

US college life: when sport is a must

With the rugby world cup hot in the news these days, it is interesting to observe the recipe for a successful sports team. Talking to Kiara Seggewiss and Devon Johnson helped put the spotlight on the fact that most of the USA team members get recruited from college. Whereas in France, they mostly come from private sport clubs. How different can sports culture be between these two countries ?

The sport culture in the US



Kyra Seggewiss started playing sports at eight years old when she moved from Canada to the US as a way to meet friends and make the move easier to adjust. “This is why basketball represents a sense of belonging and family. I leaned on my teammates to be my family as I had none here.” She has spent lots of holidays with her teammates since she was young. “Basketball also has built my work ethic and made me be confident in achieving my goals.”

Picture of Kira playing basketball

As for Devon Johnson, he first started playing football when he was nine. He discovered this sport as a way to have fun all day with his friends. When he grew up, he began playing basketball in school, and over time, sport became a way to relieve stress for him. When we talk about sport, the first thing that comes to his mind is that “it represents my level of competitiveness, determination and commitment”



Picture of Devon playing basketball

Everybody watches college matches, people can buy tickets which allows them to go to all the home games. Why is it so great to go see non professional matches ? “In the US, it is something to do in our free time, it brings a sense of community”, explains Kyra. Paying to watch college matches is actually very popular in this country, it’s like going to the movies. Americans enjoy cheering for college competitions, “it’s part of the American culture”.

The budget invested into college sports in the US and in France is nothing alike. In France, regarding the expenses directed towards school sports and elite sports, the Ministry of National Education is the primary contributor within the government. Providing an average of 5.5 billion euros in 2017.

In contrast, in the USA, the budget is on another level. For the 1,100 schools across all three NCAA (National College Athletic Association) divisions, roughly \$18.1 billion was spent on athletics in 2018. \$6.5 billion comes from institutional and government support and \$1.5 billion from student fees.

Even if we put aside the US's taste for grandiose events, ceremonies and their incredible taste in showmanship, the costs are undeniably different between the two cultures. Which inevitably implies some difference in treatment at school.



Photo de football wife sur Pexels.com

The sport culture in the US

Belonging to a sport's club at school can influence your application's decision. Indeed, students can apply for top rank colleges through athletic credentials, and receive scholarships. That even created scandals in the USA involving celebrities corrupting colleges to get their kids in it through athletic credentials even though they don't do any sports.

Being part of a college sports club gives you the opportunities to achieve success not only through your grades, but also through your sports result.

D1 players are the most popular one and belong to the highest division. They usually go professional. Often signing contracts before the end of college, they are the "future athletes of the country".

D2, D3 are divisions where you are more or less on your own. It is possible to go professional but work hard to get there by yourself. D2, D3 College athletes can be paid through educational scholarships. They don't always end up professionals but they get a lot of deals with brands, sponsorships, marketing deals.

In France, most sport clubs are private, and most renowned athletes come from private clubs. School clubs are rarely the way to become professional, they are usually used to be initiating students to different sports. "Going pro" undeniably implies a lot of sacrifices. However, should education be part of the sacrifice ?

College : Sports or education ?

When in the US, joining clubs is highly encouraged by the schools, does it tend to sweep away students' priority on education as well ?

Discussing with Kyra Seggewiss and Devon Johnson, their opinion on the importance given to sport in college is quite enlightening. Whether it is distracting for students' education or that on the contrary, it actually gives new success opportunities, their vision on sport is very captivating.

First of all, playing basketball taught Kyra a lot, such as "how to work with different people, reach a common goal, but it made me a goal oriented person. I realize that I can't be giving so much time to basketball because I need to get good grades. It takes time going to the gym plus practice is almost 4 to 6 hours spent. It can be distracting, even more when we go on week end trip, it takes time. But, it taught me time management to make things done"

Even though it takes time and devotion, Kyra sees beyond that, "I think it is beneficial because some kids who can't go to college based on academic skills, can go thanks to their athleticism, so everybody can try to be an athlete and get education. If you can't afford school, sport is an opportunity." Indeed, sport "can be their way out. If somebody is poor, instead of a minimum wage job, they can get sports scholarships. It also helps stay focused, not getting into violence, but staying in school."

Devon adds, « It helps people keep their grades up, you need to have at least a 2,0 GPA to keep doing sports. Otherwise you are on academic probation. He got put off the team that way and waited for the next year to play."

Sport, the American dream ?

With no doubt, sport culture in the US is widely generalized compared to France, and is even part of their education's basis. What is sure is that even through the US sport culture, you can see the will of the American dream with equal opportunities for everyone. That's the American spirit.