

# Program emphasizes the 'A' in athletics

By [Robert Lucero, Correspondent](#)

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The Scholar-Baller® recognition program acknowledges the best performances by Citrus College athletes on the field, but most importantly, in the classroom.

The title Scholar-Baller is given to those athletes who maintain a 3.0 GPA or higher while continuing to represent the Owls on the field.

During the fall 2007 semester, which was the first semester the program was active, 15 Owls earned the status of Scholar-Baller.

For 2010-11, 69 Owls are designated Scholar-Ballers, the highest number that Citrus has proceeded since the program was implemented.

C. Keith Harrison, Ed.D, who played football at West Texas A & M University and earned scholar athlete honors, initiated the Scholar-Baller program back in 1995.

Those who earn the title are given a hat, shirt, and a ThinkMan® or ThinkWoman™ patch stitched onto their uniforms. They are also called out for honors at a home game.

Throughout the country, Scholar-Baller athletes from community colleges to universities, wear the patch.

When Citrus student athletes apply to transfer, their Scholar-Baller title is an indicator that these student athletes are competitors in the classroom and on the field.

Citrus first came across the program in spring 2007 while athletics counselor Alicia Longyear, Dean of Athletics Jody Wise, and physical education professor Mary Brawner were attending a California Community College Athletic Association meeting.

During that CCCAA meeting, Harrison, along with Scholar-Ballers cofounders Jean Boyd and Cliff Parks, gave a presentation on the program. The three Citrus representatives decided to introduce it to Citrus.

Wise said the teachers and coaches at Citrus were really impressed and saw it as a way to put more emphasis into academia.

"A lot of [student athletes] focus primarily on their sport. Then they try to squeeze in academics and part-time jobs and all of those kinds of things," Wise said. "We wanted to make sure we had a push within our department to stress the academic part for them and to reward their efforts in the classroom."

Longyear, who is the director of the Citrus chapter, said the implementation of the program went well.

"We didn't have to twist too many arms," she said.

A former college student athlete, Longyear described herself as "more like a 2.8, 2.9" student.

"I was never academically ineligible or anything like that, but I never had anything like this to strive for," she said. "For someone like me, this would have been huge."

Christina Kinney, nursing major and basketball forward, being a Scholar-Baller is a real challenge.

"Most people don't want to study because you're tired and you just want to sleep, but you have to fight through it," she said.

Kinney said that good grades reflect who an individual is and those grades show how hard working that person is, which is what keeps her persevering as a student athlete.

"It means something," Wise said. "It means you're a champion in the classroom as well as in the sport that you're doing."

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