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COMMENTARY

Study finds college-level athletics hit by hazing



Nelson Price
Hooping and Fibreglas
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I focused on hazing's connections about fraternity and sorority hazing. I think I have spent a little more time on a related and equally significant topic.

The first, hazing among college sports teams, is the focus of a new study and monograph — custom study of athletes and coaches. Nover, 53, served as an adviser for the study by New York's Alfred University, a pioneer in anti-hazing literature, after some campus tragedies.

More than 2,000 athletes in National Collegiate Athletic Association sports — from water polo and basketball to football, soccer, basketball and golf — participated in the study.

Twenty percent revealed they'd been involved in hazing that included criminal acts or "possibly dangerous" activity.

"This is really significant," Nover says. "The best estimates from Greek organizations, including some from the Intercollegiate and Association of Intercollegiate Athletes, are that 15 percent of Greeks have been involved in some hazing incidents."

"To have 20 percent of players on college sports teams — whom nobody would have paid attention to in terms of hazing — say they have been involved... Well, it should alarm all of us."

Blaze drinking

Most serious hazing incidents among NCAA athletes, including players on women's sports teams, involved alcohol abuse.

Examples include "drinking contests" in which rookies were pitted against senior team members or "blaze, mistle-toe-season drugging" in which rookies were ordered to consume, say, 21 shots of alcohol in 21 minutes.

So what's the big deal about a night or two of underage "blaze drinking?"

"The health risks are tremendous," Nover says. "I can tell you about so many tragedies where people have said later, 'It seemed fine. But I had been standing up with the rest of us.'"

They haven't understood the amount of time from being able to stand straight to collapsing in a coma can be almost instantaneous.

Athletes who reported the highest rates of hazing were those in water polo, football, wrestling and swimming. At the other end was golf, where hazing, in Nover's words, "seems so minimal as to be non-existent."

But there's encouraging news in the study for more than just athletes. Many athletes at that seemed alert to hazing, in contrast to previous generations.

As a student at Buffalo State University in the 1970s, Nover was manager of the soccer team.

"Foreign players on the team were hazed for not playing what we considered aggressive, American-style soccer," he recalls. "Incidents are painful memories in their backlogs."

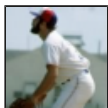
"But if you would have asked me 20 years ago if that was hazing, I would have said 'No, that's just professionalism or competitiveness.'"

Unfortunately, NCAA coaches contacted by the Alfred University study often responded in ways that reflected such hostile attitudes. Or they responded with denial and hostility.

The study quotes coaches' responses such as, "Hazing occurs in Greek organizations, not here," and "Why are you wasting our time with this?"

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