Contestant: **T-2**

Many think that the world in black and white. Society has determined that individuals can only be one thing or another and there is no room for grey. On this notion lies the foundation of the oft-cited statement “jocks are dumb.” Many criticize the NCAA and its members, including athletics, for encouraging laziness and forcing students into professional sports careers too early. However, most make these assumptions without knowing all of the facts.

According to the NCAA, 86 percent of its affiliated athletes graduate within six years. When compared to the non-athlete graduation rate, 65 percent, this statistic shows the extent to which student athletes are committed to obtaining an education. Most of those who criticize the NCAA and its affiliates do to without any information on the real numbers.

As CBS News legal analyst and sports correspondent Jack Ford noted, many NCAA athletes on scholarships would not have the opportunity to attend college without athletic scholarships. Ford spoke from experience, having been one of those impoverished students before attending Yale University on a free-ride football scholarship. This opportunity allowed him to get a quality education while pursuing what he loved to do.

Some argue that the NCAA is to loose with its rules, and that “one and done” athletics take advantage of the system, but they fail to realize that the NCAA does not develop these rules, and cannot be held accountable for guidelines they do not implement.

In order to dissolve the stigma against college NCAA athletes, people must become educated and follow the facts before criticizing. The media should help build a positive influence and accurate statistics so that naysayers know what they are dealing with. These athletes are people too. They have goals and desires, and though they do not need the approval of anyone else, they certainly deserve respect for the hard work they put in. Many go on to have careers in professional sports or the professional job market, sometimes choosing both. They are more than their sport, and that should not invalidate them as people.