

Your Name

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### The Importance of Education

In the aftermath of the Joe Sandusky scandal and the firing and death of Penn State football Coach Joe Paterno, all sorts of sordid details have come out into the public spotlight. However, some of the great things that Coach Paterno did for his players have also come out. For example, when one of his players, Adam Taliaferro, incurred a spinal injury during a football game, even after it became clear that he would never return to football, Coach Paterno said something to him that surprised me, given the level of success that Penn State football has attained on the field. He said, "I came to Penn State to become a lawyer. I never made it" (Reilly). While most coaches stay away from faculty club lectures, Coach Paterno would go to them. He made recruits who weren't quite college-ready turn in extra book reports to his wife, and he made his players who weren't doing so well come over for tutoring. Why would education be so important to someone who coached a sport, rather than teaching an academic discipline?

One benefit of pursuing studies is having choices later in life. While all of Coach Paterno's players came on scholarship to get a free education, only a handful make it to the National Football League. Of those, only a handful has long, lucrative careers. The Brett Favres and Jerry Rice's of the league are the extreme rarity; the average length of an NFL career is 3.5 seasons (BusinessWeek). Each team carries 49 players, which means that there are 1,568 players in the league (32 teams). In 2010, 352 players, or more than 20 percent, went on injured reserve at some point (BusinessWeek). What this means is that, even for someone who reaches the pinnacle

of success in football, getting a degree is vital to having choices later in life. Roger Staubach, the Hall of Fame quarterback who led the Dallas Cowboys to two Super Bowl titles, has done much better financially in his real estate firm after retirement (CNN Money). Because he took advantage of getting a degree from the Naval Academy, Staubach was able to get out into the world and prosper once his football salary stopped coming in.

Another benefit of studying is exposure to enriching influences in life. Coach Paterno did not attend faculty club lectures, for example, to get a better idea for his 4-3 defense. Instead, he wanted to use the resources available to him to broaden his mind. While a successful attorney might not need to know anything about Michelangelo or Maya Angelou to argue a case or negotiate a settlement, awareness of the beauty that those two artists (and many others like them) have brought to the world makes one a more complete person. If you can understand the meaning behind Angelou's poem "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," then you can empathize with the plight of people who feel oppressed because of their background. If you can appreciate the considerable work that went into sculpting the musculature of the "David" statue, then you can appreciate both the sheer time that goes into excellence, as well as the prodigious talent that can produce such a piece. Whether it's gaining access to choices or learning appreciation for beauty, education is an invaluable resource.

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