

JOAN VENNOCHI

The Boston Globe

A high price for BC glory

By Joan Vennoch, Globe Columnist | December 1, 2005

THE MONEY gods really do rule sports. Even the Jesuits kneel to their demands.

Last July, Boston College became the 12th member of the Atlantic Coast Conference, which is considered the country's most prestigious collegiate athletic conference. This fall, BC basketball fans learned the price of that glory.

Gene DeFilippo, BC's director of athletics, recently informed season ticket holders that only those who have made a minimum gift of \$10,000 to BC have a shot at tickets to the ACC Men's Basketball Tournament in February. Et tu, BC?

"Based upon our research, it will be necessary for us to limit orders that will be accepted to season ticket holders who have made a gift to the Flynn Fund of \$10,000 or more. Unfortunately, we will not be able to offer you tickets for the 2006 tournament," De Filippo writes in a November letter to those who don't make the cut. (The William J. Flynn Fund is the central way to support BC athletics.)

Well, at least the Jesuits value honesty, even when it reveals frank commitment to the bottom line.

Fenway Park is now an official haven for those with enough cash and connections to score scarce, overpriced tickets. And Sox management is squeezing revenue out of every inch inside Fenway and beyond. The latest ballpark project entails the demolition and rebirth of the .406 Club and infield roof boxes. Even with fans willing to pay \$90 to \$275 for new premium seats, the ballclub's owners are unashamed to hit up taxpayers for \$55 million for "neighborhood improvements" -- after swearing there would be no public "ask" if the Sox stayed at Fenway. (The New York Times Co., parent of the Boston Globe, owns 17 percent of the Sox.)

In pro sports, fans pay so a ballclub can buy a Manny Ramirez or Johnny Damon -- although keeping these high-priced players happy is more complicated.

In college sports, money pays for top of the line facilities, quality coaches, and scholarships.

In an interview, DeFilippo explained that the donor-based ticket policy is "new to BC" and acknowledged that "change is difficult." But, he said that linking ticket access to donor generosity is standard practice at other colleges; in fact, one ACC college requires \$100,000 in lifetime giving, plus \$10,000 per year. It is the price, said DeFilippo, of being competitive.

"We have done everything we can to hold the line and do what we think is right and fair," said De Filippo, adding, "The majority of our fans demanded that we be competitive at the highest level. If we are going to compete at the highest level, there's a price for that. . . . While we maintain the Catholic and Jesuit mission and goals, the reality is, in order to compete, we have to have money for scholarships." There is \$11 million in scholarship money in next year's budget, he said.

Speaking of those Catholic and Jesuit mission and goals, they are an integral part of BC's athletic mission statement, posted on the university website. Just how quaint-sounding are they?

The mission statement proclaims that the athletic department is committed to "the quest for excellence; to the personal formation of our undergraduate, graduate, and professional students; and to the pursuit of a just society." It also speaks to BC's tradition "rooted in a belief that seeks God in all things, especially human activity." And it says the athletic department prepares students for "citizenship, service, and leadership."

The BC athletic department now also prepares students for another life lesson. Value is measured in dollars donated, not by devotion to team over time.

It's a useful, if sad lesson, given modern day realities. But is it the best lesson an institution like BC can teach?

A Boston Pop Warner football team has to beg for \$70,000 to compete in a Super Bowl tournament. Boston College can tell basketball fans if they don't give \$10,000 to BC, they can't get tournament tickets.

What if some of those wealthy BC donors gave just once to the Boston Raiders, the Pop Warner team that is trying to

get to the Florida Super Bowl -- or to some other charitable cause -- instead of giving to the BC Eagles?

Would that better serve the goal of "a just society?" The money gods get you to the ACC. Are they really a ticket to heaven?

Joan Vennoch's e-mail address is vennoch@globe.com. ■

© [Copyright](#) 2005 The New York Times Company