. The interview sessions will be conducted in a professional manner that provides and protects confidentiality.

The proposed plan is to interview each participant on three separate occasions, each session lasting anywhere from 45 minutes to 1 1/2 hours. The interview sessions will be tape-recorded to ensure accuracy when transcribing the information into written form. To ensure confidentiality, the participant will be informed of their rights, and will select a pseudonym as their personal identity. All information will be kept in a locked file and all audio tapes erased after the completion of my dissertation.

Those participating in this study are expected to be subjected to minimal risk. Participation in the interview sessions will be strictly voluntary, and participants will be advised that they may terminate their participation at their discretion with no penalties.

After reading this letter, I would greatly appreciate your support in this research project. There is so much to be learned from these athletes and their decision making process. The results of this study are directed toward future athletes who may find themselves sharing a similar experience, as well as coaches and sport psychology consultants who need to help athletes during their decision making process. Concomitantly, this study may provide valuable information to the families, friends, and institutions of the young athlete.

_____ _____

Head Coach Signature Date

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____, hereby volunteer to participate in a qualitative research study that examines decision making among college athletes, specifically college football players deciding when to enter the professional draft. They may choose to enter the draft after their junior year of playing eligibility or wait until their senior year.

I understand that I will possibly be involved in three interview sessions. Each interview session will last anywhere from 45 minutes to 1 1/2 hours. The last interview will serve as a debriefing interview where clarification and reflection are the main focus. I understand that the interviews will be audio taped.

I understand that I will be given the opportunity to listen to the tapes, read the transcriptions, and approve its use for the study. I understand that my name will not be used in the study and a pseudonym will be given to me. I understand that my university will also not be mentioned in the study except through a pseudonym. In order to preserve confidentiality, the audio tapes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet, and will be erased at the completion of the study.

I understand that the possible benefits obtained through this investigation will provide insight into the decision making process of athletes. This in turn may help future athletes who find themselves in a similar experience. I understand that there are no apparent or foreseeable risks or discomforts involved in this study.

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that participation or refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. I understand that at any time I may withdraw or discontinue participation without penalty.

Date:_____ Signature:_____

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VITA

Gerald Richard Kaforey, Jr. was born in Akron, Ohio on July 20, 1965. He graduated from Green High School in May, 1983 and entered the University of Akron the following August. While at Akron he majored in Psychology with a minor emphasis in Sociology. In May, 1985, he graduated from Akron with a Bachelor of Arts degree. He completed his Master of Arts degree in Counseling Psychology at the University of Akron in December, 1991. While completing his M.A., he was a student consultant with the universtiy men's athletic teams. He entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in August, 1994 and in May, of 1997 received a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education, with a major emphasis in Sport Psychology.

He plans on remaining in Tennessee, Knoxville in order to establish his own business in sport psychology and to pursue teaching at a collegiate setting. He also plans to continue writing poetry and songs for his own leisure and for the people he loves.