

The Michigan Model

The Michigan Philosophy

Excellence in intercollegiate athletics is one of the many important traditions of the University of Michigan. Michigan is almost unique in its ability to combine world-class academic programs with nationally competitive programs in almost all areas of intercollegiate athletics. Indeed, if you compare the two top-ten lists--top-ten universities in academic quality and the top-ten athletic programs in major sports such as football, basketball, and hockey--you will generally find only one name on both lists: Michigan.

Yet the pride in the winning tradition of Michigan athletics is exceeded by the pride in the integrity of its programs. At Michigan there is only one way to compete, and that is the right way, by the rules.

But perhaps most important of all is a fundamental Michigan belief that athletic competition can play an important role in its central mission of education. There is something in the very nature of a college education that motivates students to continually ask questions about their values, goals, and priorities. If one were to listen to the talks given to our teams in the locker room, one would hear words such as pride, sacrifice, dedication, courage, confidence, leadership, integrity, honor, and honesty. It is clear that intercollegiate athletics have the capacity to provide students with an important opportunity to develop these qualities so essential in later life, particularly when led by inspiring and committed coaches.

Of course, these programs can also do more, because they serve as models not simply for the university community, but for others throughout society. How many youngsters, because they dream of someday playing in the Rose Bowl or the Final Four, learn from others the qualities necessary to get there? And how many of us as adults tend to identify with these teams, sharing their thrill in victory and suffering with them in defeat? While college sports are games, they also provide in many ways a remarkable model of life. And those factors which lead to a program's long-term success are also the factors which prepare young men and women for life itself! While it is important that we always keep it in perspective, that we always place primary emphasis on the first word in the term "student-athlete," it is also important that we acknowledge that the lessons our coaches teach to the young men and women who don the maize

and blue at Michigan are some of the most important lessons of life--lessons as important as those we teach in the classroom, the library, and the laboratory.

It takes great dedication and commitment to balance the demands of intercollegiate athletics with the demands of a Michigan education. Education is challenging enough without the additional pressures of participation in some of the nation's leading athletic programs. Yet later in life most of our student-athletes will look back on their experience at Michigan and realize that they received an extraordinary education, in the most complete sense of the word. It has sometimes been said that the purpose of a college education is to learn the art of life. And in this goal, our student-athletes may have a certain edge, since most of them will benefit from a full range of experiences on our campus--from the intellectual, to the athletic, to the cultural.

The value of athletics, when combined with a Michigan education, becomes all the more apparent when meeting former Michigan student-athletes who have gone on to great success--indeed leadership--in their careers as teachers, executives, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and even as President of the United States.

Finally, Michigan plays a particularly important role in intercollegiate athletics. Over the years it has mounted some of the most successful and visible programs. It has been characterized by a long tradition of playing strictly by the rules. Indeed, Michigan athletics are really the envy of many universities. That gives the University a unique responsibility, because in many ways it stands for all that is good in intercollegiate athletics--integrity, quality, class. This responsibility provides the University with an unusual opportunity for leadership. It also provides it with an unusual opportunity to lead in the effort to restructure and better align intercollegiate athletics to the academic priorities of higher education.

Some Goals of Michigan Athletics

Let me suggest several operational goals of our athletics programs:

1. Nationally Competitive Programs: The University of Michigan attempts to conduct an unusually broad array of sports programs at a nationally competitive level, analogous to its unusual combination of size, comprehensiveness, and quality in its academic offerings. It does so with strict adherence to the rules. The operating assumption is that all nationally competitive programs are supported by the revenue generated

by these programs (ticket sales, broadcasting, concessions, licensing) and by gift income (including endowment). No General Funds (state support, tuition and fees) are used to subsidize these programs. While men's basketball, hockey, and baseball generate some revenue, over 75 percent of the revenue necessary to support men's and women's programs is generated by football. Key to the Michigan strategy is maintaining its football program at the very highest level of quality, integrity, and competitiveness.

2. Opportunities for Student Varsity Competition: In addition to nationally competitive programs, the University should seek to provide a number of other opportunities for student participation through varsity sports programs designed to compete at the regional or conference level. Further, a broad array of club sports and intramural sports opportunities are also provided. Since these latter programs are designed with the primary goal of providing students with opportunities for sports experiences, they should be supported in part through student fees.
3. Gender Equity: The University believes quite strongly that both women and men should be provided with equal opportunities to participate in sports programs at all levels, as measured by opportunities for varsity competition. Michigan should commit itself to achieving true gender equity within the next several years.

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 student has the capacity to benefit from an undergraduate education at the institution. Does the university have the confidence 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 which 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 responsibility in the end 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. There should be careful monitoring to ensure that students 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 in commitments to student-athletes is the issue of fairness. During the 1970s and 1980s a major effort was made to provide women 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. Indeed, I would go further and suggest that, in those institutions which have primarily stressed spectator athletics, a major effort might be given to introducing 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 of 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 indeed. Coaching requires extraordinary commitment, long hours of work, and demanding travel schedules. And it yields frustration and disappointment. But 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. From this perspective it is my belief that coaches should be treated first and foremost as teachers, not as managers of athletic programs. If this philosophy would be adopted more generally, I believe 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.

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. Therefore, we believe that to play a leadership role and to honor our commitment to student-athletes and to our academic programs, we simply 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 to them 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 that we have. 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.

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 terribly important that coaches work hand-in-hand with University administrators and faculty in order 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 at the University. Through such interactions universities can develop and most effectively integrate their athletic activities into their athletic programs.