

August 27, 2012

# Endowments Grow From Chalkboards to the Sidelines

By ADAM HIMMELSBACH

Joel Smilow, a former chairman and chief executive of Playtex, is a philanthropist whose name is attached to hospitals, Boys and Girls Clubs, and buildings at Yale, his alma mater.

But for Smilow, whose college athletics career did not progress beyond intramurals, perhaps the most unusual outcome of his benevolence is a permanent link to the Bulldogs football team. In 1988, he gave \$1 million to endow Yale's coaching position. Future coaches would forever be the Joel E. Smilow '54 Head Coach of Yale Football. The title does not exactly flow, but the money from the endowment does.

"The athletic director has jokingly referred to me as the owner of the Yale football team," Smilow said.

Seven of the [Ivy League](#)'s eight football coaching jobs are endowed, along with numerous positions in other sports. The premise is that these coaches are also teachers, part of the academic fabric of their institutions.

The only Ivy League football team that does not have an endowed position is Brown. That job had been named after one of the university's most famous alumni, Joe Paterno, but the honor was [removed in July](#).

Endowments in athletics are similar to those in academics. The donation is invested, and a portion of the return is distributed each year.

The glaring difference between some endowed professorships and coaching chairs is that coaches never receive tenure.

"In terms of athletics, unfortunately, we just don't work that way," Columbia Athletic Director Dianne Murphy said. "You've got to win. It's just a different animal."

Coaching endowments are prevalent in Bowl Championship Series conferences, too. The football programs at Stanford, Vanderbilt, Boston College and Northwestern, for example,

have endowed positions. Michigan State, Rutgers, Duke and Texas Tech are among those seeking donors for theirs — with required donations as high as \$5 million.

“Given the current fiscal climate, especially places where people are really passionate about football, it doesn’t shock me at all that a Michigan State or Michigan would try to do this,” Dartmouth Athletic Director Harry Sheehy said. “They have such passionate fan and alumni bases that it just makes sense.”

In major conferences, access to luxury suites and trips to bowl games could lure potential contributors. But those perks are not a prevalent option in the Ivy League, where the football culture is more subdued.

Smilow has received three Ivy League championship rings through Yale, and earlier this month he was scheduled to greet the team for the start of fall practice.

“It’s the same way people in the art world, if they give money or a valuable painting to a museum, they then get on a personal basis with the curator,” Smilow said. “It’s another path to that world that they are interested in mixing with.”

Athletic directors said most major donors realized their gifts did not buy them decision-making power. But there has been some dissension.

In 2011, Robert G. Burton asked Connecticut [to refund his \\$3 million donation](#) to the football program after it neglected to consult with him before hiring Paul Pasqualoni as the Huskies’ coach. Burton later retracted his request.

Connecticut’s football position is not endowed, but the case illustrates the potential for conflict when a donor’s name and money are permanently attached.

“Most of our donors understand, and we’re pretty upfront about this, that personnel decisions will be left to the administrations,” said Joe Karlgaard, Stanford’s senior associate athletic director for development. “We involve them, but to say we consult with them is too strong.”

Roger Weiss, whose \$750,000 gift endowed the Roger J. Weiss ’61 Head Coach of Football chair at Cornell in 1982, said he had recommended candidates for the Big Red’s football openings.

“I’ve submitted names that they didn’t hire, too,” he added. “It’s not ‘This came from Roger Weiss, so we have to hire him.’ And they don’t contact me and say, ‘Roger, who do you want to be the next coach at Cornell?’ ”

Thomas Stephenson was a two-year letter-winner on Harvard's football team before graduating in 1964. He created a \$2 million endowment for the Thomas Stephenson Family Head Coach for Harvard Football in 1994. Stephenson said he did not meddle in the team's operations, just as he would not tell an endowed professor how to fashion a curriculum. He speaks to Crimson Coach Tim Murphy several times a year, he said, and they sometimes golf or eat together.

"It's two friends talking about a subject they love and enjoy," Stephenson said. "It's not Tim reporting to me because I happened to be the endower of the chair."

In the spring, an anonymous donor [endowed Stanford's offensive coordinator position](#) and called it the Andrew Luck Directorship of Offense, named after the quarterback who was drafted No. 1 over all by the Indianapolis Colts in April.

The gift received national attention, ostensibly because it was named after such a recognizable figure. Karlgaard said that six weeks after the position was named, a donor endowed one of Stanford's assistant men's basketball coaching positions in honor of a former board of trustees chair, and that it was mostly unnoticed outside Stanford.

Other donors have also used their endowed coaching positions as a way to honor someone else. Henry M. Paulson Jr., a former Treasury secretary and Goldman Sachs chairman, was an offensive lineman at Dartmouth from 1965 to 1967. In 2000, Paulson's \$2 million gift established the Robert L. Blackman Endowed Coaching Position, honoring his former coach.

"It was only after I looked back after having spent time in the financial world and the business world that I realized how much I had learned, and so many others had learned from him, in terms of life lessons," Paulson said.

Paulson said that he had not attended a Dartmouth football game since graduating and that he did not follow the team during the season. He said he did not expect to be consulted during coaching searches, either.

"If they needed to rely on me to find that person, they're in big trouble because I haven't played football in 40 years," Paulson said. "I'm just not one of those guys that hangs around locker rooms and wants to give money to the football program, help pick coaches, go back to games and have good seats."

