

The George H. W. Bush "Lifetime of Leadership" Awards
Acceptance Remarks by Jim Duderstadt
November 21, 2003

It is a very great honor to receive an award from one's alma mater, particularly when it carries the name of a distinguished Yale graduate and national leader such as President Bush.

Even if he did mispronounce my name... Actually, he has done so before, first when we brought the NCAA champion Michigan basketball team to the White House for a Rose Garden ceremony in 1989, and then in 1990 when my daughter was honored as a member of the first Peace Corps delegation to Eastern Europe.

But we understood and forgave, giving President and Mrs. Bush not only honorary degrees in 1991 but also the game ball from a last-second Michigan victory over Notre Dame later that fall.

There are many links between Yale and Michigan athletics, including another American president, Gerald R. Ford, a Michigan football captain who went to Yale law school and served as an assistant football coach in the 1930s. Yale and Michigan rank as the top two winning football programs in the nation.

Tomorrow's games in New Haven and Ann Arbor provide yet another Yale-Michigan link, and an interesting contrast. Of course we all know the long tradition of the Yale-Harvard game. What might not be so well known in New Haven is that tomorrow's game in Ann Arbor will be the 100th between Michigan and Ohio State.

Of course there are some contrasts here: In New Haven, two of the finest academic institutions in the world will meet on the gridiron, with alumni and fans gathering to tailgate and bask under sunny skies.

In Ann Arbor, the mood will be more serious, as over 112,000 gather in weather more typical of the North Atlantic, for a gridiron battle with not simply a Rose Bowl and the Big Ten title at stake, but possibly a place in the BCS national championship game as well.

But a more significant contrast between our institutions has to do with the fundamental character of intercollegiate athletics on each of our campuses.

Yale aspires to the *collegiate* model, centered about the student-athlete, with the belief that done correctly, college sports can contribute significantly to one's education. To be sure, Yale sometimes falls short, with occasional problems in student admissions, student-athlete behavior, and the academic underperformance of student athletes. But at least ESPN and Nike don't run your athletics programs.

At one time Michigan (and Ohio State, Notre Dame, USC, etc.) embraced the collegiate model (back in the days of Gerry Ford). But today they have long since allowed the lure of commercial riches to lure them down the slippery slope toward a quite different model, that characterizing *professional* sports, in which the marketplace becomes the focus of their athletics programs.

As a former Michigan president I must confess I have known the sin of commercial big time college sports with 5 Rose Bowls, 3 Final Fours, 4 Frozen Fours, numerous national championships, 7 victories over Ohio State, and a very serious scandal in our basketball program! After four decades as a college athlete, a faculty member, provost and president of the University of Michigan, and member and chair of the Presidents' Council of the Big Ten Conference, I have arrived at several conclusions:

1. First, while most of our intercollegiate athletics programs are both valuable and appropriate activities for our universities, big-time college football and basketball stand apart, since they have clearly become commercial entertainment businesses. Today they have little if any

- relevance to the academic mission of the university. Furthermore, they are based on a culture, a set of values that, while perhaps appropriate for show business, are viewed as highly corrupt by the academy and deemed corrosive to our academic mission.
2. While I believe that one can make a case for relevance of college sports to our educational mission to the extent that they provide a participatory activity for our students, I can find no compelling reason why American universities should conduct intercollegiate athletics programs at the current highly commercialized, professionalized level of big-time college football and basketball simply for the entertainment of the American public, the financial benefit of coaches, athletic directors, conference commissioners, and NCAA executives, and the profit of television networks, sponsors, and sports apparel manufacturers.
 3. Most significantly, it is my growing conviction that big-time college sports do far more damage to the university, to its students and faculty, its leadership, its reputation and credibility, that most realize—or at least are willing to admit. The examples are numerous:
 - Far too many of our athletics programs exploit young people, recruiting them with the promise of a college education—or a lucrative professional career—only to have the majority of Division 1-A football and basketball players achieve neither.
 - Scandals in intercollegiate athletics have damaged the reputations of many of our colleges and universities.
 - Big time college football and basketball have put inappropriate pressure on university governance, as boosters, politicians, and the media attempt to influence governing boards and university leadership.
 - The impact of intercollegiate athletics on university culture and values has been damaging, with inappropriate behavior of both athletes and coaches, all too frequently tolerated and excused.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist (although that happens to be my background) to see what needs to be done to re-establish the primacy of educational over commercial values in college sports:

1. The elimination of freshman eligibility for varsity competition;
2. The replacement of "athletic scholarships" (an oxymoron that really amounts to "pay for play") by need-based financial aid;
3. The mainstreaming of coaching compensation and employment policies;
4. The establishment of firm faculty control over all aspects affecting academic integrity such the admission of student-athletes, the assessment of student progress toward degree, and the constraining of student participation and competitive schedules.
5. The elimination of those mega-events such as the BCS and the Final Four that are so grossly distorted by commercialism that they exploit our student-athletes, corrupt our institutions, and trample upon our academic values and priorities.

(Sounds very much like the philosophy of the Ivy League, doesn't it?)

But here I must also acknowledge that a century of efforts to reform college sports have been largely unsuccessful. It is now my belief that working through athletic organizations such as the NCAA, the conferences, or the athletic departments is futile since these are led or influenced by those who have the most to gain from the further commercialization of college sports. It is my belief that we will never achieve true reform or control through these organizations, since the foxes are in firm control of the hen house. After all, the primary purpose of the NCAA is to maintain and promote the commercial value of college sports, not to protect the welfare of student-athletes or higher education.

Instead, I believe that reform efforts must proceed through academic organizations, characterized by the academic interests of higher education rather than the commercial values of the entertainment industry.

And here is where you folks can help out. Yale's commitment to intercollegiate athletics within the collegiate, anchored by educational values, coupled with its extraordinary academic achievements gives it an important voice in higher education, a voice capable of helping your colleagues at universities plagued by "big time college sports" to beat the beast back into the cage. We need you to weigh into this battle.

More generally, it is my view that the Ivy League institutions (and their academic peers such as MIT) cannot sit this one out. The commercial forces spawned in big-time sports not only affect all of higher education, but they propagate into K-12 as well, distorting the nature of competitive sports, pushing them away from the collegiate model and the primacy of educational objectives and toward the commercial focus of the professional model, a model that is both undermines and corrupts the most fundamental values and roles of the university.

Let me conclude by suggesting that the challenge of the commercialization and professionalization of college sports impact ALL institutions that aspire to academic excellence. And ALL institutions will have to work together to restore intercollegiate athletics to an appropriate role in higher education.

Thanks again...and GO BLUE!

Both Old Blue...and Maize and Blue!

Beat the Crimson tomorrow...

The Crimson of both Harvard ...and Ohio State!