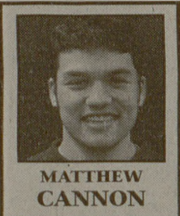


OPINION

THE BATTALION

Nothing Special

A&M should treat, provide all students, even athletes, with same benefits



MATTHEW CANNON

It is hard to spend a year on the Texas A&M campus without hearing the phrase "world-class university." While it is nice to have school pride, it is even nicer to be realistic: A&M is not a world-class university — not yet, anyway. A world-class university is a place where students come first. Unfortunately, A&M is a place where student-athletes come first, and to be honest, students and student-athletes are vastly different creatures. Only when the University decides to stop pandering to athletics and start emphasizing academics will A&M become the great university it can be.

The emphasis on athletics starts before students even get to college. For many students, making it to college is no easy task. Students must work hard to make good grades throughout high school, do well on the SAT, and spend large amounts of time filling out college applications and applying for scholarships. When, if they are lucky, they will get into their first-choice school and be able to scrounge up the necessary funds.

However, if a "student" is 6 foot 3, weighs 220 pounds and can catch an oblong leather ball, no such effort is needed. Yes, it must be nice to be a football player.

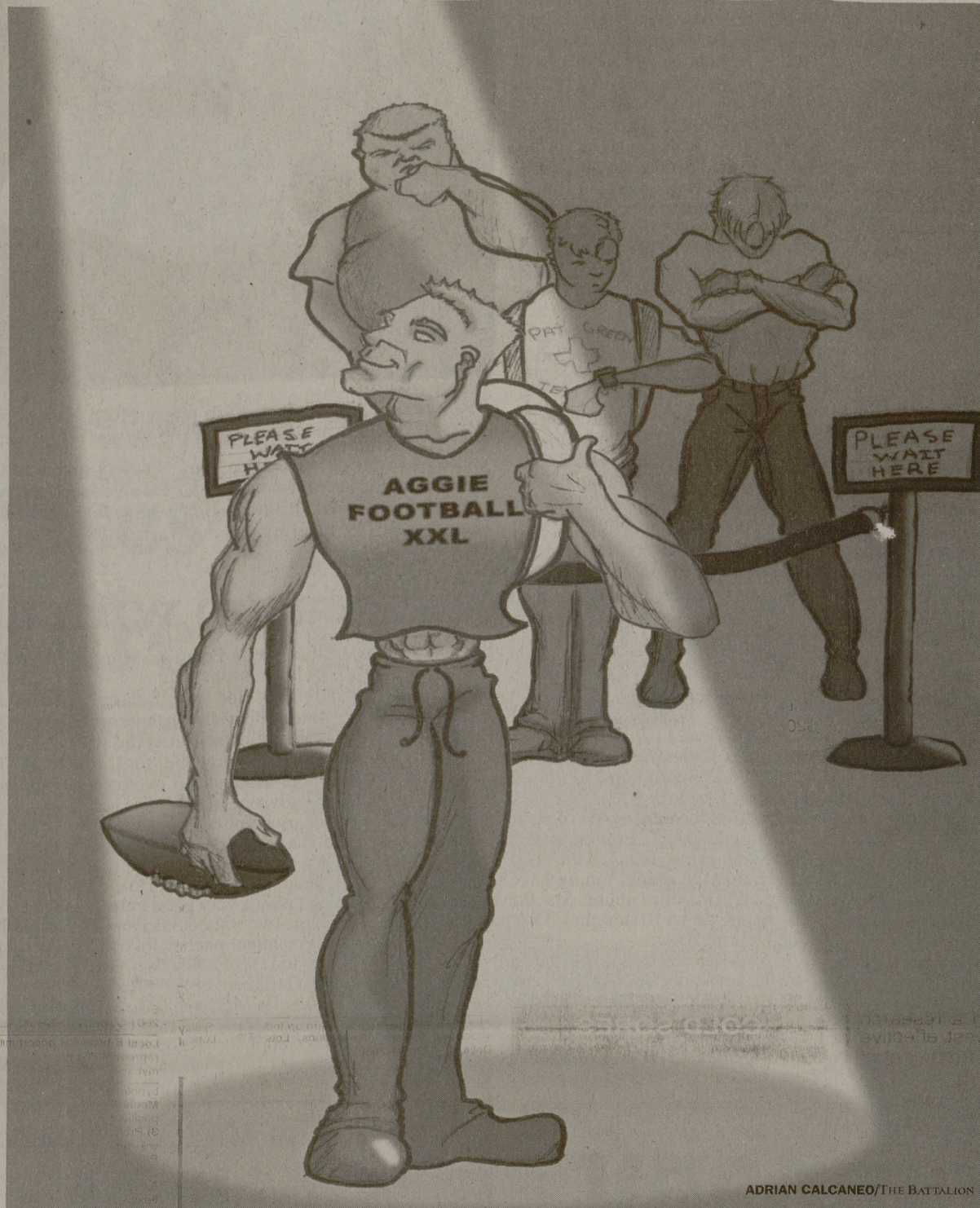
At A&M, high school football players are recruited in ways that can be described only as questionable. According to Tim Cassidy, assistant athletic director for football at A&M, this may include in-home visits by Cassidy and Co., all-expenses-paid visits to A&M (including hotel accommodations and free meals), and full scholarships (tuition, books, and room and board).

If A&M ever recruited academically talented students in this manner, it would bring the brightest students in the country to College Station. In addition, while most real students are worried that their 1100 SAT score will not be good enough for A&M, football and other athletic recruits are fretting over the whopping 20 they must make to be eligible to play college sports. There are people on campus who scored almost as well as a perfect 800 — on only one section of the test.

Bart Childs, chairman of the A&M Athletic Council and a computer science professor, said in a Battalion interview in Fall 1999, "Like every major university, athletes are admitted with lower academic standards than other students. Particularly for [football and basketball], many of the athletes we recruit were not great students in high school."

This kind of double standard should not exist at an institute of higher learning.

Once athletes have been successfully recruited, they are offered money in exchange for their athletic services. The Athletic Department is fond of calling this a "scholarship" although it often has nothing to do with scholarship. A number of football recruits receive full scholarships to attend A&M, even though some of



ADRIAN CALCANEO/THE BATTALION

them have not only struggled academically in high school, but will struggle here as well.

Meanwhile, academic scholarships offered by the Honors Program are rarely full scholarships and are only given to people who exemplify an entire range of qualities, including academic excellence, leadership skills and community involvement.

In addition, an academic scholarship is taken away if the student does not perform well academically. If athletes lose their scholarships when they do not perform to their fullest potential, then somebody should explain why A&M basketball players still have scholarships.

All these discrepancies are strange, especially considering that the students receiving academic scholarships are integral to Vision 2020. Unless college ranking systems start considering "quality of athletics" as an indicator for top 10 public universities, A&M's priorities are backwards.

The pampering does not stop with money, either. Athletes have access to the Cain Hall complex. It includes an athlete computer lab complete with full-time staff, free tutoring services for athletes, Cain Dining Hall, and front-door parking. The only way regular students can get access to Cain is to live there, and they still do not receive some of the benefits, such as free tutoring.

One former A&M athlete, archer and senior biomedical science major Amanda Magee, said athletes do not even have to register for classes: They just hand in their first-choice schedules to advisers, who enter them into classes before anyone else, including student workers and honors students, has registered. This is sad, considering the hours of stress and frustration normal students often face trying to register for classes by phone.

It would be a different story entirely if the athletes were performing well academically. But the lackluster academic performance of athletes as a group has been well documented. According to the 1993-'94 graduation figures from the Registrar's Office, the graduation rate for student-athletes was 63 percent, compared to 71 percent for all students. The graduation rates for football and basketball players is pathetic: 38 percent and 33 percent, respectively. According to the Athletic Department, during Fall 1999, 63 percent of student-athletes earned grade-point ratios of 3.0 or lower, compared to only 49 percent of all students.

A&M is already considered one of the premier athletic universities in the country, and it is easy to see why. However, if the University has serious aspirations of becoming world-class, academics must be put first. A&M has tremendous potential, but it will never achieve greatness if it continues to leave good students second in line behind athletes.

Matthew Cannon is a senior biomedical science major.

Space for qualified only



GEORGE DEUTSCH

In 1986, the Russian Aviation and Space Agency established its dominance in long-duration human spaceflight with the Mir space station. Mir, which means peace in Russian, has conducted groundbreaking research and experiments in its 15 years in orbit. But that orbit has been anything but peaceful as of late, due to computer failure, fire, explosions and in-orbit collisions. The Russian space program is planning to send Mir hurtling through the atmosphere toward the Pacific, completely burning it up in the process.

MirCorp, an Amsterdam-based company, wanting to exploit Mir and the Russian space program, has different plans for the orbiting disappointment. MirCorp is intent on marketing either Mir or Russia's new International Space Station (ISS) as the world's hottest vacation spot. The price for six-day trip is \$20 million.

If Russia wants to have continued technological progress in space, it must abandon the hazardous, uneconomical Mir and forbid civilian passengers to buy their way aboard Russian space shuttles and effectively into the Russian space program.

California millionaire Dennis Tito, scheduled to be the first tourist in space, will launch from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on April 30. Though Tito admits his chances of going to Mir are not good, he remains hopeful.

"I believe the chance of me going to Mir is less than 1 percent, but I think it is highly likely that I will end up flying to the International Space Station," he recently said in an interview with Space.com.

Sending a civilian on a \$20 million joyride into space undermines the legitimacy and integrity of the Russian space program. Becoming an astronaut is more than just hard work. It is a national honor, and that position must not be heaped by an eccentric millionaire who has money to throw around.

Astronauts and engineers are schooled and trained for years for the privilege of space exploration, and now it is for sale? Space missions should have a scientific objective — they should not be reduced to \$20 million guided tours.

Somewhere there is a qualified cosmonaut who may need the experience this mission will provide, but his career and future will take backseat to a millionaire's money. Unfortunately, this looks like it will be more than a one time event for the cash-strapped Russian space program, which is struggling to find a dependable source of income.

Not only is this proposed mission a slap in the face of those who take space travel seriously, it also poses an extreme risk for the Russian space program and its cosmonauts. Though Tito will likely visit ISS and not the aging

Mir, the dangers and risks involved in space station life are still very real.

If Mir's success is any indication of what to expect from the ISS, Tito might get more than he bargained for. Do not forget Mir's disastrous collision with an unmanned cargo ship, or the countless computer failures and fires the creaky station has undergone — and these were in the presence of trained professionals.

Letting an untrained civilian tag along on a space mission jeopardizes the lives of all those on board. No amount of money can substitute for training and preparation in space, where even the smallest mistakes can prove fatal.

When did Russia's space program lose sight of its purpose? Technological advancement and long-term human presence in space are not achieved by selling mission seats to the highest bidder. The disaster-prone Mir, and any plans of sending tourists into space, must be abandoned if Russia is to maintain its dominance in space exploration and its respect among space-travel enthusiasts.

George Deutsch is a sophomore journalism major.

CARTOON OF THE DAY



THE UNCARTOONIST

Life or Death

Wife should choose in right-to-die case

Robert Wendland has been on life support for seven years. His wife and children would like to remove the feeding tubes and let him die peacefully, so they might have some closure with the accident they believe took their father's life.



MELISSA BEDSOLE

But Wendland's mother insists her son should continue to live a life stuck in a hospital bed, surviving only by the tube in his throat. It is a difficult decision, but Wendland's past opinions and more recent actions give reason to believe he does not want to live the way he is now and should be allowed to die.

For years, the question of inducing death for ill or comatose patients has been debated. An ongoing case in California is not debating whether cutting off life support is right or wrong, but rather who gets to decide when it is time to let go.

No one knows what the inner world of Wendland's life is like. Maybe no one would want to know. For 16 months after his accident in 1993 he lay flat, only occasionally twitching. In 1995, Wendland began to show signs of awareness. He can move his arms or legs when asked. He can answer some questions and seems to interpret what doctors and visitors say to him, but the doctors and family need to do some interpreting of their own. Maybe Wendland doesn't want to live like this — if this is living at all.

When he began to show signs of awareness, doctors defined Wendland's condition as a state of semiconsciousness. At that point, Rose, his wife and the mother of their three children, had the right to ask doctors to remove his feeding tube (under California law), but she chose to give him the chance to pull through. As time passed, the circumstances of the situation changed in his wife's eyes, and it should be her right to change her mind.

In his semiconsciousness, Robert Wendland's feeding tube repeatedly came dislodged. After the fourth incident, his wife decided he was trying to tell her that he would rather be allowed to die.

When she made plans in 1995 to remove the

feeding tube, Wendland's mother, Florence, went to court to save her son. Judge Bob McNatt ruled in favor of Florence Wendland, saying that Rose Wendland had not presented "clear and convincing evidence" to prove her husband's desire to die. At that point, the judge admitted he did not know whether he was "preserving Robert's life or sentencing him to life."

This case is diving into unexplored territory, and people on both sides of the argument are fighting out of fear of the precedent they think this case might set. Like many cases that go to the Supreme Court for action, it is imperative that a decision be made only for Wendland's specific situation.

Two years before her husband's accident, Rose Wendland had to make the decision to take her own father off life support, and her husband told her she "had done the right thing." She believes her husband would want her to do the right thing again and let this seven-year ordeal come to an end. She does not believe that he would want to be kept alive in this condition. She told "Good Morning, America" that, "What he said was, 'If I could not be a father, a husband or a provider, then why even exist?'"

Because his life is being artificially preserved, Wendland's wife and children have not been able to deal with his death. They do not believe he is alive, and they want to move on with their lives the way that they believe their father would have wanted them to.

Seven years has gone by. While miracles should never be discounted, it is important to think about what Robert Wendland would want.

There are a lot of "maybes" and "what ifs" in these kinds of situations. If "maybe" is fueling the arguments of this case, then Wendland's life (as well as the lives of his children and wife) will continue to be in limbo.

Nothing about life is easy, and deciding to end a life may be one of the hardest choices any person could face. Rose Wendland loves her husband, and if she believes that letting him die would honor his wishes, any court should honor those wishes as well.

Melissa Bedsole is a junior psychology major.