‘Obviously it’s worth it’: The Value of being a Canadian Student Athlete in the U.S.A.

Meghan Gilgunn

**Abstract:** Each year, young, elite Canadian athletes travel south to attend American colleges and universities, funded in part by athletic scholarships. These ‘student athletes’ leave their home country to pursue opportunities they believe are only available in the U.S. The demands made on their time, finances, and personal wellbeing can be staggering. Yet for those who become student athletes, the value of the experience tends to be unquestionably identified as being ‘worth it’. In this paper, I explore how this exhortation, repeated so readily by the individuals I interviewed during fieldwork in the U.S., reflects a complicated set of beliefs. This deceptively simple statement provides an entry point for understanding what Canadian student athletes find valuable about their experience and how they believe it affords them a degree of personal distinction that would have been impossible had they stayed in Canada.

**Keywords:** beliefs, distinction, scholarships, student athletes, travel, well-being

**Introduction**

‘In university, you have readings, you have classes, you have so much stuff going on just in school’, Fiona told me, while we sat in her university student union building. She continued: And then you get involved in a Division 1 team. We’re taking four classes a semester. For the regular students it’s not that much. But for us, it is a lot. We have to be in classes that are finished before two o’clock because after two o’clock, we have work-outs until six or seven. And then we shower, eat, and do schoolwork. You gotta do your work. So it’s a long day. It’s always long days and it’s really demanding. But, obviously it’s worth it.

A few weeks earlier, I spoke with Evan, a hockey player who attended the same American school as Fiona. We also discussed the demands he faced as a student athlete and the difficulty of balancing athletic and academic responsibilities. But, unlike Fiona, who wanted to do well in her classes as well as on the basketball court, Evan was far more concerned about succeeding athletically. He said:

That’s why I took a history major. I wanted to concentrate on hockey, you know, I didn’t wanna do something that would really keep me stressed out all four years or anything that was too tough. I was definitely here for hockey. I hope to continue playing hockey for many years and, uh, I don’t have any aspirations of going back to school.

Evan went on to describe the sacrifices – such as time and a ‘typical’ social life – he had to make so that he could play college hockey: ‘I don’t think people really realise or understand what kind of sacrifices we make, but … I’m not trying to get any praise or anything for it. I mean obviously, you know, it’s a choice and obviously it’s worth it’.

Fiona and Evan are young Canadians who were living in Boston when I interviewed them. They, along with thousands of other Canadi-
ans, travel to the U.S. after high school to play varsity sports while attending university or junior college. Many of them receive athletic scholarships: financial awards offered by colleges and universities to entice the most talented athletes to compete at an exceptionally high athletic level and win for their team and school. Student athletes pursue such scholarships to help cover the high financial cost of American post-secondary education. In Canada, athletic scholarships offered by schools in the U.S. have also taken on other meanings where they are valued as awards in their own right, thought to be won only by the best athletes (Dyck 2006).

Like Fiona and Evan, all the student athletes with whom I spoke repeatedly recounted the high demands that being a student athlete required, from the often extraordinary financial cost (even for those with scholarships) to the physical and psychological toll that is exacted by elite athletics. Despite diverse experiences, each of these students articulated some variation on the claim that ‘obviously it’s worth it’. Even when student athletes left their schools early – either because they were ‘cut’ from the team or had become dissatisfied with their experience in some way, thereby ending their time as a student athlete – they claimed to have ‘no regrets’.

The pervasiveness of this statement conveys one particularly strong message on the surface – that the experience of being a student athlete is obviously and unquestionably worth the cost. Yet when considered in the context of the student athletes’ stories, the claim becomes more complicated. Vered Amit’s suggestion to use points of discontinuity as entries for anthropological enquiry is relevant here (Amit 2007). The statement ‘obviously it’s worth it’ initially is a point of connection and convergence, reiterated in some way by all the student athletes interviewed. An ethnographic approach to examining the everyday experience of student athletes, however, reveals considerable variations in the experiences of student athletes and the frequent disjuncture between what they say and what they do.

It is this negotiation between the discourses of the lived experiences that is particularly interesting. I employ the concept of ‘discourse’ here in line with Daniel Miller’s definition: ‘the manner in which language and practice become routinised and externalised beyond the expressions of particular individuals and become, therefore, a common location for the standard generation of normative ideals and sentiments’ (2001: 15). What kind of normative ideals and sentiments become evident when exploring what ‘it’ is and why it might be obvious, at least in the minds of the student athletes?

By examining what Canadian student athletes value about their experiences as well as the costs demanded, the claim becomes more problematic. In this article, I consider how the expression ‘obviously it’s worth it’ reflects a powerful and persuasive discourse and how this discourse affects (and is affected by) the lived experiences of student athletes. I draw on formal interviews and more casual conversations with Canadian student athletes, as well as four months of participant-observation fieldwork conducted in a major metropolitan region in the United States.

The research on which this article is based was part of a larger investigation into how various forms of international travel have been increasingly incorporated as integral parts of the transition to adulthood for middle-class youths in Canada. As the ‘Introduction’ to this special issue of *Anthropology in Action* explains, different types of international travel – including that undertaken by young Canadians who move to the U.S. to take up athletic scholarships – tend to be celebrated as vehicles for self-transformation that serve to ‘cultivate’ young travellers. Agencies and institutions that position themselves as patrons and facilitators of one form of international student/youth travel or another tend to explain the merits of their programmes in terms of the socialisation benefits that young travellers are expected to obtain.
from participation in these activities. Thus, athletic scholarships are enthusiastically promoted by American inter-collegiate athletics officials as well as by some community sports officials, coaches, and parents in Canada as a means for facilitating international travel and experience. This article considers how young Canadians who have taken up athletic scholarships in the U.S. position themselves in relation both to institutional discourse concerning this topic and varying personal experiences they have had of being student athletes in another country.

My concern here is not to compare the experiences of student athletes who come from Canada with those of their American or non-North American team-mates. Instead, what I examine is the type of implicitly scripted and speculative assessment made by individual Canadian student athletes about what her or his life might have been like had she or he not gone to the U.S. on an athletic scholarship. This manner of reckoning by young athletes of the outcomes of the decisions they have made provides valuable insights into the larger features and attractions of athletic scholarships and the movement by Canadians to the U.S. that these prompt.

The research methodology for this article included semi-structured interviews with current student athletes, former student athletes, and coaches. I also conducted a considerable amount of participant observation on school campuses, at sporting events, and at some team practices. The twenty-one student athletes to whom I spoke in the U.S. came from across Canada, with the majority from British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. All were attending universities that granted bachelor degrees after four to five years of study, as opposed to two-year ‘junior colleges’ that generally offer diplomas. I also spoke in Canada to three former student athletes who had attended university on athletic scholarships elsewhere in the U.S.

One possible limitation of this research is that it involved speaking primarily to successful varsity athletes. As I contacted most of the varsity athletes through their institutions’ athletic department staff and coaches, I might have been guided to speak with the more successful student athletes. I do not imply conspiratorial behaviour on the part of staff and coaches to encourage contact only with model student athletes; rather it might be the case that only the student athletes who had good, beneficial experiences wanted to speak about them. Also, the metropolitan Boston region where fieldwork was conducted is where many Canadian student athletes seek to live due to political and cultural similarities with Canada, density of well-recognised schools, proximity to the Canadian border, and overall high standard of living the region is thought to have. Therefore, it is possible that student athletes living in other regions of the United States might have different experiences from the ones described here and might have less positive attitudes about being a varsity athlete. I do think this possibility is partially mitigated by the fact that I also had a chance to speak with three student athletes who had attended schools in other parts of the U.S., including the Midwest and South, and their general comments and attitudes were strikingly similar to those of the people to whom I spoke in the metropolitan region where I did my research. Another limitation is that I was able to access only student athletes from NCAA Division I programmes who attended very reputable universities and colleges. Further research would need to examine experiences of student athletes in other athletic associations and less well-regarded schools to see whether and how their experiences compare and contrast with the ones presented in this article.

The Various Claims of ‘It’s Worth It’

What is ‘it’ that entices Canadians to the United States to play varsity sports? Put another way, what are some of the benefits of being a Canadian student athlete in the United States,
according to those who experience it? When student athletes say, ‘obviously it’s worth it’, to what are they referring? What is the appeal of being a student athlete and what does the experience offer? What values and considerations prompt Canadian student athletes to pursue athletics and post-secondary education in another country?

For Christine, the attraction of going south lay primarily in the opportunity to play intercollegiate sports: ‘I definitely wanted to come to an American school because of the hockey. And that was definitely a huge appeal because the hockey is quite a bit better here. There’s obviously a lot more funding for it’. Like Christine, other student athletes I interviewed felt that the level of competition, quality of sport, athletic resources (including facilities), and opportunities to improve their performance were much greater in the United States than in Canada. The funding and support for American inter-collegiate athletics in many schools is impressive. At NCAA Division I schools, tens of thousands of spectators regularly attend football, basketball, and other big-ticket sporting events (Bale 1991). Also, athletic departments, particularly at NCAA Division I schools, can have substantial operating budgets deriving from NCAA broadcasting contracts with major television networks, alumni donations, merchandise sales, advertising rights, and ticket sales, among other sources.

The quality of athletic programmes can, however, vary significantly within divisions and even between different types of sport in individual schools. High levels of funding do not translate inherently into ‘good’ programmes or ‘winning’ teams. The landscape of inter-collegiate athletic programmes in the United States, therefore, is diverse and nuanced. Graham, a hockey player, considered this disparity in American athletic programmes when he decided on which school to attend. He had offers of athletic scholarships from several institutions and decided on the one where the hockey programme was considered the ‘best’, which he judged according to such criteria as the reputation of coaches, winning records, and the level of competition.

As indicated above, part of the appeal is in the perceived difference between American and Canadian university athletic programmes. ‘I really wanted rowing to be my focus in university, whereas in Canada I felt like it was sort of a part of it, but not the whole thing’, Colleen told me. She continued: ‘I feel like here, it’s really defined my university experience. [...] Most of my friends are rowers – and I have friends outside of the sport as well – but it’s been a huge part of what defines me on campus’.

Colleen’s observation that athletics are a part of her identity and substantially shape the way that others perceive her was expressed in similar terms by other student athletes. Playing college sports can be appealing both for the athletic competition and for a sense of camaraderie and connection that comes with being a member of a team. As one student athlete put it, you have an instant family, with the coaches taking a parent’s role and team-mates those of siblings. Also, in the often anonymous spaces of university campuses, student athletes who wear clothing bearing their team’s name and logo demonstrate that they belong to visible and celebrated groups and teams. Since varsity athletes compete at elite athletic levels for the honour of their school, they are valued as part of a privileged group of students. Canadian student athletes immediately attain a level of distinction on their campuses by virtue of being a varsity athlete.

For student athletes like Colleen, American college sport can be the pinnacle of an amateur athletic career. For others, inter-collegiate sports are valued as a training ground for future athletic endeavours. In sport that has professional divisions – such as hockey and baseball – some student athletes view their time in college as an opportunity to develop their strength and ability and to gain the attention of scouts and recruiters from professional teams. I asked Evan
if his reasons for being at an American college extended beyond playing hockey. He responded: ‘No, it was definitely an opportunity to get better, improve, and I have aspirations of professional hockey, so that’s my goal. And you know, I had four years here to develop and now I’m hopefully moving on to pro hockey. So, that’s what my goal was all along’.

While Evan and many of his peers assert that the primary value of being a student athlete is to play American collegiate sport, part of what makes this experience so prestigious and respectable for young Canadian athletes (and their parents) is that student athletes simultaneously attend classes to earn a college degree or diploma. For many Canadian middle-class families, attending university and attaining at least one post-secondary degree is now expected as a minimal requirement for their children (Dyck 2006).

Given the major commitments of time and energy required by varsity athletics and differences in academic standards among American institutions, the actual value of that education could be disputed. But, at minimum, student athletes who follow through with their academic duties will graduate with a diploma or degree. Some student athletes and parents believe that having an American education might be particularly beneficial when applying for jobs in Canada because it will distinguish the student athlete from other job-seekers who have Canadian degrees and mark her or him as ‘unique’. This belief that the distinctiveness of an American education will contribute to career success is linked to increasingly common messages in Canada put forth by schools, media, and even the government regarding the value of travelling internationally and living abroad (Amit 2007).

The value of living abroad ostensibly underpins the whole experience of being a Canadian student athlete in the United States. The student athletes I interviewed, however, generally did not see this aspect as being especially important. Rather, living in the United States was simply necessary in order to play American college sport since Canadian universities do not offer ‘full ride’ scholarships as do their American counterparts.

Living in many parts of the United States may be quite similar in certain respects to living in Canada: the language is the same, at least for anglophones; institutions such as universities operate in familiar ways; and everyday practices are often reasonably like those encountered in Canada. Therefore, the Canadian student athletes who lived in the metropolitan region where I conducted research had the freedom of living away from their families and the excitement of being in a different country, without being too far from home or in too strange an environment. A student athlete from Toronto, for instance, might have a much more ‘foreign’ experience were she or he to move to a different part of Canada such as a small rural community.

Despite similarities between the two countries, student athletes who move to parts of the United States unlike their home province or town do experience ‘culture shock’. Jacob, for example, moved from a small town to a major city in the southern U.S. where he was shocked to see extreme poverty and racial segregation, which he says does not exist in the same way in Canada. He felt that living in a place so different from his home helped him ‘grow up’ during his time at university. Therefore, the distinctive character of local places and regions, not just international borders, matter in affecting the types of ‘foreign experiences’ student athletes have while in the U.S.

Inherent thus far in the described benefits of being a student athlete are embedded assumptions about the value of international travel, inter-collegiate sports, and post-secondary education. As student athletes describe what is valuable about their experiences, they simultaneously identify specific ideas about what young people such as themselves should be doing with their lives. Returning to Miller’s (2001) definition of discourse, student athletes are identify-
ing the normative ideals and sentiments that underpin their lives and influence their reasons for being in the United States pursuing a particular form of young adult lifestyle.

By living these ideals and sentiments in the U.S., student athletes achieve a level of distinction that is recognised and appreciated by many, even those back home in Canada. Ironically, I repeatedly heard frustration during interviews that in Canada, it is not understood just what a ‘big deal’ it is to be a varsity athlete. Evan’s assertion quoted at the beginning of the paper, is that people do not understand the kind of sacrifices he makes. He was referring not just to fellow classmates and teachers, but to family, friends, potential employers, and the general public in Canada. So what are those sacrifices? What are the costs that are ‘obviously’ worth the experience of being a Canadian student athlete in the United States? The three types of costs discussed below were identified and elaborated upon in almost every one of the interviews conducted with current and former student athletes.

The Costs of Being a Student Athlete

Financial

The most immediate and obvious cost of being a Canadian student athlete in the United States – the financial cost – was the one least mentioned during the interviews. Perhaps student athletes are less inclined to speak of this cost because it is often shouldered by their parents and not themselves. In Canada, a commonly held, though inaccurate, assumption is that student athletes who go to the United States receive ‘full ride’ scholarships that offer a ‘free education’. In fact, many student athletes only receive partial scholarships. I asked a varsity coach whether he offers full-ride scholarships to Canadian players in order to entice them to play for his team. He replied: ‘Nope, not all of them. We’ll offer Canadians, um, any range of different things. Yeah, we’ve done scholarships where it’s 25%, 50%, 75%, full-ride’. I told the coach I was surprised to hear this and asked if these players are willing to pay in order to have the experience of playing on his team:

Kids pay. And that’s another myth, another myth that Canadians think it’s all full scholarships the whole time, and it’s not even close. And it’s not even close. And what it is, it’s kids with egos going back home, telling everybody they’re on full scholarships and they’re not. They’re paying some money. They are and it’s, you know, I mean my first year, I had to pay two or three thousand dollars. After that, I didn’t pay. But I got upgraded. And so with these guys, we up-grade them. We don’t promise them. We say we’ll start you at this, we’ll try to – by your last year we’d like to have you on full, but we won’t promise you. But we do that by holding back a scholarship every year and we divvy that up between the guys, giving them 10, 15%. You do that for five guys, it adds up.

Even for the fortunate minority of student athletes who are on ‘full rides’, additional expenses not covered by scholarships (such as flights to and from Canada, taxes, and school books) can equal thousands of dollars each year. In many cases, it would be less expensive for families if their children stayed in Canada to attend university even without any financial assistance from scholarships.

Another factor not often acknowledged in Canadian sports circles when discussing American athletic scholarships is that the parents of the Canadian student athletes can often afford to pay the relatively low cost of post-secondary education in Canada. Unlike in the United States where athletic scholarships are promoted as a way of enabling a post-secondary education for young athletically-gifted persons (often African-Americans) who could not otherwise afford to attend university (Harrison and Lawrence 2003; Sailes 1996), it is largely members of the middle-class in Canada who value and seek athletic scholarships and the experience of being a varsity athlete in the U.S. I was constantly surprised that many of the student athletes I interviewed were from two-
parent families in which at least one of the parents was a professional in law, medicine, or other well paid fields. This is not to suggest that all Canadian student athletes in the United States have wealthy parents; rather, it calls into question the claim that getting a ‘free education’ is what draws people to the United States. It is unlikely that any of the young Canadians interviewed would have been unable to attend university due to financial considerations had they remained in Canada.

There are also substantial expenses that precede becoming a student athlete in the U.S., such as playing in elite leagues, travelling with youth teams, and attending development camps, all of which have a monetary cost usually paid by parents. An application for university entrance and scholarships involves a financial investment, which includes costs for participating in sporting events that university scouts attend, applying to schools, visiting campuses, making long-distance phone calls to coaches, creating athletic résumés and videos, and, in some cases, hiring recruiting agencies.

**Time**

A far more visible and openly discussed cost is that of time. As Fiona described at the beginning of this article, being a student athlete in the United States requires a major commitment of time and energy. Varsity athletes attend full-time classes and also spend up to twenty-five hours per week training and competing in sport. The weekly time commitment grows even greater when factoring in travel time to ‘away’ games at schools that are sometimes in other states. Student athletes usually only had one evening a week free of athletic obligations when they could relax or go out with friends. Even in the ‘off-season’ when there is a break from official inter-collegiate competition, coaches expect student athletes to train and maintain high levels of fitness.

Considering how full student athletes’ schedules are with practices, training sessions, and competitions, to juggle academic and athletic duties can be difficult. Participating in varsity sport limits the amount of time available for study, which in turn influences the type of education, its quality, and even the particular degree pursued. Almost all student athletes I interviewed indicated that, in effect, meeting the demands connected with athletics came first. For a number of them, concern about maintaining a balance between athletics and their studies was not really an issue. The usual priority that varsity sport takes over athletes’ academic commitments is typified in the common practice of skipping classes (with the instructor’s permission) to attend games. None of the student athletes whom I interviewed indicated that they had ever chosen to prioritise classes over competing in games. The parity implied in the term ‘student athlete’ – a term that is preferred by NCAA institutions – does not seem to exist in practice for most of these young people, although some are more determined to seek some degree of balance between classroom and playing field than are others.

Because of the demands that athletics makes in the lives of most student athletes, scheduling classes and selecting degree programmes can be difficult. For example, student athletes choose and schedule courses in a way that will accommodate game and practice times. As Evan mentioned, student athletes will sometimes pursue degrees that they believe are ‘easier’ so that they can invest less effort in classes but maintain a passing grade. The student athletes to whom I spoke, however, were sensitive to the stereotype of the ‘dumb jock’ and emphasised that they manage the same amount of work as do other students. There were also student athletes who seemed to be able to reconcile athletic and academic demands reasonably well, as demonstrated by academic awards they had received alongside the completion of ‘difficult’ degrees such as engineering and business.

The sheer amount of time required by athletic and academic obligations leaves little op-
portunity for rest and relaxation. During her interview, Diana, a basketball player in her freshman year, spoke about how she always felt tired: ‘[I’m] just exhausted from everything. Like, getting up in the mornings, and then by the time you go to bed at night, you’re exhausted. We have to do early-morning things now. Like 6 a.m.s [practices], and by the end of the day, like, midday, you’re just beat. So it’s really, really exhausting’.

This combination of exhaustion and lack of free time also means that the social side of being a varsity athlete is quite different from that of other students. While some of the student athletes to whom I spoke seemed hesitant to acknowledge that they were ‘missing out’, most willingly admitted that their college experiences did not involve the same types of events and relationships usual among students who are not varsity athletes. They had an idea of the ‘typical’ college life, which they felt they were unable to enjoy. Evan, who was about to graduate, spoke about how he made few friendships outside his team and felt that he had to sacrifice typical college experiences like partying, joining university clubs, and attending campus events: ‘We’re really limited to going out, meeting people. […] I definitely had a lot of fun but, you know, you don’t really – I kind of, not regret, but, like I, being on the hockey team, I never really got out and experienced all of what the university has to offer and all that kind of stuff’.

Evan also spoke about other restrictions that result from being a hockey player:

I feel like people always know who I am and they think I’m some kind of arrogant person maybe because I’m on the hockey team. I think the hockey team in general has a bad rep, probably because – it’s probably deserved because a lot of guys are idiots [laughs] but I think, um, I think also it’s like we’re on the hockey team and there’s twenty-seven guys and, you know, we go out once a week during the year. We kind of tend to stay in our group ‘cause that’s all we know. Like I don’t have any other friends outside of the hockey team, so. […] Other guys don’t like us and, and we’re intimidating in being such a big group, so it’s really hard to meet people and it’s hard to meet, like, you know, obviously we meet people but, I haven’t really met a lot of people over four years compared to what most people probably do ’cause they get to go out more often and less intimidating being in smaller groups. […] We’re not welcome at house parties ’cause there’s too many of us. No one wants twenty guys showing up, you know, ruining the place.

Competition

Evan, his team-mates, and other student athletes I interviewed live in a constant atmosphere of competition. Coaches, school administrators, fellow students, and alumni expect varsity athletes to perform at the highest level possible in matches against other teams, and to win. This high level of competition prevalent in American varsity sports is a major attraction for Canadian athletes. What they might not appreciate, however, until they are in the midst of competing as varsity athletes is just how demanding this environment can be. Even during practices, student athletes are expected to try as hard as they would in competition against another team. Charlotte, a field hockey player, described the importance of practice:

C: Like, here [in Canada], you’d know that every game you play, you’re going to start. But there you have to prove yourself, like, during every single practice.

M: So practice really counts. It’s not just to kind of train; it really matters.

C: Yeah! Like if you have a bad practice, you’re not going to start. Even if you’re the best player on the team, it doesn’t matter. You have to prove yourself every practice.

The blurring of lines between team-mates and opponents in practices is one example of how varsity sports can figure largely in the mental and emotional states of student athletes. Trying to meet the expectations of coaches and team-mates can take a psychological toll, so that student athletes feel stressed and sometimes doubt their own abilities.
Lauren spoke about the mental strain that she experienced as a varsity athlete. Like Charlotte, Lauren’s team-mates were made to compete against each other for the reward of playing on the starting line-up, which led to conflict in the team. Lauren also felt that her coaches were tough to the point of being mean, which she claims is common with most NCAA coaches whose jobs depend upon producing winning teams. Lauren spoke about this psychological tension:

It’s a head game. Like everything is mental. And that’s what I hated ‘cause they [the coaches] screw around with your head. And even if you think you have a good practice, they’ll bench you on purpose just to see how you’re gonna react and if you’re gonna let it bring you down or if you’re gonna fight and, you know, try and be better.

This competitiveness in athletics can also lead to physical injuries alongside the other demands made of athletes’ bodies. One student athlete had experienced three MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) procedures, a couple of x-rays, and surgery in the previous month. He brushed this off as being part of a ‘bad year injury-wise’.

Student athletes never raised the issue of how the physical demands resulting from constantly having to perform at the peak of one’s athletic ability might affect them in the long-term. They did express concern about keeping their scholarship should they experience an injury that prevented them from playing. Their coaches, however, assured them that an injury would not jeopardize their scholarship, an assurance that they sought to verify through carefully observing the experiences of fellow team-mates who had incurred injuries.

**Conclusion**

‘Obviously it’s worth it’ seems, at first, a straightforward statement with a simple message: being a Canadian student athlete in the United States is obviously worth the cost. Frequent pronouncements regarding student athletes seem to support this claim: they receive a ‘free education’, they ‘live abroad’, and have the opportunity to compete in elite university athletics. This message promotes the notion that being a student athlete in the U.S. is a positive, worthwhile endeavour, even though the consistency of the claim obscures the variety of experiences.

And yet, to an outsider, the types of challenges and demands relating to finance, time, and the pressure of competition that being a student athlete requires makes it difficult to see why and how the value of this experience would be obvious. Why do these young Canadians all reiterate some variation of this claim, even when, for some of them, it seems to contradict their lived experiences rather blatantly?

Part of the answer surfaces when one identifies this claim as being reflective of a broader discourse that encases the lives of Canadian student athletes. I want to avoid suggesting that student athletes misunderstand or dissemble about their experiences. Rather, it is a reflection of how they understand these as mediated by the experiences of those around them and the messages they hear from coaches, team-mates, school officials, peers and people back home. They repeat this claim, which they believe to be obvious, because for them and those around them, it is taken to be so.

This discourse is persuasive. Young Canadian athletes hear it for many years before going to university, for student athleticism is an intrinsic, long-lasting part of who these individuals are as young adults and have been as children and youths. By becoming student athletes at American schools, they have succeeded, and for some, the peak of their athletic careers has been accomplished. To suggest that the experience might not be worth it, that they have regrets, would be to question the value not only of the years in university, but also the costs that have gone into achieving that goal, which extend far back into childhood. There-
fore, to acknowledge that being a student athlete might not be ‘worth it’ potentially would be very revealing. Such an admission could be interpreted not as a statement about varsity athletics but as a personal admission of a kind that many elite competitors would view as exhibiting weakness. It is the kind of attitude that could get you ‘cut’ from the team.

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Meghan Gilgunn completed her Masters degree in Social Anthropology at Simon Fraser University in 2008 and has been employed since as an Analyst with the Indian Residential Schools Adjudication Secretariat. Her research interests include sport, citizenship, and the nation-state.

Notes

1. All names have been replaced with pseudonyms in this article.
2. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the major governing body of collegiate athletic programmes in the United States. The NCAA divides schools into three classifications: Division I has the ‘big sports’ schools that place high value on athletic excellence and offer ‘full-ride’ scholarships that cover tuition, housing, and meals; Division II institutions offer a combination of athletic and academic scholarships; and Division III has athletic programmes, but not athletic scholarships. Ivy League universities are an exception to this categorisation: technically, they do not offer athletic scholarships, regardless of their NCAA division. The NCAA divisions exist so that, in theory, teams will compete against others who possess a similar skill level and have the same level of emphasis on athletics in their schools. To set a Division I team against a Division III team presumably would result in the first team winning because of the massive financial advantage in funding sports to which the former institution generally has access. Research has suggested, however, that these boundaries are not as clearly defined in practice (Wheeler 1996).
3. Noel Dyck interviewed university sports officials in the U.S. and parents in Canada as part of a larger investigation of young Canadians’ acceptance of athletic scholarships in the U.S. See his article in this issue and also Dyck (2006) for further discussion of their perspectives upon athletic scholarships.
4. Moreover, despite the substantial attention that has been devoted to American inter-collegiate athletics in the United States, the greatest part of the published literature on this topic is based on statistical data of a sort. The type of data that would permit reliable comparison between my research findings on Canadian student athletes and American and non-North American student athletes at U.S. colleges and universities is not available.

References