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Rhetorical Analysis Field Essay

For many athletes, their sport is their life. So when that gets taken away, how are these athletes impacted? For many athletes, loss of sport can lead to significant increases in depression, anxiety, stress, and other mental health problems. Various circumstances can lead to the loss of sport for athletes. Most commonly, injuries lead to loss of sport. Recently, COVID forced many sports to be canceled. The least common way to experience loss of sport is by being ruled ineligible. However, the NCAA carelessly rules countless athletes ineligible every year despite constant complaints from coaches, athletes, fans, and even university administrators. The NCAA does not seem to care about how their actions impact the mental health of athletes. To quantify the impacts of these decisions, I will present a rhetorical analysis of two artifacts that examine how athletes are affected mentally due to the loss of sport.

My first artifact is a research paper, “Change Event Steals ‘Athlete’ from ‘College Athlete’: Perceived Impact and Depression, Anxiety, and Stress,” by Matthew J Garver, Aqualus M Gordon, Nicolas M Philipp, Matt R Huml, and Amanda J Wakeman published in July 2021. This paper examines how sport cancellation due to COVID affected college athletes mentally. The audience for this paper is high-level people within sports organizations. This research aims to share findings about athletes’ mental health with organizations such as the NCAA to help them make future decisions. The authors of this research paper appeal to logos by referencing statistics to quantify their observations. At the beginning of the article, the authors provide context into the

circumstances of sports cancellation and information about the test subjects. The authors continue to detail their data collection methods, further appeal to logos, and establish credibility. After providing background information for the experiment, the authors begin to share the findings. Using statistical analysis to identify changes in mental health further establishes credibility with the audience. In the Results section, the authors state, "Of 249 participants, 110 had elevated scores on the depression subscale. The mean score for all participants was 10.1 (mild depression)." The authors' direct communication of their findings causes the audience to understand the statistics better. The authors were not able to find a significant increase in anxiety or stress.

Due to the scholarly nature of this article, it primarily appeals to logos. However, the authors provide an additional data point that appeals to pathos in the Discussion section. Subjects were asked to use one word to describe how their situation has made them feel. The authors said:

"The words most frequently used to describe respondent's feelings in the midst of the crisis were "disappointed," "upset," "frustrated," and "sad." Respondents equated the magnitude of emotion as similar to "significant injury," "losing a loved one," "having no purpose," and some said it was like nothing they had ever experienced before."

Using direct phrases from athletes helps the audience understand what they are feeling.

Considering the intended audience does not include athletes, it can be hard for them to think of things from an athlete's perspective. The authors understand that the audience is NCAA decision-makers. Using logos first helps the audience understand the authors' methods and continues to build trust. The audience is presented with quantifiable evidence of the authors' claim. Then, the author provides some information appealing to pathos, which makes the article more memorable for the audience. The quotes offer a change of pace to the rest of the article, which is primarily

professional and statistics-based. While the surveys didn't show significant increases in all three aspects of mental health, pairing the findings with quotes from athletes appeals to the audience in various ways. Later in the discussion, the authors explain that there were no patterns detected between the athletes suffering from mental health problems. As the authors explained, "The patternless feature of those who suffer from mental health issues makes it difficult to detect individuals in need. If we are not careful, unhealthy individuals may hide in the context of cohort-based clusters." This may be the most critical takeaway from this study. It is impossible to predict how an individual athlete will be impacted mentally by being unable to play their sport. This is especially important when making decisions regarding eligibility. The intended audience is the ones who make those decisions, and the authors intend to make them think of the potential consequences of declaring any individual athlete ineligible.

My second artifact is a YouTube video, "Coach Mack Brown sounds off over the Tez Walker issue," which shows UNC Football head coach Mack Brown detailing the mental health struggles his player Tez Walker has encountered since the NCAA ruled him ineligible. In this video, Mack Brown's intended audience is the NCAA decision-makers. Brown appeals to pathos and attempts to help the audience understand how this decision has impacted Tez and his family. First, he calls out to his intended audience, "We have a committee that sits up there that never talks to Tez, never talks to his grandmother, never talks to our doctors, never talks to the mental health people on our campus, never talks to our chaplain who Tez talks to every day," highlighting the disconnect between them and the people impacted by their decisions. This creates a sense of guilt within the audience. Next, Brown explains how Tez was affected, saying, "He feels really guilty that he's brought negative attention to our program, which he shouldn't, but he does, and he's really struggling. I see him crying after practice." This quote by Brown

forces the audience to sympathize with Tez. Brown's use of video as a medium helps him show emotion with his facial expressions and tone of voice, causing his words to stick with his audience.

Brown appeals to logos after his initial appeal to pathos, explaining why he believes Tez should be eligible. Tez was ruled ineligible because he has transferred twice, and UNC is technically his third school. However, Mack tells the audience, "He's only played at one school." This is because COVID canceled football season at Tez's initial school, and he transferred before ever playing there. While he has technically played at three schools, hearing it explained this way helps the audience understand why UNC believes Tez should be eligible. Mack continues, "One of the most important things is that the school that the young man transfers from writes a letter that says they agree that he needed to transfer for his mental health, and Kent State did that." By addressing the two potential reasons for ruling Tez ineligible, Mack Brown forces his audience to rethink their decisions. Mack's combination of appealing to logos and pathos through an audio-visual medium provides the audience with a compelling argument favoring Tez Walker. It is clear that Brown has a particular intended audience, and all of his words are intended to persuade the audience to agree with him. He references the NCAA board multiple times because that is his intended audience, and they are the only ones who can make a change. Mack's examples of how these decisions can impact any student-athlete at the end of the video helped establish a final level of credibility. He is transparent in saying that this decision is "not about us. He is a good player, but if I say that I'm going to take care of every player and treat them like I'd want my son to be treated, that's what I'm trying to do in this situation. Tez needs to be able to play." Brown's acknowledgment of Tez's athletic ability further establishes that he is genuinely doing this because he cares about his players mentally.

These two articles provide compelling evidence of how athletes are mentally affected when they lose their sport. The combination of appeals to pathos and logos helps build evidence that the loss of sport impacts mental health. The NCAA rules countless athletes ineligible every year. Most of these athletes aren't as famous as Tez Walker and don't play for massive programs like UNC Football. This can make it harder for athletes to make the NCAA reconsider their decisions. Imagine being in the same situation as Tez Walker but without online supporters. Being ruled ineligible is a lonely life and can often make mental health problems worse. Hopefully, between the statistics presented in the first article and Mack Brown's emotional statement, the NCAA will be more reasonable regarding eligibility decisions in the future. There is too much at risk, and it is almost impossible to predict how an athlete will be mentally affected by being ruled ineligible. Most of these athletes are already transferring for mental health reasons, and ruling them ineligible is only going to make those problems worse. Implementing a meeting between the NCAA board and an athlete might be a good idea before the board decides on their eligibility. This allows the athlete to explain why they should be eligible and how being ruled ineligible impacts them. The NCAA board would likely be more understanding if they had to hear a counterargument before making a decision.

Works Cited

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