

WHARTON'S KENNETH SHROPSHIRE ON HOW UNIVERSITIES CAN HELP ATHLETES ATTAIN MEANINGFUL DEGREES

THE PROBLEM:

The pursuit of a professional sports career often comes at the price of a good education for college athletes who find themselves sacrificing study for practice. The revenue and publicity generated by college sports is powerful enough that schools are incentivized to place athletic prowess over academics. It's an inequity gap that grows wider for young Black men and women who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and may view professional sports as a way out of their economic circumstances. While a pro-sports career can certainly be lucrative, it's exceedingly rare. A scant percentage of college athletes make it to the pros, where they may experience only a few seasons of play. But the benefits of a meaningful college degree last a lifetime. That's the argument that Wharton's Kenneth L. Shropshire lays out in his book with co-author Collin D. Williams Jr., *The Miseducation of the Student Athlete: How to Fix College Sports* (Wharton School Press).

The title pays homage to *The Mis-education of the Negro*, the 1933 book by Carter G. Woodson that exhorts African Americans to demand better education from a system that failed them. Through examples and details, Shropshire and Williams explain why educating the athlete is key to helping them forge fulfilling careers. The book proposes a paradigm shift: Reform the college sports system to put academics on equal footing with athletics, which will better serve students in the long run, especially those students of color.



THE SOLUTION:

In their book, Shropshire and Williams offer a framework for reform that they term the "Student-Athlete Manifesto." Their 13 recommendations, some of which are listed below, are intended to improve the quantity and quality of college degrees for student-athletes.

- 1.** Make obtaining a meaningful degree the priority—not football, basketball, or any sport.
- 2.** Mandate academic boot camps for entering student-athletes and professional boot camps for exiting student-athletes.
- 3.** Review and enforce existing limits on hours of sports participation.
- 4.** Make sure athletes are the ones actually doing the academic work.
- 5.** Standardize a way to more accurately track all graduation rates.
- 6.** Increase accountability by requiring the NCAA to routinely report data disaggregated by race, sex, sport, division, and particular subsets of institutions within a division.



THE SCHOLAR: *KENNETH L. SHROPSHIRE*

Kenneth L. Shropshire has spent 40 years as a professor, business consultant, author, and lawyer. His career has focused on a wide range of issues related to the business of sports, from contract negotiation and stadium construction to race and diversity. At Wharton, he served as a professor of business ethics and legal studies, and also Africana studies, for 30 years before retiring and returning as senior advisor to the dean for the Wharton Coalition for Equity and Opportunity.

Shropshire attended Stanford University on a football scholarship, playing as a center and linebacker while earning a bachelor's degree in economics. He was inspired to write the book because of his own experience as a student athlete, and his son's experience as a college tennis player a generation later. In the book, Shropshire recalled when Stanford's first Black coach, Bill Moultrie, recruited him with these words of advice: "Son, I don't really care if you're All-American on the football field, I want you to be All-American in the classroom."

"A lot has changed in college sports since the book was published in 2014. But even with all these changes, the principles still hold true," Shropshire said. "Student athletes still need to have a quality and meaningful degree as a top priority." Shropshire also earned a juris doctorate from Columbia Law School and was a member of the California Bar. Before joining academia, he practiced law in Los Angeles and was an executive with the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee. He has worked with numerous professional sports leagues and athletes, served on public boards, and was the acting director of the Jackie Robinson Museum.

The Wharton Coalition for Equity and Opportunity (CEO) creates research-driven solutions to help current and future leaders ensure equity in business relationships and leadership. Dean Erika James, who is Wharton's first Black and first female dean, is emblematic of a paradigm shift in executive leadership. She has launched the Wharton Coalition for Equity and Opportunity as the hallmark of her leadership commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The initiative is being led by Kenneth L. Shropshire, Wharton emeritus professor of legal studies and business ethics. Shropshire is the former director of the Wharton Sports Business Initiative and former CEO of the Global Sport Institute.