

Military Academic Athletes

This week, I saw a story about Tim Duncan going back to the Virgin Islands to help with hurricane relief. He raised over three million dollars and delivered over 60,000 pounds of food. Duncan was a star basketball player in college and the pros. That got me to thinking about athletes who attended our military academies and later became a star in professional sports. David Robinson, teammate of Duncan's came to mind, so I did some research.

After graduating from high school in 1983, Robinson, who scored 1320 on his SATs, followed his father's path and enrolled at the U.S. Naval Academy. There, he continued to play basketball, turning in a respectable freshman season by averaging 7.6 points per game. Growing seven inches to 7'1", Robinson became one of the most dominant centers in all of college basketball. By his senior year he was the NCAA's best player. He was named the College Player of the Year. That spring, in the 1987 NBA draft, the San Antonio Spurs selected Robinson with the first overall pick. After serving his obligation in the Navy, he joined the Spurs and had an all-star career. In addition to making a difference on court, Robinson donated \$9 million during his playing days toward the building of the Carver Academy, an independent school in San Antonio that's geared toward students from culturally mixed communities.

Another Naval Academy graduate is also worth mentioning, Roger Staubach. Staubach won the Heisman Trophy. Staubach in 1965 and went on to serve four years of active duty service in the Navy, with one year of overseas duty in Vietnam. Staubach played 11 years of professional football with the Dallas Cowboys. He was elected into the Hall of Fame in 1985. Also active in charity work, Staubach was on the Board of Directors of the United Way of America and the Board of Advisors of the Children's Scholarship Fund. He played an active part in the American Cancer Society Annual Children's Luncheon, and other civic, charitable and professional organizations.

Of course, one cannot write about successful military athletes without mentioning Blanchard and Davis, running backs at West Point, known as Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside. Felix Anthony "Doc" Blanchard is best known as the college football player who became the first ever junior to win the Heisman Trophy, Maxwell Award and was the first ever football player to win the James E. Sullivan Award, all in 1945. Although drafted third in the NFL draft, Blanchard chose to make the US Air Force his career, serving in Vietnam where he flew 113 missions and retiring as a Colonel.

Glenn Davis won the Heisman at Army in 1946, and while he was the second overall pick in the 1947 draft by the Detroit Lions, he didn't play his first game in the NFL until 1950. He served three years in the Army after college. Unfortunately, a knee injury suffered during the filming of a movie ("Spirit of West Point" in 1947) meant he never was at his best in the NFL.