

Sports

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C.J.
RisakGreg Dingens,
scholar-athlete

THERE ARE SCHOLARS. There are athletes. And many the two should meet. How could they? Athletes are prodigious physically, able to coordinate hands, feet and body with amazing dexterity. Scholars are adept mentally, able to conquer intricate problems with incredible ease. The two have been considered separate entities for eons. Eggheads can't throw a baseball a lick. And jocks are forever epitomized as big, burly — and empty-headed.

On our college campuses the stereotypes prevail, feeding off what students perceive scholarship athletes to be, an image that often is accurate: a poor kid with mediocre grades who wouldn't be here if he was average-sized. Student-athlete has become a many, including college administrators, a contradiction in terms.

THEN ALONG comes someone like Greg Dingens, and a belief that was accepted as a law of nature suddenly crumbles like a Tokyo skyscraper under Godzilla's foot.

Dingens doesn't like stereotypes (but who does?). He doesn't fit any, either. Dingens plays football for Notre Dame. He stands 6-foot-5, weighs 257, and starts at defensive tackle. Sounds like a candidate for Big Time Wrestling or some other such cerebral profession.

But the Bloomfield Hills native and Birmingham Brother Rice graduate is nothing of the sort. Instead, he is a candidate for a Rhodes Scholarship, the most prestigious of academic awards.

A senior, Dingens is in Notre Dame's pre-professional program in the College of Arts and Letters. His major is modern history. He carries a 3.77 grade point average. His career goal, at present, is to become an orthopaedic surgeon. And his primary reason for enrolling at Notre Dame was not to play football. It was to get an education.

"EVERY SCHOOL that recruits you will say academics are important, that they want you to get your degree," Dingens said. "That's just lip-synching at most schools. I looked for a school with a commitment to academics. I thought they had that at Notre Dame."

The conflict between academics and athletics is heading for a showdown. College presidents are becoming increasingly involved in the NCAA and the governing of athletics. Scandals, from drugs to recruiting violations to throwing games for gamblers, have cast dark shadows on otherwise highly-respected institutions.

Fewer athletes earn their degrees each year. Critics claim many are exploited by universities, who recruit them, coddle them for four years without regard for their academic achievement. Dingens doesn't buy that. Not entirely, anyway. "I don't think there's that much exploitation of athletes," he said. "I believe that most major universities give you an opportunity to get a degree."

"The opportunity is there. I don't think there are major college programs that discourage going to classes."

BUT AT THE SAME TIME, Dingens admits, "Most colleges are passive in their encouragement. They take the attitude that 'You're here to play football, then get an education.'"

"But a lot of guys would never get an opportunity for a college education otherwise." Dingens' commitment to academics, as well as athletic, excellence takes tremendous self-discipline. Football fills his afternoons, from "about two in the afternoon to 8:30 at night."

Book work and classes take up the rest of Dingens' day. And yet, as hectic as the schedule is, it could all be worth while if he becomes the first Notre Dame football player to earn a Rhodes Scholarship.

"I'm in the process of applying for it now," Dingens said. Colleges who believe a student of theirs is worthy of one of the 32 Rhodes Scholarships awarded each year start an involved process that includes a series of interviews at the school, state, district and national level.

SHOULD DINGENS win a Rhodes Scholarship, he'll spend his two years at Oxford, England, studying modern history. He'll either get a deferral to attend medical school at a later date, or may change his career plans.

"This is the kind of opportunity that only comes once in a lifetime," Dingens said. "Who knows, after I do go over there and study I may change my mind (about school). A Rhodes Scholarship could open a lot of doors for me."

Studying vs. sports, athlete vs. scholar, two opposing forces attracted to the same goal — college — for different reasons. And for far too many of our college-level athletes, that conception remains too true.

College student-athletes need to know about his cost-free four years of education. They need to know that college isn't a stepping stone to professional sports; rather, it's a bridge to a better world — toll-free.

Perhaps Dingens will serve as a model for future athletes. Few could fill the role better.



DAN DEAN/staff photograph

The Farmington connection (Chris Inch and Al Stebbins from Farmington and Kirk Armstrong from North Farmington) let Wayne's Ron Tolson set the pace Saturday, but the trio rallied to overtake him at the finish line.

Inch sets record,
Falcons defend
Schoolcraft titleBy Chris McCoosky
staff writer

The 20th anniversary running of the Schoolcraft College's annual High School Cross Country Invitational proved one thing: There isn't a middle class in Observant boys cross country this season.

Farmington's boys team defended its Schoolcraft title with alarming ease, outpacing second-place Plymouth Salem by 94 points, 49-143. That is the largest margin of victory in the history of the event.

Livonia Stevenson (163) placed third, Plymouth Canton (166) fourth and Northville (173) fifth. (See statistical page for complete results.)

The meet also lent evidence to the suspicion that there is no elite class among Observant girls teams.

Trenton captured team honors in the girls race with 57 points. Ypsilanti was second with 112 — both non-area schools.

Livonia Stevenson (141) was the best Observant contingent, placing third. Livonia Churchill, Observant's No. 1 girls team, placed fourth (148) and Farmington (160) placed fifth.

"WE WERE the heavy favorite coming in, no question," said Farmington boys coach Jerry Young, who has coached his team to four Schoolcraft titles, more than any other team. "We expected to win; we felt we were the best team in the group."

"The area's a little weak in cross country this year. It's difficult to say this was a tough test for us. It's nice mentally to win this type of meet, but there aren't a lot of top-notch teams in Observant."

Farmington, weak field or not, was not without brilliant individual performances.

Chris Inch set a new meet record, running the flat and grassy 5,000-meter course in 16:03.5. (The old mark,

16:42.0, was set last year by Dave Homann of Garden City.)

Falcon teammates Al Stebbins finished a close second (16:10.7). Bryan Lawton placed fifth (16:48.2).

All of the Falcon runners ran personal best times.

ALSO EARNING berths on the all-observant team (top 10) were Kirk Armstrong from North Farmington (third, 16:16.8), Ron Tolson from Wayne Memorial (fourth, 16:44.8), Jim Swiecki from Canton (fifth, 16:51.7), Dan Liedel from John Glenn (seventh, 16:51.7), Tony Atwell from Salem (eighth, 16:53.1), Bill Atwell from Salem (ninth, 16:54.3), and Rich Shaffer from Lincoln Park (10th, 16:54.9).

"We're a good team," Young said. "We're not a great team yet. But when you beat 17 teams it's nice, no matter who the teams are."

There were no great teams among the Observant girls contingents either, although teams like Stevenson and Plymouth Canton (eighth) ran better than anticipated.

Ypsilanti's Carlene Mighty ousted Westland John Glenn's Karen Opp for individual honors. Mighty ran the course in 19:53.1. Opp finished in 19:58.3.

Trenton's Kristen Zanetti closely followed those two with a 20:03.3. Then the times began to trail off.

Fourth place went to Farmington's Nicole Jolley (20:19.2), Canton's Marie Jaros placed fifth (20:28.8).

Rounding out the all-observant team were Joan Peor of Trenton (20:51.5), Jenny Campbell of Ypsilanti (20:54.8), Carol Sulick of Churchill (20:56.0), Karen Kantor of Churchill (20:57.3) and Bonnie Stecker of Farmington (20:59.6).

It was the eighth annual girls race and the second straight year a non-Observant team has captured the title. Northville was last year's champ.

State waives rule,
Maison can playBy Chris McCoosky
staff writer

Yvette Maison is legally a Marlin. The Farmington Hills Mercy junior was ruled eligible for athletic competition by the Michigan High School Athletic Association's Executive Council after a hearing with Mercy athletic director Ellen Sekerak Monday.

On Tuesday the MHSAA, which initially ruled Maison ineligible until January, waived its rule on transfer eligibility as it pertained to Maison. Maison's family challenged the MHSAA's initial ruling in court and was granted a temporary injunction by Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Frederick Ziem. A Sept. 25 court date was set.

That injunction enabled Maison, a transfer from Harper Woods Bishop Gallagher, to compete on the Mercy basketball team until the dispute was settled.

The court action has been rescinded by the Maison family as a result of the MHSAA's waiver.

THE MAISONs moved from St. Clair Shores to Union Lake this spring. Yvette Maison switched high schools from Gallagher, where she had been a starting guard on the basketball team, to Mercy.

The MHSAA considers the Catholic League (of which both Mercy and Gallagher are members) one school district because enrollment in parochial schools isn't limited to a specific geographic boundary.

MHSAA bylaws state that if an athlete transfers to another school within the same district, or to another school within the same service area, the student must attend the new school one full semester before becoming eligible for athletics.

The MHSAA cited this rule in initially deeming Maison ineligible.

Mercy High School and the Maison family argued that Yvette Maison did not violate the MHSAA rule.

"As her rule is written, Maison is eligible to play because she moved out of the Gallagher service area," Sekerak said.

SEKERAK presented the executive council with an affidavit signed by Gallagher officials stating that the school did not service residents of Union Lake.

"The affidavit said that Gallagher hadn't enrolled a student from Union Lake in at least four years," Sekerak said.

girls basketball

Vern Norris, executive director of the MHSAA, agreed that the affidavit was the key to Mercy getting the waiver.

"This should have never been the big issue. It was," Norris said. "The school was able to show that Harper Woods Bishop Gallagher hadn't drawn a student from Union Lake in four years. Therefore Union Lake could not be considered within Gallagher's service area."

The council's main concern, according to Sekerak, was that the parochial schools should establish boundaries.

"One of the members told me that if we had boundaries there wouldn't be any trouble," Sekerak said. "To me, that's irrelevant. The kid clearly did move. Most of the transfer cases they (MHSAA) deal with involve kids who don't really move. They move in with an aunt or somebody else. There was no hanky-panky in Yvette's case."

SEKERAK BELIEVES the executive council's decision to waive its ruling for Maison may have been influenced by the pending court date.

"The injunction and the threat of a court date really helped," the first-year AD said. "I don't think they wanted to haul the rule before a judge with the possibility of having to rewrite it."

Norris disagreed.

"No, I didn't present this court case to the committee until after the hearing," he said. "I didn't want that to affect their decision. There's integrity to maintain. We don't make decisions based on a pending court case."

Sekerak and Mercy, in fighting the state's rule, ran the risk of forfeiting the five basketball games Maison has played in so far.

"I'm glad we don't have to go to court," Sekerak said. "The next few steps would have been nasty. But I'm glad we decided to stand by the issue. You should back what you believe in. And since I'm so new at this, maybe I was just naive enough to think I could win. Perhaps if I'd been at this a few years I might have been more scared. Being naive helped me in this case."

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