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# *The Place of Intercollegiate Athletics in Higher Education*

## *The Responsibility of the Faculty*

By S. M. MARCO

IN THE early stages of development, activities in the field of intercollegiate athletics were predominantly the concern of undergraduates. As a result of the growth of universities and alumni associations, and because of the size and complexity of intercollegiate affairs, these activities have become the concern of many different groups, not all of which are connected with colleges or universities. In addition to the influence of students, alumni, administrators, faculties, and athletic staffs, pressure is exerted directly and indirectly by sports writers, editorial writers, legislators, business groups, and the general public. Some of the objectives of these various groups are the same, but others conflict.

Because these groups have varied interests and differ in the degree of success they have achieved in exerting their influence, the present rules and regulations for the government of intercollegiate athletics are compromises which seem to satisfy none of them. In addition, many of the practices followed in the conduct of the affairs of intercollegiate athletics are inconsistent with the stated objectives and ideals first set forth by the Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives (the controlling body of the Western Conference) and later reaffirmed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (the regulating body of a large number of associated colleges and universities in this country).

The primary ends which athletic competition should serve, as stated by these bodies, are as follows:

(1) To supplement and broaden modern education. In order to take full advantage of opportunities of intercollegiate sport to this end the entire intercollegiate sport program should be made a definite part of the general educational scheme. (2) To promote the all round welfare of an increased number of participants—physical (health, motor skills), recreational (pleasure in sport), social (increased "social insight," good will), moral and spiritual (strengthening of essential attitudes and behavior through illustration and practice). (3) To strengthen by illustration and example individual, university and public conceptions of sportsmanship (group, sectional, national, international: regard for

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player or adversary in victory or defeat, proper balance in victory, courage in defeat, fairness of attitude), team play, clean and healthful living, true winning spirit (tenacity, honesty of purpose), self-control, self-confidence, citizenship (respect for rules of game under stress, and for wise discipline and authority), fortitude. (4) To develop group consciousness, morale and spirit in the sense of loyalty to the institution, and to fellow members of the college community. (5) To reflect through representation the spirit of the institution (intellectual ability and achievement, moral tone and idealism, genuine sportmanship through behavior and conduct).<sup>1</sup>

This list of commendable objectives may be condensed to the statement that intercollegiate athletics should be a proper part of the general educational scheme, and that the intellectual, physical, moral, and spiritual welfare of the participants is of great importance. Unfortunately, the pressures existing in several of the areas of intercollegiate athletics have made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to realize these objectives or to live up to the stated ideals under the type of control which now exists. Furthermore, these pressures have apparently made it impossible for the governing bodies to conform strictly to the rules and regulations which they themselves have developed and to which they have agreed. For example, the Handbook of the Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives clearly states that "only institutions having full and complete faculty control of athletics may hold membership in the Conference." The fact is that a significant number of the member institutions do not have "full and complete faculty control" and therefore should not be eligible to hold membership. Since these ineligible institutions do hold membership, it is apparent that control of athletics is not in the hands of the faculties. The making of rules and regulations in this conference is a function of the faculty representatives, who are appointed in most cases by the institutional administrators or by boards or councils which in turn are appointed by institutional administrators. Naturally, then, the faculty representative is more often than not an individual who is interested in athletics and athletic affairs to a much greater degree than the average faculty member, and, as a consequence, is much more likely to reflect the views of the athletic directors and athletic staffs than those of the academic faculty whom he is supposed to represent. As a consequence, the rules which are developed, and the administration and enforcement of these rules, have resulted in an inordinate emphasis on the financial and public-relations aspects of intercollegiate athletics (both of great importance to administrators and athletic staffs) while permitting practices which are not in the best interests of the students.

AT THIS point one might well ask who should be responsible for the control of intercollegiate athletics. Certainly, institutional administrators who are responsible ultimately for the conduct of the affairs of their institutions have a legitimate interest in this area, and certainly they are

<sup>1</sup>"Athletic Sports," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1957), Vol. II, p. 620.

men of integrity who subscribe to the objectives stated in the preceding paragraphs. Also, the athletic directors and the members of athletic staffs, who are professionally trained and who are ultimately answerable for the conduct of intercollegiate athletics in the field, must be granted a large share of interest in the molding and shaping of these activities. Whereas the legitimate interests and responsibilities of these two groups are obvious to the general public, it has difficulty in understanding why faculty members also have a legitimate interest and responsibility in this area. Many motives have been attributed to faculty members who have had the temerity to suggest that the control of intercollegiate athletics is an area of responsibility for academic faculties and that perhaps the present situation is not perfect. They have been accused of being "anti-athletics," "oddballs," "fuzzy-headed intellectuals," "power-hungry publicity seekers," and other kinds of undesirables. For the most part, these accusations are made by sports writers or others who have access to mass media of communication but are not connected with academic institutions and in many cases are insufficiently informed about their objectives and purposes. Too frequently, however, these charges are made by persons who are connected with academic institutions and should know better.

The reason for the legitimate interest and the responsibility of faculties in the control and conduct of intercollegiate athletics has been given earlier in this paper in the statement of objectives to be served by athletic competition set forth by the Western Conference and the NCAA. The concept of intercollegiate athletics as a proper part of the general educational scheme, and the importance of the intellectual, physical, moral, and spiritual welfare of the participants, make this area a responsibility of academic faculties. Educating students to become doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, scientists, writers, historians, and so on, is an important responsibility of the academic faculty, but their chief responsibility is to develop adults who are capable of exercising rational judgment and discriminating between what is right and what is wrong; who have developed a basis for determining the good course of action instead of the bad, and will exert their influence in the direction of the good course. If our university and college faculties train the world's best scientific, technical, and professional men and women but neglect the development of their capacity to seek and select proper values and courses of action in all their pursuits, they will have done mankind a serious disservice. Although much can be done to develop attitudes and capacities in the classroom,<sup>2</sup> a far more powerful force is the example set in the conduct of affairs by the faculty, the administrators, and others connected with the university. A student is in attendance at a university or a college during a period in which some of the most important traits of his character are being formed. Many of the attitudes he develops while he is in the university community will persist for the rest of his life.

The question arises, What has this to do with the responsibility of faculties for the control of intercollegiate athletics? The answer lies in

the fact that although the control and administration of these activities are the legitimate responsibility of all three groups, the administrators, the athletic staffs, and the faculties, only the faculty is essentially free from the pressures which have made it impossible to realize the desirable objectives of intercollegiate athletics. In the opinion of this writer, only academic faculties can afford to be altruistic and objective about these activities. And only the influence of objective and altruistic attitudes can offset the pressures which bring about the many undesirable aspects of intercollegiate athletics.

Institutional administrators, regardless of their own ideals, are subject to many pressures. The effects of the financial and public-relations aspects of intercollegiate athletics loom large in their area of responsibility. The opinions of influential small groups and individual friends of the institution are a continual source of concern. Winning teams and individual athletes who can draw crowds big enough to finance large athletic staffs and plants, and attract favorable local and national attention to their athletic superiority, are considered important to the general welfare of their institutions. For these reasons, it is almost impossible for administrators to be entirely objective. They are forced to make realistic compromises.

Athletic staffs feel compelled to produce winning teams, and, to do so, they must obtain the best possible talent. This attitude has been forced upon them by the external pressure brought to bear on them by many of the same groups that bring pressure on the administrators. Moreover, they are the victims of their own activities in competing with their counterparts at other institutions for the services of talented athletes. At the present time, their professional lives are actually dependent on their producing winners at almost any cost. This fact alone makes it almost impossible for them to approach the problems of intercollegiate athletics with objectivity.

Academic faculty members, as a general rule, are not personally involved with the groups which are prone to exert pressure for bigger and better athletic plants and bigger and better teams. Nor do they feel that their success in their professional fields is intimately connected with victory on the athletic field. It is possible for them, by virtue of their training and inclination, to consider the welfare of student-athletes as their first and foremost responsibility in the area of athletics. It is also possible for them to recognize that athletes and other students derive definite benefits from properly conducted programs of intercollegiate activities, and that all students are injured when these programs are not properly conducted.

IN SPITE of the Western Conference requirement that member institutions have full and complete faculty control of intercollegiate athletics, the fact is that control is in the hands of administrators and athletic staffs. The importance of the financial and public-relations aspects of intercollegiate athletics to these groups has been responsible to a large

extent for the kinds of practices which many faculty members consider contrary to the stated objectives of the athletic associations, particularly with respect to the welfare of the student.

We are presently in the position of paying lip service to the educational values of participation in games and at the same time sacrificing everything we believe in to achieve the unattainable goal of perfection in athletic performance. The compulsion to win victory on the field has led to all the evils of high-powered recruiting practices. An outstanding athlete, young and highly impressionable, cannot help but become possessed with his own importance when scores of colleges bid for his services. He cannot fail to be impressed by the knowledge that some of the bidders are willing to close their eyes to the existing rules regarding recruitment. He is further impressed by the fact that when infractions of the rules are discovered, and sanctions against the offenders are invoked, the administrators and athletic staffs responsible for the violations are prone to resort to the plea that they are being punished for practices which everyone else follows. The implication is that they were at fault, not in committing the act, but in being caught. The standard public statement of the authorities of an institution on whom athletic associations have imposed sanctions is, "We do not agree with your findings, but we will abide by your decision." What kind of impression does this make on the student-athletes—indeed, on all the students—of such an institution?

In many cases the desire to win at any cost has led to "dirty" playing. When very flagrant violations are protested, the usual result is that the violator's coach issues a public statement that the offending athlete was not intentionally breaking the rules but was carried away by his enthusiasm. To the best of this writer's knowledge, no athlete has ever been expelled for an infringement of the rules, and no coach has ever been fired for permitting it. Here, again, the inference seems to be that the disgrace is not in being unethical or resorting to illegal practices but rather in getting caught. Once more, we are setting the student an example which leads him to the conclusion that it is proper to get away with what you can. These examples are only a few of the many instances in which lack of proper control has an adverse effect on the student's moral welfare.

The necessity to win and to produce revenue has led to longer playing seasons, a heavier schedule of games, an increase in the number of post-season contests, and longer and harder practice sessions, all of which must have a profound effect on the student-athlete's physical well-being and—what is assumed to be his major objective—his education. Certainly, protracted playing seasons and long, hard practice sessions cannot help but reduce the athlete's efficiency as a student and consequently have a lasting effect on the quality of his education.

Two fairly recent experiences show that these conditions have had a profound influence on the moral fiber of some of our young athletes. In the not too distant past, a large percentage of the members of the football

team of one of our prominent military academies had to be expelled for cheating on examinations, and a shocking number of the nation's finest basketball players in a large university were prosecuted for accepting bribes to control the scores in games. A survey covering a nine-year period at William and Mary College gives some indication of the effect of the conditions which prevail in intercollegiate athletics on the student's educational goals.<sup>2</sup> It showed that only 32.2 per cent of the football players graduated as compared with 55.9 per cent of the general student body; this in spite of the fact that as a general rule athletes select the less demanding curriculums.

WHO is responsible for this situation? All segments of a university must share the blame: the administrators, the athletic staffs, and the faculties. Every faculty member who is too busy or too uninterested to be concerned with these matters or who takes the attitude that they are not in his province or that there is nothing he can do about them is at fault.

Fortunately, some faculties have become sufficiently aware of their responsibility to exert their influence to improve the situation. In 1956 the Ohio State University faculty recommended action to ensure a greater measure of faculty control, which was approved by its board of trustees. Faculties of other member institutions of the Western Conference have begun to show signs that they, too, agree with the first statement of the section on Membership and Representation of the Handbook of the Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives, which was quoted earlier, namely, that "only institutions having full and complete faculty control of athletics may hold membership in the Conference." The activities of certain faculty representatives and athletic directors designed to eliminate faculty control, such as the secret meetings of these groups held in October and November of 1959, are being resisted by some faculties.

I wish it were possible to report that conditions are improving, but this would not be true. At the present time, the faculties distrust the motives of the existing controlling bodies, on the one hand; and the athletic directors and their staffs distrust the motives of the faculties, on the other. It was for this reason that in January, 1960, the Faculty Council of the Ohio State University requested that a constitutional convention be held to draw up a constitution for the operation of the governing body designed to control intercollegiate athletics in the Western Conference. Such a constitution is essential in clarifying the responsibility and the function of the various groups that must have a voice in the control of intercollegiate athletics if we are ever to work our way out of the undesirable conditions imposed by more and more ambitious programs. These conditions have been increasingly detrimental to the educational ideals to which we are all dedicated. If they are permitted to continue, universities with large intercollegiate athletic programs will inevitably be powerless to perform an important educational obligation.

<sup>2</sup>Richard I. Miller, *The Truth about Big-Time Football* (New York: William Sloan Associates, Inc., 1953).