

KU helps athletes rebound from problems

By PHIL GOLDBERG
J-W Staff Writer

On the basketball court this year, her shooting eye is not sharp. The swift hands that pilfered balls from high school opponents are not as swift in her freshman year at Kansas University. Her scoring average has dipped from 35 points per game at a Buffalo, N.Y., high school to just more than 5 points per game at KU.

As a result, Toni Webb, freshman KU basketball player is, in her own words, "feeling some anxieties."

So she went to Andrew Jacobs for help. Jacobs is not a coach. He is not a teacher. He is a sports psychologist, the first hired at KU and among a growing number of such consultants in college athletics.

His office is usually a study hall in KU's Jayhawker Towers, an apartment complex where many KU athletes live.

ON FRIDAY, Jacobs held sessions in an abandoned office in Parrott Annex, the administrative building for the athletic department. Among those was a 40-

minute session with Ms. Webb. There are no couches, no pictures of Sigmund Freud in this office. Just a table and two chairs for Jacobs and his client.

Jacobs does not prescribe pills nor does he recommend fancy therapeutic methods, only the power of positive thinking.

"What we're trying to do is to get her to relax, to concentrate more," Jacobs said after Ms. Webb's session. "Especially for younger athletes in a new setting, there are

fears, questions about their ability."

JACOBS' relationship with KU sports began in 1981. Bob Timmons, KU head track coach, and Carla Coffey, women's head track coach, wanted Jacobs for their programs. When Jacobs first came on board, he counseled mostly track athletes.

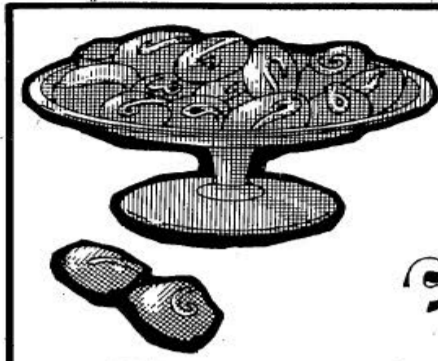
In September, the university hired Jacobs to counsel all KU athletes who ask for his help.

Working two days a week at KU, the 28-year-old Jacobs has talked to athletes from a variety of sports. Only athletes from football and softball, Jacobs said, have not approached him for advice.

The treatment varies slightly with each sport. For Ms. Webb, Jacobs said he recommended that she concentrate on the moment.

"We call it relaxation motivation," said Jacobs, who also works

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(Staff photo by Keith Cutler)

Andrew Jacobs, Kansas University's sports psychologist.

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at a sports psychology firm called Enhance Performance Associates in Kansas City, Mo. The process is an exercise that relaxes the muscles, thereby creating a more fluid mental and physical posture, Jacobs said.

After her session, Ms. Webb explained her problem and praised Jacobs for his work.

"I'VE BEEN hesitant in my performance, I didn't want to make mistakes," she said. "It is safe to say I've been playing conservatively. I knew I wasn't playing to my full potential."

"He told me to let go of myself," she continued, "not to be scared and to take chances. The advice sounds really good."

Marian Washington, Ms. Webb's coach at KU, also likes the advice. So much so, the coach said, she encourages players with on-court problems to get help from Jacobs.

For the most part, she said, her players do not view Jacobs as the stereotypical psychologist.

"They see him as positive and he takes a positive approach," said Ms. Washington. "No one is required to see him. But they are more aware of the sports psychologist and what he can do."

It is too early to measure the effect of Jacobs' efforts, Ms. Washington said.

BUT TAMMY THOMAS, record-holding swimming champion at KU, has credited Jacobs with helping improve her performance.

And Timmons praised Jacobs for helping athletes in an area

where "things are so complicated, we (coaches) can't handle it."

Asked to describe Jacobs' job, Timmons said, "A distance runner in good shape runs under 4 minutes 10 seconds in the mile. Then he goes to a meet and runs in 4 minutes 20 seconds. Andy is here to figure out why that happens."

Jacobs said he received his undergraduate degree from Vanderbilt University, and a doctorate from the California School of Professional Psychology. The latter has campuses in Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, and Fresno. Jacobs said he also counsels the 1984 Olympic cycling team, now training in Colorado Springs.

Beginning in January, Jacobs said, he will work with the cycling team one week out of every month during training.

AS A SPORTS psychologist, Jacobs says he can't guarantee success to the athlete. "It isn't for everybody," he claims.

But the sessions can't really hurt the athlete who seeks his help, Jacobs said.

"Just being able to talk in a good setting helps," Jacobs said. "It's really identifying goals, strengths, and weaknesses of the athlete."

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