

Athletes create their own minority

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It doesn't matter if the athlete is late for a class, or for a study hall. "What people fail to understand," said Terrell Jones, vice provost for educational equity, "is that these students from morning to evening have their day planned out for them. There's a certain allotment for study hall, for eating, and practice."

Those activities take place in a structured living and eating area. It is the same for most of the athletic programs. The living situation is a sore point with many in the community.

"I hear they get to live wherever they want," said LaRay Jolly (freshman-business). "That doesn't seem fair, but I guess there's a reason."

Athletes are strategically placed throughout campus where they will be close to where they spend more than half of their time — the field.

Director of Academic Support Services Don Ferrell regards the housing situation as a much overblown issue.

"Why should athletes be housed at one end of the campus when their (field) is on the other side?" Ferrell said. "If the coach says to a player 'I want to see you in my office,' and the player says 'OK, coach, I'll be there in 45 minutes.' It doesn't make sense. It's the modus operandi for athletes to be housed where they are."

And ironically, the housing issue is one that is misunderstood. With the possible exception of football players, who usually live in Nittany Apartments, Assistant Director of Housing Lynn DuBois explained that the housing situation for athletes is much the same as for any other students.

"Athletes are pretty much housed across campus. They usually chose a (location) close to their sport. For example if you're a soccer player, you'd probably request East Halls, and if you're in volleyball, you'd want West Halls."

About 20 to 25 percent of on-campus housing is reserved for freshmen, DuBois said. That number includes interest houses and housing for University Scholars.

"There may also be an allotment for athletic housing, but it's in that 20 to 25 percent. A person could get Hamilton Hall as a freshman, but if all the space reserved for freshmen is gone, a freshman athlete wouldn't necessarily be able to live there."

Older athletes, sophomores and up, are subject to the same housing system as the rest of the students, DuBois said. They have reassignment rights to the dorms they reside in, but if they want to move to a different part of campus, they



Collegian Photo/Ian Sherman

Keith Olsommer and Wally Richardson relax while playing a game of Sega college football in Richardson's room last night. Olsommer, tight

end for the Nittany Lion football team, and Richardson, quarterback, are apartment mates.

will be considered by their semester standing.

Football players have a set number of Nittany Apartments and Nittany Hall put aside for their use. The football team is the only athletic team that has space reserved in Nittany Apartments and Nittany Hall. DuBois said that the main reason for this is because Nittany Apartments is close to the team's playing and practice facilities.

Tanya Dunbar, who is black, said athletes probably do withdraw from the community. "But it's kind of impossible for them with their schedules and where they live. It must be hard to mix in — I do think that they could make more of an effort, though," said Dunbar (freshman-premedicine).

The big taboo

The popular persona of athletes is one compiled from various incidents and folklore passed down from class to class. With the addi-

tion of more minorities on campus, the tale has changed just a little bit. Many people say that in terms of a social life, minority athletes want to be seen with the "in" crowd, and perhaps that crowd isn't in the minority community.

Tales of black athletes dating predominantly in the white community and placing themselves out of the loop are common. As one female student said, "(They) date white women because black women won't put up with their stuff. White women will do whatever (in hopes) that the guys will make it to the pros."

"Sometimes I see (the athletes) just fronting on me. They have their white women on the side. They need to be real about it."

Still others don't understand what all the hoopla is about. Collins points out that the big stereotype of black jocks on this campus is that they seek out white girlfriends for status.

"I have nothing against black females, I have a black girlfriend," Collins said. "(Some) players might have white girlfriends. I don't think it's a big matter. It's basically whoever crosses your path."

Heather Collins (sophomore-journalism) has been around the football team and athletes longer and more often than most people on this campus. Though she can only speak for her two brothers, Aaron and Jason, who are currently on the team, and those close to them, she believes that the interracial dating issue is a nonfactor.

"I don't get the perception that most athletes are exclusively dating white women," she said. "As far as I know, athletes aren't the only ones (dating interracially). There are other people who do it, so I can't say why it's such a big deal."

No autographs, please

Most Penn Staters have followed the athletic program in some detail before they ever stepped foot on campus. It takes until the first Ag Sci class where you're among 400 people and see Mr. Big Athlete on Campus for the realization to set in that you are within an elbow's length from a person only previously known through television.

The superstar image of an athlete might not be shattered by his performance in the classroom, but if he passes by on the street without speaking, then a problem arises.

It is common in the minority community to exchange greetings with other minorities. The belief is that minority athletes, more so than any subcommunity on campus, walk around on their own private pedestal — ignoring everyone.

Ferrell offers his view on why so many students have those feelings. Ferrell has been an administrator at Penn State for 30 years and has worked with Lion football coach Joe Paterno for 26 of them. In his tenure here, he has seen and heard every myth, rumor and snide comment known to man. The thought that athletes, and in particular, black athletes snub the University community alarms him.

"There are two black communi-

ties," Ferrell said. "One on campus, and the one off campus, and I believe that the athletes interact with both of them very well."

"(People) see what they want through their own eyes. People have dual perceptions (of athletes)," Ferrell said. "I will tolerate you because you're a star, but if I see you doing something I don't like, I will condemn you. You cannot live in a world where there are a mix of people wanting to both idolize and kill you at their own convenience."

Could it be that the very students who want to get to know the athletes are the self-same ones that widen the distance between themselves and everyone else?

"People put them up on such a pedestal," Heather Collins said. "They create the distance themselves by treating them differently."

Along that line of thinking, Raheem Jarbo (freshman-biobehavioral health) said he has had contact with minority athletes and they treat everyone like regular people and the feeling is reciprocated.

"I play basketball with people on the football team, and on the track team and it's cool," he said. "I don't treat them any differently because they're well-known and they don't look down on me."

Nittany Lion tight end Keith Olsommer thinks that the student body is too hard on him and his brethren, probably because they have no idea what an athlete goes through.

"The problem is we are the peers of everyone when we're doing good, but when we're not then (they) say we're getting special treatment. (We're) given this, allowed to do this and that."

"My peers are on the football team. Let them get up 5:30 in the morning, five days a week. It's hard to explain. It gets really frustrating sometimes."

Shadows

But other types of athletes attend the University besides football players. The rugby, soccer, fencing, lacrosse and even the basketball players don't have the stigma attached to them that the football team does. Add to this the remarkable fact that the female athletes are almost out of the loop.

These athletes, minority or otherwise, are considered "all right." Yet, they have the athlete prefix to their names as well, so what makes them so different?

Call it an athletic hierarchy. At Penn State, the sports that get all the attention coincidentally are the ones that get the most endorsements and air time. Football is Penn State. Many students, before they even step foot on campus, are well aware of the JoePa legacy. The same cannot be said for the basketball team, and it certainly can't be said for newer teams, like men's and women's volleyball.

So these student-athletes are like other students. It's as if their athletics serve only as something to do after classes. Never mind they put in the time in the weight room, in

practice, at games, like the football players. Yet, because their sports do not get the same support, the athletes aren't in the same brackets as football players, and them putting on airs would make as much sense as a chicken at a wolf convention.

Women athletes have had to fight to have their athletic contributions taken seriously. As a result, it is hard trying to get people to talk about what they have done on the field, to say nothing of their "civilian" conduct.

"You really don't hear about tennis players being stuck-up," Jarbo said. "I don't think anyone really knows who anyone is on the smaller sports."

As far as the men's basketball team is concerned, perhaps the fact that four of the starting five players are white has to do with the relative ambivalence about basketball players' interaction with other students.

For sports such as baseball, softball, fencing and lacrosse, it is safe to say that the majority of the athletes are white, on both the men's and women's teams, so they are out of the minority loop from the beginning.

And finally. . .

But the athletic issue extends well past the minority community. The debate runs on a grand scale with varying degrees of ideologies. The bottom line is that the minority community and its athletes have something between them that keeps them from being unified.

All the taboo issues have yet to be solved, all the hard feelings have yet to be assuaged. In truth, the athletic community is its own little minority — 600 or so students out of 40,000 — so it is unusual that there is no sense of common ground. Until then, however, the jokes, rumors, and angry glares are going to continue, and a sizable section of the Penn State community will remain divided.

Lady laxer transcends tradition

Shauna Williams, a redshirt senior on the women's lacrosse team, excels in a predominantly white male sport.

By ERIN WRIGHT
Collegian Sports Writer

Eleven years ago in quaint Philadelphia, a young girl began to play a sport that would guarantee her a time in the spotlight. Not because she would burn up the field, or become the best, brightest, or most incredible. No, her big claim to fame would be one that has raised eyebrows for almost 12 years — she is a black female lacrosse player.

Shauna Williams is a redshirt senior who has been a staple on the defensive side of the field for the Lady Lions the past four years. Because of an injury, she will be around for at least another semester. She loves the game and has played it long enough and well enough to be able to put aside any extraneous information. But the fact that she is a black woman playing what is considered a predominantly white male sport is one that many have noticed.

Williams began her career at the Springside School in Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, as a fifth-grader. The private school offered lacrosse as a physical education class. Williams took it and liked it. The fact that she was the only black person on her team didn't deter her at all.

"I just went out to play. (It) didn't make me feel weird," she said. "I just love to play and I didn't even notice that I was the only black person on the team."

Time passed quickly, and when the time came for Williams to apply to colleges, she was not particularly looking at Penn State as a possible school, or even a Division I school at that. It took her coach, Betsy Williams, sister of Lady Lion lacrosse coach Julie Williams, to persuade her to give Penn State a look.

"I applied to other schools, Division III schools, but Betsy wanted me to apply to Penn State," she said. "Julie saw me play and recruited me. I didn't even visit the place before I came up here to school."

Williams came up to Penn State knowing well what to expect, and boasts a "very good relationship" with her coach and her teammates that transcends any kind of color barrier.

Amy Carnaggio, a junior defender, has played with Williams for three years and has never felt that either Williams or the rest of the team have had any feeling of division.

"When I played with Shauna, I never got the feeling that she felt or was treated differently," Carnaggio said. "We also have a freshman, Summer Downing, who is black, but she's a freshman and its going to be hard for her to step forward."

Carnaggio and teammate junior2 midfielder Tam Crowe admitted not really thinking about the minority distribution on the lacrosse team.

"Coach Williams treats us all like equals," Crowe said. "The lack of (minorities) is relative, because there's nothing you can compare it to."

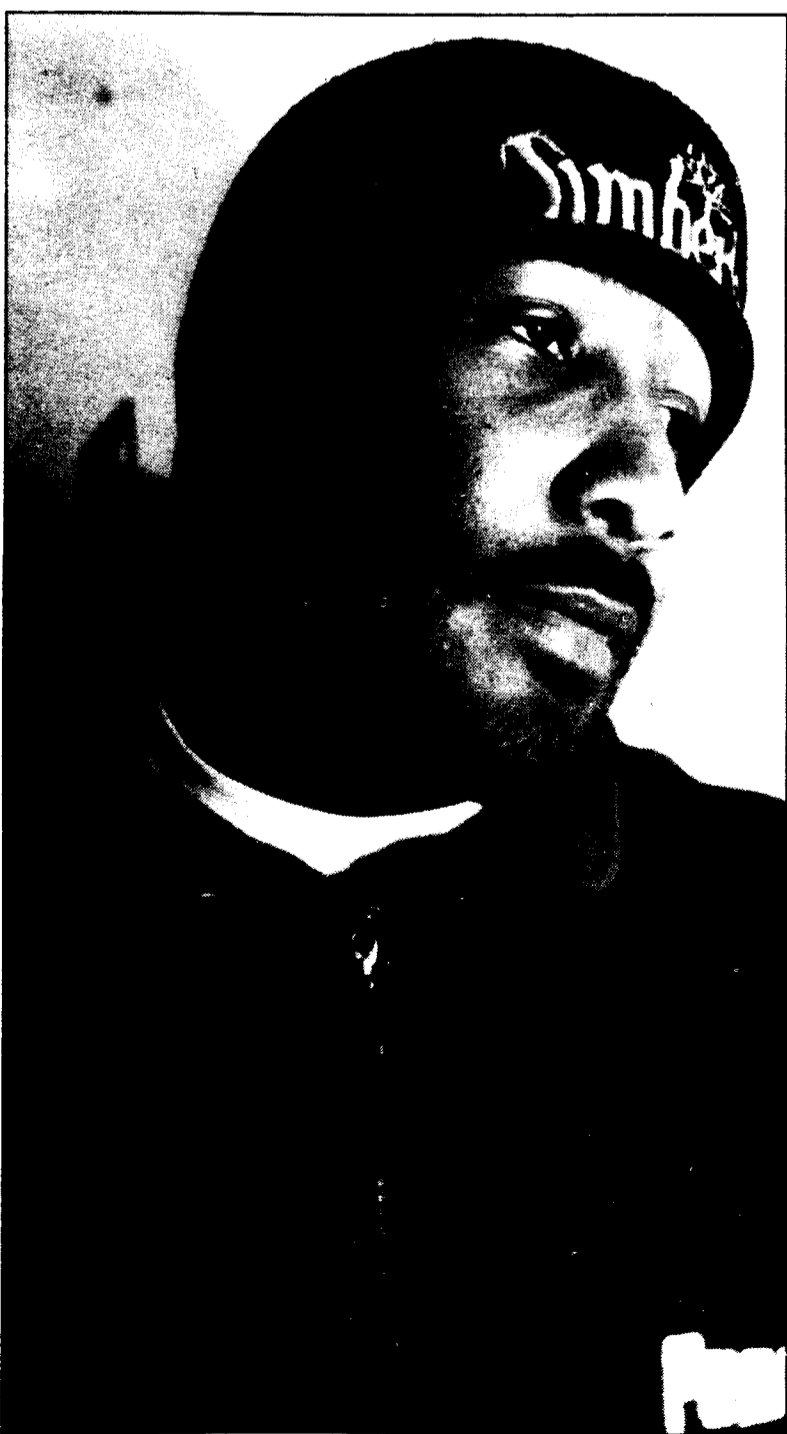
Shauna Williams has gotten verbal double-takes from people who are unfamiliar with the game. She admits that most of the chiding comes from black people.

"(They'll) say things like 'where did you learn to play lacrosse? No black people play that.' I tell them that my school had it and I liked it," she said. "They don't know anything about the game, like that it comes from the Native Americans."

"Once I tell them about the game they get more interested. My friends come to the games I play in, and they love it. It's an addictive game — once you see it, you start really liking it."

She believes that the trick in spreading the appeal of lacrosse over all ethnic groups and genders is to make it more available in the cities and to start early. She talks up the sport in her neighborhood, and two Philadelphia public schools, Central High School and Philadelphia High School for Girls, both have intramural teams.

She believes that its only a matter of time before her story isn't so extraordinary.



Collegian Photo/Laura Chiles

Aaron Collins leans against his desk in his room in Nittany Apartments. Collins, a defensive player on the football team, enjoys gospel music and sings in a choir.

DIVERSITY OR DIVISION

Let us know what you think about diversity issues. Drop off a letter to the editor at our office at 123 S. Burrowes St. or E-mail: cec114@psuvm.psu.edu

The stories on March 19 will focus on the Greek community.