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Andrew Lewey calling for a pass

photo provided by Ken Lewey

The Athlete's Crown

By Cynthia Howe

ASK ANY ATHLETE in the NBA how he got there, and his reply will probably reflect “hard work and determination.” As the pressure for success starts younger and younger each decade, it has forced our children to work harder, and commit younger, to achieve their athletic dreams.

They begin with club or “select” teams when they’re as young as nine or 10 years old. Their goal is to eventually be a star on the high school team or perhaps a high-level select team that gains the notice of college recruiters. For a number of players who reach success in high school, it may not be enough. The dream shifts to the collegiate level. Many high school players continue to play for year-round select teams hoping to garner the attention of college recruiters. Parents cheer their children on with the gleam of possible athletic scholarships in their eyes. The pressure mounts as the dream expands to

the possibilities before them.

But not all student athletes go on to play at the collegiate level and many of those invited to play have another obstacle before them: finances. While over \$600 million dollars are awarded annually in the form of athletic scholarships according to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), only nominal “full-ride” scholarships are handed out, with the balance divided among numerous secondary sports such as fencing, synchronized swimming and archery.

The Frisco Independent School District (FISD) boasts a number of student athletes who have signed letters of intent to play at the collegiate level representing colleges nationwide. As of February of this year approximately ten students throughout the district have signed for a variety of sports and more may follow.

What all these athletes have in common

is the fruition of their passion: playing before the masses at the collegiate level. For most of them the passion burned brightly at a very young age and was followed by years of excruciatingly hard work. For one Frisco student the result was playing at the Division I level.

**No athlete is crowned
but in the sweat of his
brow. ~ St. Jerome**

David Kuykendall, FISD athletic director, had nothing but wonderful words for Xxavier Carter, Frisco High’s former running back. “He’s a great kid and will be something more than just a football player someday.” Xxavier’s awesome record of running for 1,010 yards his senior year of football won him a coveted roster spot on

the Stanford University team. Graduating from Frisco High School in 2005, he is one of the few athletes that will experience what it is like to live his dream. His father, understandably, was his first coach and role model. Russell Carter was a first round pick of the New York Jets in the NFL Draft in 1979. He played in the NFL for seven seasons, playing with the Raiders for his last three. When Xavier was asked who the most influential person was in his life, his response was “my Dad,” whom he acknowledges he still patterns his play after. He chose Stanford not just for the athletics, but more importantly for the academics. This young man’s favorite book is *Titus Andronicus*, displaying a passion for Shakespeare and ancient history. His dream, being fulfilled, has created the stage for a new passion to ignite.

Igniting passions is what college is all about. It is a four year-stint on the welcome mat of life and should be remembered as the best of times. It should be about learning, making friends, becoming responsible and having fun. Playing your sport at the collegiate level should only add to the fulfilling experience. However, many athletes find themselves weighing their athletic career against their ultimate collegiate experience.

Andrew Lewey has played soccer since he was in the 5th grade and is currently playing for the Scots at Lyon College in Arkansas as a 5’10” defender. His high school didn’t have a soccer team at the time so he played for Everton FC at the top of the Intermediate level. He did play football at the high school and at one point had to make a decision between the two sports. “I would like to have known how well I could have done as a kicker in college, but I followed my passion.” Andrew proved to be an excellent player, but all the coaching received from his select team, albeit solid coaching, did not thoroughly prepare him for what awaited him at the college level.

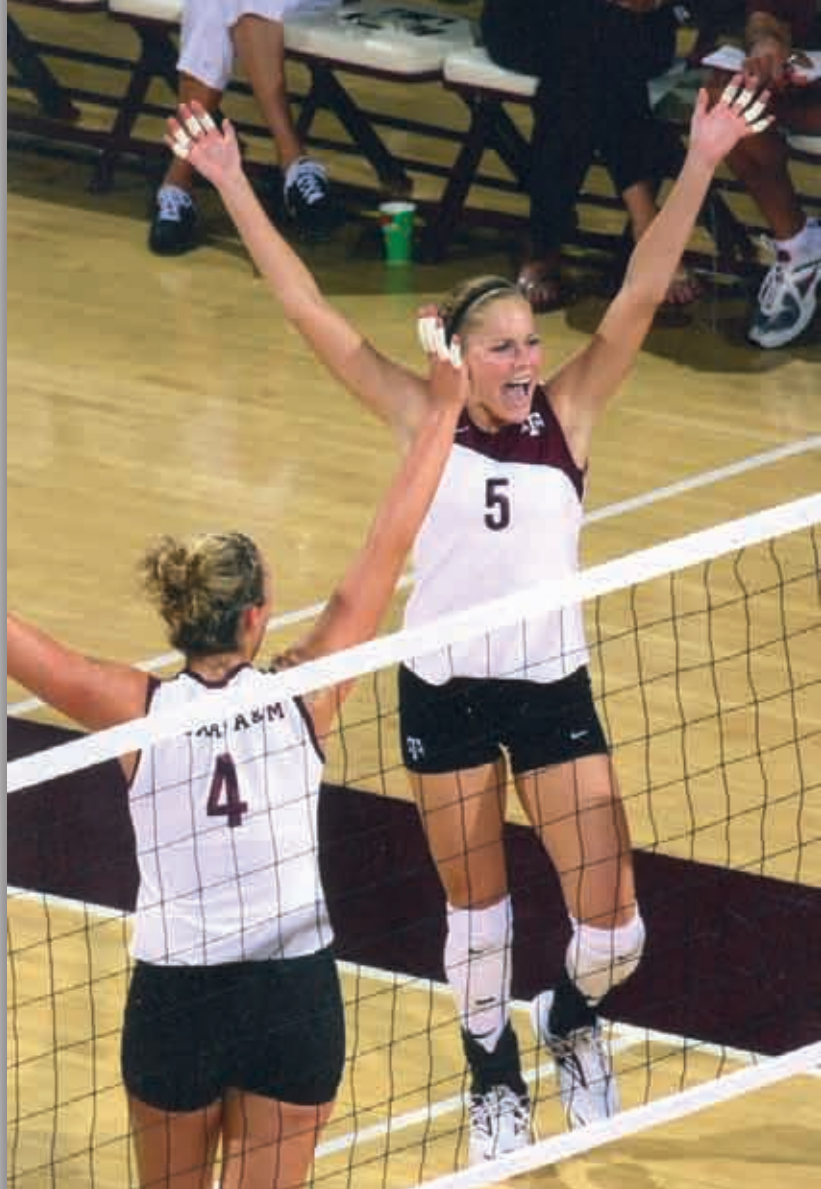
“It’s tough!” Andrew says, “It’s two to three days out of the week traveling for games, daily practices, year-round conditioning and then keeping up with your classes.” He knew things would be different in college, he just didn’t realize the extent of it. “Everyone is faster, stronger, better. The difference in skill level is huge.” Although he pursued Dallas Baptist and Westmont College, he settled

on Lyon’s to meet his academic as well as athletic goals. “If I had to do it over again, I would have decided earlier who to sign with and then just do it.”

Similar to Andrew’s experience, Korey Taylor of McKinney also grew up playing soccer on club teams and has recently signed with Rice University to become an “Owl.” She played club soccer for the past eight years, simultaneously playing high school soccer for the past four years. She is excited about the possibilities she will be experiencing as she heads for Houston this fall.

Chris Huston, coach of the Rice soccer team, stated, “Korey is one of the most versatile players coming out of this class. She is quick, aggressive and crafty. She will find herself playing in a number of different roles this coming season.” She has received a number of awards throughout her playing career but her character is as strong as her talent. She is a member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and has donated a most treasured commodity, “time,” to the Habitat for Humanity. Korey has what many coaches are thirsting for: a coachable spirit.

Ask any coach what their three top priorities are when interviewing athletes and they’ll answer intelligent students who are talented and coachable. They don’t want to invest in a student who could



Amy Sherrill

photo provided by Nancy Sherrill

possibly flunk out of school. They naturally want physically talented athletes who have a passion for their sport, but more importantly they want players who are coachable and don’t have overpowering egos. Wayne Mazzoni, author of *The Athletic Recruiting and Scholarship Guide* stated, “College coaches want to work with players who are coachable, respectful and hard working. In short, work hard on and off the field and be as good a person as you can.”

Amy Sherrill is a passionate young lady that respected the game, the process and the college but subsequently had to make some hard decisions relating to her athletic career. Amy fell in love with volleyball while in middle school where she was fortunate to have a terrific coach. In her freshman year at Prosper High School she dreamed of making the varsity team and she did. By the next year her

aspirations turned to college. She added a club team to her schedule and did quite well despite a few bumps.

When she played for the 16-year-old age level team she was asked to move up to the 17-year-old level. She turned it down due to her concern about playing time. However, her then current team did quite poorly and when she was asked to play with the 18-year-old age level team, she decided to take advantage of the opportunity. While her performance was outstanding, it left her at a disadvantage. The older players, having already signed letters of intent, left Amy out of the recruiting limelight.

"Amy was disappointed. We took a friends' advice and put together a video of Amy's playing to send to Texas A&M. We didn't realize at the time that Division I schools don't really invite players on the team as walk-ons. However, after reviewing the video they invited her to try out," explained Nancy Sherrill, Amy's mother.

While Amy was accepted onto the team and the team was ready for her, Amy came to realize that she was not ready for the team. "It was an unbelievable experience and I'm glad I pursued it, but I just came to realize after a couple of weeks that it wasn't for me." The battle that went on within her during this time was difficult and demanded a maturity often lacking at such a young age. Her mother explains, "Folks don't realize the pressure of playing on a Big 12 team – you don't have a life at Division I. The coach's careers are on the line, and it's a pressure cooker for the coaches and the athletes."

Shortly thereafter, Amy transferred to Criswell Bible College where she is continuing to pursue her degree. Her dreams of playing volleyball are now a cherished memory while her desire to win continues. She won't be winning games however, but winning souls for Christ. She

will be joining her soon-to-be husband as a missionary in the Philippines when they complete their studies. "All said, it was a wonderful experience. I learned a lot about myself. I learned what commitment was as well as discipline. I know I can set goals and achieve them. Regrets? I have none."

In conjunction with winning the coveted



#20 Xavier Carter and teammates

photo provided by Frisco ISD

collegiate athletic positions is winning an athletic scholarship to compliment the achievement. In *How to Win a Sports Scholarship*, authors Hastings and Caven explain how to get a coach's attention as well as how the scholarship and recruiting process works. Caven won a four-year scholarship to play soccer for Stanford University. Acquiring that scholarship was accomplished by hard work and dedication. Caven did not rest on his athletic abilities but relied on his intelligence to actively pursue colleges making the first contact with coaches and recruiters.

"While Caven spent hours excitedly pouring through college catalogs and talking with coaches, other talented student-athletes in our area to whom we spoke sat back and waited to get noticed," explains Hastings of her co-author/son's experience. "As a result, most were never contacted by a single college coach!" It is important to realize as well that only approximately 3 percent of high school student-athletes will go on to play at the

collegiate level, and only a third of these will receive athletic scholarships attached to those positions. Along with team achievements, it is important to research a school's academic program.

Parents are often surprised to learn that just because a school is classified as a Division I college does not mean it has strong academics. Sometimes Division II and III colleges can provide the athletic arena the student desires while also providing the student the academics he or she needs to make it in the real world. Furthermore, some smaller colleges not associated with a Division designation may provide the less talented athlete with the necessary playing time to build his game skills.

On the far horizon of athletic dreams often lies the fervor to play at the professional level. Coming straight out of high school, it is rare to gain a look from a professional team. Furthermore, the professional teams are seeking maturity along

with ability. Del Harris, assistant coach for the Dallas Mavericks explains, "Players are not ready in any sense when they come out of high school for the NBA – physically, spiritually, mentally or socially... and they are thrown in with an entire cast of peers, who are not really peers." He went on to say what a coach looks for in a player, "We look for physical ability first of course, then maturity, coachability, stick-to-itiveness, team compatibility, work ethic and the gamut of basic positive character aspects. Some do not look so deeply into character and that usually turns out to be a mistake."

St. Jerome would agree that hard work is its own reward and no athlete has reached his or her potential without it. The crown of success is only possible to those whose dream was born of passion and whose sweat marks the path of those dreams.

Cynthia Howe is a freelance writer living in Little Elm.