

CHAPTER 1

The Top 10 Tips for a Championship Education



1. Believe in Both of You: The College Student and the College Athlete



The importance of maintaining your self-confidence in college cannot be overstated. If you practice good study habits and have the desire to succeed, you will do just that at each and every college that offered you admission. Know that this is true, remind yourself daily, and never question your intellectual abilities.

There is a mind game that gets played out at every college. Very simply, students worry that they're not up to the college's standard. Unfortunately, colleges do very little to allay such fears. First-year students look at their peers in the residence hall cafeteria, at the college convocation, at the first lecture or the first team meeting and

worry that they're just not as smart as the other students. The reality, however, is that how well you do in college is not just about how smart you are. Instead, the key is developing good study skills, discovering your interests, meeting good students and faculty, and finding your own identity.

Most student athletes come to college with a strong belief in their athletic competence. In fact, it is part of your competitive spirit to believe that you landed on a college athletic team because you belong there. You may have been recruited by a few, even many, schools on the basis of your athletic prowess. But just like most new college students, most student athletes do not have that same level of confidence in their academic abilities when starting college. This dichotomy of feeling so confident in the athletic arena yet lacking confidence in yourself in the academic arena can sometimes create a self-fulfilling prophecy that can land you in academic trouble. You want to be successful in *both* athletics and academics. See also Tip 7 on pages 45–47.

One of the most valuable lessons you can acquire as a successful college student athlete is about transferable skills: how to transfer the athletic skills you already possess and have trained toward perfecting to the academic area of your life. You have trained to be focused and prepared, to have confidence in yourself, and to believe that practice makes perfect. These same principles apply to academic success.

Effort also plays a critical role in athletic and academic success. Any seasoned athlete knows a coach would choose the athlete with less natural ability and a strong work ethic over the athlete with more

natural ability and a poor work ethic. Just as there will be athletes better than you and not as good as you, there will be students smarter than you and less smart than you. Your success will be determined, in large part, by what you do to attain the results you want.

Even the brightest students at the best schools experience feelings of academic inadequacy. You have the advantage of being trained to believe in yourself as part of your athletic development. Pay attention to the feedback you get from instructors as a helpful indicator of how you are *actually* performing, as opposed to how you think you're performing. Be as prepared for an exam as you would be for a game or meet. Don't be embarrassed to ask questions or ask for help. Believe in your right to be a student, believe in your ability to be successful, and allow your competitiveness to flow into your academic life. Above all else, believe in both parts of you, the student and the athlete.

2. Learn to Be a College Student

Chances are you visited your college while you were being recruited; so that when you arrived on campus to start college, you already had some familiarity with it. However, once you start going to class, you will appreciate that you did not fully understand what college would be like. College is an entirely different universe than high school, both athletically and academically. The easiest way to describe the difference is that college is more of everything—more expectations and demands both athletically and academically and more independence in how you live each day. Simply said, college is not Grade 13. This is true both academically and athletically.

Don't waste your time in college by approaching it as you approached high school. What worked for you in high school will not work for you in college, and, really, you wouldn't want it to. Athletically, everything will be more intense—preparation, practice, and competition. As a student athlete, you will be governed by the NCAA and conference rules. The compliance office in your athletic department will be your primary resource for following these rules. Don't take chances with your eligibility. The stakes are much greater than they were in high school.

Come to college mentally prepared and with the right expectations for your college learning experience. It's your time to be an independent adult thinker. You can assert your own ideas, interpretations, and analyses. You can, and should, get involved in the issues of the world. Be prepared to defend your ideas, opinions, values, decisions, and actions. This can be difficult, especially in your first year. But embrace this opportunity. Don't shy away from it.

Think about what skills you want to improve to help you do better in college. Then find out where you can learn those skills. Most students have not had formal instruction in note taking, study skills, time management, or test taking, yet these are fundamental skills that will make a difference in your college success. See also Tip 2 on pages 30–32, Tip 8 on pages 47–49, and Tip 2 on pages 56–57. Most college athletic programs provide academic and tutorial support that includes the opportunity to work on these skills.

Whether or not you know what you want to pursue in college, do not think you need to take all of your requirements right away. Balance your schedule with courses that count toward your requirements and courses you find interesting and exciting. See Tip 9 on pages 71–73.

Most new college students have not thought about taking courses in subjects not offered in their high schools. What steps can you take in your first year to help you transition from high school and to embrace the best that your college has to offer?

- 1 Take a small class or seminar in a subject that interests you. In a small class you will be with a faculty member who loves to get to know students, and you will get to explore the subject very differently than you would in a large class.
- 2 Take courses with good teachers. See also Tip 8 on pages 69–71. Regardless of how interested you are in any given course content or course description, you are better off selecting your courses on the basis of the best teachers you can find. Speak to your advisors and other students for suggestions (see also Tip 5 on pages 91–93).
- 3 Try out a new idea. It is the very essence of college.
- 4 Try out a course in a subject you've never considered before. See Tip 4 on pages 109–11.
- 5 Imagine a new career. See Tip 6 on pages 177–79.
- 6 Make new friends with students from all backgrounds (see also Tip 3 on pages 121–23).

3. Expand Your Comfort Zone

The first days of college can be intimidating socially as well as academically. After four or more years with the same group of friends, having established a reputation among your peers and teachers, having been a