Sports Medicine

With strong presidential control, clear academic and financial integrity, and independent certification, the University of Florida offers an example of how to strengthen college sports.

By John V. Lombardi

THE UNIVERSITY of Florida has developed a complex and tightly organized structure for intercollegiate athletics that provides a state-of-the-art example of control and accountability. In the last ten years, the university experienced the full impact of the dramatic changes influencing college sports nationwide and entered the 1980s well placed for an impressive decade of athletic performance. While our teams performed exceptionally well in many sports, a major NCAA investigation in 1984 (followed by severe sanctions) and a subsequent investigation in 1988 (followed by minor sanctions) brought the university under intense public scrutiny.

This traumatic experience prompted the university to reexamine all aspects of its sports programs, values, organization, and operation. As a result, the university emerged at the beginning of the 1990s with a program of institutional control and management for intercollegiate athletics that—while surely not perfect—clearly meets and often exceeds contemporary standards for quality, effectiveness, and responsibility.

We cannot eliminate all the pressures to win at all costs, but we can create a climate and an organization that resists those pressures and insists that our university, at least, chooses to pursue excellent performance within the boundaries of appropriate ethical and professional standards. We have organized the university to make sure no one misuses our commitment to discourage inappropriate behavior before it happens and our refusal to tolerate such behavior if it occurs.

We have a long-standing dedication to intercollegiate wide range of sports, women. We operate sports in football and other intercollegiate sports. These revenue sports, the costs of one of the athletic facilities.

The University of Florida's athletics program is key elements, discussed by Commission on Intercol- lege Athletics, required for a program: presidential control, academic integrity, financial independence.

Presidential Control

Every observer of athletics has identified control as key to many programs. Presidential control replaces the ultimate in program management with the commitment to managing college athletics within the university's normal channels.

The University of Florida's athletics program is designed to give NCAA into a president's leadership, naturally into which the president's leadership is a special interest in the constitution.

If presidents have co-special interests, whether is a special responsibility to programs, they also have a mental responsibility to programs to operate as they were when presidents must control with board responsibilities, booster group ations, athletic director then no one is fully responsible for the enormous pressure on intercollegiate athletics, come difficult to resist.

Recognizing this dilemma
We have a long-standing commitment to intercollegiate athletics in a wide range of sports for men and women. We operate major revenue sports in football and basketball, which together support the costs of all other intercollegiate sports programs. These revenue sports, in addition, pay the costs of one of this country's best athletic facilities.

The University of Florida organizes its athletics program around the four key elements, discussed by the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, required for a responsible program: presidential control, academic integrity, financial integrity, and independent certification.

**Presidential control**

Every observer of intercollegiate athletics has identified presidential control as key to managing these programs. Presidential control clearly places the ultimate responsibility for program management with the institution's chief executive and reinforces the commitment to maintaining intercollegiate athletics within the institution's normal channels of authority.

The University of Florida is prepared to initiate and support useful reform measures designed to convert the NCAA into a presidentially controlled membership organization, instead of one in which the presidents exist as but one special interest within a complex constituency.

If presidents have control of athletic programs, they also have the fundamental responsibility to see that the programs operate as required. But when presidents must share authority and control with boards, athletic associations, booster groups, alumni associations, athletic directors, or coaches, then no one is fully responsible, and the tremendous pressures to subvert intercollegiate athletic programs become difficult to resist.

Recognizing this dilemma, the Florida legislature and the state board of regents have explicitly designated the presidents of individual institutions responsible for the conduct and integrity of their athletic programs. It is the president who hires and fires head coaches and athletic directors. It is the president who must establish institutional policies for academic and financial integrity, and the president who must insist on the maintenance of standards in all areas related to intercollegiate athletics.

Specifically, the Florida legislature and board of regents require that legally independent organizations in support of the university's mission, such as booster clubs or athletic fund-raising organizations, must be controlled by the president. In Florida, these organizations are known as direct-support organizations and include all university fund-raising groups, including those for athletics.

The laws and rules under which these organizations exist permit their establishment for the sole benefit of the university. The university president and a regents' representative must serve on the organization's board; the president approves its chief operating officer who reports to the president; quarterly expenditure plans are approved by the president; and annual audits and budget are approved by both the president and regents.

Of course, presidents cannot di-
rectly manage the details of intercollegiate sports effectively and at the same time fulfill their other responsibilities, so the president's day-to-day control is, in many aspects, delegated to different university officers. Critical to this delegation of authority is the involvement of several officers whose primary responsibility is not related to intercollegiate athletics. At the University of Florida, the vice president for administrative affairs monitors the financial arrangements related to student-athletes; the provost monitors and reviews policy and practice related to student-athletes and their academic progress; and the vice president for student affairs monitors aspects of student-athletes' campus life.

These officers are responsible for seeing that our sports programs meet institutional standards, including gender equity. They report to the president and bring their special expertise on finance, academics, and student life to the task of supporting and encouraging intercollegiate athletics.

The key presidential appointee, however, is the athletic director. Appointed by and reporting to the president, the athletic director is responsible for the proper management of all aspects of intercollegiate athletics. The athletic director is a member of the president's senior staff and serves the university's broader interests as well as managing the athletic program.

Within this structure, the president also controls the university's athletic support organization—the University Athletic Association—and its board. Further, the president appoints the university's Intercollegiate Athletics Committee. These two groups of appointed individuals draw from faculty, staff, alumni, and students to review budgets, discuss policy, participate in setting goals and priorities, review financial and other issues associated with scheduling and television contracts, and set standards for recruiting and compensating coaches and other athletic department personnel.

The university recently reviewed these two bodies and increased their independence from each other so as to maximize the checks and balances of the system and enhance their effectiveness. These two groups serve to enhance the convergence of athletic goals and standards set by the university. Finally, the responsibility for ensuring that athletic programs meet academic standards rests in the hands of the provost, who reviews the academic progress of all student-athletes. The provost also assesses the academic progress of the entire student body and recommends academic advising, if necessary, to ensure that all students meet academic requirements. The provost's role is crucial in maintaining academic integrity and ensuring that all students, including student-athletes, have equal access to educational opportunities.

Academic

Our commitment to the success of our students is reflected in our efforts to provide a comprehensive academic environment that supports student-athletes. The university's academic programs are reviewed and monitored by the provost and academic advisers to ensure that they meet the highest standards of excellence. The university does not maintain separate educational programs for student-athletes.
goals and standards with the broader goals of the university.

Finally, the president appoints a faculty athletic representative whose responsibility is to become fully involved in all aspects of the university's athletic program, advise the president on academic issues, report to the faculty on the athletic program, and collaborate with faculty representative groups in the university's regional athletic conference (the Southeastern Conference or SEC) and the NCAA. The more effective the faculty representative, the better the president's understanding of important issues.

### Academic integrity

Our commitment to academic integrity is implemented through a variety of structures and programs. First comes the recruitment phase in which student-athletes must meet standards set by the SEC, the NCAA, and the University of Florida. These standards continue to evolve, but all have the goal of ensuring that all student-athletes fit within the range of UF students not involved with intercollegiate athletics. The ultimate authority for admission of student-athletes rests with the admissions office and the provost, who review the recommendations of the athletic department and make the final determination of admissibility. The provost not only reviews the admissibility of student-athletes in the current year but also sets the standards for subsequent admissibility.

Because admission is only the first step, the university maintains a comprehensive counseling service that supports student-athletes in their academic programs. This service is reviewed and monitored by university academic advisers and is being revised to ensure it continues to meet or exceed normal university standards for academic advising. The university does not maintain special majors for student-athletes and requires all of them to follow the same academic programs available to other university students.

The ultimate test of a successful academic program is graduation. At the University of Florida, student-athletes graduate at rates lower than those of the general student body. Moreover, student-athletes in football, basketball, and some other sports have even lower graduation rates. To reaffirm the commitment to graduation, the university has placed a graduation-rate incentive...
in the contracts of the football and basketball coaches to make explicit its expectations. Some have recommended that we limit the time student-athletes spend in practice, but we believe that the test of whether an individual student spends too much time outside of class is performance in class. We do not limit the time student leaders spend on student government nor do we limit the practice time of music students. To single out student-athletes for such rigid time constraints confuses the issue. We will work within the NCAA to make eligibility depend on academic performance and progress toward graduation rather than on simplistic time constraints that discriminate against student-athletes.

Financial integrity

Nothing affects intercollegiate athletics more than the power of money. The budgets for intercollegiate programs loom large within the total financial operations of the university. At the University of Florida, the annual budget for intercollegiate athletics is about $17 million, while the university’s nonathletic budget exceeds $900 million. When programs are well managed and appropriately scaled to the needs and capabilities of the institution, then the income and expenses balance, and the athletic program represents a neutral financial element within the university.

At the University of Florida, local supporters, superfluous financial management, careful husbanding of resources, and high-quality programs have combined to produce an athletic operation that not only breaks even, but returns a surplus to the university, maintains a reserve for repair and enhancement of facilities, and keeps pace with inflation and other costs.

The university’s organization of intercollegiate activities permits a complete accounting of revenue and expenses for sports and deserves special comment here. The University Athletic Association, a special nonprofit corporation, serves as the university’s holding company for athletic programs. Invented to assure a skeptical legislature that sports would never divert state education funds, the UAA maintains completely separate books, audits, budgets, and funds. Even though the UAA is a legally separate corporation, it operates in coordination with the university by virtue of being controlled by a board, which includes faculty and administrators appointed by the president, and by having its financial affairs reviewed by the university’s vice president for administration.

Thus, while completely under the control of the institution and its president, the separate books of the UAA permit the University of Florida and its friends and supporters to clearly understand the financial commitments and liabilities of intercollegiate sports. A peculiarity of the Florida situation results from the state’s aggressive sunshine laws. The university, as a state agency, is subject to perhaps the most open sunshine laws in the nation. Practically everything the university does is open for inspection. The UAA has long been operating in the sunshine, and its budgets, financial arrangements, and meetings are open to the public and the press. So well has the UAA managed its affairs that over the last several years it has transferred more than $250,000 annually to the university in support of general university programs. This year, the UAA made an extraordinary contribution of $600,000 to the university.

The university also has a booster organization called “Gator Boosters.” As a direct-support organization, it operates under the direct control of the university president. The bylaws of Gator Boosters clearly indicate its compliance with this mandate. Further, Gator Boosters transfers all funds collected in expenses to the University for student expenditures. It does not operate profitably; it simply manages the funds in a manner that details the conditions, relationship to the program to be funded.

Among other recent legislation, the UAA has seen other bills that attempt to regulate academic sports, particularly with respect to the use of student-athletes as agents. The cost of compensating student-athletes, outside of athletics, for services it might require for the university’s athletic programs is an issue that will not go away.

While various certification schemes have been developed to establish some degree of quality assurance, none currently addresses the need for independent oversight of programs. The need for an independent, nonpartisan, peer review of student-athlete compensation, particularly in view clearly of the substance of an issue that is at the very heart of collegiate sport. The recent passage of state legislation authorizing the CCCU to certify and regulate such programs has not changed the need for independent oversight.
serves special
university's
athletic pro-
gram of having its fi
by the univer-
affected, the UAA
Florida and to clearly un-
legitimate sports. Florida situ-
ete's aggressive in-
Perhaps the the na-
the nation. The UAA
is in the sun-
financial ar-
are open to
So well has
that over
as transferred
ually to the
universi-
the UAA
contribution of
a booster or
or Boosters."
avation, it op-
control of the
bylaws of
indicate its
funds all funds

collected in excess of operating ex-
spends to the University Athletic Asso-
ciation for student support or capital
expenditures. Gator Boosters itself
do not operate these programs di-
cutest; it simply raises funds to make it
possible for the intercollegiate athletic
program to be successful.

Among other improvements the un-
iversity recently has instituted is a com-
prehensive, 31-page coaching contract
that details the expectations, obliga-
tions, conditions, and benefits of the
relationship between coach and insti-
tution. The contract covers such things
as compensation, bonuses for the aca-
demic and athletic success of student-
athletes, outside compensation and ac-
tivities, grounds and due-process
procedures for termination, and re-
newal provisions. The contract in-
cludes provisions for the student-life
coordinator and recruiting coordinator
to report to the athletic director, not
the head coach. Coaches report their
business relationships and outside
earnings to the athletic director who
must approve them and, in turn, report
them to the president.

The completeness of this contract
helps make clear the university's expec-
tations and provides the coach with a clear template for a relationship
that will be enduring and successful.

Independent certification

While various forms of independent
certification would appear useful,
none currently exists at the national
level. Nonetheless, Florida regents
have a procedure for independent, reg-
ular review of college athletic pro-
grams in the nine universities. The
review clearly meets the spirit and
substance of an independent certifica-
tion. The regents require a full self-
study, a site visit by experts external
to the programs, and a review-team re-
port with suggestions for improve-
ments. This matches the process used
to certify and review academic pro-
grams within the state system.

In addition, the university had the
doubtful distinction of having its sys-
tem of institutional control reviewed
by the NCAA. It was found to be
clearly in compliance with its stand-
ards. The university also continues to
perform financial, academic, and
NCAA compliance audits internally.

Consequently, while the national
discussion on certification continues—
and we support some forms of national
certification—the regents in Florida
already have instituted such a pro-
gram at the state level.

Although we have much to do to
make intercollegiate athletics fully re-
fect the values and goals of our insti-
tutions, we have learned from our suc-
cesses and the pain of our failures.

We are not finished, however. A
presidentially appointed committee re-
viewed the structure described here
and recommended improvements. As
we implement them, our continuing
conversation about intercollegiate ath-
etics at the University of Florida will
find new perspectives and continue the
evolution of quality and accountability
that must be our hallmark.

John V. Lombardi is president of the
University of Florida in Gainesville. A
version of this article originally
appeared in the NCAA News.