



## **'Scholar Baller' an ASU institution**

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While performing well in the classroom has its obvious benefits, ASU athletes and coaches are also receiving more tangible rewards for success in academics.

For some coaches, it's a salary bump.

ASU football coach Dennis Erickson receives an academic-performance bonus when his team reaches a certain overall grade point average or graduation rate.

And for many athletes, it's a visible patch on their uniform indicating that they are a "Scholar Baller."

The Scholar Baller program was co-founded by Jean Boyd, ASU's Associate Athletic Director of Student-Athlete Development, to combine excellence in athletics and academics by honoring those athletes that hold a 3.0 or higher GPA. It was first implemented by the ASU football team in 2001 and has since been adopted by the women's basketball, wrestling, softball, soccer, swimming and volleyball teams.

"Scholar Baller was started by three men who were concerned with some of the negative messages society promotes about athletes, and the tendency of some student-athletes in high school and college to overemphasize athletics and not take advantage of their education," Boyd said in an e-mail.

In the seven years of the program's existence, Boyd said ASU has seen an increase in team GPA, improved athlete retention rates and far less concerns about academic eligibility.

On Tuesday, ASU reported that its graduation rate for the student-athlete class of 2001 was 67 percent, which is the highest all-time in school history.

While the men's basketball (42 to 38) and baseball (36 to 30) rates fell, the numbers for football (55 to 60) and women's basketball (78 to 90) each rose.

Erickson said that the honor of having a patch on their jersey that everyone can see also gives his players an additional reason to do well in school.

"Scholar Baller and the emblem on their jersey is huge for those guys," he said. "It's like being an all-conference player; that's how important it is."

The Scholar Baller program has since been adopted by over 80 other colleges and universities in North America.

To make sure the athletes make the grade and players and coaches reap the benefits, ASU provides a number of academic services to student-athletes.

The university currently has 10 full-time employees, three graduate assistants and 40 subject tutors and mentors that hold a variety of responsibilities from academic coaching to handling study groups to career exploration and development.

Those academic responsibilities also extend to the coaching staffs that get frequent reports from the Office of Student-Athlete Development about the progress of their players.

"In a good cop, bad cop [relationship]; we're the bad cops," Erickson said. "If [players are] not doing what they're supposed to, [that] basically is what we hear about."

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