

Getting away with murder essay

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English 250 November 6, 2008 Getting Away with Murder When accused of rape, assault, or other crimes against their peers or other ordinary members of society, collegiate athletes are often times favored in the eyes of the courts as well as school officials, staff, coaches, and members of society with ties to the team. Because athletes are often times seen as role models, this reflects negatively and adds to the growing problem in America where those with money, fame, and talent are seen as “above the law” and can afford or are given better representation and therefore receive lesser/no sentences.

For example, collegiate athletes that find themselves accused of rape or sexual assault are often times surrounded by and supported by members of society with affluence and power. Sometimes, these individuals use this affluence to coerce victims in to silence or out-of-court settlements, sparing the athlete’s reputation as well as playing eligibility and future career. When Pierre Pierce, a former member of the Iowa Hawkeyes men’s basketball team, was accused of sexually assaulting a fellow student in 2002, an “Iowa City couple with ties to the men’s basketball team tried to persuade [the] victim... to resolve the matter quietly outside of the legal system”, as reported in the Des Moines Register (Rood, 4A). These prominent members of society can be linked to troubled collegiate athletes in the form of friends or family, or linked to the university as season ticket holders or athletic boosters. In addition to being favored by members of the public, collegiate athletes are also sometimes favored in the eyes of the courts. In the case of the assault of his former girlfriend in 2002, Pierre Pierce was indicted on charges of third-degree sexual abuse and awarded a deferred judgment after agreeing to plead guilty to lesser charges; a few years later he was found

guilty of another offense involving attempted sexual assault, when he was this time seen as a repeat offender and sentenced to four years in prison (ESPN). One might say that Pierce's troubles finally caught up with him and he "got what he deserved" since he eventually did serve time for his crimes, but it is interesting to note that he only served eleven months of his four-year sentence and although still on probation, Pierce is being allowed to travel overseas to play basketball (Gazette Online). Not only are prominent members of society and the legal system on their side, but athletes sometimes find favor over the victim in the eyes of university officials and staff.

One might think these officials and staff are more worried about preserving the player's character or their school's reputation, recruitment, and athletic program than they are making sure justice is served and the victim's voice is heard. Kathy Redmond, founder of the National Coalition Against Violent Athletes, suggests victims of crimes committed by collegiate athletes should avoid legal services, counseling, and student health facilities provided by the university to prevent unfairness and bias. Redmond states, "Any university facilities, like a campus medical center, are too intermingled... The workers who deal with these cases face a lot of pressure from the administration" (Rood, 4A).

Redmond's concerns with the integrity of university administrators may be with legitimate reason; there has been evidence of misconduct among several school officials and staff across the country in the last decade. In September of 2008, the vice president for student services as well as the

vice president for legal affairs and general counsel at the University of Iowa were fired for their mishandling of an alleged rape that occurred on campus last year (Jordan & Rood). A similar situation in 2004 at the University of Colorado at Boulder included the dismissal or resignation of the university's athletic director and football coach, as well as the president of the university; this as a result of accusations that school officials knowingly allowed drug and alcohol use at recruiting events, which led to the high profile case involving the rape of two females by high school recruits and college football players in 2001 (Sander).

A third instance of misconduct by a university official involves coaching staff at Pennsylvania's La Salle University "instructing a woman not to report a rape by basketball players to the police" (Campus Crime, 81). One might ask, why would university officials risk so much for the sake of these athletes and put themselves in this sort of predicament? Why would affluent members of society risk ridicule and embarrassment to attempt to persuade victims to not pursue charges against these athletes? Perhaps great athletic programs attract new college recruits and increase booster and athletic department financial support. According to a new study done by New York's Cornell University, the correlation between a winning season and the level of financial support from alumni and boosters might not necessarily be as linked as previously thought. According to Robert Frank, an economist and the author of *The Winner-Take-All Society*, "Alumni donations and applications for admission sometimes rise in the wake of conspicuously successful seasons... but are likely to be both small and transitory" (Campus Crime, 81). The most important question being asked is why these collegiate

athletes are “ getting away with murder” when sentenced for their crimes? According to Justice Department statistics reviewed by Jeff Benedict, arrests were made in 79 percent of sexual assaults committed by athletes that were reported to the police. But of this 79 percent of arrests, “...only 53 - 31 percent - resulted in convictions... In 43 cases the accused athlete pleaded guilty to a reduced charge or entered a plea of no contest; only 10 were convicted at trial” (Benedict). These athletes have access to better representation and are “ able to tap legal expertise that is seldom available to average students” (Rood, 4A). Those with big names, big money, and the right connections will always have an advantage over those they hurt when these types of violent crimes are committed.

It is common knowledge that justice is not always served in the courts systems or in American society. The fact that this is common knowledge and our society has accepted it rather than trying to thwart it is a sign that our country has grown accustomed to injustice and discrimination towards those without big names and big money. Until our courts, university administrators, and society treat these collegiate athletes who commit acts of assault and rape the same as the average citizen who commits these crimes, crime and acts of violence will continue to plague our universities and set bad examples for those generations to follow. Works Cited Benedict, Jeff. “ Athletes and Accusations. ” New York Times. 5 Aug 2003. 2 Nov 2008.

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