

The Thrill of Victory . . .
The Agony of Defeat . . .
and the Gnashing of Teeth . . .
as College Presidents Attempt
to Reform Intercollegiate Athletics

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A Modest Proposal

Let me begin by suggesting a modest proposal designed to recapture both the original purpose and spirit of college sports:

- All universities would agree on a five-year moratorium on television broadcasting of all college sports. The media – and the public – would be chased out of the locker rooms for this period.
- During this moratorium, universities would have an opportunity to determine the purpose and priority of college athletics on their campuses, without the glare of public attention.

- They would then develop, or realign, their intercollegiate athletics programs in a manner consistent with this mission.
- Because of the loss of television revenue, universities would have to learn how to live on a revenue diet by controlling the costs of intercollegiate athletics, scaling back their programs (and their aspirations) to more realistic levels. They would have to learn to live without athletic dorms, shoe contracts, and big time promotion. Further, they would even have to learn how to treat coaches as normal staff and to treat their athletes as students.
- After this five-year moratorium, television, the media, and the public would be invited back as spectators of college sports, but only on terms set by the universities, in a manner consistent with their academic priorities. There would no longer be late night basketball every night of the week, or football games starting in the gathering gloom of the late afternoon, or television commentators shrieking in a fever pitch to hype the action.

In other words, my modest proposal is to take “show biz” out of intercollegiate athletics and to once again allow academic priorities to determine the nature of college sports.

Needless to say, my proposal has not been greeted with overwhelming enthusiasm by many of my colleagues in higher education. But I do believe this proposal illustrates the degree to which we seem to have lost sight of the fundamental purposes of intercollegiate athletics. Rather than dwelling on the standard litany of concerns, both on our campuses and among the public at large, in this brief essay I would like to focus instead on three fundamental questions:

1. Why should we conduct intercollegiate athletics in the first place?
2. What is causing the distortion of intercollegiate athletics? What generates the pressure?

3. Why do we have so much difficulty getting intercollegiate athletics under university control?

But first, let me set the stage for this discussion ...

The Thrill of Victory, the Agony of Defeat

Mention Ann Arbor, and the first image that probably comes to mind is a crisp, brilliant weekend in the fall . . . walking across campus through the falling leaves to Michigan Stadium . . . gathering at tailgate parties. One recalls the excitement of walking into that magnificent stadium – “the Big House” – with 107,000 fans thrilling to the Michigan Marching Band as they step onto the field playing “Hail to the Victors.”

Clearly, intercollegiate athletics provide some of the very special moments in our lives. There is the excitement of traditional rivalries such as Michigan vs. Ohio State. Or perhaps special events such as a Rose Bowl or an NCAA basketball championship. Then too, there are the Cinderella stories; e.g., substitute coach Steve Fisher’s basketball team moving through an incredible series of victories to the NCAA championship or his later return to the championship round three years later with an all-freshman team, “The Fab Five”; Jim Abbott overcoming his disability to become the leading amateur athlete in the nation and then going on to become a major league baseball pitcher; Desmond Howard’s spectacular catch against Notre Dame and his Heisman Trophy season; and Mike Barrowman’s great effort to win the gold medal in the Barcelona Olympics.

Of course, sports have always been an important part of our culture. Intercollegiate athletics continue a tradition from ancient times, in which the games allow athletes to test and develop their own abilities in competition with one another. They teach both the player and the spectator some of the most enduring lessons of life: the importance of discipline, perseverance, and teamwork. Sports teach us all that the most important goals are achieved only through effort and

sacrifice – and sometimes even these are not enough. And they provide a sense of excitement, pride, and involvement with our institutions.

The Dark Side of the Force

Of course there are other images of intercollegiate athletics that reflect the concerns that have risen in recent years: the quasi-professional nature of college sports and their apparent inconsistency with our academic priorities; the degree to which college sports are portrayed as taking advantage of our student-athletes; the concern about graduation rates or the awarding of meaningless degrees. Then too, there is a perceived pressure to win at all costs, which leads to cheating and scandals; or images of misbehavior, such as when players taunt one another or coaches engage in tirades against officials; or the sordid story of drugs and crime involving college athletes.

And, there is the gross over-commercialization of college sports: the tendency to schedule events every night of the week, the media hype, and the feeding frenzy of the sports press.

This latter phenomena is a familiar one in Ann Arbor. When Bo Schembechler resigned in 1990 as the winningest coach in Michigan football history, there were seventeen television camera crews to cover the press conference announcing his resignation. The news was reported with headlines somewhat larger than those that would have announced an invasion from Mars. Even on campus the University student newspaper, the Michigan Daily, devotes more attention to the sports page than it does to its traditional call for student revolution on its editorial page.

The pressures generated by commercialization are seen all around us: The media clamor for a national football championship playoff for NCAA Division I-A schools, even when university presidents continue to resist this because of its dreadful impact on the academic

schedules of student-athletes. So too, the realignment and dismantling of conferences has been driven by the goal of maximizing bargaining with the television networks based upon greater market share. And then, of course, there is the greed surrounding the negotiations for distribution of the \$1 billion CBS contract for the NCAA championship or the rush toward more and more licensing income, a la Nike.

There are many signs that college sports have lost their bearings and now threaten to overwhelm the academic priorities of the institutions conducting them. In many cases, our programs have shifted away from providing an important learning and recreational experience for students – and a unifying, community-building opportunity for spectators – to an intense competition for maximum revenue and exposure for the participating teams and institutions.

As the Knight Commission observed in its important report of 1992:

“Within the last decade, big-time athletics programs have taken on all of the trappings of a major entertainment enterprise. In the search for television revenues, traditional rivalries have been tossed aside in conference realignments, games have been rescheduled to satisfy broadcast preferences, the number of games has been multiplied, student-athletes have been put on the field at all hours of the day and night, and university administrators have fallen to quarreling among themselves over the division of revenues from broadcasting contracts.”

There is an old saying in academics that the modern university is a fragile academic organism, delicately balanced between the athletics department on one end of the campus ... and the medical center on the other. Both are equally capable of harming the university: athletics can destroy its reputation, and the medical center can sink it financially.

Signs of Growing Concern

Public concerns about intercollegiate athletics continue to grow. A recent Harris poll indicated that 78 percent of the public believes that “intercollegiate athletics are out of control.” Many believe that television dollars, not the universities themselves, control college sports.

Almost monthly a new book on the “scandal” of intercollegiate athletics appears. Every major newspaper and columnist has taken a crack at bashing intercollegiate athletics, from the New York Times to the Washington Post, from David Broder to George Will. Even Congress wants into the act, with calls for legislation dictating the reporting of graduation rates and taxation of athletic revenue. With over one-half of all Division 1-A institutions receiving sanctions for violating NCAA regulations over the last decade, it is hard to blame them.

Calls for reform have triggered new activities in the public and private sector. The Knight Commission, chaired by Father Theodore Hesburg, former president of Notre Dame, and William Friday, former president of the University of North Carolina, has developed major reform agendas for intercollegiate athletics. Congressmen and legislators repeatedly attempt to introduce legislation that would constrain athletic programs. And, of course, the intense political battles within the NCAA, as best represented by the President’s Commission to develop a reform agenda and by the so-called Conference of Conferences, the coalition of major athletic conferences in the country that has been attempting to develop reforms.

A very broad range of proposals have been associated with reform efforts. At one extreme are calls for returning to the so-called “ivy model” of amateur play – although the Ivy League itself acknowledges its institutions face many of the problems that plague intercollegiate athletics nationwide. On the other extreme, many individuals – although primarily members of the media – call for a professionalization of college sports with payment to players.

In an effort to respond, the NCAA has implemented wave after wave of rules and regulations governing the conduct of college sports. Indeed, as the Knight Commission noted, the “NCAA manual more nearly resembles the IRS Code than it does an guide to action” . . . and NCAA Conventions resemble a political convention – or worse, Congress itself – attempting to make the rules even more complicated. It is also interesting to note that this complex maze of regulations really involves only the “athletic” side of the student-athlete, almost ignoring that these individuals are – or at least should be – first and foremost students.

What is the Problem?

What is the problem? Is it simply the usual human frailties? Greed? Arrogance? Ignorance? All of these are certainly contributing factors. I believe that the real problem lies not in the failure of human character but rather in the very nature of intercollegiate athletics today.

College sports have become a major source of public entertainment in America. Coaches and players have become media celebrities. Dollars from television have distorted institutional priorities. The media has created a feeding frenzy in which sports columnists have imitated gossip columnists in their efforts to pander to public curiosity. They have distorted intercollegiate athletics from its original status as an extracurricular activity to a form of show business. The traditional organizations that should be resisting this, such as the NCAA or the conferences, have become too unwieldy and cumbersome to be effective – and they have been co-opted by the lure of additional television dollars.

My hypothesis is simple: as long as colleges continue to allow the media, whether electronic or print, to promote and pressure college sports to become an entertainment industry, there will be little progress on true reform. Until colleges insist on the primacy of academic objectives and values over those of athletic

competitiveness, visibility, and financial bottom line, true reform is impossible. My fear is that few universities and athletic conferences and athletic associations have been able to withstand the tremendous pressure and rewards of “big time athletics,” not to mention their alumni, public, and governing boards. Few institutions have insisted on the dominance of academic principles over financial and entertainment objectives.

To examine this hypothesis in more detail, it is useful to step back and consider the evolution of college sports in America.

The Evolution of College Sports in America

One can distinguish three different stages in the evolution of college sports in this country. The first stage might be called the classical or amateur model. From ancient times it has been recognized that athletics are an important opportunity for teaching values of character, motivation, endurance, loyalty, and striving for one’s personal best – all qualities of great value in citizens. The first ideal for college sports was the scholar-athlete. The objective was the education of the whole person. Athletics were viewed as an extracurricular activity. This particular model continues to be regarded as the ideal by the Ivy League, but even here, it is really only an ideal. Efforts have long been made to keep college sports under control. As Cornell’s President White a century ago observed when his students sought to play football against Michigan, “I will not permit thirty men to travel to Ann Arbor just to agitate a bag of wind.”

Earlier in this century in many larger universities, college sports evolved from a participatory to a spectator activity. Athletic events were increasingly used as an opportunity to bring together the complex campuses characterizing the American university – Clark Kerr’s “multiversity” – where people who were connected only by a common heating plant or a need for parking became connected as well by identification with major sporting events and athletic

activities. This continues today since many of the most stolid alumni and faculty take pride in the success of an institution's athletic teams. Athletic events tended to promote the institution, giving it visibility and attracting support. As Chief Justice Earl Warren observed, "At the breakfast table I always open the newspaper to the sports pages first. The sports pages record people's accomplishments. The front page reports nothing but man's failures."

In the 1960s and 1970s such spectator events turned into public entertainment on a national scale. Of course, television was the principal reason. College sports represented a very attractive opportunity for television since most of the costs of production were borne by the institutions themselves or subsidized by spectators. Furthermore, television found that by promoting and marketing college sports much as they would other commercial activities – generating great media hype, hiring sensationalistic broadcasters, urging colleges to arrange more spectacular events – they could build major nationwide audiences.

While the dollars paid by television for college sports today seem excessive – witness the \$1 billion CBS paid for the NCAA basketball tournament or the \$200 million ABC pays for Big Ten-Pac Ten football broadcasts – the degree to which these sporting activities and their participants were regarded as entertainment rather than competition was of major significance. Coaches and players rapidly assumed celebrity status surrounded by their own cadre of "groupies" and subject to all of the associated temptations and pressures. Conferences began to be run more like professional leagues. Today the Big Ten Conference rivals the NFL in its governance, administration, and financial structures.

The lure of television and the desire for visibility began to distort seriously the nature of college sports. Some conferences agreed to completely restructure their schedules; one even agreed to start its games at midnight in order to accommodate one of the major cable sports networks. Advertising invaded athletic facilities, even for

products that seemed antithetical to the objectives of higher education, e.g., beer commercials.

It has become clear that during this third stage – the “big time show biz stage” – television in particular and the press more generally have seriously distorted the nature of intercollegiate athletics. They have distorted schedules by demanding excessively long seasons and pressuring for post-season play and conference tournaments, which in the end trivialize seasonal play. Media hype has transformed players into celebrities. It has generated pressures on coaches and players to cheat. As was noted in a recent book, *College Sports Incorporated*, intercollegiate athletics have “ become a huge commercial entertainment conglomerate with extremely well-paid coaches, elite athletes, gleaming facilities, and enormous media coverage. And in the process the institutions, their academic programs, and the academic objectives of their students have not been well served.”

Myths and Realities

The myths surrounding college sports are rampant. It seems useful to look more closely at several of the popular myths in order to understand what the real issues are.

Myth 1. Colleges make lots of money from college sports.

Don Canham, former athletic director at Michigan and regarded as one of the premier athletic directors in the history of college sports, noted that over 99 percent of the schools in this country do not balance their budgets in athletics. Indeed, the University of Michigan, as one of the nation’s most successful programs, provides an excellent model: In 1989 the University of Michigan won the Big Ten football championship, the Rose Bowl, and the NCAA basketball championship. The University appeared in seven national football telecasts and dozens of basketball telecasts, played before a stadium averaging 105,000 fans at six games, and sold out most of its

basketball and hockey events. Yet it still managed to barely break even for the year.

Continuing this example, Michigan's entire intercollegiate sports budget this past year amounted to roughly \$38 million. This sounds large, but it is just slightly over 1 percent of a total University budget of roughly \$2.6 billion a year. When I was provost, Coach Bo Schembechler once noted the enormous pressures he faced to keep the Michigan Stadium filled. He pointed to the losses that we would face if stadium attendance dropped 10 percent. I pointed out that while this loss would be significant, it paled in comparison to the loss we would experience with a 10 percent drop in bed occupancy in the University of Michigan Hospitals – an income loss of almost a factor of 50 larger than that experienced in football. Even athletic revenue has to be placed in perspective.

The University of Michigan, as one of the nation's most successful athletic programs, generates one of the largest levels of gross revenue in intercollegiate athletics. And yet, the University itself these days barely manages to operate in a break-even stance, with expenditures now for the first time in its history beginning to exceed revenues.

The problem is rather simple. The “business culture” for intercollegiate athletics is wacky. Striving for athletic competitiveness creates revenue-driven management models. The philosophy is to generate more and more dollars and then to spend them all, without ever really paying any attention to expenditure control. The belief is that the team that spends the most, wins the most.

It seems clear that until intercollegiate athletics begin to operate with as much of an eye on expenditures as revenues, universities will continue to lose increasing amounts of money in their athletic activities, regardless of the lucrative nature of the television contracts that they negotiate.

Myth 2. Winning teams motivate alumni to make contributions.

Of course, some alumni are indeed moved to give money to the University when it is basking in the glow of winning athletic programs. Unfortunately, these generous alumni usually give only to athletic programs and not to the University more generally. Development officers have known for many years that the most valuable support of a university generally comes from alumni and friends who identify with the academic programs of the university, not its athletic prowess. (A good example here is evidenced by Columbia's spectacular fund-raising ability – which is clearly unrelated to its athletic prowess.)

Myth 3. Television is making colleges rich.

The staggering sums associated with recent television contracts, such as the \$1 billion contract with CBS for televising the NCAA tournament, suggest that television revenue is the goose that lays the golden eggs for intercollegiate athletics. Yet, for most institutions, ticket sales are still the main source of revenue. The real payoff is through gate receipts, not television revenue. Indeed, there is recent evidence that television has begun to actually decrease overall revenues of many athletic programs by overexposing athletic events and eroding gate receipts. Further, erosion of attendance by television has been particularly harmful to those institutions and conferences that do not receive television exposure, since many of their respective fans stay home from their events in order to watch televised events involving major athletic powers.

Additional costs required to mount “TV quality” events tend to track right along with increasing revenue in such a way that the more one is televised, the more one must spend. There is little actual financial incentive for excessive television exposure. It is clear that while exposure can convey the good news of successful athletic programs and promote the university’s visibility, it can also convey “bad

news,” particularly if there is a major scandal or mishap with an event.

If the financial and visibility impact of television is not necessarily positive, then why is there such a mad rush on the part of college athletics to push for more and more television exposure? Speaking from the perspective of one of the most heavily televised universities in the country, my suspicion is that the pressure for such excessive television exposure is not coming from the most successful and most heavily televised institutions – the Michigans, Ohio States, USCs, and UCLAs. It is instead coming from the “have not” institutions, those who have chosen not to mount competitive programs but who have become heavily dependent on sharing the television revenue generated by the “big box office draws” through conference or NCAA agreements.

Stated more bluntly, the television revenue-sharing policies of many conferences or broader associations such as the NCAA, while implemented with the aim of achieving equity, are in reality having the perverse effect of providing strong incentives for those institutions that are not attractive television draws to drive the system toward excessive exposure of popular events. While the have-not universities share in the revenues, these institutions do not bear the burden of providing television-quality events. In essence, the revenue-sharing system itself has created a situation in which there is little feedback that might lead to more moderate approaches to television exposure.

Myth 4. Colleges are exploiting student-athletes. We should give them professional pay.

The argument usually goes that college sports is golden – witness, for example, the \$1 billion from CBS for the NCAA tournament or a \$6.8 million pay-out for the Rose Bowl. And yet, the athletes don’t even get pocket money. Look how much Michael Jordan and Shaquille O’Neal make in the pros. Shouldn’t we pay those college athletes who generate all this money?

Well, there are several realities that clarify this particular myth:

Reality 1: What do universities really make from athletics?

Let's take the University of Michigan as a good example. This past year Michigan made \$3 million total from television. That's the entire revenue from football, basketball, Rose Bowl, NCAA tournaments, and so forth. That's it! Of course, the University actually generated far more than this, but this was split with all other Big Ten teams. In any event, the \$3 million, spread over the 150 football, basketball, and hockey athletes who generate it, amounts to about \$20,000 each per year. Of course, if we want to consider total revenue generation, then it would be about \$18 million for total gate receipts, but this would be spread over 700 varsity athletes and about 200 coaches and staff—amounting to about \$18,000 per athlete per year. And, of course, we haven't said anything yet about expenses. Expenditures at Michigan, as at every other university in the nation, are generally larger than revenues. As a result, the net revenues—that is the profit—is zero!

Reality 2: What do the players get from the university?

At Michigan the typical instructional cost (not “price” or tuition) of our undergraduate programs is about \$20,000 per student per year. When we add to this support for room and board and incidentals, it amounts to an investment of about \$30,000 per year per fully tendered student-athlete—or between \$120,000-\$150,000 per athlete over four or five years of studies. Of course, the actual value of this education is far higher since it provides the student-athlete with an earning capacity far beyond that of a high school education—and even far beyond that of a professional sports career—as experienced by all but the greatest superstars. And, of course, only a few student-athletes will ever achieve high-paying professional roles. Most do not make the pros, and those who do are only moderately compensated.

Reality 3: Is such a “show biz” approach really appropriate for college athletics?

Those who call for professionalizing college athletics by paying student-athletes – and these are generally members of the media – are once again approaching college sports as show business, not as part of an academic enterprise. Only in show business do the stars make grossly distorted amounts. In academics, the Nobel Prize winner doesn’t make all that much more than any other faculty member. In the corporate world, the inventor of a device that earns a corporation millions of dollars will make only a small incentive from his discovery. The moral of the story is that one simply cannot apply the perverse reward system characterizing the entertainment industry to college sports – unless, of course, you truly believe college sports should be show business.

An aside here: A U.S. Department of Education study attempted to determine what the impact of their college education was on 8,000 college students, including 200 athletes, over a period from 1972 to 1986. By age thirty-two, athletes were found to have the highest rate of home ownership, the lowest rate of unemployment, and earnings 10 percent above the mean. Despite having somewhat poorer high school records, test scores, and preparation for college, athletes tended to graduate at rates only slightly behind those of students at large. Of course, the reason for academic success involved both their strong financial support through scholarships and the academic support and encouragement through programs not available to students at large. In a 1992 column criticizing college sports, even David Broder acknowledged, “This study suggests that college did not fail – or ruthlessly exploit – these jocks.” Of course, Broder goes on to say, “whether the care and resources the college invests in the few hundred players who draw such huge crowds and produce such vast revenues is consistent with the overall educational mission is another question altogether – to which my answer is a resounding no.”

But, of course, the real argument against professionalizing college sports and putting athletes on the payroll has to do with the fundamental nature of the university itself. Professional athletics have absolutely nothing to do with education and should have no role in a university.

In summary, then, the mad dash for fame and profits through intercollegiate athletics is a fool's quest. Recognition on the athletic field or court has little relevance to academic reputation. UNLV can win all the national championships it wishes, and it will never catch Harvard's eye. Indeed, athletics' fame can be a two-edged sword, since it can attract public scrutiny revealing violations and scandal. So too, experience has shown that expenses always increase somewhat more rapidly than the revenues generated by college sports. And, as the intensity and visibility of big-time athletics build, the university finds itself buffeted by the passion and energy of the media and the public who identify with their athletics programs.

The Fundamental Questions . . . and Some Answers:

With this background then, let's return to the questions I first posed in the introduction and consider some possible answers:

Fundamental Question #1: Why should we conduct intercollegiate athletics in the first place?

Answer: First, and foremost, we should use such programs to provide an opportunity to participate in athletics as one component of the education we provide our students. We should embrace the ideal of a scholar-athlete and its objective of educating the whole person. Of course we also utilize athletics as a spectator activity to unite our campuses, and those who identify with them, through our programs. It is true that intercollegiate athletics has become a major form of entertainment to the public at large. These secondary purposes, of providing community-unifying events and public

entertainment, should be subordinate to the educational character of college sports.

Fundamental Question #2: What causes the distortion of intercollegiate athletics? What generates the pressure?

Answer: Clearly, it is television, that turns intercollegiate athletics into big time show business, with all the attendant pressures such as media interest (particularly the feeding frenzy of sports writers) that makes coaches and players into celebrities. Ironically, the pressures from television are NOT financial. Indeed, only 12 percent of Big Ten revenues come from broadcasting, in comparison to 44 percent from gate receipts. (The remainder comes either from auxiliary activities such as concessions and licensing or from subsidies from student fee revenues or state appropriations.) Rather the pressures arise from the vast public exposure they provide institutions.

Fundamental Question #3: Why do we have so much difficulty getting athletics under university control?

Answer: The answer seems painfully clear. The organizations we use to control athletics – particularly the NCAA, but also, to some degree, the conferences themselves – are unable to acknowledge or cope either with the pressures of television or with the extraordinary diversity of the colleges and universities they represent. For example, the NCAA is comprised of over 800 institutions, ranging from vast, comprehensive, research universities such as the University of Michigan and the University of California, to comprehensive four-year institutions such as Eastern Michigan University or Cal State-Long Beach, to small liberal arts colleges such as Kalamazoo College or Occidental College. Just as it would make no sense to have small liberal arts colleges set academic priorities for major research universities, it makes no sense for the fifty or so major AAU-class institutions to have their athletics programs controlled by the majority vote of NCAA. Even within conferences, it is important

to recognize the profound differences among institutions. For example, within the Big Ten, large institutions such as Michigan, Ohio State, and Penn State will clearly have different missions and objectives for their intercollegiate athletics programs than more focused institutions such as Purdue, Northwestern, and Indiana – just as they have significantly different academic missions and objectives.

What can we do to realign intercollegiate athletics with the academic priorities of universities? While I still think the television moratorium idea would make a great two-by-four to get the mule's attention, let me suggest several more pragmatic approaches. First, we need to agree on some fundamental principles.

The Fundamental Principles

I believe that the key to realigning intercollegiate athletics with academic priorities is to first establish the fundamental reasons why an institution wishes to conduct competitive athletic programs. These reasons will then determine the philosophy and fundamental principles that govern these activities. Earlier I outlined several stages in the evolution of sports that suggested reasons for conducting these activities: i) to provide an educational opportunity for students beyond the classroom, and ii) to serve as community events that unify the campus community and those who identify with the institution.

The Knight Commission spells out a series of fundamental principles that make a good starting point for this effort:

1. The educational values, practices, and mission of the institution determine the standards by which intercollegiate athletics are conducted.
2. The responsibility and authority for the administration of the athletic department, including all basic policies, personnel, and finances, are vested in the president.

3. The welfare, health, and safety of student-athletes are primary concerns of athletics administration on campus.
4. Every student-athlete will receive equitable and fair treatment.
5. The admission of student-athletes will be based on their reasonable promise of success in a course of study leading to an academic degree – as determined by the admissions officials.
6. Continuing eligibility will be based on students being able to demonstrate each term that they will graduate within five years of enrolling. Students who do not pass the test will not play.
7. Student-athletes in each sport will be graduated in at least the same proportion as non-athletes who have spent comparable time as full-time students.
8. All funds raised and spent in connection with intercollegiate athletics programs will be channeled through the institution's general financial structure.
9. All athletics-related income from non-university sources for coaches and athletics administrators will be reviewed and approved by the university.
10. Institutions will conduct annual academic and fiscal audits of athletics. Changes are clearly required in intercollegiate athletics. Making these changes will require courage, determination, and perseverance on the part of all.

While these make a good starting point, some issues need further consideration.

Key issues in realigning athletic with academics

The Treatment of Student-Athletes

Here, I believe that programs should be guided always by the question of “what is best for the student.” For example, in deciding on the admission of a student-athlete, one must always ask whether or not the prospective student has the capacity to benefit from an undergraduate education at the institution. Is the university confident that with sufficient academic support the student has the ability to pursue meaningful studies and to graduate? Only those students who have a high probability of graduating should be admitted.

In this regard, it is important to recognize that the underlying principle of admissions policies at most selective institutions is to achieve a student body of unusual distinction and depth. Most institutions are aware that excellence is a multi-dimensional characteristic. It comes in many forms – in academic ability, artistic ability, and athletic ability. For that reason, few institutions today insist on blind, one-dimensional standards for all students, for example, those based on test scores or grade-point average. Rather, they seek diversity in their student bodies, and it is this search for diversity that justifies in many ways the commitment to building successful intercollegiate athletic programs.

At Michigan we believe that the admission of athletes must flow through the normal academic structure. In most academic institutions, the chief academic officer, usually the provost or vice president for academic affairs, has the ultimate responsibility for the quality, standards, and success of the academic programs of the institution. These responsibilities include admissions, academic counseling, and academic eligibility. The final decision point on admissions and academic standing of student-athletes should rest with the provost and his or her designees. Of course, this should require a careful monitoring of progress toward degree by academic officers and not simply monitoring by staff in the department of intercollegiate athletics. It will also require the provision of sufficient academic support services to recognize the unusual pressures and time commitments of student-athletes.

Of comparable importance is the concept of academic progress. Students should be carefully monitored to ensure that they are making real progress toward real degrees.

There should also be a commitment of adequate financial aid and support until students graduate – not just until they complete eligibility.

Of equal importance is a commitment to fairness. During the 1970s and 1980s a major effort was made to provide women students with opportunities equal to those of men. To the degree that intercollegiate athletics is justified in terms of its value in character building and in education, it seems clear that women should be given the same opportunities as men who have access to such programs. I would go further and suggest that, in those institutions that have primarily stressed spectator athletics, a major effort might be given to introduce a series of athletic programs designed primarily for student participation. Broad participation should be encouraged for all students, not just those involved in competitive or varsity athletics. But more on this later.

The Treatment of Coaches

Coaching a modern college athletic program is a demanding and intense profession. The rigors of recruiting, of coaching, of working with student-athletes, of handling the enormous public attention – particularly that from the media – and of adhering to the complex rules governing athletes and athletics are challenging. Coaching requires extraordinary commitment, long hours of work, and demanding travel schedules. And it yields frustration and disappointment. It also yields rewards, not simply in winning, but more importantly in seeing the development and success of the young men and women in the programs. I believe that coaches should be treated first and foremost as teachers, not as managers of athletic programs. If this philosophy were adopted more generally, it would lead to extended commitments by institutions to coaches, as

well as more consistent methods of compensation from universities, e.g., avoiding the need for shoe contracts.

Financing

I have already noted that a serious imbalance exists between the competitive pressures to generate revenues and inadequate expenditure control and cost containment. Far too many intercollegiate athletic programs are allowed to operate without sufficient university supervision. Such programs must come under the general scrutiny and operational structures characterizing other university units. Furthermore, during periods in which higher education is being asked to carefully assess its efficiency in an effort to reduce costs, I believe that intercollegiate athletics must be looked at from a similar perspective.

Integrity

At Michigan we believe that there is only one way to play and that is by the rules. The right way is the Michigan way. The institution is not only one of the most visible, but one of the most highly competitive institutions in the nation. We believe that to play a leadership role and to honor our commitment to student-athletes and to our academic programs, we must implement adequate institutional control to insure that our programs, our coaches, and our players respect and adhere to the rules governing academic athletic competition. Each year I, as president of the University, meet with all of the coaches in order to stress to them the importance of the integrity of our programs. I take great pains to point out that in my many years at the University there has never been a coach who has been released from the University because of his or her win-lose record. However, if coaches or staff are found bending or breaking the rules, then dismissal is almost certain.

Winning

How does one evaluate successful athletic programs? Win-lose records? Revenue (gate receipts)? Graduation rates of student-athletes? The number of athletes who go on to national recognition and professional careers? In most of our institutions we aspire to

excellence in intercollegiate athletics just as we do in every other endeavor. Just as Michigan seeks to have the number one program in the nation in psychology or classical studies or engineering or law, we also aspire to leadership in football or swimming or softball. But, as important as success is, it is not the most important goal. Winning must not come at the expense of other more important objectives such as the integrity of our program and the academic success of our student-athletes.

The Pros

Many of the most serious conflicts between athletic and academic priorities occur in those sports for which collegiate participation serves for a very talented few as a training ground for professional careers. It is certainly the case that professional football and basketball rely on intercollegiate athletics much as professional baseball and hockey rely on their own farm clubs.

If there is sufficient separation between college and professional sports, then who can deny the opportunities that the latter provides to athletes of exceptional ability? Unfortunately, in recent years, professional sports has become a far more intrusive and negative influence. The feeding frenzy of professional agents seeking out college athletes has led to serious abuse of academic and athletic standards. Professional teams take a “meat market” approach toward the professional draft: College athletes are expected to drop their college activities to participate in try-out camps designed to measure their physical abilities, and the lure of professional riches distorts the academic priorities of student-athletes.

Perhaps the most serious threat is the increasing tendency for professional sports to entice college athletes into professional careers – or at least into the professional draft – long before they have had an opportunity to complete their academic degrees. This trend not only represents the most cynical and abusive attitude on the part of professional teams and agents toward the well-being of student-athletes, but it frequently leads to the most tragic of circumstances in

which students are encouraged to drop out of college to pursue the will-of-the-wisp of a short-lived professional career.

Unfortunately, despite the importance of college athletics to their future, the leaders of professional athletics have yet to demonstrate either the interest or the sense of responsibility to develop guidelines that will protect the best long-term interests of student-athletes. Instead they – and many members of the media – call for even fewer limitations on the interaction between college and professional sports by allowing student-athletes to test the water by participating in the professional draft without jeopardizing their college eligibility.

However, in the spirit of tilting with windmills, let me offer a proposal that would enable professional sports to step up to their responsibility both to the athlete and to the institutions that have assisted in developing their athletic ability. The idea is quite simple: Whenever a professional team recruits student-athletes prior to the completion of their academic degree, the team would be required to place in escrow with the university an amount sufficient to fund the students' eventual completion of their degrees when they return – during or after their professional career. Note that this would accomplish several objectives: i) It would provide an insurance policy for the students to allow them to complete their degree; ii) It would provide an incentive for professional teams to allow students to finish their studies before playing professionally, thereby avoiding the expense of the escrow account; iii) In the event that the student did not return, the reversion of the funds to the institution would compensate it to some degree for the prior investment it had made in the student through its own grants-in-aid.

A simple enough concept, but probably unrealistic without a major sea change in the attitude of the owners of professional franchises.

Team Work

In any institution, and on occasion at the University of Michigan, a sense of isolation develops, separating athletic programs from the mainstream activities of the University. We believe it is important

that coaches work hand-in-hand with University administrators and faculty to integrate student-athletes into the mainstream of the University, to stress the fact that they are first and foremost students – and that coaches themselves play important roles as teachers at the University. Through such interactions universities can integrate their athletic activities into their academic programs.

The Importance of Recognizing Institutional Diversity

Let me turn to another thorny issue: that posed by the extraordinary diversity of colleges and universities in America. It is essential to recognize and respect this diversity among academic institutions, even as we seek a common ground – a level playing field – for athletic competition. It is unlikely that the present NCAA will ever have the capacity to do this. In many ways, the intense desire of the 800-plus Division I, II, and III institutions to achieve the public visibility and financial success of the 50 “AAU class” institutions in athletics – perhaps as a surrogate for similar parity in academics – currently drives much of the abuse in college sports today. The massive dollars generated by the major institutions through events such as the national championship basketball tournament are fueling a massive bureaucracy within the NCAA that not only is incapable of controlling abuse, but actually contributes to it through staggering inefficiency and red tape.

In early 1996, the NCAA took a major step to restructure itself to recognize institutional diversity while facilitating presidential control. By a 90 percent vote of all the member institutions, it transformed itself from an association, governed by the tyranny of one institution, one vote, into a federation of three divisions (I, II, and III), each with sufficient autonomy to control its own destiny and recognize institutional diversity. The total NCAA federation will now be controlled by a small executive committee of university presidents, the majority of whom will come from the larger institutions in Division I who have the most at stake in college sports. While athletic administrators, coaches, and faculty will have

important roles and input to divisions, this new structure is consistent with the Knight Commission's view that, in the end, the integrity of college sports depends on presidential control.

Similar steps would have to be taken within conferences to recognize the diversity of members. For example, within the Big Ten it is clear that several members no longer have the desire or financial resources to field competitive programs across the full spectrum of sports. Such differences in institutional priorities should be tolerated and encouraged at the conference level. Consider, for example, football, in which several Big Ten schools – Penn State, Michigan, Ohio State – are generally able to compete at the national level year-in and year-out. Rather than seeking to pull these programs down to a competitive level comparable to programs at those institutions who chose not to compete at this level, one should instead simply accept the fact that some institutions will – and should – build nationally-competitive programs in this sport, just as others will in hockey or women's basketball or soccer. Why should a conference seek to make every institution competitive in any particular sport? It should be an institutional decision.

OTHER PROPOSALS FOR RESTRUCTURING COLLEGE SPORTS

Sports Tiering

This brings me to another theme that applies at the institution level: sports tiering. At the present time, there are twenty-two varsity sports at Michigan – ten for men and twelve for women. All seek national competitiveness; all offer full grants-in-aid; all are supported by revenue sports (football, men's basketball, and hockey). Yet these twenty two sports provide opportunities for participation in intercollegiate athletics to only about 600 students – out of an undergraduate student body of 22,000. The only alternative opportunities are club sports using volunteer coaches, poor equipment and facilities, and supported directly by contributions, or intramural athletics, supported by student fees.

The Michigan model stands in sharp contrast to the Ivy model, in which universities maintain 30 to 40 varsity sports to provide broad participation opportunities for students. Since none of these sports are able to generate substantial revenue, they are primarily supported by student fees.

It is becoming increasingly clear that cost containment and gender equity objectives will require some differentiation among Michigan sports – a so-called “core sports” or “tiering” approach – in which some sports are maintained at nationally competitive levels, while others aim at achieving only regional or conference competitiveness. However, it might also be appropriate to consider a broader set of sports tiering in an effort to provide a significant increase in opportunities for student participation. One such model might be a hybrid of the Michigan and Ivy League models.

At the highest tier would be programs that aim at national competitiveness. These would be characterized by full grants-in-aid, high quality coaching staffs, facilities, and support. They would be supported from Athletics Department revenue and would include many of our present programs: men’s football, men’s and women’s basketball, men’s and women’s swimming, hockey, softball and baseball, etc. At the next level would be regionally or conference-level competitive sports, characterized by high-quality coaching, facilities and support, but only by limited (perhaps only need-based) grants-in-aid. Again, these would be supported by Athletics Department revenue.

At the next level would be a number of varsity sports programs, with professional coaches but more limited facilities and support and no grants-in-aid. These programs, designed to increase opportunities for student participation, would be supported entirely from student fees. While such programs, which might include crew, lacrosse, and skiing, would generally compete on a regional basis, they might from time to time achieve national prominence. Below these would be a variety of what might be called “super” club sports, similar in nature to our present club sports models, but subsidized to some degree by

student fees. Included in this latter group might be “junior varsity” opportunities in nationally competitive sports such as baseball, basketball, and hockey. Finally, there would be a broad array of intramural sports opportunities and informal athletics programs as there are today.

While such a tiering approach might appear to be a bold departure from Michigan’s tradition, it has proven to be a very successful approach at other institutions that manage to combine nationally-competitive programs with broad opportunities for student participation—Stanford and Penn State being two notable examples. The positive impact on the educational experience provided to undergraduates through varsity competition has been vividly demonstrated by the Ivy League for decades.

Returning to Single Platoon Football

When confronting the excessive escalation of costs or the demand to move toward greater gender equity, universities—and the sports press—all too frequently use as an excuse the large size of college football squads, coaching staffs, and costs. Indeed, there have even been lobbying efforts aimed at Congress to exempt college football from the same set of rules that apply to other sports programs.

But there is a very easy technical fix that would solve these problems. Simply return to the substitution rules of the 1950s in which players are expected to play both ways, offense and defense. This would effectively cut in half the parameters characterizing football teams: the number of players (from over 100 to 50), the number of coaches, and very significantly reducing the costs (e.g., grants-in-aid, coaching salaries, equipment and travel expenses).

Moreover, there are those who suggest it might even improve the quality of the game since requiring athletes to play more diverse positions would place a higher premium on recruiting outstanding all-round athletes rather than finely-honed specialists (... 300 pound offense linemen or 4.4 second wide receivers ...) It could reduce injuries, since smaller, more athletic players would not generate the

same level of physical trauma. It would trigger a significant restructuring of high school football, once again reducing costs dramatically and placing a premium on developing the complete athlete. And, while it would decouple college football from responding directly to the highly specialized needs of the professional leagues. I, for one, do not believe this would be an altogether bad prospect. It might even encourage student-athletes to stay in school until they complete their degrees.

Eliminating Freshman Eligibility in Revenue Sports

Clearly the practice of allowing first year students to compete at the varsity level in such revenue sports as football, basketball, and hockey must be challenged. The transition to college is difficult enough for most students, without adding the additional pressure of varsity competition in media-intensive sports.

While the Big Ten Conference has long supported the elimination of freshman eligibility, other conferences – particularly those involving smaller institutions which depend on freshman to sustain programs – have long resisted this change. However, this is one of those issues in which the concern for student welfare should dominate.

Clearly, the elimination of freshman eligibility would also be consistent with prohibiting transfer students (including junior college transfers) from competing immediately after arriving on campus.

Some Final Comments

In conclusion, it is my belief that intercollegiate athletics should be and, indeed, are an important part of higher education. College sports provide an important educational opportunity to the student-athlete. They are important as a unifying force for the university communities and beyond. However, I do not believe that intercollegiate athletics has any obligation to be responsive or subservient to armchair America, particularly if this conflicts with the fundamental educational missions of our programs.

Indeed, I believe that the key to the control of intercollegiate athletics and to proper alignment with the academic priorities of the institution will be the effort of universities to strongly resist media pressure – whether electronic or print – to transform college sports into an entertainment industry. The academy simply must recapture control of college sports from the media.

More specifically, universities must first establish their own priorities, objectives, and principles for college sports and then commit themselves to holding fast to these objectives in the face of the enormous pressure that will be exerted by the media and the public-at-large. In the end, athletics must reflect the fundamental academic values of the university. There is no other alternative acceptable to higher education.