

## **Devon Ramsay**

### **Introduction**

Good afternoon Chairman Rockefeller and Members of the Committee, it is an honor and a pleasure to have this opportunity to be in your presence and share my story and thoughts on the current state of college athletics. Let me first thank you and your staff for the invitation.

### **Academic and Athletic Background**

I was born to Sharon Lee and Devon Anthony Ramsay on December 8th 1988 in Red Bank, New Jersey. My mother has always valued a strong education and sent me to the Rumson County Day School, a Blue Ribbon winning private school that covered kindergarten through the eighth grade. At Rumson, I excelled in the classroom and participated in athletics. By 2003, My achievements at Rumson County Day School garnered the attention of many prestigious boarding schools along the east coast. I decided to attend the Lawrenceville School, an elite preparatory and boarding school outside of Princeton New Jersey. This would be the best environment academically and athletically. At Lawrenceville, I would go on to have a successful academic and athletic career graduating in 2007. In 2007, I signed a letter of intent to attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. What drew me to this amazing school was its esteemed reputation as a top academic institution and the hire of then new head coach Butch Davis. This showed that the University had an all around commitment to excellence.

My career at the University of North Carolina has been one filled with adversity. I have underwent five surgeries, been through three head coaches, have been asked if I wanted to transfer and if I wanted to take a medical redshirt. However, despite all the adversity, I have managed to succeed being named an offensive starter for four out of my six seasons, named as one of the top three fullbacks in the country by NFL Draft Analyst Mel Kiper Jr. and most importantly attaining a degree in Public Policy with a concentration in business. After graduation, I moved back home to Red Bank, where I pursued my dreams of making an NFL team. I would get an opportunity with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers; however, I did not end up making the roster.

### **NCAA Case**

In the summer of 2010, two of my teammates had violated NCAA rules and attended a party thrown by sports agents. The University of North Carolina then launched their own investigation into the matter and discovered several potential counts of academic fraud. After the final practice before we are to play Clemson, I was told to report to one of our conference rooms and brought in for questioning by University officials. Before the questioning began and was told that this conversation would be recorded and I was asked if I needed a lawyer. I thought I had been called to see if they could find any more leads in the investigation. They then proceed to ask my definition and understanding of plagiarism. After which the investigators presented a two year old email

correspondence between myself and a tutor. In said email, I ask the university's tutor for help with grammar and overall quality. She replies by adding four sentences to a two and half page paper.

They began to ask me if I turned in the paper as the tutor sent it and I couldn't remember since it had been two years for a two and half page paper. In the following four weeks that I was held out of competition, I was sent to see the Attorney General of UNC's Honor Court who came to the conclusion that since there was no final version of the paper present, this case would not go to trial due to lack of evidence.

As I was being held out by UNC, an official from the compliance office proposed that if I were to plead guilty after being held out for so many games that the NCAA would in fact allow me to play. At this time, I believed that UNC's compliance to be well versed in NCAA policy. It was a shocking blow when the NCAA had ruled I was guilty of "academic fraud" which strips away my remaining eligibility and tarnishes my reputation. After coming to the realization that UNC was more concerned with penalties and loss of scholarships than protecting one of its own, my mother and I set out to find lawyers that would hopefully have my best interests at heart. However, none wanted to stand against the NCAA nor its membership. Fortunately, Robert Orr, a former State Supreme Court judge, reached out to my mother after reading an article in The News and Observer. Without Judge Orr's legal knowledge and tenacity, I would have no one to turn to. As we went through the appeals process, which was only possible with the endorsement of the University of North Carolina, the leadership at UNC once again wanted me to take a plea for a reduced sentenced. However, Judge Orr, my mother and I needed to have my name unsullied. By going back and looking at the original interview, reviewing a lack of evidence and disregarding the guided testimony, the NCAA overturned its ruling and reinstated my eligibility. Unfortunately, the first game of the next season, I tore three ligaments in my left knee. After receiving a sixth year of eligibility, I was not able to make a return to the field of play in my final game.

## **Internships**

A few of my friends from the Lawrenceville School went on to play football in the Ivy League and one of the things I noticed and admired is that they were able to participate in assorted internships during their summers and upon graduation received great job offers. An internship gives you direction, teaches you valuable life lessons and prepares you for a level of professionalism. At a competitive football school, completing an internship is almost impossible. In order to be eligible to receive your scholarship stipend and grant in aid (if you're eligible) one must be enrolled in a certain number of credit hours. I've seen several teammates attempt to manage school, summer workouts and their internship. Most of these athletes ended up quitting their internship because of the sheer level of exhaustion experienced on an average day. Only one was able to complete his internship because it counted towards his credit hours. At the University of North Carolina, football players are one of the only teams not allowed to participate in University camps, which would hone skills for those that want to get into coaching and create another source of income. During a panel discussion about the documentary *Schooled: The Price of College Sport*, Head Coach

of the George Mason Men's Basketball team Paul Hewitt stated that his team has to do an internship before they graduate. I think this is a great practice. If the NCAA truly wants to develop "student athletes" and prepare them for success off the field, then they should mandate that all athletes complete an internship. The reason it needs to be mandated is because there exists a culture, that demonizes activity that won't directly help a program. Players that go for a semester are labeled as "selfish" and "lazy", when in fact he is only improving his value for the likelihood that he will not make the NFL.

I have come to realize that there is a void in college athletics. The NCAA as an institution no longer protects the "student athlete". They are more concerned with signage and profit margins. As I was called up to the initial meeting with UNC's investigators, I wasn't aware that I needed to defend myself against my university and the NCAA and as a student I lacked the resources and knowledge to defend myself against an eighty year old system. My family lacked the resources to hire a lawyer and if I refused to be interviewed I would have been held out until I testified. In the NCAA, college football players have a small window of opportunity to prove their worth to the NFL. Therefore, every game you miss is a lost opportunity and a means to devalue your worth. There needs to exist an entity that quickly and effectively advocates for the "student athlete" I was extremely fortunate that Judge Orr reached out to my family to help. However, It terrifies me how many students might have had their eligibility unjustly taken and their reputation damaged. The "student athlete" has a short career and is an amazing renewable resource and because of that the NCAA is able to take advantage of naive young men and women. There needs to be an organization that will in fact protect the college athlete and has no ties to the financial well being of the Universities or to the NCAA. Allowing the NCAA to continue to intimidate schools and athletes is dangerous and unfair. To quote a famous Roman poet, "Who will watch the watchmen?"

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to taking your questions.