



THE TOTAL TIGER

The athletic department's Total Person Program works to produce well-adjusted graduates.

By PAUL HOEMANN



Mizzou's Parris Watts waited for the right moment.

Attending a regional meeting of college athletic directors, he patiently listened to their cries for an all-encompassing athletic program that would mold student-athletes into well-rounded individuals. But, alas, the athletic directors were fragmenting their efforts.

The architect and director of Mizzou's new Student Athlete Total Person Program unveiled his approach the next day.

"I showed them our total-person plan and said, 'This is what I think we need to do.' They bought into it immediately."

Athletic Director Jack Lengyel says, "People had never seen a program like this. They were saying, 'This is the way to go.'"

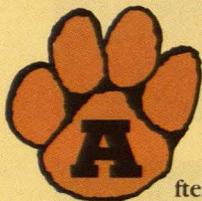
Lengyel knew a total-person approach was the path he wanted to take when he came to Mizzou last April. He says that he accepted the athletic director's job because former Chancellor Barbara S. Uehling agreed to have a tenured faculty member direct the program.

"It shows that the institution is making a significant commitment toward the satisfactory progress and graduation of its student-athletes," he says.

That statement embodies Lengyel's athletic philosophy. "The successful person is our goal. We're saying that we have the best interests of the student in mind. One by-product is that the program will win more often than it loses. There will be more successes because the competition is within the athletes themselves, to achieve what they want to become. The Total Person

Program helps define their choices.”

To assist Mizzou's student-athletes in their search, Lengyel wanted a director who understood intercollegiate athletics, was sensitive to the time demands on the student-athlete and was familiar with Campus academic resources.



After a four-month search, he picked Watts, an associate professor of health education at Mizzou with a PhD from Indiana. Watts' teaching specialty is developing what he calls the "health-for-human-wholeness approach." It encompasses each facet of the human being—physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual. Lengyel's basic concept combined with Watts' expertise fit like a hand inside a glove.

"Our ideas were developed independently, but they meshed like naturals," Watts says. "This kind of program is so important because of the drastically changing environment in intercollegiate athletics today. We're a microcosm of society. So much accountability is required now."

The Total Person Program has four arms: academic counseling; academic assistance; rules, eligibility and financial aid; and health-for-human-wholeness-lifestyle division.

The latter is what makes the program so revolutionary, according to Watts. For example, in its first year, the health-for-human-wholeness-lifestyle division has enacted a substance-abuse program with peer counseling and drug education.

Each team elects a peer as a support source. This person directs athletes with drug problems to professional help and directly intervenes in a substance-abuse situation.

"We're somebody that an athlete can talk to, knowing that it will be kept confidential," says Toni Waters, a senior journalism major from St. Louis and peer counselor for the tennis team. "Maybe the person's problem is not that bad and can be nipped in the bud. If not, we have a list of excellent professionals we can refer them to." That includes Watts; Steve Groff, an athletic department tutor; Fran Joy, unit director at Mid Missouri Mental Health Center; Rick McGuire, women's track coach and sports psychologist; and Don Walker, campus minister at the Baptist Student Union.

To satisfy NCAA requirements, drug testing is a part of the program. Mizzou athletes are tested an average of three times during the academic year, Watts says, including once at the beginning of the school year. Screening is necessary because it protects the athlete and the University.

"We don't do it to catch people and punish them. It's to identify individuals who need help and then help them," Watts says.

In cases of self-referral, no punitive action is taken, Watts says. But when an athlete

tests positive, Lengyel, the coach and the trainer are informed, and punitive action will be taken. In either case, it is Watts' job to secure professional help for that athlete.

A unit, led by McGuire, dealing with interruption or premature termination of an athlete's career also is operational. By fall 1987, components covering nutrition, mental/emotional health, sexuality and death will be a part of the health-for-human-wholeness-lifestyle division. Positive self-concept, stress management, interaction with the news media, weight management, dating and relationships, birth control and suicide prevention will be addressed.

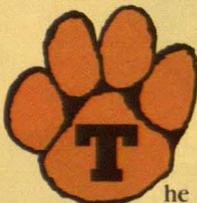
"The program is worthwhile," tennis-player Waters says. "The athletic department is doing all it can to make us better teams and individuals."

Admittedly biased, Watts believes the health-for-human-wholeness-lifestyle division is making Mizzou's Total Person Program the prototype.

But, Watts says, it only will realize its potential if he and his staff do their jobs in three vital areas: accurately assess a recruit's academic potential, monitor academic progress and provide assistance whenever necessary. That's what the program's other parts are designed to do.

For instance, a key component of academic counseling is the academic success potential profile. Developed by Watts, it estimates how well a recruit will do academically at the University. The profile is important because of two recent NCAA rulings. Proposition 48 sets minimum entrance requirements for student-athletes, and the satisfactory progress rule stipulates that by the beginning of their junior year, they must declare an academic major and be taking classes that will satisfactorily move them toward a degree. The rules put a premium on recruiting student-athletes who are academically solid, he says.

The academic success potential profile is structured on a 1-to-10 scale. Standardized test scores, high-school class rank, grade-point average for core courses and extracurricular activities are the basis for compiling a final score. Results then are given to the coaches recruiting the athlete.



he scale does not dictate to coaches, but informs them," Watts says. "If Coach [Norm] Stewart is looking at four recruits to play point guard and one is an eight, one a six, one a four, and one a three, we're encouraging him to go for the person with the eight. Our intention is to recruit student-athletes who are better prepared academically so they can be here for four years and develop their athletic skills without being declared ineligible or put on academic probation."

Once enrolled, a student-athlete's

school work is scrutinized by the academic progress monitoring component, part of the counseling and assistance divisions. Records are kept of class and tutor-session attendance, completion of class assignments and mid-term grades. Negligence in these areas results in disciplinary action. "Close monitoring indicates how committed we are to a quality athletic program that has academic integrity," Watts says.

Other elements of academic assistance include 50 tutors to assist Mizzou's 395 student-athletes; a freshman- and transfer-student orientation; specialized educational services for the learning disabled and foreign students; psychological counseling referral; and academic skills development and enhancement, which covers everything from how to study a textbook to improving test-taking skills.

Rules, eligibility and financial aid, headed by women's swimming Coach John Little, monitors University, Big Eight and NCAA eligibility requirements to ensure that Mizzou's student-athletes measure up.

Watts is a realist. He knows that despite the Total Person Program's thoroughness, there will be academic casualties.

"I don't think that should be interpreted as failure of the Total Person Program. The student-athletes must assume final responsibility for their academic performance. We do all we can to motivate, encourage and assist them. But we can't take a test or write a paper for them."



ennis Paloucek, a redshirt freshman defensive back from Brookfield, Ill., can attest to that. Early in the semester, he experienced problems in his English class. But a tutor helped him formulate essay ideas, critiqued his writing and showed him how to correct his mistakes.

"The class would be extremely hard without help," he says. "In high school, they would tell you how to write the essay. In college, they just tell you to do it."

In recent years, Mizzou's student-athletes have scored better than average, academically. According to Lengyel's report to the Board of Curators last fall, athletes recruited in 1980 on a five-year academic program graduated at a 54.1 percent clip. That ranks among the top 10 percent in the country. More specifically, football players during the period graduated at a 58 percent rate, compared with the University's overall average of 49 percent, Lengyel says. The Total Person Program, he believes, can boost the average for student-athletes into the 70 percent to 80 percent range.

"The Total Person Program is education," he says. "It represents what we're all about, and that's why I'm so excited about it. It truly is the essence of Mizzou's athletic program." □