It’s easy to assume that professional athletes, with their multimillion-dollar contracts and celebrity status, are set for life once their playing days are over. There are countless stories, though, of former athletes struggling to cope with life outside the locker room. Many have financial troubles, while others have difficulty adjusting to life without teammates, coaches and the routine of practices and games.

Charece Williams ’02 wants to help such former athletes. She is vice president of external relations and strategic planning for the National Basketball Retired Players Association, which was founded in 1992 to give retired players a voice. The association’s role has since expanded to include services such as financial counseling and job placement.

Williams says the image of the rich, pampered athlete doesn’t apply to the majority of professional basketball players, who may work on a series of 10-day contracts or see their careers end before they get a second, lucrative contract. She says many players end up divorcing within five years of retirement and some experience financial difficulties. “Psychologically, it’s very different when you’ve had someplace to go every day, were honored and cheered for,” Williams says. “But now you don’t wear the jersey anymore. Something as simple as that can be very difficult for some.”

Williams saw it firsthand with her father, Clarence Williams, a running back for the San Diego Chargers and the Washington Redskins in the NFL in the late ’70s and early ’80s, before multimillion-dollar contracts were commonplace. He struggled after his playing days. “He didn’t have a lot of work experience, so it was a challenge to find the right job to support his family,” she says.

Williams grew up in Columbia, S.C., where her father had been a football star for the University of South Carolina. But she was drawn to NC State by the sense of family within the athletics department. “When I look at where I ended up, I knew I made the right decision,” she says. “I was able to be a leader at a young age, both on and off the court.”

On the volleyball court, Williams was an offensive force, someone her teammates looked to make a hit to score a point. Off the court, Williams worked in the business office of the athletics department. She went on to earn an MBA at the University of Central Florida, with an eye toward becoming a college athletics director.

Instead, Williams worked in sports marketing and as an account manager for ESPN’s Wide World of Sports complex in Orlando before learning in 2012 about a job opening at the association. “Once I read what they did, it tugged at me,” she says. “As the daughter of someone who played professionally and watched what he went through, it was a perfect fit for me professionally and personally.”

—Bill Krueger

On the Web:
www.legendsofbasketball.com

Running Up Hill

Ryan Hill believes one thing will cement his NC State track career.

After winning five individual ACC championships in track and field, Ryan Hill has only one thing left to accomplish in his NC State running career—a national championship. “That’s something I haven’t done that I really think would cement me in having a good legacy at NC State,” Hill says.

The senior came close last spring, finishing third in the 1,500 meters at the NCAA’s outdoor track and field meet in June. Hill, a first team All-American last year, has continued to impress since then, setting NC State’s record in the 1,500 meters when he ran a 3:56.78 in the Morton Games in Ireland last year. It was the first time a Wolfpack runner had run a mile in less than four minutes in an outdoor meet.

NC State track coach Rollie Geiger says Hill can win a national title this year and represent the United States in the future. Hill finished fifth in the U.S. Olympic trials last summer in the 1,500, and could capture one of the three spots to run for the U.S. Olympic team in the 2016 games. —Jack Daly ’01