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**Special Issue Editors' Note: The Role of Social Work Practice, Advocacy, and
Research in College Athletics**

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Over the last three years, a group of forward-thinking social work faculty members, practitioners, advocates, and students started a grassroots effort, The National Alliance of Social Workers in Sports, to lead the integration of social work into all realms of sports. As advocates, clinicians, case managers, researchers, community organizers, and agents of change, social workers are uniquely positioned to positively impact the lives of the vulnerable athletic population. Through the lens of social work and social justice, we invited research-based, theoretically grounded, and practice-oriented scholarly submissions that offered perspectives on college sport, university governance, and politics. This collective of peer-reviewed articles comprises the first-ever special issue on Sport Social Work.

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help to meet the basic needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable (National Association of Social Workers, NASW, 2008). Sport Social Work promotes social justice and social change by focusing on the vulnerabilities of athletes at both an individual and environmental level (National Alliance of Social Workers in Sports, NASWIS, 2017). Sport Social Workers address the vulnerabilities of athletes through direct practice, community organizing, advocacy, policy development, education, and research (NASWIS, 2017). Sport Social Workers seek to enhance the capabilities of athletes to address their own psychosocial and behavioral health needs. They encourage athletic organizations, communities, and other social institutions to recognize athletes as a vulnerable population and to join in the fight to reduce the challenges present in athletics. At the heart of these efforts is a focus on the values and ethics of the social work profession (e.g., social justice, self-determination, importance of human relationships, competency, integrity, and the dignity and worth of athletes) (NASW, 2008). Many of the articles included in this special issue present strong evidence for athlete vulnerability. Included articles discuss mental health risks, patterns of disordered eating, substance and alcohol use, sexual assault and interpersonal violence, learning disabilities, criminal activity, stigmatization of behavioral health concerns, and sociocultural risks.

While each article in this issue delivers a unique perspective on social work involvement in college athletes, there are common themes connecting the various pieces. First, the articles raise awareness for the needs of athletes and how social workers can enhance the well-being and effective functioning of athletes through advocacy, research, case coordination, direct practice, and policy change. Second, the articles identify the strengths of athletes and how these strengths can help promote social justice, personal success, and community change. Third, the articles illustrate the need for professionals working with college athletes to use ecological and person-in-environment models to fully understand behavioral health and psychosocial needs. Fourth, the articles give athletes a voice so they can de-stigmatize behavioral health and combat threats to their safety and well-being. Fifth, the articles position social workers as inter-professional partners who can collaborate with other health professionals working with college athletes, much like social workers have done from the inception of our profession.

As you read through these articles, we hope it provides a clearer perspective on what Sport Social Workers can offer to college and university athletes, teams, and athletic departments. At the conclusion of this special issue, we hope readers have a deeper appreciation for the impact social workers can have on the health and functioning of college athletes. We also

hope current and future social workers learn valuable ways to connect the theoretical, practical, political, and research arms of the social work profession to a new population – college athletes. The articles in this special edition fit into three overarching themes (1) the history of sport social work, (2) ongoing risk factors impacting the lives of athletes, and (3) providing micro and macro social work services to athletes. Here is a preview of what you will find in this special edition.

The History of Sport Social Work

Jane Addams' Forgotten Legacy: Recreation and Sport

Sport is one of the oldest known social work interventions. Sport activities, with social work objectives, emerged in the United States in 1900's with the play movement as a means for immigrant youth to cope with the complications of social inclusion and transitioning into a new country (Hardy & Ingham, 1983). Fast forward to the late 1960's when the National Youth Sports Program (NYSP) emerged. NYSP, which was sponsored by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), provided economically disadvantaged youth, ages 9 to 16, the opportunity to receive educational programming and daily sports instruction. Eventually, sports programming would become a part of the social service efforts with the 4-H Club, Salvation Army Boys Club, and community-based non-profit organizations across the US as a way to "hook" youth. In the mid-1980s, midnight basketball (Shogren, 1994) was used to combat crime and provided a clearer link between social work and sports and adult populations (Hartmann, 2003). After basketball, participants attended workshops on the different necessities for living. These workshops were later added to the Violent Crime and Control Enforcement Act of 1994.

In *Jane Addams' Forgotten Legacy: Recreation and Sport*, Reynolds explores the rich, yet largely undocumented, history of the intersection between social work and sport. Reynolds leads off describing the early days of social work by highlighting one of its founders Jane Addams, a defacto athletic director. Reynolds continues with narrative of how Hull House, an intricate part of the settlement house movement, was essential in steering young people away from street gangs and other at-risk activities that prevailed at the turn of the century. By tracing the origins of sport social work back to Tonybee Hall in London, England, Reynolds goes international with his commentary and brings us back to the US with insight from Dr. James Naismith, which adds to the validity of his claim that there is a forgotten legacy pertaining to sport, recreation, and social work. Eventually, the work of Jane Addams became a movement via the Playground Association of America (PAA). Her work also had an influence on organizations like the New York City Police Athletic League and the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy. During the first decade of the 1900s, the number of cities nationwide with publicly funded recreation facilities expanded from ten to over 500 (Riess, 1991). The number of parks nationwide rose to over 4,000 (Azzarito, Solomon, & Munro, 2004).

Ongoing Risk Factors Impacting the Lives of Athletes

College Athletes and Crime: The Role of Race, Age, and Peers and the Implications for Social Work Practice in College Sports

Increasing media attention on college athletes involved in crimes raises numerous questions about the nature of the crimes and any correlations to the socioeconomic, racial, and

other contextual conditions that surround them. Prior to the publication of this piece, the topic had not been studied and reported on for nearly two decades, with the exception of crimes related to sexual assaults. In Gill's article on *College Athletes and Crime*, Gill presents a secondary analysis of media reports over the past six years, elucidating data on how a college athlete's age, race, and peer supports impact their propensity to be involved in crime. The goal of this piece is to help the reader conceptualize better athlete development strategies that reduce the chances for criminal acts. Regarding the race factor, Gill's data support the recent assumptions (Barry & Smith, 2000; Lapchick, 2000) that Black athletes do not commit more crimes than their White counterparts. Gill exposes that a remarkably high amount of property crimes involving items such as textbooks, laptops, and other electronics are likely indicative of economic need, supported by other existing data that show 80% of college athletes live below the poverty line (Huma & Staurowsky, 2011).

Sexual Violence in Intercollegiate Athletics: A Historical Perspective of Male Athlete Entitlement

The actuality that sport organizations, in particular college sports organizations, have divested in coaches with formal training as teachers may be one cause for the seemingly increasing prevalence of sexual assaults in intercollegiate sports. Sexual assaults in sports are complex because they involve a plethora of variables including hyper-masculinity, aggression, substance use, and ideologies about women. Moreover, sexual assaults in collegiate sports unfold in various contexts – including sexual assaults by male athletes against female athletes, assaults involving multiple perpetrators against single victims, and victimization that occurs in the direct or indirect purview of coaches and/or team personnel. Prior to the alleged gang rape at the University of Minnesota, there were sexual assault scandals at Baylor, Vanderbilt, Colorado, Alabama Birmingham, Duke, St. John's, and other cases that never made it to public light. One would think that the NCAA, which oftentimes professes to have cartel-like authority, would use its influence to deter, or better yet extinguish sexual assaults, but sexual assaults do not impact the integrity of athletic completion and thus are not a part of NCAA governance. The NCAA's best effort, which is far better than no effort, are the publication of the 2014 NCAA Sexual Assault Manual and the Sexual Assault and Interpersonal Violence Toolkit (NCAA, 2015).

In *Sexual Violence in Intercollegiate Athletics: A Historical Perspective of Male Athlete Entitlement*, Mordecai qualitatively explores sexual assault - one of the more complicated, alarming, and most talked about issues in college sports. Through a feminist lens that suggests sexual violence reinforces male dominance in a patriarchal society, Mordecai identifies themes of male athletic entitlement in college sports. According to this lens, male athletes have access to power and privilege granted to them by a patriarchal system (Hattery, 2010) and in a sporting environment that promulgates violence and domination. Moreover, Mordecai adds that entitlement is a parallel process between athletes and society as people in society, including on college campuses, may contribute to their inflated egos. Mordecai uses relevant articles from *The Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Hartford Courant*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post* between the 1950s and the present day to develop a database of sexual assaults in college sports. Multiple perpetrator sexual assaults, recruiting parties, recruitment of athletes with a violent past, racial hierarchies, threats to victims, and organizational culture's mishandling of sexual assault were among the themes produced by the database. Mordecai goes on to explore organizational cultures of college sports program,

their values, and perceived power structures in an attempt to sort out how to address sexual assaults by college athletes and concludes that athletic administrators and staff should model the expected attitudes and behaviors they wish to see.

The Emotional Needs of Women in Sports: An Exploration of Self-Efficacy, Self-Compassion, and Self-Conscious Emotions

Researchers agree that the emotional needs of individuals across genders differ. Women are more prone to experiencing guilt and shame, and shame stemming from body image can be even more impactful (Tracy, Robins, & Tangney, 2007). Women were found to score higher in self-conscious emotions, such as embarrassment, guilt, shame and pride, and these were found to be even worse in the domains of athletics and appearance (Tracy & Robins, 2004). In this piece, Gummelt presents evidence from a recent empirical study comparing female NCAA athletes with female non-athletes on the dimensions of self-efficacy, shame, and self-compassion. Results show that female athletes experience increased levels of shame and self-consciousness and lower levels of self-efficacy. Gummelt challenges mental health professionals to provide support to female athletes and suggests that social workers are uniquely qualified to address emotional well-being in the sporting environment, in addition to having case management skills that are helpful in linking athletes to resources.

Is There a Need for Social Workers in Intercollegiate Athletics? A Conceptual Study

Eating disorders and body image concerns are prevalent among college athletes. Wollenberg, Shriver, and Gates (2015) found 6.6% of female college athletes showed symptoms of disordered eating. Nearly 10% of female college athletes had low self-esteem about their appearance and 12% of female college athletes were dissatisfied with their body image (McLester, Hardin, & Hoppe, 2014). These disorders and body image concerns significantly and negatively impact physical and emotional well-being, academic success, and sports performance (Thompson, n.d.). In *Is There a Need for Social Workers in Intercollegiate Athletics? A Conceptual Study*, Miller discusses the prevalence of eating disorders and body image concerns amongst female athletes using a social work lens. Miller discusses the role of an ecological perspective on the development of eating disorders by exploring genetic, sociocultural and sport-related risk factors. Miller also discusses the practice interventions social workers could use to work with athletes, coaches, and other multidisciplinary professionals touching the lives of athletes. This article does an excellent job illustrating the unique perspective of social workers and how their integration into athletics offers different perspective that could enhance overall athlete functioning.

I Know I Can Learn: The Perceptions of NCAA Division I Football College Athletes with Learning Disabilities

For academic eligibility purposes, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2017) defines an education-impacting disability as a current impairment that has a substantial educational impact on a student's academic performance and requires accommodation. One of the most common education-impacting occurrences is learning disabilities and disorders (NCAA, 2017). In an effort to understand more about learning disabilities in the college athlete

population, Stokowski and colleagues, in *I Know I Can Learn*, conducted nine semi-structured interviews with Division I FBS college athletes with learning disabilities. The themes that emerged from their work were learning competence (an athlete's belief that they are capable of learning) and learning strategies (the development of practices to be successful in the classroom). This article takes a strength-based and ecological perspective on how to help athletes appropriately manage their learning disabilities as opposed to ignoring the disability, or worse, fabricating educational results (e.g., University of North Carolina and Syracuse University).

I Know I Can Learn also encourages readers to critically examine whether or not academic institutions are more concerned with winning in competition than developing the academic knowledge of athletes (Murty & Roebuck, 2015). Is there so much of an emphasis placed on sport that it reduces academic achievement and promotes role conflict between being both a student and an athlete? Yes, college athletes graduate at higher rates than their non-athlete peers (NCAA, 2016), but are we fully addressing the needs of vulnerable athletes with learning disabilities or disorder? The work of Stokowski and colleagues shines light on this debate and positions social workers for providing support to athletes as they pursue athletic success and academic success that allows athletes to pursue careers in fields of their choice.

Understanding Student-Athlete Reintegration: Using Social Work Strengths

The reintegration process for a student athlete is characterized by both positive and negative factors. These can include numerous encouraging social supports, helpful coping skills, and goal-setting behaviors, but also isolation, role engulfment, and feeling as if part of them has died. If the reintegration process is not a positive one, it can have long-term effects. Social workers are uniquely positioned to assist the transitioning college athlete, whether their exit from the sport is planned or unplanned (Dean & Rowan, 2014; Gill, 2008). In the article, *Understanding Student-Athlete Reintegration: Using Social Work Strengths*, Dean and Reynolds discuss reintegration success factors, highlight programs that have been successful at assisting with reintegration, and present an illustrative case study of how a social worker can help the athlete to leverage their strengths through the process.

Providing Micro and Macro Social Work Services to Athletes

Stepping Outside their Comfort Zone: Perceptions of Seeking Behavioral Health Services Amongst College Athletes

The existing literature base is replete with evidence that athletes are susceptible to a variety of mental health disorders, including depression, eating disorders, anxiety-related conditions, and substance use disorders (Cox, 2015; NCAA, 2017; Rao & Hong, 2015; Wolanin, Hong, Marks, Panchoo, & Gross, 2015). In Moore's article, the reluctance of athletes to seek behavioral health services is empirically. In an exploratory, cross-sectional web-based survey design, Moore collected data from 349 college athletes across multiple universities with NCAA Division I, II, and III athletics. Division I athletes reported the most reticence to seeking mental health treatment, citing concerns over scholarship eligibility, losing playing time, and disappointing teammates and coaches as the main reasons. These reports are supported by previous studies and they are also consistent across sports. The study finds that a significant number of athletes have a moderate to severe need for services, yet perceive significant systems-

related barriers to receiving help. The article meaningfully recommends that college athletics and associated systems, including the mental health system, address structural barriers to athletes seeking needed services without repercussions.

Clinical Social Work and Coaching: The Similarities That Foster Collaboration

The term 'Coach' was initially started in 1830 when Oxford University put forth the meaning of this term as slang for a tutor (Morrison, 2010), and thus it has long been established that coaches and social workers share common characteristics. Prior to the 1970s, high school and even college coaches almost always served dual roles as teachers and coaches. For example, at historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's), almost every coach, from John McClendon to Clarence "Big House" Gaines, graduated from a university with a title that started or ended with "Teachers College". However, today fewer high school coaches, and even a smaller number of college coaches, have formal training as an educator or some formal instruction in a field that legitimately prepares them to instruct or lead young people. Formal training as a teacher helps coaches deal with the off the court, life challenges that all adolescents and adolescent athletes confront. While the number of college and secondary school coaches with formal training, in working with young people, may have decreased, community based organizations, non-profit sport-focused entities, and faith-based institutions have increasingly relied on coaches with a skill set that addresses the person in the environment. Organizations like the Salvation Army, the Boys and Girls Club, and Upward Bound are social service and faith-based organizations designed to address issues of well-being via sport and thus require personnel with the skills set to empower young people to cope with life through sports.

Felizzi, in *Clinical Social Work and Coaching: The Similarities That Foster Collaboration*, explores the similarities in the developmental work of coaches and social workers and how their work extends beyond the person or the athlete. Felizzi kicks off his practice notes with making a critical observation – social workers and coaches both rely on a fundamental approach, one that includes a combination of specialized knowledge and attitudes. The coaching philosophies of long-time hockey coach Bob Jonson, Stanley Cup winning coach Mike Keenan, and the Philadelphia Flyers Fred Shero are integrated throughout *Clinical Social Work and Coaching: The Similarities That Foster Collaboration*, and demonstrate that coaches also subscribe to a person in the environment approach and are lifelong professional learners - just like social workers. Whether its motivation, delivering a genuine response, helping others leave their comfort zone, or allowing for trial and error, the two professions share many common characteristics that allow others to win on and off the court.

College Athletes, Social Justice, and the Role of Social Workers in Advocating for Change

Nelson Mandela once said, "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than government in breaking down racial barriers." Sport has the potential to rectify social issues in communities and to positively influence social change (Misener & Schulenkorf, 2016). However, social justice activism from college athletes is considered a rare occurrence often due to the intensity of negative public response and the possibility of athletic repercussions.

Staying true with social work values, McCoy, Oregon, and Sullivan, illustrate the role of social workers in using sports as a tool for social change. In particular, they examined the influence college athletes had in the highly-publicized protests at Grambling State University and the University of Missouri. These protests set the tone for college athlete unionization and a new era of college athlete activism.

In *College Athletes, Social Justice, and the Role of Social Workers in Advocating for Change*, McCoy, Oregon, and Sullivan elaborate on the role of social workers in standing beside athletes as they advocate for sociological concerns. This idea of advocacy fits strongly within the competencies of social work education (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). First, social workers should help athletes advocate for policies that promote athlete well-being at the state, national, and organizational level. Second, social workers should help athletes understand the history of college athletics and how this history influences current service delivery. Third, social workers can help athletes identify the influential social, cultural, economic, organizational, and environmental factors that affect policy aimed at athlete and community well-being. *Sport as a Form of Social Justice and Growth* emphasizes the impact social workers can have beyond clinical practice and case management, and focuses on macro perspectives of community development and advocacy. The article provides a roadmap for engaging college athletes in future advocacy around health and safety topics – health and safety concerns that are prevalent on a routine basis.

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