February 2016

Behind the Jersey

Jacqueline Cordova
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol2016/iss3/13

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ethos by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
PLAYING THE POSITIONS OF BOTH STUDENT AND ATHLETE

“We’re just regular people who play a sport,” says Naz Mitrou-Long, senior guard for the men’s basketball team. Yet somehow there’s always buzz around campus for these “regular people.” You watch them sprint down the court to make a three pointer on ESPN, pin their opponent on the mat or see their names make the front page of the paper after a major win. What exactly is the divide among the athletes and non-athletes? Are they really just your average people?

You see them consistently talked about, but they are still just students like us. You find them sitting in your math class, grabbing lunch or simply making jokes with their friends as they walk around campus. “When I see them on campus I feel like they think they’re better than us, which just makes them intimidating,” says one sophomore in animal science.

Mitrou-Long says he thinks there are some misconceptions in how other students view them. “I feel like you hear things about us, for example like that we don’t pay for school, which can put us in a category where people think we’re cocky, selfish or ungrateful — you can’t really be mad at people for it when it’s the stereotypes and stigmas that get put on to us.”

Walking around in their matching cardinal and gold gear they stick out like sore thumbs. With high expectations from peers, coaches, and professors, their status as athletes can complicate even their lives as students and young adults. A title comes with attachments and Mitrou-Long acknowledges there’s a responsibility in his court when upholding a good image.

College athletes have several opinions, stigmas and stereotypes surrounding them — thus, they are likely to be misunderstood by their peers. People think they are only the person on the front page, or the person seen on TV.

“It’s like they’re celebrities and somehow we’re just the smaller people under them because of the attention they get over us who don’t play a sport,” says a junior in English education.

Nicole “Kidd” Blaskowsky, a senior guard for the women’s basketball team, doesn’t like the stereotype of athletes being separated from the rest and set on a pedestal. “I’m no different than anybody else who goes here, regardless if I play a sport or not,” says Blaskowsky.
"We’re just regular people who play a sport," says Naz Mitrou-Long, senior guard for the men’s basketball team. Yet somehow there’s always buzz around campus for these “regular people." You watch them sprint down the court to make a three pointer on ESPN, pin their opponent on the mat or see their names make the front page of the paper after a major win. What exactly is the divide among the athletes and non-athletes? Are they really just your average people?

You see them consistently talked about, but they are still just students like us. You find them sitting in your math class, grabbing lunch or simply making jokes with their friends as they walk around campus.

“When I see them on campus I feel like they think they’re better than us, which just makes them intimidating. Somehow being an athlete automatically gives you a title," says one sophomore in animal science.

Mitrou-Long says he thinks there are some misconceptions in how other students view them. “I feel like you hear things about us, for example like that we don’t pay for school, which can put us in a category where people think we’re cocky, selfish or ungrateful — you can’t really be mad at people for it when it’s the stereotypes and stigmas that get put on to us.”

Walking around in their matching cardinal and gold gear they stick out like sore thumbs. With high expectations from peers, coaches, and professors, their status as athletes can complicate even their lives as students and young adults. A title comes with attachments and Mitrou-Long acknowledges there’s a responsibility in his court when upholding a good image.

College athletes have several opinions, stigmas and stereotypes surrounding them — thus, they are likely to be misunderstood by their peers. People think they are only the person on the front page, or the person seen on TV.

“It’s like they’re celebrities and somehow we’re just the smaller people under them because of the attention they get over us who don’t play a sport,” says a junior in English education.

Nicole “Kidd” Blaskowsky, a senior guard for the women’s basketball team, doesn’t like the stereotype of athletes being separated from the rest and set on a pedestal. “I’m no different than anybody else who goes here, regardless if I play a sport or not," says Blaskowsky.
THE BUSY SCHEDULES

It’s 8 a.m and Lelund Weatherspoon, a junior wrestler, is already sitting at a desk, prepared to tackle a day full of classes along with a work out, a quick lunch, therapy and a practice to end the day. Back to back to back, from the moment he opens his eyes to the moment he falls asleep. This is apart from homework, projects and other academic responsibilities. When leaving the wrestling room after practice more than ready for bed, Weatherspoon has to go home and continue his duties as a student.

“I have friends who text me and try to tell me I must have it easy as an athlete, but sometimes I wish I could see other people try and go through these busy schedules,” says Weatherspoon.

Athletes essentially tackle their passion for a sport as a career, along with being full-time students. Being a part of the team doesn’t just involve what you see on the screen. It includes more than just showing up to play a game or wrestle in a match — there are other commitments, like press conferences, interviews, photoshoots and workouts, to name a few. They eat, breath and sleep their sport once they’re in season, giving them little room to do anything else.

“I respect students who have to work, go to school and study. The same way, I feel they should take into consideration our practices and the hard work we put in,” says Mitrou-Long when discussing his peers at Iowa State. Crazy hours and schedules in the life of an athlete are also accompanied by sacrifices.

For Weatherspoon, it was evident when tackling crazy schedules during the season that some things would suffer. In order to give his best and not risk hurting his career, his social life suffered a little by giving up the usual college party scene. He spends laid-back weekends with teammates who can understand his commitment.

Just trying to go about their everyday lives puts athletes under the microscope. They walk into a room, getting stares while some start whispering. All it takes for an athlete is to walk into a room with a cardinal Nike backpack for everyone to know who they are.

For Blaskowsky, when being out on campus, all it takes is the gear to know someone is an athlete. “When everybody is given the same gear and the same backpacks you already know at least who is an athlete and who’s not — if I see a football player or a wrestler, I already know that much.”

With a barrier set by something as simple as what someone is wearing, there’s no denying that there is going to be a gap between athletes and non-athletes — even for something like standing in line for lunch.

“We’re separated and isolated. You can clearly see the eyes and people saying things about you, but I can only try and assume it’s positive.” says Mitrou-Long Long when discussing his life on campus.
It's 8 a.m and Lelund Weatherspoon, a junior wrestler, is already sitting at a desk, prepared to tackle a day full of classes along with a workout, a quick lunch, therapy and a practice to end the day. Back to back to back, from the moment he opens his eyes to the moment he falls asleep.

This is apart from homework, projects and other academic responsibilities. When leaving the wrestling room after practice more than ready for bed, Weatherspoon has to go home and continue his duties as a student.

“I have friends who text me and try to tell me I must have it easy as an athlete, but sometimes I wish I could see other people try and go through these busy schedules,” says Weatherspoon.

Athletes essentially tackle their passion for a sport as a career, along with being full-time students. Being a part of the team doesn’t just involve what you see on the screen. It includes more than just showing up to play a game or wrestle in a match — there are other commitments, like press conferences, interviews, photoshoots and workouts, to name a few.

They eat, breath and sleep their sport once they’re in season, giving them little room to do anything else.

“I respect students who have to work, go to school and study. The same way, I feel they should take into consideration our practices and the hard work we put in,” says Mitrou-Long when discussing his peers at Iowa State. Crazy hours and schedules in the life of an athlete are also accompanied by sacrifices.

“I have friends who text me and try to tell me I must have it easy as an athlete...”
“We as athletes look at students who are engineers, or journalists, and we are intrigued by what they do.”
THE END GOAL

So, after all this effort, what is the end goal for college athletes? Like any other student, they too came into college with goals and aspirations of a successful future. Weatherspoon is putting time and commitment into a sport that basically ends after graduation. Unless one wants to make it to the Olympics or join MMA, wrestling has an end point, and that last match isn’t too far from Lelund.

Working toward a degree in hospitality management, he looks forward to working with a hotel or a resort and climbing the ladder. As for wrestling, being a national champion — and maybe winning even an Olympic title — are still on his radar. The passion never ends. Not only has he become a better athlete, but through wrestling, Weatherspoon says he has gained some valuable life skills.

“It has taught me discipline, responsibility, and basically taught me how to be a man, gave me every life lesson there is,” says Weatherspoon.

Blaskowsky walked into college with eyes set on the ball, and trying to figure herself out as the player she was going to be. When junior year rolled around, she began to look beyond the sport. When her time comes to cross the stage at graduation, she hopes to take a year off to travel and see the world. She wants to be just like any other person and enjoy the world beyond what she already knows. Her ultimate goal is to join the military — she hopes to enlist in the Marines. When it comes to basketball, she only hopes to walk out of Iowa State with a bang in her basketball career and be remembered in a positive way. Overall, she just wants make her family proud — something any other student wants to accomplish.

For Mitrou-Long, earning a degree in communication studies, he’s had the opportunity to explore his options. He loves the game and that’s something he wants to pursue whether on the court or on the sidelines as a coach. As far as life outside basketball is concerned, he is ready to get his diploma, an achievement he is looking forward to. He hopes to continue to make meaningful friendships and grow in the community.

Like the rest of us, college athletes are here for the same purpose — to earn a degree in what they love, grow as a person and to have the best four years of their lives. Although athletes seem to be under a spotlight and get more attention than an average student, that doesn’t take away from the achievements of other outstanding students on campus.

Mitrou-Long acknowledges all the hard work and accomplishments by other students around him. He admires engineering students because he says he could never be successful in one of their classes.

“We as athletes look at students who are engineers, or journalists, and we are intrigued by what they do, we respect how many hours they put into their work,” says Mitrou-Long.

So in the end, everybody has their own talents and goals they are pursuing. For some, the talent comes in a field where all eyes are on them. All the athletes you see on campus are just like you, here to learn and pursue what they love.

“You’re put in your position by God and by your way of life, and in that position you just learn excel at it,” says Mitrou-Long.