

## BIG TIME COLLEGE SPORTS AND THE STUDENT ATHLETE

One of America's most nostalgic traditions, ranking right up there with Mom, home, and apple pie, is college sports. Although in the early years of this century not as popular as Major League baseball, college sports, particularly football, held a tremendous fascination for the American public. Many memorable teams of those years have become a part of folk-lore. The Carlisle Indians and their great all-round athlete, Jim Thorpe; Notre Dame and the Four Horsemen and its "Win one for the Gipper"; Army with its Touchdown Twins, Glen Davis and Doc Blanchard, and a few years later, its "Lonesome End", Bill Carpenter, who later served at Fort Campbell.

During the 1930's, college basketball came into prominence. Originally, popular mainly in the big cities of the East and in the Midwest, the game eventually spread everywhere. Television made college sports even more popular.

But recently several disruptive influences have appeared and many say that the college game is in deep trouble.

Drugs are a problem in college athletics, although not to the extent that they are in professional sports, especially baseball or basketball. In these sports the players are older, have more spare time, are more likely to be located in urban areas, are less strictly supervised, and, most important, they are much richer. But the colleges have drug problems. Tennessee's star quarterback of last year, Tony Robinson, was implicated last Fall in the sale of cocaine to undercover narcotics agents. The Michigan State basketball star, Scott Skiles, was charged last year in his hometown, Plymouth, Indiana, with possession of cocaine. But his offense was dealt with somewhat leniently; the charge was reduced to a misdemeanor and Skiles was sentenced to thirty days; the sentence was suspended. Nor was Skiles dropped from the basketball team. Coach Judd Heathcoate decided that (as he put it) Skiles deserved "one more chance"; Skiles continued to play. Heathcoate later evidently decided that Skiles deserved two and then three more chances! For after his probation on the drug charge Skiles was convicted twice of drunken driving. Eventually his drug probation was revoked, but Skiles was thoughtfully permitted to serve his sentence after the basketball season.

Tennessee reacted somewhat more forcefully in the above-mentioned case of Tony Robinson, revoking his scholarship, an action which was tantamount to kicking him out of school. One might contrast this swift, speedy justice with that administered by Tennessee to a Vol basketball star of a few years ago, Bernard King. King was convicted twice of stealing, once from the athletic department, and once from a dormitory room, but was nevertheless given "another chance". Is it too cynical to suggest that the distinction between the two cases is that at the time of King's offenses he had a couple of seasons of eligibility remaining? Tony Robinson had used up all of his.

Violence is a part of the life-style of too many college athletes. The University of Minnesota seems to be particularly cursed. A few years ago basketball coach Bill Musselman resigned in the wake of a bitter on-court fight between his players and those from Ohio State, a fight in which a couple of Ohio State players were seriously injured. Only this past season Gopher basketball coach Jim Dutcher also resigned after three of his players were charged with rape while in Madison, Wisconsin, to play the Badgers. Ironically, one of the three charged had been acquitted of the same offense in Minneapolis only a couple of weeks earlier.

The University of San Francisco was sickened to the extent that it dropped big time basketball for a couple of years after its star, Quentin Dailey, was convicted of a similar type of offense. Although somewhat beyond the scope of this paper, it might be worth pointing out that Dailey's conviction has not prevented him from playing professional basketball with the Chicago Bulls.

Big time gambling has become a problem; all sports, including the colleges, have been affected. Last year Tulane University had two of its basketball players involved in fixing the point spread on games. Two years earlier Boston College had two of its players similarly implicated. But fixing basketball point spreads is nothing new. Our older members will remember back to the early 1950's when Long Island University, City College of New York (the only team ever to win both the NIT and the NCAA in one year) and the University of Kentucky, all had players involved in point fixing scandals. UK's involvement was particularly embarrassing, because after the initial reports about New York City players shaving points, U.K. Coach Adolph Rupp piously proclaimed that "gamblers couldn't touch my boys with a ten foot pole"; maybe the gamblers used an eleven foot pole, but touch them they did!



Money has become a problem. This paper will not go into detail, but college basketball and football have become enormous money makers. Each football team that plays in the Rose Bowl takes home five million dollars. Each team that participated in the recent NCAA Basketball Tournament took down roughly \$160,000 per game as it advanced along the tournament trail; a trip to the Final Four was worth approximately \$835,000. With stakes this high it is almost inevitable that some schools will push to the limit to be able to win.

Stories of poor boys from poor families, showing up at college in a brand new car, are numerous. A few years ago a topflight Texas high school football player chose Southern Methodist University over many other schools. He arrived in Dallas driving a Trans Am and explained to questioning reporters, with a perfectly straight face, that his grandmother had bought it for him. She had been saving money for years for him to go to college but when he received the scholarship at SMU the money was no longer needed for tuition, so she bought him the car. An investigating reporter determined that this thoughtful grandmother lived in a Houston housing project. Evidently, she was most penurious and a very shrewd investor!

Only last year tales of payoffs to football players at Texas Christian University caused their dismissal from the team and the crash of what had been a very promising season. Even closer to home the Lexington Herald Leader reported that a few years ago basketball players at the University of Kentucky were regularly visited in the dressing room by well-healed fans, who would exchange handshakes with top players and secretly pass them one hundred dollar bills. (The charges against UK have not been wholly substantiated and basketball fans in Central Kentucky reacted in the time honored manner. A storm of protest arose against the Herald Leader for breaking the story. It is all too reminiscent of the olden days when the King would kill the messenger who delivered him bad news.)

Persons who have spoken out against these practices have seldom been supported to the extent that they deserve. When Notre Dame's basketball coach, Digger Phelps, during last year's NCAA Tournament, reported that the going rate for high school basketball stars was \$10,000, the University of Nevada's Jerry Tarkanian, nicknamed appropriately, Tark the Shark, stated that he had heard a Southeastern Conference coach say, "Well then, let me have a couple of them! (Tark the Shark is not known for recruiting the

highest type athlete. Only last month it was revealed that he is planning to bring a New York City basketball star with below average grades to the University of Nevada at Las Vegas for pre-college work. The kid is not a graduating senior, but a highschool junior. Tark the Shark has another top prospect in mind -- a lad ranked by some scouting services as the second best player in California, and this even though the young man has never played a high school game. He is confined in a reform school and only plays against other prisoners.

Some of the evils of big time college athletics have been mentioned above, but tonight our focus will be on a more specific area: The prevalence of student athletes whose scholastic abilities are so limited that they really have no business being at a major university.

For years there has been the standing joke about the big dumb tackle who was attending college only to play football. My father used to tell a story about the days when Hopkinsville's South Kentucky College had a football team. William Turner could probably tell you that this date had to be in the early 1900's at the very latest. South Kentucky had a tough game coming up and decided to bolster its ~~xxxxxxxx~~thin forces by recruiting a robust young man

who happened to be the town blacksmith. As the game progressed, his words and actions led the opposing players to conclude that perhaps he was not a bonafide student at South Kentucky; one of them finally challenged him on this point. The young blacksmith vigorously asserted that he was a college student. The opponent pushed on, and demanded to know what subjects he was taking. The young blacksmith replied: "Typewriting and telegraphy".

But today things are not much better. Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, must have suffered incalculable damage when it was revealed that one of its players, who had been at the school for four years, had to return to a Chicago grade school to learn to read.

A player from the University of California at Berkeley, who had used up his four years of eligibility, was discovered eating all of his meals in Jerry's Restaurants. Those of you who have eaten in a Jerry's Restaurant can guess the reason why. The menus in these restaurants show pictures of the foods that are served, and the former "student athlete" could order in Jerry's by pointing out on the menu ~~xx~~ the items he wanted. After four years in college he could not even read a menu!



Exact information about the graduation rate of college athletes is often unavailable, as the schools sanctimoniously hide behind the Federal Privacy Act and decline to divulge the data. It can, however, sometimes be pieced together. For example, since 1973 thirty-eight players have gone through the Memphis State basketball program; four have graduated. All of them were white, a fact which properly produced an uproar from the Memphis Chapter of the NAACP.

The University of Georgia integrated its football program in 1971. Since that time 66 blacks have played four full years; sixteen have graduated.

To be sure many schools have a fine graduation rate. Notre Dame this past year graduated thirty-four out of thirty-five of its football seniors. Since Digger Phelps became Notre Dame's basketball coach, over fifteen years ago, every single one of his seniors has graduated.

Most of you have seen Georgetown University of Washington, D.C., in the NCAA finals the last few years. Its team was all black from its coach to the last substitute on the bench; perhaps some of you feel that Georgetown is nothing but a basketball factory. But almost all of Georgetown's players graduate, including Patrick Ewing,

its great star of the last few years who could easily have left school early for the big bucks of professional basketball.

The University of Kentucky graduates almost all of its basketball players and since Hopkinsville's Jerry Claiborne came to U.K., almost all of its football players. Many other schools do about as well. And the graduation rate for athletes at the Ivy League schools approaches 100%.

But the essential problem remained. Finally the colleges, led by their presidents, not their coaches, decided to do something about it.

In 1984 the NCAA adopted a resolution known as Proposition 48, a rule designed to keep players from enrolling in Division I colleges who have practically no chance of graduating. Letting such a person into college was felt to be a frank recognition that the school wanted only his services as an athlete.

As originally adopted Proposition 48 established the following rule. A high school senior must have a 2.0 average on a 4.0 scale, that is a C average, in certain basic subjects including science, math and language; eleven credits in these areas must be taken. Further, the prospective athlete

must score at least 700 out of 1600 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (commonly known as the SAT), or 15 out of 36 on the American College Test (generally known as the ACT).

It was immediately perceived that if this rule were enforced it would have a serious impact on college athletics. Pat Dye, the football coach at Auburn University, was asked what effect the rule would have on college football teams. He remarked somewhat pathetically, "Teams will be smaller, slower, and whiter".

We must not deceive ourselves. There is, I am afraid, some truth in the charges of the black colleges that there may be a degree of racism behind some of these rules.

The new rules will seriously affect black athletes. The average score on the SAT for white athletes is 940; for blacks it is 722. Joseph Johnson, the president of Grambling State in Grambling, Louisiana, a black institution which has furnished far more than its share of professional football players, pointed out that forty per cent of his graduates would not have even been able to enter.

Percy Pierre, president of Prairie View A and M, another black institution, reported that of the athletes who entered his school in 1977, only 31 per cent graduated, but 70 per cent of this 31 per cent could not even have gotten in under Proposition 48.

Some black administrators went so far as to accuse the NCAA of "athletic apartheid", segregating black and white athletes by schools.

Evidently the NCAA administrators felt that perhaps some changes were in order. It was felt that perhaps the sudden imposition of such academic standards might be too precipitous. It was recognized that the problem really began back in the high schools. Accordingly, at its latest convention the NCAA somewhat relaxed its requirements. The rule was to be phased in over a two year period. For this coming year, instead of needing a 700 on the SAT, a 660 will do; a 2.0 standing in the core curriculum is replaced with a 1.8 standing. For the following year the required SAT score goes up to 680 and the required high school grade point average to 1.9. But by 1988 the original proposals will be in effect.

But even this reduced standard will cause problems. A study of athletes who entered college in 1982 showed that the 660 score on the SAT was achieved by 93% of the whites, but only 59% of the blacks. At institutions using the ACT 81% of the whites reached the 15 score required, but only 38% of the blacks.



So the time has now come when athletes must really be students if they wish to go to a major college and become a "student athlete". While colleges, as far as the NCAA is concerned, can still admit anyone, these persons are not eligible to play or practice their freshman year. Even worse, and I think this may be a mistake, they are not eligible for the tutoring that goes with the usual athletic scholarship.

Proposition 48 might be an athletic bonanza for smaller scale institutions with lower standards; they can now attract real quality athletes. The junior colleges or schools that belong to the lower echelons of the NCAA and the schools who are members of the National Associations of Intercollegiate Athletics, can now have bonafide stars. But many of the schools in Divisions II and III of the NCAA long ago decided to get out of big time athletics, and the junior colleges and the smaller and less prestigious NAIA schools probably do not have the financial resources to support expensive sports programs, especially in football.

If the numbers 660 on the SAT or 15 on the ACT plus a 2.0 grade point average, do not impress colleges with the necessity of doing something, perhaps another number will. The number I refer to is \$2,579,681.90. This was the amount of damages a Georgia federal court returned in a recent law suit brought by Jan Kemp, a former University of Georgia professor, against her superiors at the University

who had first demoted and finally fired her. She alleged, and evidently the jury believed, that she was fired because she had spoken out against permitting football and basketball players to slide by in remedial programs she was teaching.

Time does not permit dwelling on this litigation at length, but I cannot resist telling you a little bit about this landmark case. The University of Georgia's defense was two fold. First, they used the old argument so frequently heard by the parents of teenagers: "Everybody else is doing it". Second, they contended that while their practices did not help black athletes graduate, they did improve their lot in life. In fact, in his opening statement to the jury Hale Almond, the attorney for the Georgia school officials, got his case off on a less than Clarence Darrow level by stating of the typical illiterate athlete, "We may not make a university student out of him but if we can teach him to read and write maybe he can work at the post office rather than as a garbage man when he gets through his athletic career".

The University of Georgia officials were aghast at this virtual admission that Georgia athletes were permitted to slide through with little effort made to give them an education. Veteran sports editor Furman Bisher of

the Atlanta Journal wrote in his column that this statement is "the most damning indictment of college athletics that I may have ever read." Although most legal experts freely predict that the amount of Mrs. Kemp's verdict will be considerably reduced on appeal, it is nevertheless a fact that verdicts of this type will get the attention of a college athletic department awfully quick.

Incidentally, the Atlanta Journal promptly turned up a young man named Landy Ewings, a black football player who had been at Georgia for three years. Currently he is still in Athens, the university's home town, employed as a garbage man.

My own opinion concerning the above?

Frankly I am less interested in keeping young athletes out of school than I am in seeing that they progress properly once they are in. I am not against Proposition 48. I think it is a good thing. But I think more emphasis should be placed on requiring an athlete to proceed at a normal pace toward graduation and toward a degree. At most large universities there are a great number of "Mickey Mouse" courses that one can take simply for a good grade. The problem, however, is that this eclectic cafeteria style approach prevents one from getting enough credits in any one area to have a major and without a major one cannot graduate from most colleges. We should require college athletes to be on a normal graduation course, every single year.

The NCAA, for all its alleged strictness, is not really requiring too much. An athlete, although he can play only four years, is allowed five years to graduate. Since it takes 120 credits to graduate at most colleges, this means that one need pass only twelve hours per semester, hardly an unreasonable load.

The five year requirement also means that many colleges, particularly in football, can "red-shirt" players, that is hold a player out a year and save one season of his eligibility for later. (The name "red-shirting" comes from the olden days when such a player wore a "red-shirt" at practice to differentiate him from the other players.) Many big time football schools routinely "red-shirt" everybody their freshman year. Although in principal I am opposed to red-shirting, if the players are allowed five years to graduate, I suppose red-shirting is inevitable.

Another suggestion sometimes made is that colleges revert to the practice of a few years ago when freshmen were not eligible to play varsity sports. Even today the Ivy League follows this practice. The coaches object, claiming that they need a large number of players to have a big time program. They claim that without the use of the freshmen they would need to have ten or fifteen more athletic scholarships, at a cost of roughly \$50,000 per student. I think it



would be a good idea to remove freshman eligibility, especially in football, the sport that commences in the fall, immediately upon the student's arrival on campus. Doing so would give freshmen a chance to get their feet on the ground, both academically and socially, without the added pressure of playing varsity sports.

Another practice of big time college sports that I oppose is athletic dorms. It is ironical that the same coaches who loudly argue that even if a player doesn't get a degree he will nevertheless have acquired associations and social poise from his contact with other students, are the very ones who insist most religiously on segregating their players from these other students in athletic dorms. The reason is obvious. The players can better be kept from getting into trouble, and, more importantly they are virtual captives and can be tutored under the watchful eyes of assistant coaches. But this is not sufficient reason to keep athletic dorms. Let the athletes be real students and mingle in the dormitories with everyone else. And it is possible to maintain a big time football program without athletic dorms. For example, at both the colleges my sons attend, Vanderbilt and Notre Dame, there is no such thing as an athletic dorm.

Some persons argue that we should continue the present system because it enables many athletes, especially blacks, to enter the professional ranks and make big money. But a prominent black sociologist, Harry Edwards, a professor at the University of California and a long time crusader against the exploitation of black athletes, has compiled figures that show there are only about 2,500 jobs in professional sports now filled by blacks. And this includes everybody, from the top super stars of the professional leagues to the exercise boys at the race tracks. And with the black population of this country somewhat in excess of 20,000,000 persons, it does not seem that making a living in professional sports is a very realistic possibility for very many of them.

This brings us to the end of this paper. I hope I have thrown out some facts and ideas that will get you to think about this situation. I hope that in the future, with the adoption of Proposition 48 and more stringent requirements in the high schools, the problems I have outlined tonight will be partially ameliorated. But the power of the almighty dollar is great. Sports fans and college coaches go to great extremes to assure that their teams will excel. So it remains to be seen whether the problems I have mentioned will be solved.