



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, val-

ues, 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 mistakes our commitment to discourage inappropriate behavior before it happens and our refusal to tolerate such behavior if it occurs.

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 Flor-

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ida 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 missions, such as booster clubs or athletic fundraising 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 intercol-

NCAA adopts Stronger academic Standards

DELEGATES TO the NCAA annual convention this month adopted tougher academic standards for student-athletes, including a landmark change that will require incoming athletes to have a higher grade-point average in key academic classes.

Other changes include a stronger requirement that athletes make progress toward a degree and an increase from 11 to 13 in the required number of core-course credits for high school students. The additional subjects must be in English, mathematics, or natural or physical sciences.

The proposals, Propositions 14 and 16, passed over strenuous objections from many black education officials who say standardized tests are culturally biased against minorities. Together, they represent the most significant changes in the organization's regulations since 1983, when delegates approved Proposition 48. That measure allowed schools to admit academically deficient athletes but removed one year of eligibility so the student-athletes could concentrate on their studies.

Proposition 16 establishes freshman eligibility guidelines based on a sliding scale that takes into account an incoming freshman's grade-point average and either SAT or ACT standardized test scores, and Proposition 14 requires two additional course credits for high school athletes. Both take effect August 1, 1995.

legiate 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 drawn from faculty, staff, alumni, and students 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 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

Southern accrediting Group adopts Athletics standards

THE SOUTHERN Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) has adopted new criteria for evaluating athletics programs in its accreditation reviews.

The new standards—echoing reforms advocated by AGB, the NCAA, and the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics—state that athletics should be an integral part of certain institutions' missions and that sports departments and personnel should be held accountable in the accreditation process.

According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, most college officials recognize the need for greater scrutiny of sports programs but are split on how involved accrediting groups should be in that process. Some maintain that the threat of losing accreditation could put pressure on colleges to clean up their programs, while others argue that accrediting groups already are spread too thin and would be ineffectual in dealing with athletic issues.

The SACS standards say a college's president must have ultimate authority over athletics and that institutions must monitor closely the financial and academic aspects of their sports programs.

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 nonathletics 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, loyal supporters, superb 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 ex-

penses 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 excess of operating expenses to the University Athletic Association for student support or capital expenditures. Gator Boosters itself does not operate these programs directly; it simply raises funds to make it possible for the intercollegiate athletic program to be successful.

Among other improvements the university recently has instituted is a comprehensive, 31-page coaching contract that details the expectations, obligations, conditions, and benefits of the relationship between coach and institution. The contract covers such things as compensation, bonuses for the academic and athletic success of student-athletes, outside compensation and activities, grounds and due-process procedures for termination, and renewal provisions. The contract includes 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 expectations 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, regular review of college athletic programs in the nine universities. The review clearly meets the spirit and substance of an independent certification. The regents require a full self-study, a site visit by experts external to the programs, and a review-team report with suggestions for improvements. This matches the process used to certify and review academic pro-

grams within the state system.

In addition, the university had the dubious distinction of having its system of institutional control reviewed by the NCAA. It was found to be clearly in compliance with its standards. 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 program at the state level.

Although we have much to do to make intercollegiate athletics fully reflect the values and goals of our institutions, we have learned from our successes and the pain of our failures.

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



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