

INTRODUCTION

I don't know about you folks, but to me this sure feels like "déjà vu" all over again...we have come together to discuss the reform of college sports, but with a hidden agenda to commercialize them even further...

Nevertheless, let me commend the Scott Cowan, Tulane, and the Knight Foundation for putting this meeting together.

And commend again Myles Brand, who has been fighting a valiant if sometimes lonely battle on behalf of truth, justice, and academic values with the NCAA, although I fear he is a bit like Kofi Anin, trying to

I suspect my role this afternoon is to represent the views of the lunatic fringe, that small minority who believes that the ever-increasing commercialism, professionalism, and corruption of college sports is headed for the edge of the cliff and could well take our universities with it.

In that spirit as a provocateur, let me begin by noting the irony that the real driving force behind this meeting is to enlarge the feeding trough of the BCS, which would likely result in a playoff system in Division 1-A football even though:

1. Most football coaches don't want it (since they know there is only one real winner in such a system, thereby putting their own jobs in jeopardy)
2. Even though such a system would destroy traditions like conference championships and bowls (much as it has in college basketball)
3. And even though it likely transform college football into the same cesspool we have created in college basketball with the insanity of March Madness and the Final Four.

I'm really puzzled here:

I can understand the greed of
the networks and the sports media
the athletic directors and the conference commissions

But I simply cannot understand the stance of university presidents that would seriously entertain such an abomination. Whether naive, hypocrisy, or stupidity, I can't say...but this certainly demonstrates a profound flaw in the leadership of our academic institutions.

Now, having fired that shot across the bow of this audience, let me tell you where I'm coming from...

THE VIEW FROM THE LUNATIC FRINGE:

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 intercollegiate athletics 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.

If you think about it for a moment, you will realize there are only three reasons why a university would want to conduct big-time college sports:

1. Because it benefits the student-athletes.
2. Because it benefits the university (reputation, community, revenue)
3. Because it benefits the larger community

I think one can make a good case that Division 1-A football and basketball fail to meet any of these criteria.

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 were numerous and have been emphasized by many of you at this meeting:

- 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.
- So too, the commercial culture of the entertainment industry that characterizes college football and basketball is not only orthogonal to academic values, but it was corrosive and corruptive to the academic enterprise.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist (although that happens to be my background) to see what has 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" ("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 to a single academic term.
5. the elimination 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.

Here I would acknowledge that a century of efforts to reform college sports had been largely unsuccessful (including the Knight Commission's own efforts). Hence let me suggest a quite different approach.

I believe 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 (Myles, of course, being an exception). 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 the 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. In the past I have recommended a process in which the presidents of organizations such as ACE or AAU would hammer out a disarmament treaty with ratification as a requirement for membership. But here I beginning to suspect that this approach is also doomed to failure.

In fact, a major reason why the various efforts to reform college sports over the past several decades have failed is that we continue to bet on the wrong horse. We continue propose that the university presidents take the lead in the reform of college sports, whether through academic organizations such as the AAU and ACE (my proposal) or the NCAA (the Knight Commission). And very little happens, and the mad rush toward more and more commercialism and corruption continues.

Perhaps this is not so surprising. After all, university presidents are usually trapped between a rock and a hard place: between a public demanding high quality entertainment from the commercial college sports industry they are paying for, and governing boards who have the capacity (and all too frequently the inclination) to fire presidents who rock the university boat too strenuously.

It should be clear that few contemporary university presidents have the capacity, the will, or the appetite to lead a true reform movement in college sports.

Yet, all hope is not lost. There is one important ally remaining that could challenge the mad rush of college sports toward the cliff of commercialism: the university faculty.

After all, in the end, it is the governing faculty that is responsible for its academic integrity of a university. Faculty members have been given the ultimate protection, tenure, to enable them to confront the forces of darkness that would savage academic values. The serious nature of the threats posed to the university and its educational values by the commercialization and corruption of big-time college sports has been firmly established in recent years. It is now time to challenge the faculties of our universities, through their elected bodies such as faculty senates, to step up to their responsibility to defend the academic integrity of their institutions, by demanding substantive reform of intercollegiate athletics.

To their credit, several faculty groups have responded well to this challenge and stepped forward to propose a set of principles for the athletic programs conducted by their institutions. Beginning first in the Pac Ten Conference universities, then propagating to the Big Ten and Atlantic Coast Conferences, and most recently considered and adopted by the American Association of University Professors, such principles provide a firm foundation for true reform in college sports.¹

The next obvious step in this process is for the faculties to challenge the trustees of our universities, who in the end must be held accountable for the integrity of their institutions.² To be sure, there will always be some trustees who are more beholding to the football coach than to academic values. But most university trustees are dedicated volunteers with deep commitments to their institutions and to the educational mission of the university. Furthermore, while some governing boards may inhibit the efforts of university presidents willing to challenge the sports establishment, few governing boards can withstand a

concerted effort by their faculty to hold them accountable for the integrity of their institution. In this spirit, several faculty groups have already begun this phase of the process by launching a dialogue with university trustees through the Association of Governing Boards.

Ironically, it could well be that the long American tradition of shared university governance, involving public oversight and trusteeship by governing boards of lay citizens, elected faculty governance, and experienced but generally short-term and usually amateur administrative leadership, will pose the ultimate challenge to big time college sports.

After all, even if university presidents are reluctant to challenge the status quo, the faculty has been provided with the both the responsibility and the status (e.g., tenure) to protect the academic values of the university and the integrity of its education programs. Furthermore, as trustees understand and accept their stewardship for welfare of their institutions, they will recognize that their clear financial, legal, and public accountability compels them to listen and respond to the challenge of academic integrity from their faculties.

As many of you know, I am among a growing number who believe that today higher education has entered an era of great challenge and change. Powerful social, economic, and technological forces are likely to change the university in very profound ways in the decades ahead. As our institutions enter this period of transformation, it is essential that we re-examine each and every one of our activities for their relevance and compatibility with our fundamental academic missions of teaching, learning, and serving society.

If we were to retain intercollegiate athletics as an appropriate university activities, it was essential we insist upon the primacy of academic over commercial values by decoupling our athletic programs from the entertainment industry and reconnecting them with the educational mission of our institutions.

From this perspective, it is my belief there is little justification for the American university to mount and sustain big-time football and basketball programs at their current commercial and professional level simply to satisfy the public desire for entertainment and pursue the commercial goals of the marketplace. The damage to our academic values and integrity was simply too great.

The American university is simply too important to the future of this nation to be threatened by the ever increasing commercialization, professionalization, and corruption of college sports.

¹ Bill Pennington, "Unusual Alliance Forming to Rein in College Sports", *New York Times*, Friday, January 17, 2003, pp. C21-C-24.

² Julie Basinger and Welch Suggs, "Trustee Group Plans to Join with Faculty Senates in Bid to Change College Sports", *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 31, 2003.