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BYU Student-Athlete Panel¹
IAS 302R | Scott Sanders
February 6, 2026

Behind the noise of BYU athletics lies a quieter reality that a recent student-athlete panel made visible. Here, sports function less as spectacle and more as formation, shaping discipline, responsibility, and public character that endures well beyond any single season.

On campus, it is easy to measure success by scorelines, rankings, and highlight reels, especially in a year when conference shifts and national broadcasts keep BYU in the headlines. But a different story emerged during a recent student-athlete panel held as part of BYU's Sport and Society winter lecture series, where swimmers, volleyball players, and cheerleaders spoke candidly about balancing high-level competition with academics, travel, and training. What they described was not just busyness but a way of life in which early alarms, missed labs, and long road trips quietly serve as a classroom of their own.

That classroom begins with how student-athletes treat time itself. For them, time is not something to squeeze around commitments but something to steward carefully. Travel removes students from campus for days at a time, labs cannot be recreated, and exams must be anticipated rather than managed after the fact. Planning becomes an ethical necessity: assignments are mapped out before flights, professors are contacted early, and responsibilities are honored without shortcuts. What stands out is not complaint, but acceptance. The discipline required by athletics is framed not as sacrifice but as accountability, a habit of follow-through that trains students to honor commitments to both their teams and their education.

The panel also complicated common assumptions about BYU's religious identity by showing that representation operates through shared standards rather than shared belief. Non-LDS athletes did not describe an atmosphere of pressure or exclusion. Instead, they spoke of a culture shaped by clear expectations of conduct and responsibility. Representing BYU was understood as a serious obligation, tied to behavior rather than belief. Belonging, in this context, was not granted through conformity of faith but sustained through consistency of character, turning BYU's religious identity into a framework for trust rather than a test of who qualifies.

Those expectations become most visible under pressure, particularly when student-athletes represent BYU in public spaces that are not always welcoming. Several panelists acknowledged hostility, mockery, and misunderstanding encountered on the road. What was striking was how they described responding to it. Rather than meeting opposition with defensiveness, they emphasized composure, patience, and conversation. In many cases, they noted that resistance was aimed more at an idea of BYU than at the individuals themselves. Learning to carry that distinction calmly, in front of crowds and cameras, becomes an unspoken but powerful lesson in public character.

¹ *BYU Student-Athlete Panel*, "Sport and Society" Winter 2026 Lecture Series, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, February 4, 2026.

From the stands, athletics can seem separate from the university's academic and spiritual work, louder and more visible than everyday campus life. Yet the panel revealed something more demanding and more instructive. Athletics at BYU serves as a place where discipline is practiced daily, representation is taken seriously, and public character is shaped under pressure. If athletics is one of BYU's most demanding classrooms, then the question is not whether sports belong on campus, but whether the rest of the university is paying attention to what they already teach.
