

Contents

Foreword—Stan Wilcox	vii
Acknowledgments	xiii
Introduction	i
How to Use This Book	5
<i>Secret 1</i> Create and Follow Your Student-Athlete Plan	7
<i>Secret 2</i> Understand Who a Student-Athlete Is	16
<i>Secret 3</i> Learn What Name, Image, and Likeness Means for You	27
<i>Secret 4</i> Ride Your Success Wheel	39
<i>Secret 5</i> Acquire the Life Skills You Need to Succeed	54
<i>Secret 6</i> Be Balanced in Everything	61
<i>Secret 7</i> Make Smart Decisions on the Other Stuff	75
<i>Secret 8</i> Seek Support Everywhere	83
<i>Secret 9</i> Your Major Really Matters	93
<i>Secret 10</i> Take Nothing for Granted	100
<i>Secret 11</i> Manage Your Highs and Lows	107
<i>Secret 12</i> Face Reality in Sports and Life	120
<i>Secret 13</i> Mentally Move On as a Senior	129
<i>Secret 14</i> Identify Who You Are	136
<i>Secret 15</i> Find Your Other Passions in Life as You Prepare to Be a Sophomore	147
<i>Secret 16</i> Invest in Yourself, Your Health, and Your Future	156

<i>Secret 17</i>	Activate Your Student-Athlete Advantage	171
<i>Secret 18</i>	Create Your Brand	181
<i>Secret 19</i>	Be Fiscally Smart	191
<i>Secret 20</i>	Prepare for the Future by Tracking Trends	200
	The End—Your Road Map: It’s Not a Secret	211
	Afterword—Christopher J. Parker	217
	Appendix A—NCAA Student-Athlete Success Data	219
	Appendix B—Other Resources	237
	Appendix C—Contributors to the Book	241
	Appendix D—About the Authors	245
	Notes	249

Foreword

It wasn't until eighth grade that I developed a fierce feeling of confidence that I was destined to play basketball at the high school varsity and collegiate level, and potentially professionally. At that time, I truly did not know all that it would take to reach each of these heights. But the experience of playing for a first-time coach who had just completed his undergraduate degree as a student-athlete at Dowling College on Long Island was exciting.

Joe Pellicane, my eighth-grade coach, trained and managed our team as though it were a college team. The conditioning and discipline, combined with the defensive mindset that was a cornerstone of his strategy, catapulted our team to a one-loss season. (And it is worth noting that the one loss was avenged in crushing fashion in a late-season rematch.) One of the most significant things I recall Coach Pellicane teaching our team was how to play one-on-one and team defense.

The first couple weeks of practice, we never touched a basketball. We just conditioned on the court and did defensive slide drills. Our workouts were like nothing I had ever experienced, and at the end of one specific practice, I recall more than half of the team, including myself, discussing quitting the team. We felt we couldn't take any more of the pain that came with the physical conditioning. I remember one evening lying in bed and screaming because it felt like I had cramps in every muscle of my body. Needless to say, by the end of that season, we were all in such great shape that we felt invincible. That we could take on any team, at any level, and beat them.

What really set me on the path to a collegiate athletic career was the feeling Coach Pellicane instilled in me at the end-of-the-year class assembly. I was sitting with classmates as Coach recapped our season and called each of my teammates up to the stage to receive his end-of-the-year participation recognition award. It appeared he had finished calling up the entire team but had forgotten me.

At that point, Joe began talking about an individual whom he deemed the catalyst for the team's success, the hardest worker day in and day out. He

read out individual players' playing statistics (none of us even knew individual stats were kept at that time). Then he called my name and motioned for me to join my teammates on stage as the team MVP.

To this day, that was one of the most significant moments of my life.

It was the point I knew I could be successful in this sport and wanted to prove to my family and friends that I could be successful in life. I began to seek guidance from Coach Pellicane as to what it would take to become a collegiate athlete like him. Our team went undefeated as ninth graders; then it was on to high school, where I became a three-year starter on the varsity team and we eventually won the New York state championship.

It was Coach Pellicane who provided me with my first book on all I needed to know about the collegiate athletics recruiting process. Along my high school journey, I became one of the top guards in the country. I was admitted to the best summer camp where all the college coaches went to see the top players in the country, and I played at different all-star basketball events around the country.

Hundreds of recruiting letters poured in, and I took my five permissible official visits and a few unofficial visits. I finally narrowed my decision to three institutions, Rutgers, Syracuse, and Notre Dame. It was time for me to make one of the most important decisions in my life. I knew it was a decision that was going to be all mine and that my parents and high school coach would support me.

I ultimately chose to attend the University of Notre Dame for the following reasons:

1. It had almost a 100 percent graduation rate for its basketball team.
2. The few individuals that left Notre Dame early to play professional basketball were coming back in the summer to take their remaining classes to graduate.
3. I wanted to play with and against the best in the country.
4. I wanted to benefit from national TV exposure, and Notre Dame basketball was one of the few teams in the nation at that time offering that spotlight on an annual basis. Plus, the UCLA–Notre Dame basketball games were among the most watched games (at that time) in the country. That rivalry happened because Notre Dame had broken the eighty-eight-game winning streak of John Wooden (one of the winningest coaches in history) in 1974, just before I arrived at Notre Dame in 1977. Those games were featured on national television every year, much like the North Carolina–Duke games today.

As I mentioned, I entered Notre Dame in the fall of 1977 as a wide-eyed, naïve freshman living away from home (on my own for the first time) for an

extended period. From the hustle and fast pace of New York to the mellow, slow pace of the Midwest. If I would have had access to a book such as *20 Secrets to Success for NCAA Student-Athletes*, my four years at Notre Dame would have been so much easier.

I had no idea how to create a student-athlete plan, no full understanding of what being a student-athlete meant, and no vision for a success wheel. I followed the path of my upperclassman teammates. I observed what they did wrong and what they did right. I also listened to the advice of my coaches and academic advisors. So as a freshman my student-athlete plan and success wheel came from my teammates, coaches, and academic advisors. That plan included attending classes, then playing pick-up ball in the evening, and going to the dining hall for dinner after. After dinner came class assignments for a few hours, then socializing with teammates and dorm mates into the late evening.

Notre Dame was unique in that it required all students to live in on-campus dorms unless you were married. Then, you either had to live in on-campus married student housing or an off-campus apartment. Notre Dame had no coed dorms, fraternities, or sororities and created a rule precluding male students from being in a female dormitory after a certain hour and vice versa. The term used for these restrictions was “parietals.” You could get expelled from school for breaking parietals.

Freshman year was an eye-opener for me from an academic perspective. I would see the thousands of students on campus only when changing classes or going to the cafeteria for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. At all other times, the campus had just a few students walking on the quads, a very eerie feeling. I soon learned that when the quads were empty, the students were in their dorm rooms studying for classes. That was foreign to me, as I expected most of the students would be outside socializing.

My academic goal as a freshman and sophomore was to be eligible to participate in practice and competition. Before the NCAA even had eligibility rules, Notre Dame had its own academic eligibility requirements. You had to complete twelve hours a semester with a 2.0 GPA. So that was my goal each semester of my first two years. My first semester, I put in the same effort I did in high school toward my academic studies.

I was in for a shock as basketball practice started and we had our first team meeting with our academic advisor regarding our midsemester grades. Including me, there were five freshmen on the team. Professor DeCicco was the head of our academic advisors and the head coach of the fencing team. He would always jokingly threaten us with one of the foils or sabers if he heard we were not attending class or doing poorly. Needless to say, I had a number of foils and sabers pointed at me during my freshman year.

As Professor DeCicco went around the room and discussed with my teammates what their midsemester grades were and which classes they needed

to focus on and improve in, he left me as the last person to discuss grades with. He looked at me and said: “Stan, four Ds and an F. We have some work to do here. I believe we can drop the class that you are failing in and work on those Ds for the remainder of this semester and get them up to Cs.” He indicated if we could do that, I would be all right. It was very embarrassing, but an eye-opener for me.

If I had not worked hard in the classroom to get those Ds up to Cs, I would not have been eligible to play. Fortunately, with tutors, study hall sessions, a time-management plan that I worked out with a professor, and a cutback on social time, I was able to do just as Professor DeCicco said. I turned those Ds into one B and three Cs and was eligible to play in the fall.

At Notre Dame, you were required to take fifteen hours per semester to stay on track to graduate. With permission from our academic advisors, we could drop to twelve hours for one semester of the year. However, if you did drop to twelve, you were required to come to summer school and take six to nine hours of classwork. During my career, I was in summer school practically every June.

As I reflect upon my collegiate athletics career and compare my experiences with the *20 Secrets to Success for NCAA Student-Athletes*, I see how valuable the information in this book is for student-athletes and how it could have helped me had it been written about forty years earlier. For example, it really did not dawn on me that I likely would not have an opportunity to play professional basketball until a freshman named John Paxson was moved in front of me in the point guard rotation during my junior year. By the time we were in the NCAA tournament, I saw little to no playing time. It was at this point I realized that I had not been prioritizing my academic studies the way I should have. This is when I realized I was not getting as much out of Notre Dame academics as I was putting into Notre Dame athletics.

That was the year I became a serious student. The academic-athletic balance all collegiate athletes must strive for is well established in this book. In fact, I used the same story later in my athletics administrative career whenever I would speak to student-athletes about how important it is to have balance in their collegiate athletics careers. This is what collegiate athletics is all about. An opportunity to continue playing a sport you love while pursuing an undergraduate and, in some cases, graduate degree. If you do not balance the two, then you could lose out on the most important thing no one can take away from you: academic knowledge and a degree.

I truly wish I had come to that realization during my freshman year and used all the tools addressed in the *20 Secrets to Success* throughout my collegiate athletics career. Not to say my career after intercollegiate athletics was unsuccessful, but what if I'd been able to better apply myself during my time at Notre Dame? I might be a brain surgeon today.

I am so thrilled to be able to share my experience as you embark on reading this book. Please understand *20 Secrets to Success* will help propel you far beyond your wildest dreams, just as this opportunity to participate in a sport you believe in and love so much can also propel your career in life through the education you obtain from your institution.

Stan Wilcox
Executive Vice President
of Regulatory Affairs
NCAA



Introduction

When business author Stephen Covey wrote his landmark text *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* in 1989, he drew from more than twenty-five years of observing what made leaders successful. That book has never been out of print, and we suspect a major reason is Covey provided simple, straightforward advice built around just seven habits. Covey believed businesspeople, future leaders, and students could become more efficient and accomplished by simply reading his book.

As a group of authors, we wanted to emulate that concept but do so for a very specific audience: the collegiate student-athlete. We believed we could assist high school seniors getting ready to go to college and NCAA student-athletes already enrolled at a university . . . including the ones who sometimes learn the hard way that when the final horn sounds, life after college beckons.

Listen, we get it. Many NCAA athletes dream of playing sports professionally or competing at the Olympics, but few realize that dream. For everyone else, a primary postcollege intention is simply to find success and contentment. That's why this book is a handbook. It's been specifically written for the locker room, dorm room, house off campus, cafeteria, bus, plane, or study hall. It will also work in the classroom if you have a really boring professor. Its purpose is to help student-athletes and their parents make better decisions.

The reason we want you to read this book is because there is a rushing reality bearing down on you. Let's start with the basics: Competing as an intercollegiate student-athlete means enduring a rigorous schedule of practices, classes, labs, tutorial sessions, weight training, road trips, and academic counseling. And as this book went to press, we expected NCAA student-athletes would have the right to start a business and leverage their name, image, and likeness (NIL). That's essentially three full-time jobs.

So, let's be clear. We want this book to work for every type of NCAA student-athlete. Not just students whose families have gone to college for

generations. It should also help student-athletes whose grant-in-aid scholarship makes them the first ever in their family to go to college. Very importantly, we wanted this book to benefit student-athletes of all backgrounds. Similarly, we want this book to serve not just students who have grown up in a highly developed American system of sport (that is, Amateur Athletic Union teams, elite travel teams, private sport academies) but also the thousands of international students who are recruited to play for NCAA schools. These students must adapt not only to the myriad rules by which NCAA athletes are governed but also to the hard task of living in a new country.

But why stop there? Every individual is unique. Readers vary by personality, height, weight, intelligence, hobbies, sexuality, prior accomplishment, race, religion, socioeconomic status, gender identification, country of origin, historical association with higher education, and types of foods enjoyed (or disliked). And those are just a few of our differences. In fact, we've gone out of our way to recognize how every NCAA student-athlete is different and faces numerous physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and mental health challenges during their time at college.

Mental health is not to be taken lightly. The NCAA's Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Brian Hainline, who is responsible for running the NCAA's Sport Science Institute, has been tireless in telling athletic administrators, athletes, and parents that understanding and supporting student-athlete mental wellness (as well as addressing sexual assault and interpersonal violence) are mandates for the NCAA as well as for all of the NCAA's member institutions.

Like mental health, diversity and inclusion are also foundational issues for anyone who participates in the college sports experience. As one sage noted, diversity is getting invited to the party. Inclusion is getting asked to dance. Many student-athletes of various racial and ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, sexual orientations, genders, and religions feel their recruitment and subsequent invitation to the NCAA party failed to acknowledge their identities.

Most student-athletes will make their way through college and find individuals like themselves. But not everyone gets comfortable in every situation. Following the horrific social injustices witnessed during 2019–20, when Black men and women like George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, Jacob Blake, and numerous others were shot, murdered, or killed by police, social tensions rose dramatically. These deaths and the systemic racism behind them are also part of the NCAA landscape. We want everyone who reads this book to find value or to be provoked to think differently about their goals, aspirations, and on-campus reality.

To draw upon the work of the acclaimed writer and social scientist Malcolm Gladwell, author of the seminal book *Outliers* (2008), the difference between those who succeed and those who fail is “not something expensive or impossible to find; not something encoded in DNA or hardwired into

the circuits of [young] brains.” What those who fail lack is “something that could have been given to them if we’d only known they needed it: a community around them that prepared them properly for the world.”

You, the reader, may or may not have enjoyed great support, encouragement, and endorsement at home. Either way, most readers of this book will need to adapt to a new setting (college) and then to actively find a supportive community. We hope this book is a literary version of that process—a simple book that provides insight, advice, and counsel, much of it from others just like you, who made the same journey.

Why tell you this? Because when your time at college ends, you’ll find that 99 percent of all NCAA student-athletes will not become full-time professional athletes. The end of college is the end of the elite sports experience. What follows is the start of a new chapter: your professional life.

So, how do you prepare for what comes next? How do you leverage your strengths and minimize weaknesses? The answers are in this book. We created chapters so any student-athlete can browse or skim our secrets quickly. You don’t have to read it sequentially or in one sitting or during any specific semester. Rather, use this book the way you use Wikipedia, searching it when you need an answer quickly. In other words, this is a quick-reference self-help book for elite student-athletes with limited free time.

We believe most student-athletes arrive at their goal of playing intercollegiate sports because of a great deal of hard work and discipline that produced both athletic and academic success. To help you build on those accomplishments, we wanted to make this book flow, starting with the first secret of creating and following a student-athlete plan that leads to a successful future.

From there, nineteen more secrets follow. They have all been written by our team of five authors, including four former collegiate athletes, two of whom captured championships; a university faculty athletics representative; a dynamic young scholar; and an executive who worked his entire career in professional sports. We worked together to make this book easy to read and understand.

The NCAA and its member institutions face the ongoing challenge of doing more to support student-athletes. Student-athletes, however, must “own” the act of preparing for their future. Choosing a major with your advisor, attending classes, and launching your professional career is up to you. Simply said, whatever you put into it is what you’ll get out of it. This book gives student-athletes a wealth of information needed to positively influence individual outcomes.

In the NCAA’s promotional materials, student-athletes proudly proclaim the tag line “There are over four hundred thousand NCAA student-athletes, and just about all of us will be going pro in something other than sports.” If most student-athletes believe that claim, then most student-athletes should take advantage of our twenty secrets.

But don't take that from us. Thumb through this book and notice the athletic directors, coaches, and former players who kindly offered advice to make sure student-athletes succeed. We wrote this book with you in mind. All student-athletes are welcome in this book and all are acknowledged. Collectively, we are here to help you out and to encourage you.

We sincerely hope these pages unlock the mysteries contained and camouflaged on college campuses. We are confident these "secrets" can make you more successful in college and far beyond your current campus. We wish you all the best.

The Authors
January 2021

How to Use This Book

NOT SURE HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK (OR WHERE TO START)?

If you are a high school student-athlete hoping to play collegiate athletics, please read chapters 1–11 first.

If you are a high school senior, check out chapters 12–20.

If you are a college freshman or sophomore, check out chapters 1–11 and 15 first, then 12–14 and 16–20.

If you are a college junior or senior, check out ALL the chapters.

If you are a college graduate, check out chapters 13, 14, and 16–20.

And as a special request to everyone, please review the recommended readings and other resources (found in Appendix B) for your ongoing benefit. Importantly, we would like to draw your attention to Appendix A, which is full of student-athlete data completed by the NCAA and Gallup that will help inform you as you follow the secrets.