

NEGLIGENT ADMISSION: WAS IT UNETHICAL TO RECRUIT MARCUS JOHNSON?

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It was 1978 when Jason started as the head of the athletic department for Quandary University, a private college in the U.S. Midwest that competed in Division I NCAA athletics. Jason had heard of a star high school athlete named Marcus Johnson from Kansas City, a 6'9" center who averaged 21 points and 20 rebounds a game. His dominance on the court, however, did not translate to the classroom. While his high school "C's" were below average for Quandary University, Jason was more concerned about his American College Testing (ACT) score. He scored a 9 out of 36. The average at Quandary University in 1978 was 23.2.

When Jason expressed concerns about Johnson's ability to handle the academic workload at Quandary University, the basketball head coach winked and said, "*Don't worry, we can give him 'special tutoring.'*" Jason had heard a rumor of special athletic department tutors who would do assignments and even take tests for student athletes. The coach's comment confirmed the rumor.

"*We'll just enroll him in classes like ceramics, marksmanship, and theory of basketball,*" said the head coach.

Recruitment of College Athletes

College athletic directors and coaches faced incredible pressure to win from their institutions and the alumni of their institutions. Consequently, they recruited great players - players for whom there was intense competition. It should have been no surprise that such an environment led to recruitment violations. In the 1990s, four University of Michigan basketball players received a combined \$600,000 from one booster (Top 10 Infamous NCAA Sanctions 2010). In 1999, a University of Minnesota academic advisor admitted to accepting extra money from the coach to write over 400 papers for men's basketball players (Top 10 Infamous NCAA Sanctions 2010). The 2008 Memphis Tigers' men's basketball team was sanctioned for allegedly arranging another person to take Derrick Rose's SAT test (Top 10 Infamous NCAA Sanctions 2010). In 2013, A Southwestern Louisiana (now the University of Louisiana at Lafayette) assistant coach forged the signature of a high school principal to allow a recruit to attend (Carson 2013).

It was also no surprise that this intense competition for star recruits led to coaches making exaggerated claims. College basketball Coach Larry Brown said, *"Every kid I recruited for college felt that he had an opportunity to play in the NBA and I liked him to have those expectations"* (Sperber 2001).

In fact, the chance of an entering freshman NCAA basketball player going on to play in the NBA was smaller than 1%. The NCAA claimed that it was 1.3%. However, the NCAA's claim was based on NCAA seniors; many high school athletes who were recruited to play in the NCAA never made it to their senior year (NCAA.org).

Admission of Marcus Johnson

In his discussion with the basketball coach, Jason expressed concern that the classes Marcus Johnson would take (ceramics, marksmanship, etc.) would not contribute toward a degree. The head coach replied, *“Hey, I was hired to win basketball games; I’ve never received a bonus based on graduation rates. Besides, Marcus Johnson is a poor black kid. This will be the best thing to ever happen to him.”*

Because of his high school GPA and ACT score, Johnson needed to be admitted as a *“special permission”* student. The head basketball coach said Johnson would play an integral role on the team and asked Jason to appeal to the academic vice president, so that Johnson could attend Quandary University.

Jason reluctantly went along with the head basketball coach and got Marcus Johnson admitted to Quandary University. Just as Jason had feared, Marcus Johnson did not perform well academically. Even with the *“special help”* on tests and homework, his freshman GPA was 1.6, and it only went downhill from there. After four years at Quandary University, Johnson’s overall language skills were those of a fourth grader. To make matters worse, he turned out to not be the basketball star that he was recruited to be. He started in only 9 games and averaged only 4 points per game.

One evening, while Jason was looking over the scouting reports for the upcoming year’s entering recruits, an angry, 6’9” man barged into his office. Jason immediately recognized him as Marcus Johnson. He was upset because after four years he was nowhere near earning a degree. *“When you guys recruited me, the deal was I play basketball for you and you educate me. I fulfilled my end of the bargain so now it’s time for you to do the same,”* he exclaimed. Should Quandary University have admitted Marcus Johnson? Given that Marcus Johnson was recruited and did not receive a degree, what, if anything, should Jason do now?



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