



## **The Place of Intercollegiate Athletics in Higher Education: Hold that Tiger!**

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# *The Place of Intercollegiate Athletics in Higher Education*

*Hold That Tiger!*

By FRANK N. GARDNER

COLLEGE and university presidents, faculty representatives, athletic directors, coaches—all those who have anything whatsoever to do with intercollegiate athletics—are keenly aware of the fact that they have a tiger by the tail. They are afraid to hold on to it, and they are afraid to let it go. My own judgment is that we should hold on to the tail but get more control of the whole tiger.

With this positive affirmation about intercollegiate athletics, I have probably lost approximately one-third of my readers. I base this estimate upon my own experience of faculties. Roughly one-third of any faculty has either a congenital or an experiential aversion to intercollegiate athletics, and tends to view the whole subject with alarm. For the remaining two-thirds, the plan of this article is to discuss briefly (1) values in intercollegiate athletics, (2) present abuses, (3) corrective measures in the recent past, (4) present trends, and (5) steps which need to be taken in the future.

As an ex-athlete who also participated in intercollegiate debate and student religious activities, sang second tenor in the college male quartet, played a not-so-hot trombone in the college band and orchestra, and engaged in more strictly academic co-operative enterprises, I can testify that there were some things I learned better and faster as a participant in intercollegiate athletics than in any other way. These things were co-operation; striving for individual excellence; self-discipline; the subordination of self, if necessary for the good of the group; achieving and winning if at all possible; and best of all, winning within the rules. Quite readily I will grant that these values may be learned in other ways and in other activities. Yet I must state that, for me, they came chiefly through intercollegiate athletics. Hundreds of other ex-athletes will make the same assertion. Unfortunately, the opportunity of acquiring these values is not extended to larger numbers of young men because of concentration

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upon the "senior varsity." Why should the values I gained from participation in athletics be limited in football to men like myself—simply because I weighed 215 pounds, stood 6 feet 2 inches, and possessed a sturdy frame? More teams (junior varsity, *B*-squads, "150-pound" football teams, "5 foot 8 inch" basketball teams) need to be financed.

Then, too, it seems to me that intercollegiate athletics serves better than any other activity as a rallying point for student and alumni interest and loyalty. For years I have observed that the concerts of the Drake-Des Moines Philharmonic Orchestra or the Drake University Theatre's presentations do not quite engender the kind of personal involvement which takes place when my university plays St. Louis University in basketball. Some may deplore this, but it remains a fact. The important thing is to utilize the fact wisely.

THE values of participation in intercollegiate athletics led to an awakening of interest on the part of college administrators, and when college presidents discovered that people would actually pay money to see burly young men throw a leather-covered ball through the air or through a hoop—often committing athletic mayhem in the excitement of a game—interest waxed hot indeed! Intercollegiate athletics grew rapidly. As the turnstiles clicked and ticket-takers tore admission tickets in half, huge stadiums were built, and later tremendous field houses. Profits at many institutions were great enough to finance the construction of laboratories, dormitories, chapels, and other buildings. Gains from a good football team were sufficient to support not only the whole intercollegiate athletic program but also intramural sports and other activities.

As time passed, coaches, administrators, and boards of trustees learned to their sorrow that the American public demands a winner for its money. A state-university president found it relatively easy to get an appropriation from the state legislature following victory in a bowl game. A winning coach soon received a salary almost as large as that of the university president (sometimes even larger). A losing coach usually found himself consigned to Gehenna in short order! The pressures in some areas for a winning team are almost unbelievable. They are exerted by the American public, and no facet of intercollegiate athletics is free from them.

To win, as the football coaches say, you "have to have the horses." No Percheron ever won the Kentucky Derby. And no conference-football championship was ever won without top-grade athletic material. The best athletes are commonly referred to as the blue chips (a strange phrase for a theologian such as I to grasp immediately). How does one get them? He goes after them! And we have now arrived at one of the greatest problems in contemporary intercollegiate athletics—the problem of effective control of the recruiting of student-athletes. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the various conferences spend more time on this problem than on any other. Here most of the violations of ethics and rules occur. The second most serious

problem which is constantly with us is allied with the first. It is the problem of effective control of various kinds of aid to student-athletes. Both the promise of aid and the actual granting of it are closely connected with recruiting. Effective control of financial aid and recruiting is a nightmare to all persons connected with intercollegiate athletics.

And here, as Whitehead might have put it, what appears to be the simple solution is the most bogus. The men who control athletics in a land-grant institution in the Great Plains snort in derision when an Easterner proposes that all athletic grants-in-aid be abolished, or representatives of a university in an urban industrial center suggest that all aid be confined to a work program. Why? Because they know that in some eastern universities and colleges 60 to 80 per cent of all students receive aid in one form or another—aid which is made possible by endowment funds. Among these students some surprisingly good athletes will turn up—to the astonishment of no one, particularly the coach. As for a work program—in a town of 15,000 people, of whom 11,000 are to be found in the student body, where are enough jobs to be found?

Most of us tend to view the present situation in athletics from the perspectives of our own collegiate situation, our region or tradition, or our own procedures and practices. Consequently, we reason that our athletic problems would be solved if institutions elsewhere followed our pattern. But the United States is a complex society, and its universities and colleges display amazing diversity, not only in their regional environment, but in their academic and athletic programs. Procedures which may fit the needs and circumstances of an Ivy League school may not meet those of a school in Texas or Oregon.

IN SPITE of the difficulties involved in working at their common problems, our universities and colleges have made real progress in recent years. At the national level, sincere men have hammered out on the anvils of compromise, rules of control which have been accepted nationally. No institution, no conference, no region, no group of any kind, has achieved its ideal of what the purpose and program of intercollegiate athletics should be. But sufficient unity of mind has been achieved to legislate rules within which all believe they can live. These have served to give the universities and colleges more effective control over the program of intercollegiate athletics.

The requirements which embody the progressive achievements that have been made in regulating intercollegiate athletics may be summarized briefly: (1) the control of the program must be placed in the hands of the educational institution; (2) all grants-in-aid must be awarded by the general scholarship or awards committee of the educational institution; (3) all aid to student-athletes must be controlled and administered by the institution; (4) such aids cannot exceed the sum necessary to defray legitimate educational expenses as these are defined by the institution's catalogue (tuition, board, room, books, and up to \$15 a month for inci-

dentials such as laundry, dry-cleaning, and so on); (5) limitations have been imposed on practice and playing seasons; (6) tryouts have been abolished; (7) funds to aid athletes which are supplied by Booster Clubs and similar organizations must go through the regular institutional channels, and the institution is held responsible for violations by such organized groups; and (8) student-athletes must be admitted to college by the same procedures applicable to other students.

Strange as it may seem to many in the face of the news of violations which have occurred, and punishments which have been meted out to educational institutions by conferences and the NCAA, the conditions which existed a few decades ago have been vastly improved. Recently I attended a meeting in Chicago in which two of the participants were men of long experience in intercollegiate athletics. At present they are commissioners of conferences and thus on the firing line. Both agreed that tremendous forward steps had been taken by intercollegiate athletics in recent years.

AT THE national level the trend is to tighten up the controls we have and to get more control of unruly sectors. Proposals being considered are (1) limiting participation in intercollegiate athletics to eight semesters or twelve quarters of residence, (2) establishing minimum academic standards which must be met by applicants for a grant-in-aid, (3) setting up a voluntary pre-registration service in which the universities agree to respect applications for admission of prospective student-athletes which have been accepted by other member institutions, (4) greater use of the criterion of need in arriving at justifiable sums for grants-in-aid to student-athletes, and (5) establishing some procedure in co-operation with state high-school associations to control all-star high-school contests.

Perhaps the most noticeable trend in individual educational institutions is their quite evident desire to affiliate themselves with other institutions in organizing a conference or league, or in joining such a group which is already in operation. Such conference affiliation yields strength to an institution, provides greater opportunities for scheduling contests which are satisfactory, and in turn makes possible more effective control over the program of individual institutions.

The impact of television on sports, generally, has been staggering. Television of major-league baseball has virtually destroyed minor-league baseball. To stem television's adverse effects upon intercollegiate athletics, the NCAA colleges and universities adopted a control program several years ago for football. It has been generally satisfactory, both to the American public and to the member institutions. Nevertheless, many institutions have found it necessary to cease playing football because the sport became too expensive.

Whether American intercollegiate athletics was ever of the English amateur type is a debatable subject. If it ever was, it is not now. Forces in American public education have made the English idea both inappro-

priate and infeasible in this country. Sports on our campuses should not be limited (or so we believe) to "gentlemen" who indulge in such activities in their leisure time. American institutions of education are agreed that all students should have the opportunity to participate. When time does not permit study, class attendance, and participation along with employment, grants-in-aid have been substituted for financial gain from outside employment. Unless we limit athletic participation to the wealthy, this is probably what we shall have to continue to do. Again, the wise way lies in sound judgment and effective control.

MOST of the actions which our educational institutions have taken in the past have been, by force of circumstance, negative and restraining. We have been concerned with effective rules, consistently enforced, for preventing abuses and bad practices. Such regulations have served to stem a rising tide of unethical and vicious practices. Corrective procedures have made possible some advances. However, the time is at hand when more positive programs of action must be inaugurated by our institutions of higher learning.

Of immediate importance is the necessity for a co-operative study of the purpose and program of intercollegiate athletics as a part of the total educational program of our schools. Unfortunately, our colleges and universities have not effectively solved this problem at the institutional level. It may not be solved at the local level until regional and national conferences come to some agreement. The Special Committee on Recruiting and Subsidization of the NCAA recently recommended to the Council of the Association that a thorough study of the purpose and program of intercollegiate athletics be made by a special committee having national representation. The results of this co-operative study would be reported to the members of the Association with recommendations for the adoption of principles and programs growing out of the study. I am convinced that once our colleges and universities see clearly the purpose and program of intercollegiate athletics as it forms a part of our total educational task, the search for solutions of our problems and more effective controls will be greatly assisted.

A further positive program needs to be inaugurated by means of which the values in intercollegiate athletic participation may be made available to greater numbers of young men and women. The number of persons acquiring these values now is far too limited. Such a program would be costly, but it would be worth the price. The tiger is valuable—if we get positive and effective control of it and lead it in the right direction.