Education, Athletic Scholarships, and the Occupational Career of the Professional Athlete

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Based on a survey of 335 former major league baseball players, college education was found to be incompatible with sports performance but positively associated with postbaseball occupational achievement. Athletic scholarship recipients, when compared with nonsupported college peers, were characterized by lower levels of playing ability and limited occupational success. The results are discussed in terms of three distinct "ideal-typical" career profiles based on differences in baseball skill, commitment to baseball, and later occupational achievement. The results seriously compromise the myth of occupational mobility for the sports hero.

Education, Athletic Scholarships, and the Occupational Career of the Professional Athlete

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The professional athlete does not experience a very orderly career. Because of the unusual career decisions he must make, questions are raised about possible factors that would influence such career patterns. How important is formal education to the professional athlete? Does the fame

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derived from sports carry over into postplaying job mobility? What sorts of occupational adjustments are required of the former major leaguer? We shall be concerned with the *process aspects* of these issues.

The study of occupational careers—and the role of education in the career process—has a long and valued history in the field of sociology (Alwin, 1974; Hughes, 1958; Perrucci and Perrucci, 1970; Sewell et al., 1970). Yet in sociological terms, there is very little systematic knowledge about the nature of careers in professional athletics. Professional athletes receive considerable publicity, but the time spent at the center of national attention is generally short-lived and they must soon seek other types of work. The study of the total work careers of professional athletes may provide insight into problems associated with second careers among those who, for a variety of reasons, decide to "switch" jobs at midlife from diverse occupations such as the clergy, businessmen, movie stars, and the like (Haug and Sussman, 1970; Hiestand, 1971; Schallert and Kelley, 1970).

If we know little about the careers of professional athletes, we know even less about the role of education in their total occupational lives. We hypothesize that education will continue to play the dominant role in the postplaying careers of former athletes. Although sports fame may exert a complementary impact, in our credential-oriented society educational attainment still is assumed to provide the basic prerequisite for occupational advancement and success. Through education, one obtains basic intellectual and social skills, raises aspirations, and receives an all-important certification.

Many have thought that sports activity was detrimental to one's academic career. Now it appears legitimate to consider the manner in which a sports skill can be exploited as a means of obtaining a college education through the winning of an athletic scholarship, thereby enhancing the prospects of future occupational mobility. In short, what role does

education, and especially scholarship-supported education, play in the athletic and postathletic careers of a sample of former major league baseball players? Again, we hypothesize that those with scholarship-supported education will experience a considerable degree of social mobility.

KEY ISSUES AND BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Social mobility and success are highly valued in American society (Williams, 1970: 454).[1] Formal education has long been considered the basic route to that mobility and success (Blau and Duncan, 1969; Clark, 1964: 742). Yet the potential for taking advantage of educational opportunity is differentially distributed throughout the class structure (Sewell, 1971: 796). Family status, sex, and parental encouragement are especially important variables in educational aspirations and plans (Eckland, 1964; Rehberg and Westby, 1967; Sewell and Shah, 1968). Thus some individuals find the mobility route through education denied to them.

However, there is an important factor which may compensate for the possible handicap of social class and may overcome the negative educational consequences of lower social status—namely, sports ability and participation. The role of sport in the process of educational attainment can operate in at least one of two ways: the consequences of athletic participation per se or the translation of athletic ability into improved opportunities for upward mobility.

THE INFLUENCE OF ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION ON EDUCATION AND PERSONAL SKILLS

There is a small, but growing literature concerning the consequences of athletic participation on academic performance and educational aspirations. In essence, these studies

were designed to test the persistent image that athletes are less intelligent or academically less ambitious than non-athletes and that athletes in general hinder educational achievement and progress. Recent evidence continues to indicate that athletes in both high school and college attain higher levels of grade performance than those who do not participate in the athletic program (see, for example, indirect evidence in Coleman, 1961: 252, 274-275 as noted by Eidsmore, 1963; Rehberg, 1969; Schafer and Armer, 1968; work of Bowlin cited in Buhrmann, 1968, 1972; Schafer, 1968: 7). In addition, athletic participation enhances the level of educational aspirations or expectations and increases the rate of college attendance (Bend, 1968; Rehberg and Schafer, 1968; Schafer and Rehberg, 1970; Snyder, 1969; Spady, 1970; Spreitzer and Pugh, 1973). This is found to be especially salient for boys who do not have the "normal" college-predisposing factors.

Past research (Alexander and Campbell, 1964; Kandel and Lesser, 1969; Simpson and Simpson, 1962) has strongly documented the role of "significant others," generally family and peers, in educational and occupational aspirations, and job selection. However, Ellis and Lane (1963), in a study of lower-class college attenders, reported that nonfamily influences were stronger than family sources of support, especially teachers and "other adults" (ministers, family friends, former employers, and the like). Snyder (1972) has extended these results into the area of sports by including the athletic coach as a key socialization agent. Following the mother and father, the high school coach ranked third in terms of importance in influencing educational and/or occupational plans. Interestingly, boys with a lower socioeconomic background were more likely to pick the coach as an influential person than those from a higher SES level. In addition, Spady (1971) has widened these inquiries to the total extracurriculum (including athletics). Status confirmation in a competitive system would not only stimulate aspirations, but also would provide

social and interpersonal experiences that would enhance their later fulfillment (see also Coleman, 1961; Rehberg and Schafer, 1968; Weinberg and Skager, 1966).

In sum, athletic participation appears to be solidly associated with better academic performance, higher educational and occupational aspirations, and improved social and interpersonal skills.

TURNING ATHLETIC ABILITY INTO IMPROVED OPPORTUNITIES

Sports also may contribute to educational attainment by allowing the transfer of athletic ability or experience into direct educational benefits (through the acquisition of an athletic scholarship) and eventually greater career opportunities. This general topic is largely unexplored, especially regarding the role of education in the careers of professional athletes.[2]

Essentially, this is a matter of sport and social stratification—particularly social mobility and career patterns. Bookbinder (1955) conducted a study very similar to this one, except that he included only those men who spent ten or more years in the major leagues and had retired between 1925 and 1945—thus, a very select group. Baseball manager was the most frequently held postplaying job, followed by salesman. However, the former was highly unstable, with only one-third of those initially holding the managerial position retaining it as the main, longest-held job. There was also evidence of considerable mobility over the father's occupational level.

In addition, there are two studies which deal with sport and social stratification among amateur athletes which shed an indirect light on the problem. In the first, Lüschen (1969) found that sports activity was associated with those in the middle class or those who aspired to such a position. Lüschen interprets this in terms of high achievement motivation and

the privileged leisure position of the middle classes. This high achievement in sport was associated with social mobility, and the same achievement motive apparently spread to other areas of social life.

The second study is a survey of the occupational mobility of a sample of American university (UCLA) athletes by Loy (1972). In terms of social background, these amateur athletes tended to participate in "class-related" sports, that is, men from blue-collar families in baseball, football, track, and wrestling and those from professional families in crew, tennis, and swimming. Although lacking a control group, Loy concluded that these former amateur athletes achieved great success (31% to 47% in each sport category were earning more than $20,000 yearly in 1968) and experienced a high level of occupational mobility when compared with their fathers' socioeconomic position. The key causal variable was meant to be their sports involvement at the intercollegiate level.

Together, then, these empirical studies indicate that participation in university, club-organized, or professional sport is associated with economic success and occupational mobility in later life. Yet it should be noted that these examples deal with either samples of amateur athletes or elite professionals and tell us little about the career patterns of those with varied ability who spend up to the first twenty years of their working life in professional sport. In the context of a society which believes in success and mobility, I wish to explore the differential impact of education and sports fame on the career patterns of such a group of former professional athletes.

PROCEDURES

This report is based on data taken from a project which was focused on several problems and patterns of postathletic

career adjustment of retired major league baseball players. The decision to limit the statistical population to men who had played at least one game in the major leagues was both practical and theoretical. In the first instance, the playing records and other information are available in great quantity with easy access, thus allowing verification of some questionnaire responses and serving as supplemental information where needed. In theoretical terms, I desired to work with the most successful members of a short-term occupation, who in turn could be ranked still further into the more and less successful.[3] These men fit both criteria.

SUBJECTS

Over a period of 2 months, 875 mail questionnaires were sent out to former players in the spring of 1958. In all, 335 usable forms were received (38% return rate).[4] In range of time coverage, the respondents included a few who had retired in the first decade of this century up to those who had retired just prior to the onset of this research project.

One of the distinct advantages in conducting this investigation was the fact that the total statistical population was known. A comparison of the questionnaire sample with a control sample drawn from a list of former major leaguers revealed the following pattern.[5] With regard to region of birth, the two groups were very similar, and we may consider the test sample to be representative of the total group of living major league players. However, on the remaining associations, the test sample was highly skewed in the direction of players of more recent birth, longer major league tenure, greater fame, and better yearly quality of performance. In short, the research sample was biased, but the extent and direction of that bias were known.

An important qualification should be noted. The data cover the first six decades of this century. Thus, we cannot generalize about the role of education, and especially athletic

scholarships, since the late 1950s. In addition, in recent years, major demographic changes have taken place in the composition of the player group. A substantial proportion of the current major league rosters is made up of black and Spanish-speaking athletes. The findings here do not pertain directly to these latter men. However, the results can serve as a bench mark for a more contemporary, comparative study. Further, as the granting of scholarship aid is a more recent phenomenon, it should be noted that the skewness of the sampling bias is in the desired direction of present trends.[6]

INSTRUMENT AND MEASURES

Each man was sent a five-page questionnaire, which requested background data, facts about his baseball career, and questions designed to elicit information about his occupation(s) since retirement from baseball. In addition, twenty former players were interviewed. Most of the latter lived in the Chicago area and were contacted in an ever-expanding reference network.

Several of the key measures or variables with which I shall work are self-explanatory. These include father's and respondent's years of education, scholarship status,[7] the age at signing the first baseball contract, the proportion of playing time spent in the majors (versus the minor leagues), total years in the major leagues, first and last league,[8] years before and after the major leagues,[9] the age of retirement from competitive play, North-Hatt occupational rank,[10] and the point during the baseball career when the individual first began to think of retirement.

One variable requires further clarification and was operationalized in the following manner:

Baseball Fame Index (BFI)—The baseball fame index was computed for each respondent, based solely on his major league playing record. It consisted of a weighted scoring of three performance items: batting or pitching record, number

of games played, and level of team performance (whether a first division or second division club). Thus 2 out of the 3 items used were measures of individual skill and these had higher scores possible in the overall index.[11] Actual BFI scores ranged from a low of 2 to a high of 185.

PATH MODEL

Since the focus of this paper is on the occupational careers of professional athletes, we are concerned with *process* over time. Path analysis lends itself to this causal approach (see Duncan, 1966; Heise, 1968; Land, 1968; and especially Nygreen, 1971, for the computer application very similar to this one). Based on the zero-order correlation matrix, the approach allows us to posit a series of cause-and-effect relationships among a large number of variables in a system. The resulting path coefficients can be graphically presented through the "path diagram" (illustrated below) and this helps in communicating the underlying logic of our research problem.[12]

FINDINGS

The results will be presented in three major sections. The first section will cover family background factors in these occupational careers and will essentially deal with the impact of family status on educational plans and achievement. Here educational factors will be the dependent variable in answering the question of whether athletic scholarships improve the educational opportunities of the lower classes. The second section will focus on the professional baseball career. Educational variables will be handled as independent factors as we search for relationships with baseball performance. For example, does education enhance success in active playing? In the final section we shall consider the pattern of the

postbaseball career of our respondents. In assessing the effect of educational factors, we shall attempt to discover what variables in the earlier career phases have the greatest effect on the emerging occupational profile of the retired baseball player.

FAMILY STATUS AND EDUCATION

Whether family status was measured by father's education or level of father's occupation, those with the higher rank were more likely to have sons who went to college. For example, almost 9 out of every 10 sons whose fathers attended college had attended college themselves. This compares with slightly less than half for the men whose fathers had only an elementary school education.

We are also interested in the role played by the athletic scholarship in college attendance. There were 182 respondents who attended college, although we lacked scholarship information on 5 of them.[13] In this college group, as might be expected, those whose fathers occupied jobs of higher rank were much more likely to be attending college without benefit of scholarship assistance when compared with those whose fathers were in lower ranking lines of work.

More importantly, those respondents who attended college with sports-based assistance were largely recruited from the lower occupational levels. Fully 52% of the athletic-scholarship students had fathers with lower ranking occupations, while only about 14% of those with highly ranked fathers relied on this type of support. Although not surprising, the translation of athletic skills into educational opportunities is a significant factor in the potential mobility of those from the lower classes.

However, controversy is often raised about whether college athletes are exploited through the mechanism of athletic scholarships. The charge is made that young men are brought to college campuses to play sports and then, for a variety of

reasons (poor advising, indifference by coaches, lack of strong intellectual grounding, weak academic commitment), they are unable to complete their work and obtain the college degree. Although the data do not support this notion in a strict statistical sense ($p = .085$), among those men who went to college, there was a undeniable tendency for those with athletic scholarships to have a lower rate of graduation. Whereas almost two-thirds of those without athletic scholarships graduated from college, only slightly more than 1 out of 2 of the scholarship students was able to complete his college work.[14]

IMPACT OF EDUCATION ON THE PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL CAREER

Turning now to Figure 1, which contains the path model for background and baseball career variables influencing baseball "success," we find several interesting relationships with regard to career patterns.[15] (The supporting correlation matrix for Figure 1 can be found in Table 1.)

One of the first decisions a young athlete has to make is whether to continue his education (and play college sports) or sign a contract and embark immediately on a professional baseball career. The path coefficient in Figure 1 shows that those respondents who continued their education did indeed sign contracts at a later age, thereby prolonging the period of amateur standing. Further, these two variables influenced the league classification of first professional entry. Those who pursued their education and signed their contract at a later age entered professional play at a higher league classification, reflecting the greater physical maturity and training in skills of the college years.[16]

Very few baseball players begin their careers in the major leagues. The purpose of the minor leagues is to screen out those players who do not have the necessary ability for major league competition or to serve as the training ground for

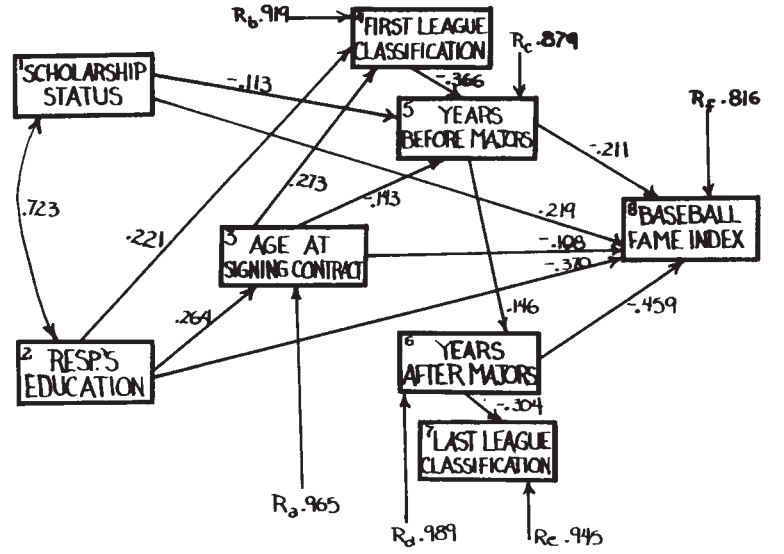

Figure 1: Path diagram of background and baseball career factors influencing baseball fame.

future major leaguers. It is clear from the data that those respondents who started playing in the minor leagues took longer to first reach the majors. The longer premajors period was also associated with signing the contract at an earlier age and not attending college or attending college with an athletic scholarship.

After playing in the major leagues for the last time, we find the number of years played *before* the majors was somewhat predictive of the number of years played *after* the majors. Thus, skill level appeared to be detected early in the career. Further, the number of years played after the majors is strongly predictive of the last league classification—that is, during the postmajors period, the longer one spends in the minor leagues, the lower he sinks in league rank. In short, those with less ability would appear to start in the lower ranking leagues and to take longer to get to the majors and

TABLE 1
Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients for Background and Baseball Career Variables Influencing Baseball Fame (Number of Cases for each Correlation is Noted in Parentheses.)

Variables	Variables							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Scholarship status (1)	...							
Respondent's education (2)	+.723[b] (331)	...						
Age at signing contract (3)	+.201[b] (333)	+.264[b] (332)	...					
First league classification (4)	+.227[b] (322)	+.293[b] (321)	+.331[b] (324)	...				
Number of years before majors (5)	-.225[b] (333)	-.222[b] (332)	-.287[b] (335)	-.439[b] (324)	...			
Number of years after majors (6)	-.112[a] (333)	-.089 (332)	-.058 (335)	-.129[a] (324)	+.146[b] (335)	...		
Last league classification (7)	+.070 (329)	+.122[a] (326)	+.082 (329)	+.045 (319)	-.057 (329)	-.312[b] (329)	...	
Baseball fame index (BFI) (8)	+.029 (333)	-.152[b] (332)	-.074 (335)	+.031 (324)	-.214[b] (335)	-.475[b] (335)	+.165[b] (329)	...

a. Significant at the .05 level.
b. Significant at the .01 level.

also to spend more years following major league affiliation and to end up in the lower classifications than those with more baseball skill. This is not a startling conclusion, but it does focus our attention on important career-pattern dimensions. Significantly, education and scholarship status were *not* predictive of postmajors career patterns as they had been in the early career stages.

Finally, we come to the variable of primary concern in this particular path model—the degree of baseball success as measured by the BFI (baseball fame index).[17] Since the BFI is a cumulative measure of major league performance, it is not surprising that this measure of success was negatively associated with the number of years spent in the minors both before and after the major league portion of the total playing career, although the "years after" was the much stronger predictor.

Of more direct interest is the finding that years of education had a strong, *negative* relationship to baseball success (path coefficient −.370). Supplemented by other analyses, I found that those with some college education gave evidence of the following pattern: signed their professional contract at a later age; played fewer total years (both major and minor leagues combined) in professional baseball; entered the professional ranks at a higher league ranking,[18] with one-quarter starting at the major league level; and retired slightly earlier or, to put it another way, were much less likely to play actively into their early forties. It is quite clear that those with some years of college education had shorter careers. Almost one-quarter of them played a total (majors and minors) of ten years or less. At the other end of the scale, almost two-thirds of those with less education had long baseball careers (seventeen or more years), while only about one-third of those with some college training stayed professionally active that long. In sum, those with more education apparently were less committed to professional sport or lacked the ability to compete. Fortunately, we have

data to pursue this knotty problem of commitment versus skill.

On the matter of comparative baseball skill at different educational levels, there was no significant difference in professional competence when viewed by level of education. Neither the total baseball career spent in the major leagues (used as a measure of overall skill, i.e., the ability to stay at the top over an extended period), the baseball fame index (BFI), nor the average yearly score of the BFI (as a measure of technical skill) was found to be differentiated by years of education. Thus, differences in baseball skill would *not* appear to explain the fact that those with more education spent fewer years in the game. The degree of commitment to the baseball career, or some dimension of it, may be a more likely explanation. This issue will be discussed more thoroughly at a later point.

Of equal importance with the negative association of education to the BFI is the positive relationship of scholarship status on the BFI (path coefficient .219) in Figure 1. This finding means that those who attended college in the more "normal" fashion (that is, without benefit of scholarship aid) have put together a better skill rating in professional baseball than those who did not attend college or attended with the help of an athletic scholarship. On the face of it, this would not be the expected pattern, since those with better athletic skill (i.e., those on athletic scholarship) ought to attain higher BFI scores.[19] This finding also would appear to contradict the earlier-mentioned relationship between years of education and BFI.

The solution to this apparent contradiction may rest in the following observations based on other data analyses of those 177 respondents who attended college for at least some period of time and for whom there is scholarship information. In several critical ways, these findings modify, qualify, or extend those reported above for the factor of "years of education."

Within the college attending group, those with athletic scholarships did not differ significantly from those without such scholarships in the age at which they signed their professional contracts, the league classification of the first team or last team played for, and the age at which retirement took place.

But important and significant differences did appear among several measures of baseball skill. Surprisingly, those with athletic scholarships gave evidence of *less skill* in professional baseball when compared with those college students without scholarship based on athletic ability. For example, only about two in ten respondents with athletic scholarships spent a large portion (70% or more) of their baseball career in the major leagues. By contrast, slightly over four out of ten without athletic scholarships spent an equivalent amount of time in the major leagues. This was a statistically significant difference. Similarly, those with athletic scholarships, when compared with their nonscholarship peers, played fewer total years of professional baseball, had lower total BFI scores, and had lower average yearly BFI scores. In sum, those who attended college with scholarships based on their athletic abilities were found to have less successful baseball careers than those who attended college without benefit of athletic scholarships.

An explanation for this perplexing finding is difficult to obtain. One possible answer might be that the scholarship holder had greater all-around athletic ability, but less specific baseball talent. Or one individual might have received an athletic scholarship for baseball alone, while another might have been offered one for several sports. However, a brief analysis indicates that, whether the respondent had a scholarship for "baseball only," for baseball combined with other sports, or for sports other than baseball, there was no significant difference regarding BFI scores, number of years spent in the majors, or the proportion of the professional career spent in the major leagues. A satisfactory explanation

remains elusive. One might speculate about the importance of personal contacts, rather than absolute skill, in the awarding of scholarships–not unlike the findings of Jencks (1972) and Granovetter (1974) on "luck" in being in the right place at the right time with the best contacts.

In summary, decisions involving education had a strong influence on the progress of the active baseball career. Those who prolonged the period of formal education were less likely to achieve highly successful baseball careers. Then, too, among those who attended college, individuals with athletic scholarships attained less professional success or fame. To a considerable degree, then, education and the baseball career were incompatible.

EDUCATION AND POSTBASEBALL CAREERS

The central question concerning the role of education is the matter of postbaseball career patterns. Professional baseball players–indeed, all professional athletes and some other occupations as well–are engaged in what might be termed a "short-term occupation," with a period of relative stability closely followed by the need to seek other employment. Thus, although they may have been in professional sports for 10 to 20 years, many productive years of work are left when they "retire" from baseball at 35 or 40 years of age.

Our major concern here is with the career patterns that characterize the former player, and especially the role played by educational factors. The path diagram in Figure 2 contains information on the causal factors that influenced the postplaying careers. (The supporting correlation matrix can be found in Table 2.)

It is not surprising that we find a fairly strong parental influence on the respondent's educational status. We have already documented the negative influence of education on the BFI score. However, two additional career-decision

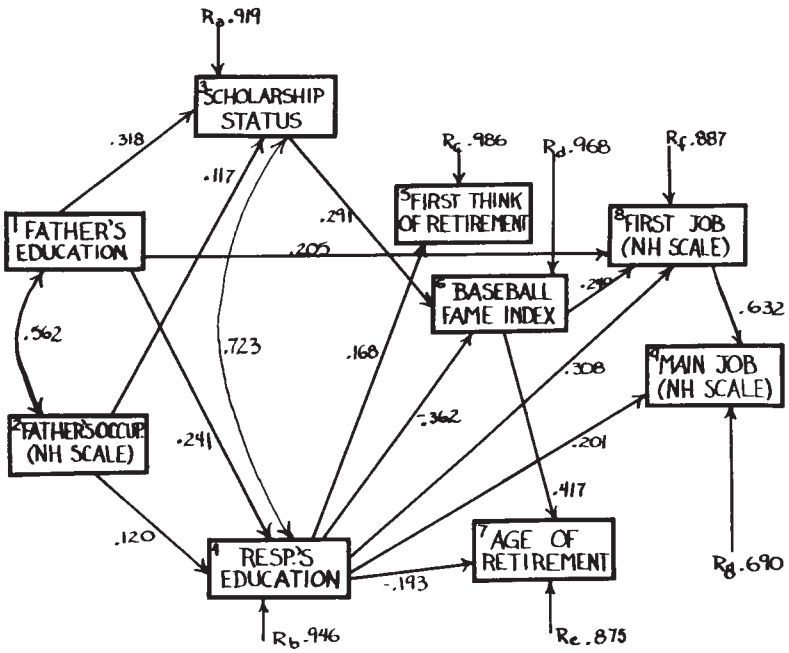

Figure 2: Path diagram of background and baseball career factors influencing the post-playing main job.

variables offer further insight into the career process: the point at which the individual first thought about retirement and the actual age when the final decision was reached.

The data show that those who had received more education began to contemplate earlier the realities of a short-term occupation and to actually retire at a younger age. Perhaps they could perceive more occupational alternatives open to them. By contrast, those with less education, particularly if they had outstanding baseball skill, stayed in the sport for a longer period of time.

Upon retirement, the occupational rank of the first job was most strongly influenced by the individual's level of education, followed by his BFI score and the years of his

TABLE 2

Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients for Background and Baseball Career Variables Influencing Postcareer Occupational Level (Number of Cases for each Correlation is Noted in Parentheses.)

Variables	Variables								
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Father's education (1)	...								
Father's occupation (2)	+.562[b] (230)	...							
Scholarship status (3)	+.383[b] (240)	+.295[b] (281)	...						
Respondent's education (4)	+.309[b] (240)	+.256[b] (281)	+.723[b] (331)	...					
First think of retirement (5)	+.128 (231)	+.085 (266)	+.137[a] (310)	+.168[b] (309)	...				
Baseball fame index (BFI) (6)	+.026 (241)	+.030 (282)	+.029 (333)	-.152[b] (332)	+.037 (312)	...			
Age of retirement (7)	-.107 (241)	-.133[a] (282)	-.153[b] (333)	-.256[b] (332)	-.042 (312)	+.446[b] (335)	...		
First non-baseball job (North-Hatt Scale) (8)	+.306[b] (238)	+.233[b] (275)	+.278[b] (322)	+.335[b] (321)	+.080 (304)	+.198[b] (324)	+.004 (324)	...	
Main non-baseball job (North-Hatt Scale) (9)	+.309[b] (239)	+.282[b] (279)	+.348[b] (330)	+.413[b] (329)	+.140[a] (309)	+.113[a] (332)	-.113[a] (332)	+.699[b] (323)	...

a. Significant at the .05 level.
b. Significant at the .01 level.

father's education.[20] Significantly, the causal factors determining the rank of the "main" or longest-held job were somewhat different. Beyond the expected influence of the first job held, the education of the respondent was the only other predictor.[21] The importance of the baseball career had receded, and the former player found himself facing the same set of education and performance criteria applied to all aspirants of occupational success (see Blau and Duncan, 1967: 403 where they conclude that education "exerts the strongest direct effect on occupational achievements"). The fame and experience of professional baseball may help initially, i.e., with obtaining the first nonplaying job, but more traditional criteria are soon applied by employers.

Problems of occupational adjustment for the retired players are exacerbated by the fact that many of them desire to remain connected with baseball in some capacity: front office, manager, coach, scout, and so on. Some 89 respondents mentioned this hope when they first began to consider retirement and others expressed an increased interest in trying to find a baseball-related job as they neared retirement. Yet there is not a sufficient number of nonplaying baseball jobs available to meet the demands of the former players. This situation was reflected in this sample, with 80 men (24%) obtaining their main job in baseball and some 251 (76%) located in nonbaseball jobs.

This immediately raises the question of whether education is differentially influential in the two different work spheres, sports and nonsports. The available data indicated that years of education exerted a very strong influence on the level of nonbaseball occupations. Three in ten of these with some college experience held higher ranking jobs while only about 9% of those with elementary and high school training reached that postplaying occupational level. By contrast, education did not appear as a significant variable among those who remained in baseball in a nonplaying capacity. Preliminary analysis indicated that baseball skill was *not* the key. Upon

further exploration, an interesting and provocative finding emerged, based on the playing position occupied during the active career. Significantly more catchers and infielders remained in baseball than did outfielders and pitchers—for both first jobs and main occupations. This is consistent with the work of Grusky (1963) on the positional factors that influence the recruitment of baseball managers. The opportunity to develop role skills appropriate to managing were available to the so-called high interactors (infielders and catchers) as opposed to the low interactors (outfielders and pitchers).

Our respondents were engaged in *all* forms of nonplaying jobs in baseball. Thus, if baseball skill and education can be ruled out, it is possible that Grusky's conclusions about social skills and formal structure can be generalized to include other nonplaying posts like general manager, coach, and scout. Once again, the importance of personal contacts (Granovetter, 1974) in these job opportunities must be emphasized. Baseball executives and managers generally select their associates from among those who were known to them personally during their active careers.

Finally, we should consider those who attended college and the impact of the athletic scholarship on the attainment of postbaseball occupational levels. As expected, those without any college experience did not occupy higher ranking jobs to the same degree as college attenders. Within the college group, those who attended without benefit of scholarship had attained a higher occupational rank and had fewer individuals in the lowest ranking category. However, those who attended college on athletic scholarships fell somewhere in between these two extremes, and closer to the profile of the noncollege group. This suggestive result will be discussed more fully below.

Once again, we should examine the comparative influence of athletic scholarships on baseball-related and nonbaseball jobs. The evidence indicates that in neither situation did the

factor of athletic scholarship operate in a statistically significant manner. Even though not significant, the observed tendency was for the recipient of the athletic scholarship to be characterized by lower ranking jobs when compared with the nonscholarship college attender.

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In evaluating these findings, it is evident that different types of career profiles have emerged. Further, occupational success and mobility have been influenced by selected educational variables. These features can best be highlighted by presenting three "ideal-typical" career-process profiles: the noncollege player and the college-educated player, with the latter group broken down into two distinct subtypes based on the presence or absence of athletic scholarships.

The first type of career profile, the noncollege player, is best characterized as more involved in the occupation of professional baseball. Coming from a lower-class background, this player tends to sign his professional contract early, to serve his apprenticeship in the lower minor leagues, to spend a long period of time in professional baseball, to postpone planning for retirement, and to play into his forties before finally leaving the active playing life. In some cases, he tries to "hang on" in baseball and begins the long slide from the major leagues back down to the class D team (often in the dual role of player-manager or player-coach). These individuals are merely attempting to assure themselves a nonplaying position in baseball after their active career has been terminated.

On balance, however, it would be unwise to interpret this extensive involvement in baseball as an indication of a strong commitment. It would seem to be more a case of *limited options* available to those without the necessary educational background to compete in the American occupational struc-

ture. Baseball, for them, may have become an end in itself, the focus for lives that do not seem to be heading anywhere. Although they are equal to their peers in terms of baseball skill, they find work in blue-collar, less rewarding tasks more often than their college-educated peers.

In contrast, we can characterize the second major type of career profile, the college-educated player, as one more loosely tied to the game of professional baseball. Perhaps because of his higher social origins, this type of individual is somewhat less dependent on the athletic career. By and large his baseball career begins later (and at the upper levels of the league hierarchy) and ends earlier (being less likely to begin the long slide to the minor leagues in the latter stages of active play).

Clearly, baseball is more of a means to an end for this ball player. When an opportunity comes along for a postplaying job, he is more likely to take it—and to be more successful in terms of the status ranking of that job. In contrast to his noncollege peers, he faces the retirement phase with a greater range of options.

Nevertheless, these options are not equally available to all of the college attenders. With the introduction of the variable of athletic scholarship, two distinct subtypes emerge. The first subtype, those who have attended college without benefit of athletic scholarships, is merely a slightly more exaggerated form of the profile of the college-educated respondents described above. They appear to have the most options open to them, they are best able to capitalize on available opportunities, and they achieve the highest level of postbaseball, occupational success.

More interesting and suggestive are those college attenders who reached higher education by turning their athletic ability into a form of financial support. When compared with nonscholarship, college-attending respondents, these men often were recruited from lower-class origins, signaling an initial ability to turn their athletic ability into a potential

mobility advantage. But unfortunately, they are less likely to translate their newly gained college entrance into a successful completion of college. This may be the first, and most important, clue to their subsequent occupational fate.

To this picture must be added one of the most unexpected findings. When compared with their college-attending peers, the scholarship students were characterized by *lower levels of playing ability*. When coupled with their relatively unsuccessful academic experiences, it results in a group of men who may have been "forced" to move out of one occupation—professional baseball—and to begin to seek employment in a nonsports field, yet without the benefit of full academic credentials. Although succeeding at a better level than the noncollege players, they were nevertheless unable to match the postbaseball occupational success of their nonscholarship, college-attending peers. In sum, a limited degree of the potential for occupational mobility had been realized.

Originally, I had hypothesized that education would continue to exert the dominant influence in the postplaying occupational careers of former athletes. Despite the effect of sports fame on obtaining the initial job, I must conclude that education has remained one of the most crucial factors in the process of occupational careers among professional athletes—especially in the long run. Without direct evidence, we can only assume that more formal education resulted in greater intellectual development, more complex social perspectives, and specialized preparation for work. The fact that advanced formal education was negatively associated with success in baseball suggests that these two endeavors operate at cross purposes. Each requires specific skills and expectations which are not transferable and may even demand different priorities.

Contrary to expectations, the scholarship-supported athlete did not succeed as well as in his postcareer occupational adjustment. Again, without direct evidence, we can only speculate about the cause of this finding. It is quite likely

that they chose to major in a field (i.e., physical education) that does not translate as readily to a nonsports, business environment. Thus, sports fame helps in the initial job contact, but subsequent job performance in the nonsports occupation may require different skills. Luck and contacts possibly enter in, but the more traditional values associated with the "right kind" of higher education prevail in the long run.

What implications can be drawn from the findings that have been presented? In striving for success and attempting to fulfill the American Dream of upward mobility, several of these men were destined to experience a degree of status frustration from blocked mobility aspirations–especially those attending college on athletic scholarships. Commenting on an analogous situation of student overestimation, Spady (1970: 700) has remarked that the "system backfires" when future status and educational goals, stimulated by early athletic success and peer support, are found to rest on inadequate or marginal intelligence and training. I feel that the data here illustrate a similar pattern for those individuals in our sample who attended college on athletic scholarships. In the end, often lacking the college degree and/or crucial educational skills, they were unsuccessful in achieving a significant socioeconomic gain in their postbaseball careers. The unfulfilled promise, with the accompanying "identity crisis" of the former athlete (Page, 1969: 200), seems a very real contingency for these men.

In recent months, there has been a spate of articles and news reports–even exposés–about the uses of athletic scholarships and related recruiting abuses. Individuals get hurt and basic cultural values are distorted, but we must be reminded constantly of Mills's (1959: 266) injunction that "personal troubles . . . must be understood in terms of public issues." Recruiting abuses have become institutionalized and are affecting large numbers of people. New policy decisions are needed (Cross, 1973) and social change must be introduced.

There are several remaining research gaps concerning the careers of professional athletes. First, we need more up-to-date information not only on baseball players, but also on sports that have a different relationship to formal education and social class. For instance, most professional football and basketball players have attended college. Baseball players, boxers, and hockey players have lower rates of college attendance. Does this make a difference in their career patterns? Only a comparative study will yield the necessary answers. And what of the experience of black athletes? Or the increasing number of professional women athletes? It is imperative that more systematic research be undertaken.

The continuing importance of education in occupational career patterns has been strongly substantiated—even for the professional athlete. An interlude of ten to twenty years in a short-term sports occupation is not enough to challenge seriously the overriding impact of the traditional factor of education in the long-term careers of a sample of successful and widely known baseball players. And the myth of mobility for the sports hero—the myth of the "psychology of opportunity" so important among segments of the lower classes (Page, 1969: 220)—has surely and seriously been compromised.

NOTES

1. The actual amount of mobility which takes place must be clearly distinguished from the extent to which a *belief* in the success theme permeates the various segments of the American class structure. Although there may be some class differences (for example, see Alix and Lantz, 1973; Della Fave, 1974; Rosen et al., 1969), both the cultural value of success and the drive for mobility are accepted widely by the general population.

2. This may involve the conscious intent of the so-called "student-athlete" and the athletic officials of the university, with all the accompanying questions of amateur status and eligibility requirements. Koch (1971, 1973) has argued that all of these problems must be resolved in the context of the acknowledged economics of "big-time" intercollegiate athletics.

3. The desire here to include men with both high and low levels of major league experience and fame was an attempt to extend the work of Bookbinder (1955).

4. The names and addresses of these former players were obtained from a variety of sources, including sports publications and autograph collectors' address lists. A few other returns had to be excluded because of incomplete or unclear information.

5. At the time of the survey, the most comprehensive reference to all known major leaguers was *The Official Encyclopedia of Baseball* by Turkin and Thompson (1956). First, I eliminated all those men who were known to be deceased, as well as those who in all likelihood were dead. This resulted in 6,229 living major leaguers. I then drew a random control sample of 300 men from this total population and calculated the following information which could be compared with the survey sample: year of birth, state of birth, number of years played in the major leagues, total baseball fame, and average yearly quality of baseball performance. The tables containing these actual relationships can be found in the appendix of Haerle (1971).

6. When controlled for the time factor, i.e., year of retirement from active playing, the original and basic relationships reported in this paper held up very well.

7. The range of responses for this variable runs from those who have not attended college at all, through those who have received only athletic scholarships (and who presumably would not have attended college without this aid) or a combination of athletic and academic scholarships, to those who attended college without benefit of any outside assistance whatever. The latter group would be viewed as having proceeded along the more normal path.

8. The organizational structure of professional baseball includes a hierarchy of leagues based on playing skill. Besides the major leagues, there were six other ability levels or league classifications at the time of this survey: AAA, AA, A, B, C, and D. The level at which a player entered and left professional baseball would be indicative of different career patterns, commitments, and ability.

9. Each of our respondents spent at least part of one season in the major leagues. Yet the number of years spent prior to and after major league experience, when combined with the first and last league, would further clarify important dimensions of the baseball careers.

10. The ranking of occupational level was based on the North-Hatt (1947) scale of 90 occupations. Each occupation was assigned a score of 1 (highest rank) to 90 (lowest rank). Lines of work not included on the original list were given the score of the most equivalent job.

11. The details of computation can be found in Haerle (1971).

12. Following the accepted practice, all path coefficients of less than .10 have been dropped from the path diagrams.

13. The remaining 177 respondents were thus broken down into the following categories: those who attended college without the benefit of any kind of reported scholarship (n = 92); those who attended college on academic or academic/athletic scholarships (n = 5); and those who attended college with athletic scholarships for various kinds and combinations of sports (n = 80).

14. The potential meaning of this suggestive finding will be discussed below. In addition, with the data available, it is possible to test an article of baseball lore regarding the level of intelligence associated with different playing positions. We found no significant relationship between playing position and either years of education or scholarship status.

15. An earlier path model included two other measures of baseball success, namely, total years in the majors and the proportion of the total career in the majors, but these were dropped from the model when they exhibited the same pattern as the BFI.

16. There is a running debate in baseball circles regarding the advantages/disadvantages of college versus minor league experience.

17. Thirty-three percent of the variation in X_8 is explained by the joint effect of five variables (X_1, X_2, X_3, X_5, and X_6).

18. Although not statistically significant ($p = .13$), there was a tendency for those with some college education to end their careers in the major leagues while those with elementary education tried to hang on and eventually retired from the lower minor league clubs.

19. The accuracy of this assumption rests on whether or not athletic scholarships are offered on the basis of financial need or solely because of athletic ability. This has not been determined to my satisfaction and so I have stated the assumption under which we have proceeded.

20. These findings are at some variance with those reported elsewhere (see Haerle, 1975). In working with a slightly different set of causal variables, I found that the BFI score was a *more* important predictor of the occupational rank of the first job (path coefficient .532), followed at some distance by the respondent's education (path coefficient .303). The remaining pattern was similar.

21. Fifty-two percent of the variation in X_9 is explained by the joint effect of two variables (X_4 and X_8).

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