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Abstract: The article discusses changes in college football from the 1960s to the early 21st century. It notes that college football has changed since the 1960s in terms of racial and social factors and in financial terms. During the 1960s teams and divisions integrated, which brought with it forced attention to the needs of African American players, and thus of all players. Also during this time the economics of college football changed radically. High salaries of coaches in professional football caused college coaches' salaries to be raised. Football began to bring in revenue beyond ticket sales, from television and radio contracts and selling of merchandise. The athletes were still called amateurs, but they received scholarships. The contradiction between athletics and scholarship is discussed.

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How the 60s Changed Big-Time College Football

FOOTBALL HAS CHANGED ENORMOUSLY since I grew up with the game in the 1950s and 60s. Most broadly, today there seems to be a general sense of a continuous path from youth leagues all the way to the NFL. Boys of my generation knew little about the NFL beyond what they figured out from watching the weekly game on Sunday. Boys today know everything about the NFL that SportsCenter and the rest of our 24/7 sports media and entertainment industries show and tell them. Boys of my generation might have dreamed of playing pro football some day. Like-minded boys today plot a course--through weight rooms, diet supplements, summer camps, personal trainers, recruiting gurus--for getting there.

What has happened in the National Football League in recent decades has powerfully affected what used to be known as Division I-A college football (now the Football Bowl Subdivision)--think only of the lure of million-dollar NFL salaries for "student athletes" and the impact on college coaches' salaries as pro coaches began making millions. Many NFL players, in turn, are shaped in part by their college experiences--think here of the sense of entitlement that follows some athletes from college to the pros.

In this new environment, college football struggles in new ways with a contradiction that is more than a century old. From the moment that university administrators in the 1890s realized that the new public passion for intercollegiate football provided opportunities for university building, college football has been torn between the competing demands of marketing and educating. Knowing that the contradiction at the heart of big-time college football is more than a century old is useful when the latest "crisis" erupts. That knowledge should also give us pause, however, to wonder why we have failed for so long to resolve the contradiction.

College football has changed in two ways since the 1960s: suddenly and gradually. It changed suddenly in "the long 60s," that period conveniently dated from November 1963, when John F. Kennedy was shot down in Dallas, to August 1974, when Richard Nixon resigned in disgrace. The 60s peaked around 1967-70--the years when Detroit, Newark, Los Angeles, and dozens of other cities exploded in race riots, campuses from Columbia University to the University of California at Berkeley exploded in antiwar protests, and Woodstock, N.Y., exploded in rock music and free love.

Football, too, was convulsed in those final years of the decade. Black players called their coaches racist and boycotted practice. White players at the University of Maryland forced their coach out for demeaning them. Coaches everywhere were forced to adjust to the special needs of their African-American athletes and, by extension, of all their athletes.

No comparable cataclysm in either college football or American life has occurred since the 1960s, yet the experiences of playing and following the game today are astonishingly different from what they were just a couple of generations ago. The entire history of big-time intercollegiate football since the late 19th century has been a tortuous working out of the sport's fundamental contradiction of being, at one and the same time, a commercial spectacle and an extracurricular activity. But sometime in the late 1980s or 1990s, incremental changes reached a tipping point or crossed a boundary beyond which the contradiction has become unsustainable.

The beginning and end of the "long 60s" coincidentally bracketed my own football career. In November 1963, when President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, I was a sophomore at Gonzaga Prep in Spokane, Wash., putting in my fall afternoons on the B-squad and awaiting my chance to be a varsity player. In early April 1968, when Martin Luther King Jr. fell in Memphis, I was a sophomore at the University of Notre Dame, a walk-on scrub who had not suited up for a single game the previous fall but was about to be given the opportunity to become an actual Fighting Irish football player. In May 1970, when college-age kids in National Guard uniforms gunned down four students at Kent State University, I was a senior, soon to graduate, not participating in spring practice and therefore not prodded to confront the protests engulfing college football. (My subsequent brief NFL career coincided with the end of the era. In September 1974, a month after Nixon left the White House in disgrace, I left the NFL after four seasons, cut by the Kansas City Chiefs at the end of a strike-torn training camp.)

During my four years at Notre Dame, Southeastern Conference institutions at last began integrating their football teams, but they did not complete the process until after I had graduated. As a senior in 1969, I played against Georgia Tech and Tulane, then against Texas in the Cotton Bowl, when their teams were still all white. My senior season marked college football's centennial but also became a milestone for other reasons, as major racial protests disrupted football programs at Indiana University, Oregon State University, and the Universities of Iowa, Wyoming, and Washington. I must have had some awareness of those events--my memory is regrettably spotty--but they were far removed from my own experience at Notre Dame. The extraordinary national and world events of my college years, which changed me and my entire generation forever, in my own mind had nothing to do with my life on football fields. I suspect that in that I was more typical than not.

While the actors were very real, these events played out as public dramas, staged and scripted by local newspapers and the national media. Football has functioned as a kind of public theater since it was first discovered by the mass-circulation newspapers in New York in the 1880s. Some dramas are generic to all sporting contests: the Home Team repulsing the Enemy, the various plots for different types of heroes. Others are specific to certain sports: the duel between pitcher and batter, so utterly different from the helmet-rattling collision in football. Others still are dictated by specific circumstances either within or outside the sport; the uproar over steroids in Major League Baseball and the false accusations of rape against lacrosse players at Duke University come to mind as recent examples.

The racial dramas in college football in the 1960s fall in that last category. How newspapers covered (or did not cover) these events created the public drama. In the South, the struggles of the black pioneers at Southeastern Conference colleges were all but ignored in the local media, out of an obvious desire to minimize the fallout from overturning cherished white Southern traditions. In the North, the black protests challenged local sports editors, students and faculty members, and the larger communities to

reconsider their assumptions about coaches' authority and what might be the legitimate desires of a racial minority.

THE DISRUPTIONS OF THE 1960s, particularly the racial protests on Northern campuses, were felt as a genuine revolution, but the subsequent economic transformation has not been. This second revolution played out in slow motion, but at some point many followers of college football awakened to a realization that the game had changed in basic ways. The simplest measure of the transformation would be the huge salaries that became the norm for coaches in top programs in the 1990s, three times as much as just a decade earlier, and many, many times the $20,000 or $25,000 salaries of the 1960s.

Obviously, more than inflation was at work here. In college football's long reign as the dominant form of the sport, from the 1870s into the 1950s, potential revenue was largely restricted to gate receipts. Radio broadcasting rights began paying small dividends in the 1930s; the National Collegiate Athletic Association actively restricted television in the 1950s, fearing the potential impact on attendance. Merchandising and fund raising (beyond the arrangements between boosters and recruits) were nonexistent throughout the entire period. (For a kid in the 1950s to own a sweatshirt imprinted with "Property of USC Football," he had to know someone who knew someone in the University of Southern California football program.) A business plan for athletics amounted to building a large stadium and then selling tickets to it. The athletic director (or graduate manager of athletics, as he was initially known) was a former coach who got on well with the old boys in the booster club. To oversimplify only slightly, his job was to support his football coach in building a team that could fill the stadium on Saturday afternoons.

Athletic directors today are CEO's of multi-million-dollar entertainment businesses, their jobs immensely complicated by the need to provide educational opportunities for student-athletes. But criticism of too much commercialism and too little academic emphasis in college football is nearly as old as the game, and so too is public indifference to those perennial problems. "Everyone" knew that boosters were subsidizing the swift halfbacks and brawny tackles arriving on campuses from farms and mill towns in the 1920s and 1930s. But few cared, certainly not the sportswriters who covered the team.

Local media have tended to have close relations with the home team, and the major football-playing universities tend to be located in smallish towns, where the local sports editor and beat writers have particularly cozy relationships with the football coach and director of athletics. The national media have faced a different need: appealing to the broadest possible audience. Although Sports Illustrated and ESPN issue periodic jeremiads against the abuses in college football, those tend to be overwhelmed by the weekly or daily coverage of the big games and top stars. The media played a key role in American universities' two great missed opportunities in the 20th century to address college football's great contradiction. Had the popular press waged a campaign on behalf of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's report in 1929--which documented the "commercialism" and "professionalism" throughout the sport--it might have generated enough public support to overwhelm boosters and pressure (or free) college administrators to consider genuine reforms. Likewise, when the NCAA went through the throes of reform in the late 1940s and early 1950s, centered around a proposed "Sanity Code" that would have established need-based financial aid as opposed to athletic scholarships, indifference or opposition in the media again assured that the reformist spasm, weak as it already was, would die. The Carnegie report prompted a few universities to de-emphasize their football programs but had no broad impact. Intermittent scandals and controversies erupted and subsided until the 1950s, when a cheating ring at West Point, slush funds at West Coast universities that eventually shut down the old Pacific Coast Conference, and continuing rancor in the NCAA between rival factions that viewed themselves as honest and the other side as corrupt or hypocritical seemed to demand drastic action.

Instead, out of the wrangling in the NCAA came the athletic scholarship, a solution to the longstanding scandal of "professionalism" by making it legal. The establishment of the athletic grant-in-aid in 1956 set the stage for the debates at NCAA conventions in the 1960s that culminated, in 1973, in the one-year scholarship, renewable at the coach's discretion. That little-noted and mostly forgotten reinvention of the athletic scholarship marks a crucial turning point for big-time college football.

The more obviously consequential events were the College Football Association's successful challenge

to the NCAA's television monopoly in 1984, then the succession of bowl alignments in the 1990s, culminating in the Bowl Championship Series in 1998, which consolidated two distinct economic classes for big-time football programs and widened the gap between them. The one-year scholarship, backed by the mind-set that it represented, exposed so-called student-athletes to the mounting pressures of an increasingly commercialized sport while denying them a share in its new bounty. The institution of the one-year scholarship in 1973 compensated coaches for a reduced limit on scholarships, but it seems also to have been in part a response to the upheavals of the 1960s. Athletes, particularly black athletes, challenged coaches' authority in the 1960s. In 1973, coaches reclaimed their control.

THE ONE-YEAR SCHOLARSHIP, with its impact on the relationship between coaches and athletes, and on their relative positions in the evolving world of big-time college football, thus provides a link between the seemingly distinct revolutions. Out of the black protests of the late 1960s, all athletes won greater right to self-expression; with the one-year scholarship, athletes became accountable primarily to their coaches, not to their professors.

A more fundamental link is the central importance of race. The 1960s saw the end of college football's era of segregation. In the succeeding era of full integration, as black athletes became dominant on the field but lagged behind in the classroom, the key issues facing the NCAA and its member institutions have been racial at their core, though rarely acknowledged as such.

I inevitably view the situation of student-athletes today from the perspective of my own experience. At Notre Dame in the late 1960s, I not only received the best education that my university offered but also enjoyed a full college experience while playing big-time football at the highest level. My fundamental concern regarding college football today is that my experience may not even be available to student-athletes in our more-fully commercialized, higher-pressure football world. At the same time, an athletic scholarship today buys exactly , what it bought during my college years. Tuition, board, and housing cost more in real dollars, but they have the same value. Or perhaps less: With less opportunity to receive a real education, athletes today might be taking a cut in real benefits.

Or not. Determining how well big-time college football serves the athletes today is one of two crucial challenges facing the institutions that sponsor it. The other is to determine how well it serves the institutions themselves.

Saturday's spectacles provide Americans with a unique social and cultural experience, providing a sense of community, meaningful ritual, and sheer pleasure for millions of Americans each weekend in the fall. But can universities afford to keep providing that social benefit, and can they provide it without exploiting those who do the actual providing--the young men on the field?

Fewer than two dozen athletic departments break even in any given year; as few as a half dozen have done so in each of the last several years. But that superelite depends on the rest, on all of the programs that struggle with annual deficits. A superconference comprising only the very top programs would have a passionate following only in its institutions' own states and among their alumni. Although the Big East is conspicuously the weakest conference on the field in the Bowl Championship Series, the other five conferences need it in order to have fully national representation. Without the weaker teams within BCS conferences, the perennially stronger teams would have no one to be perennially stronger than. The superelite even need the non-BCS conferences, if only to throw up a Cinderella challenger each year and provide one of the narratives of which football fans never weary. The superelite need the rest, but whether the rest can afford their role is increasingly uncertain.

There is broad agreement about the problems in big-time football today, but not about possible solutions. Instead of offering yet one more set of proposals to be ignored, I suggest that we refocus the conversation. From any reasonably objective perspective, university sponsorship of a commercial entertainment that pays coaches millions and performers the cost of an education that they are prevented from receiving seems obviously crazy. Yet football survives in our temples of higher learning, overseen by college presidents who are some of the smartest people in the country. The reason is equally obvious: because the sport historically has served vital functions in American higher education,

and it is not at all obvious that it no longer does so. That's the crux of the issue. It is not possible to think in any meaningful way about reforming college football without thinking also about the nature and needs of the institutions whose football might need reforming.

Each American college and university has its own history, and the presence or absence of big-time football does not figure importantly in all of them. But it is nonetheless true that big-time football was a powerful force in shaping American higher education as we know it. The relationship seems at least partly coincidental. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton Universities began playing football games against each other, and taught the game to students at colleges through the country, at the very moment that higher education was being transformed by the development of graduate schools and research agendas. Over the closing decades of the 19th century, American colleges started becoming the training ground for the professions and, more broadly, the pathway to middle- and upper-middle-class success. American higher education was expanding with or without football.

Nonetheless, the sport became an important factor in that expansion, as the publicity generated by the football team became a valuable promotional tool. Over the 1920s and succeeding decades, what J. Douglas Toma calls Football U. became an American institution unique in the global world of higher education. With few exceptions, American universities became known outside their own states, if at all, only through their football teams.

That means that big-time college football was an integral part of American higher education as it developed, not something tacked on. And it follows that radically changing--let alone abandoning--high-pressure, highly commercialized big-time football might have serious consequences. If we want a medical metaphor, eliminating football altogether might be closer to removing both kidneys than to amputating a gangrenous foot.

The Football Bowl Subdivision has six major and five lesser conferences, a wide range of more and less elite public and private universities. Thinking about the impact of football in relation to those different kinds of institutions is essential in considering potential reforms. Spokesmen for the NCAA insist that there is no financial crisis in the broad world of college football today. But there are local crises in several parts of that world, or they loom in the near future. Big-time college football's current financing is probably unsustainable for most universities, and the fiction that the sport exists above all to serve the educational interests of student-athletes has grown increasingly ludicrous. Another revolution lies in football's future. As I write, the likely depth and duration of the recession is still unknown. But with state legislatures announcing cutbacks in their higher-education budgets, the allocations to athletics while academic programs are being squeezed is already receiving more scrutiny.

Understanding football's earlier revolutions will not reveal simple solutions to college football's current dilemmas. It can, however, remind us that the sport we know today has evolved not by some inexorable force but by individuals' decisions in response to external pressures. The NCAA today can mandate academic reform but, due to antitrust law, only recommend fiscal responsibility. In the not-so-distant future, university leaders at many institutions may face hard decisions that are beyond the scope of the organization. They will need all the help they can get.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): College football functioned as a kind of public theater in the 1960s, providing stories about racial conflict and integration. Here, the Michigan State U. player Jimmy Raye discusses strategy with his bead coach, Duffy Daugherty, in 1966.

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By Michael Oriard

Michael Oriard is a professor of English and associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Oregon State University. This essay is adapted from his new book, Bowled Over: Big-Time College Football From the Sixties to the BCS Era, to be published next month by the University of North Carolina Press.

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