SPORTS AND POPULISM AT STATE U[1]

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A few hundred American universities do something that can be found in no university outside this country – they operate multi-million dollar commercial sports enterprises. They sell tickets to games, sign contracts with advertisers and TV networks, and hire coaches whose salaries far exceed those of the university's president or the state's governor. Were these sports enterprises not part of universities, they would surely be classified as part of the nation's entertainment industry.

Today 120 universities engage in this kind of commercial enterprise at the highest level. These universities are members of the NCAA's Football Bowl Subdivision. They sponsor teams not only in BB and a host of minor sports, but also in football, the most expensive, popular, and lucrative college sport. The great bulk of these universities – 100 to be exact – are state-supported public universities. Today I will focus on those 100 state universities, but much of what I'll have to say also holds true for the others.

Although this group of a hundred public universities that do big-time sports is a tiny fraction of the 4,000 or so colleges and universities in the nation, they are hugely important. Among them is a handful of institutions routinely listed among the top universities in the world. Universities on this list account for 29 of the 33 public universities belonging to the elite American Association of Universities. They include all the nation's most famous public flagship universities, among them Berkeley, Washington, Wisconsin, Michigan, Texas, North Carolina, and Virginia.

Unlike the nationally-funded universities of Europe, American colleges and universities grew up as part of a decentralized system of mostly parochial regional colleges. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the land-grant and other state-supported universities came onto the scene and soon became a significant if not dominant part of American higher education in most of the country. By World War I, most of today's 100 big-time sports public universities were up and running, and their FB teams regularly played in front of large assemblies of spectators.

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Importance of Sports

At these universities today, sports is a big deal. For those in this room who have been students or employees at by one of these universities, I don't think you'll need to be persuaded on this point.

Home football games monopolize their campuses, and no classes or important meetings can hope to compete with FB or BB games, virtually all of which are televised. Sports may be a big deal at some of these universities because there is little else to do. A Nebraska resident once explained the popularity of college football in his state this way: "the State of Nebraska has no opera, no drama, no symphony, no exalted social life and not much intellectual life. In this state if you don't go for football, you're a pariah.'"[2]

For objective measures of the importance of big-time college sports, consider these:

--Most newspaper coverage of the universities with big-time sports is about one topic: sports. I surveyed articles in the venerable *New York Times* over an entire year and looked at all the articles mentioning any one of 58 universities that do big-time sports. The percentage of the articles I found that had to do with athletics? 87%.

--For these same universities, I did a series of head-to-head comparisons between two individuals at each university – the president and the head football coach. I used Google hits as my measure of public recognition. The winner for 56 of these 58 universities: the head football coach.

To be sure, athletic budgets, which can exceed $100 million a year at the biggest programs, still are only 3-4% of total university budgets, which does not sound very big. But I would argue that this budget share grossly understates the true significance of the athletic enterprise at one of these universities. Consider another metric of relative importance: the time people spend engaged in the university's various activities. You need to count not only the hours of work by faculty, staff, and students. You also need to count the hours that spectators and TV viewers spend watching athletic events sponsored by the university.

I did a fairly detailed back-of-the-envelope calculation using this approach to estimate the relative importance of sports. I did it using actual figures on faculty, staff, and enrollment for one

[2] Michener (1976, p. 221).

famous flagship university that plays big-time football and basketball in one of the most established athletic conferences. I consulted football and basketball schedules and gathered information on seating capacity and TV viewership from various media sources. I assigned generous work weeks to faculty, staff and students. I made estimates of time spent by spectators and TV viewers. After Excel had crunched the numbers for my actual university, the total estimated time spent by spectators and viewers was 116 million person-hours for the year, twice the number of person-hours calculated for academic functions.

Precisely what numbers you'd get from this kind of calculation for another university would depend, course, on your exact assumptions and the relevant details regarding size and so forth. I was mainly interested in orders of magnitude. The upshot will be the same: sports is a big, big deal.

But here's a puzzle: if you read the published mission statements of universities, you'll will get the distinct impression that sports is <u>not</u> important. Almost all mission statements published by big-time sports universities confine themselves to the big three aims: research, teaching, and service. Here is a very concise example, from the University of Illinois:

> We at Illinois serve the state, the nation, and the world by creating knowledge, preparing students for lives of impact, and addressing critical societal needs through the transfer and application of knowledge.[3]

No mention of sports.

The same lack of attention to athletics can be seen in scholarly research on higher education. I will confess, I have been doing research on higher education at least 20 years, and for most of that time it never occurred to me to treat sports as a serious topic.

Although I was guilty, I was not the only higher education researcher who was ignoring this subject. There have been plenty of books published in the last decade that present sound, informed analyses of important aspects of American universities without ever mentioning sports.[4]

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[3] Mission statement found on the Web, January 28, 2008.

[4] See, for example, *The Future of the City of Intellect: The Changing American University* (2002); *The University in a Corporate Culture* (2003 *; Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education* (2004)*; Higher Education for the Public Good: Emerging Voices from a National Movement* (2005)*; American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Social, Political, and Economic Challenges* (2005); and *American Universities in a Global Market* (2010).

The same can be said for entire volumes of the leading academic journal devoted to higher education, *The Journal of Higher Education.* It is as if scholars have been living in some parallel universe, blind to the reality that big-time college sports looms larger in the public eye than other aspects of most public universities and exerts enormous influence over what goes on within them.

35 years ago author James Michener, in his book, *Sports in America*, noted this lack of scholarly attention: "it is easier to find a good study on the effect of the Flemish language on the children of Antwerp than to discover from articles in learned journals what really goes on in the sports department of the university in which the scholars reside."[5]

I believe scholars of American higher education have been wrong to ignore big-time college sports as a serious higher education topic, just as I think it is disingenuous for universities to ignore sports in their mission statements and pretend that their commercial sports enterprises are nothing more than inconsequential extracurricular activities engaged in by ordinary students.

On the contrary, I have come to the conclusion that sports is not only significant for these 100 universities, sports is actually one of their core functions – along with research, teaching, and service.

Devotion

Two things set sports apart from the main activities at these universities: public spectacle and widespread emotional investment.

First, the spectacle. Note this fact: outside a totalitarian regime or a country in the midst of revolution, our modern world offers few opportunities for thousands of people to gather in one place to salute a flag, be stirred by the music of marching bands, and engage in unison chants, accompanied by coordinated hand motions. Tribal and ritualistic, to be sure, these things happen today only at sporting events, and few are as stirring as college football. One writer described the excitement of a FB game at the University of Tennessee this way:

> When 106,000 people stand and scream as Tennessee splits the T and comes rushing onto the field, I guarantee that … your jaw will drop and your heart rate will begin to race.[6]

[5] Michener, *Sports in America* (1976, p. 9).
[6] Travis, 2007.

But it's not all frenzy and rowdiness, as former Yale president Bart Giamatti wrote:

> Very soon the crowd is no crowd at all but a community, a small town of people sharing … the common experience of being released to enjoy the moment…. When people win together, the joy is more intense than when any of us wins alone, because part of any true pleasure is sharing that pleasure, just as part of the alleviation of pain is sharing the burden of pain.[7]

For the truest of the true fans, the spectacle of the game is coupled with a wellspring of deep devotion to one team. These loyalties are often formed in childhood. Here is former *New York Times* editor Howell Raines, an Alabama native and lifelong Alabama football fan, writing an op-ed in 1994:

> I am slam up against my annual realization that I care who wins the Alabama-Auburn football game, and I would like to know why.
> Some people … get inculcated with the belief that the annual outcome of an infinitely repeatable recreational game is important. … In my case, I think the words 'Crimson Tide' struck my infant ears in a pleasing way. It is all academic now, for the spiny fingers of this silly addiction have long since seized my brain.[8]

A survey taken in Lexington, Ky. asked adults which of several statements most closely described how they felt about University of Kentucky basketball. Fully one third of those surveyed chose this one: "I live and die with the Wildcats. I'm happy if they win and sad if they lose."

These loyalties endure, and sometimes become a defining identity in life. Consider this, from an obituary in the *Birmingham News*, one of many I found like it.

> He was a man of faith who loved his family, his church, his community and the Alabama Crimson Tide.

This is where the "populism" in my title comes in.

When I say "populism," I don't mean the Tea Party or Occupy Wall Street. Nor do I mean the political movement of the 19th and 20th century of that name, although one of the most famous populists of them all, Huey Long, when he was governor of Louisiana, did embrace LSU

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[7] Giamatti (1989, p. 32).
[8] Howell Raines, "Editorial Notebook: The Iron Bowl Cometh; The Impossible Task of Ceasing to Care," *New York Times*, November 19, 1994.

and its football team, giving pep talks to the team at halftime and writing LSU songs. He even marched at the head of the band as it paraded down Third Street in Baton Rouge.

Rather, I am using the term "populism" more generically, to make this point: that our famous flagship state-supported universities are as much institutions of popular culture as they are bastions of intellectual pursuit. And the vehicle for cultural connection is football and basketball. I will leave it to historians and anthropologists to explain the cultural significance. I will only make this assertion: the emotional attachment that many Americans find in college sports has existed for generations, often passing from parent to child. Although today's big-time college sports are now highly commercialized, the great rivalries are not creations of Madison Avenue. They are a vessel of authentic American tradition, as deeply rooted for many people as those for Thanksgiving or July 4th.

Take for example, one of the venerable football rivalries between two of our great state universities – Minnesota and Wisconsin. Football teams from these two land-grant universities have been playing against each other since 1892. A week from tomorrow, they will again, for the 119th time.[9] Those 119 games span two world wars, the Great Depression, and 22 U.S. presidents, beginning with Benjamin Harrison. There are few other aspects of those universities have that have a greater claim to be fundamental to their institutional identities. Certainly these are great research universities, and teaching and service are also fundamental to what they are. But so is sports and the connections it makes to everyday citizens. These universities' core functions include one that cannot be found in their mission statements: it is the pursuit of happiness, channeled through teams called Badgers and Golden Gophers.

Stakeholders

But popular devotion alone cannot sustain a big-time sports program. This requires revenue. So it's natural that universities have sought to exploit that devotion commercially, by looking to three groups of supporters, or customers.

[9] James Howell, http://www.jhowell.net/cf/scores/Wisconsin.htm, 9/16/11. The only year they did not play was 1906. It was one of the games that year between traditional rivals canceled by order of President Theodore Roosevelt, to curb violent play. "A History of the Wisconsin-Minnesota Football Rivalry," http://courses.journalism.wisc.edu/2010-11/spring/j202/johnson/final_projectnew/docs/alt_storyform/maclin_timeline.pdf, 10/23/11.

Most numerous are the thousands of fans across the state and beyond whose interest and loyalty motivate them to follow games by television, radio, and newspaper. Some of these fans are alumni, but most are not.

Market surveys tell us that almost half of men and about a quarter of women describe themselves as college FB fans. But in some media markets, fans are even more numerous. In the Birmingham media market, for example, the percentage of adults who have in the last year attended or viewed a football game played by the University of Alabama was an astounding 72%. When you add up fans for all the media markets, you get numbers sure to catch the attention of advertisers and TV networks. One recent estimate showed that the university with the biggest national fan base is Ohio State, with an estimated 3.2 million FB fans nationwide.

The second group of customers are the students and other spectators who fill the stands at games. Since college football stadiums can hold tens of thousands of spectators for a single game, this is a large group, though for the most famous football teams, it is a mere fraction of the masses of TV fans. These stadium fans tend to be an affluent and well-educated lot, which they have to be to afford the high price of tickets.[10]

The third and smallest group of customers are those team supporters with deep pockets known as boosters. One scholar who has studied this issue identifies what he called the "booster coalition," an entrenched, well-connected axis of power outside a university's formal decision-making structure. According to the theory, they essentially capture the athletic department for their own purposes.

At the extreme, such a power center can create an autonomous athletic establishment within a university, reflected here with disarming candor by a famous and outspoken basketball coach of the 1980s:

> We're not even really part of the school anymore, anyway. I work for the N.C. State Athletic Association. That has nothing to do with the university. Our funding is totally independent. You think the chancellor is going to tell me what to do? Who to take into school or not take into school? I doubt it. I'm paid to win games. If I say a kid can help me win, I'll get him. It's the same at 99 percent of the places in the country.[11]

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[10] The students are not yet affluent, but their parents often are. Compared to students at public universities without big-time sports, students at the big-time public universities had higher family incomes and were much more likely to have parents who were college graduates..See Clotfelter (2011, Appendix Figure 2A.1).

[11] Malcolm Moran, "Backtalk; Smart Enough to Know Better, Funny Enough Not to Care," *New York Times*, May 2, 1993.

I used information on political party registration to compare members of booster organizations with other groups of actors in the university, including administrators, trustees, and faculty. Precisely what it means, I am not sure, but here is what I found: compared to other groups of stakeholders at their universities and also boosters at similar universities without big-time FB, boosters at big-time FB universities were significantly more likely to be registered Republicans.

In recent years the influence of athletic boosters has taken on a symbolic significance, in the form of luxury boxes in stadiums. With price tags putting them out of reach to all but the wealthiest fans, these enclosed sections feature bars with alcohol, upholstered seating, and, best of all for those cold November games, protection from the elements. At the University of Michigan in 2006, administrators proposed a $226 million renovation to their historic football stadium, which included installing 82 of these luxury boxes. The controversy that followed evoked themes reminiscent of student protests a generation before. Critics of the plan, engaging in what today might be called "class warfare," charged that the university's egalitarian tradition was being threatened by these luxury boxes designed to serve the "privileged few." It was, they said, "a sad corruption of our university's defining traditions."[12] In the end, the university approved the renovation plan, boosting the seating capacity of Michigan Stadium to nearly 110,000, making it the third largest sports stadium in the world.

This controversy at Michigan illustrates two essential identities of big-time sports in American universities – its Jekyll and Hyde. On the one hand, it is a populist touchstone that connects ordinary citizens to an otherwise haughty and unapproachable tower of learning. On the other hand, it is a thoroughly commercial enterprise, in which universities exploit popular devotion to pay the enormous costs of running a competitive operation.

So universities sell tickets to games, sell ads for scoreboards, sign lucrative contracts with apparel companies, and join with other universities in conferences to sign huge TV contracts.

And they license hundreds of products for sale. Just visit the website for University of Kansas athletics, for example, and you will find not only banners, shirts, and hats, many bearing

[12] Joe Lapointe, "College Football; For the People or the Powerful? Skybox Plan Divides Michigan," *New York Times*, April 9, 2006.

the likeness of the red and blue Kansas Jayhawk mascot. You will also find backpacks and bottle openers, coasters and calculators, pet collars and piggy banks, lounge pants and license plate frames, toddler socks and tire covers, shoulder bags and Santa hats. I could go on. When I first visited this website last year, I counted a total of 589 different items for sale. [13]

Policy Significance

What is the policy significance of having this strange bedfellow in America's great public universities? Why should policy wonks like us care? Let me suggest three reasons.

First, big-time sports creates conflicts with the academic mission and important university values.

Let's be blunt. Although exercise and athletic endeavor are surely important parts of a well-rounded education, the commercial sports programs run by American universities have little to do research, teaching, or service.

And this truth has been recognized for a long time. Let me read you three statements on this subject:

> College athletics, under the spur of commercialism, has become a monstrous cancer, which is rapidly eating out the moral and intellectual life of our educational institutions.[14]

> …the admission to the university of students who are financed because of their athletic prowess and because of their ability to round out winning athletics teams, cannot do otherwise than result in disaster to our educational program and to its standards of scholarship.[15]

> The compromises that have to be made to keep such students in the college and to pass them through to a degree give an air of insincerity to the whole university-college regime.[16]

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[13] The NCAA store Website, http://www.shopncaasports.com/, linked to pages covering Kansas merchandise: http://www.shopncaasports.com/NCAASports_Kansas_Jayhawks/browse/page/1/results/12/sort/None, 3/27/10.

The NCAA licensing program was described on the NCAA Website: http://www.ncaa.org/wps/portal/ncaahome?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/ncaa/NCAA/About%20The%20NCAA/Corporate%20Relationships/Licensing/faqs.html#15.WhatistheCollegiateLicensingCompanyCLC, 6/15/10.

[14] Sinclair (1922, pp. 370-371).
[15] Purdue University faculty committee, quoted in Savage (1929, p. 302).
[16] Carnegie Foundation president Henry Pritchett in the Preface to Savage (1929, p. xxi).

As contemporary as they might sound, all three of those statements were made in the 1920s. They sound contemporary because the facts that inspired them are reproduced in the present-day world of big-time college sports. Consider:

A survey of 21 public universities found that athletes, especially football players, were much more likely than the average freshman to have been admitted as "special admits." Whereas 4% of all freshmen at those universities were classified as special admits, the percentage for all freshmen football players was 49%.[17]

Once enrolled, revenue athletes, weighed down by bruising schedules full of practice, weight training, films, games, and travel, tend to cluster in easy majors. At N.C. State, for example, one third of the football players majored in sports management, compared to 0.8 of 1% of all students.[18]

The job of keeping revenue athletes academically eligible has been given over to highly organized tutoring offices, often housed in state-of-the-art tutoring facilities, located conveniently close to the weight room.

We need to keep in mind: all this is not part of some free-standing sports franchise, as college teams are spoken of on ESPN, they are part of research universities, that are overseen by a duly constituted board of governors, regents, or trustees. University practices that allow, even demand, lowered academic standards should be matters of public policy because these are *universities*. Sports policy is public policy.

The commitment to big-time sports also leads universities into other awkward value conflicts.

For example, many universities have contracts with apparel companies like Nike that dictate that their players must wear the corporate logo on their uniforms, and never, never cover them up. Thus the ubiquitous "swoosh." Yet at the same time, universities in the NCAA have agreed to forbid athletes from expressing any personal sentiments by writing on their faces any individualized messages, such as "Psalms 23:1."

Another arena for value conflict is university policies toward alcoholic beverages. Universities ought to know all about the problems associated with underage and binge

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[17] "Special Admits" at the Nation's Biggest Public Universities," *Indianapolis Star*, http://www.indystar.com/assets/pdf/BG11724397.PDF, 3/24/10.

[18] Douglas Lederman, "Major Issue: Athletes' Studies," *USA* Today, November 19, 2003; Suggs Welch, "Jock Majors," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 17, 2003.

drinking.[19] But because of the sizable revenue that broadcasters can earn by selling advertising, most TV contracts for college FB and BB allow for alcoholic beverages to be advertised. (The Big Ten Network, by the way, is a notable exception, for it does not allow ads for alcoholic beverages.) The NCAA, in its men's basketball tournament, merely limits alcoholic beverage advertising, to one minute for every hour of broadcast time.[20] So in 2009, the TV coverage of the tournament included156 commercials for Bud Light and other alcoholic beverages, all of which added up to 1 full hour of advertising, of the 18 total hours of commercials that year.

Even that may be too much, since there is evidence that a portion of the remaining alcohol advertising reaches under-age viewers and that this exposure increases both their propensity to begin drinking early and the amount they drink once they begin. [21] In light of the NCAA's reported strategy of building its fan base among teenagers, this policy of allowing beer ads at all has been criticized for "linking beer and drinking as integral parts of college life."[22] Keep in mind, the NCAA is universities, most of which are state-supported. Sports policy is public policy.

These value conflicts have one unifying origin: the unrelenting urge for universities with big-time sports to generate income by commercializing the product they alone can produce. This instinct does not arise from a drive to make money for its own sake. Rather, it's simply a means to an end. The urge to commercialize comes from the imperative to win games, and that costs money.

No matter how much these universities emphasize high-quality research or excellence in teaching, they make it an institutional priority to be competitive, at some acceptable level, in intercollegiate athletics, especially FB and BB. No person can survive as president or chancellor at one of these universities who does not accept this imperative. This reality is captured by a famous quip made many years ago by the University of California's Clark Kerr, who said that

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[19] Jernigan and Mosher (2005) document the harmful effects of alcohol marketing, including worse educational outcomes, death and disability, higher crime rates, and unprotected sex.

[20] Thomas O'Toole and Steve Wieberg, "NCAA Says it Followed Self-limit on Final Four Beer Ads," *USA Today*, April 25, 2008.

[21] For evidence on the effect of viewing alcohol ads on under-age viewers, see Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (2008) and Anderson et al. (2009). Gotwals et al (2005, p. 8) reports on the NCAA's "youth-recruitment" policy.

[22] Welch Suggs, "Group Urges NCAA to Cut Ties to Beer Company; Professors Seek College-Sports Reforms," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 15, 2005.

the job of chancellor "had come to be defined as providing parking for the faculty, sex for the students, and athletics for the alumni."[23]

A second reason why sports has policy importance is that public universities use sports for getting and keeping external support, including support from state lawmakers.

Consider the predicament faced by our famous state-supported flagship research universities, like Wisconsin or Berkeley.

They depend heavily on support from their state legislatures.

But the nature of their business is all about creating spillovers, and these spillovers are an open invitation to free-rider behavior. Because the research and graduates these universities produce freely flow beyond state boundaries, the taxpayers of Wisconsin and California end up paying for benefits that will be enjoyed by people in other states and, indeed, in other countries. [24] As any microeconomics text will explain, this spillover of benefits makes it tempting for states to under-invest in their research universities.

Here's where big-time sports comes in. By way of its populist roots, big-time sports connects the Ivory Tower to the common people. Recalling how often he spotted Michigan jerseys when he traveled across the state, former University of Michigan president Harold Shapiro wrote, "This identification through sports was perhaps the only way for the University to remain part of the daily imagination of alumni as well as a wide spectrum of citizens of the state of Michigan."[25]

And that connection also applies to many of the state's movers and shakers. Many legislators jump at the chance to attend a football game, so it's common for universities to offer this perk to officials. For example,

- Penn State offers legislators free seats for home games, giving out some 500 free passes a year.[26]

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[23] 1957 remark, quoted by *Time* and *Playboy*. UC Berkeley News, on the death of Clark Kerr. http://74.125.47.132/search?q=cache:ZJ3-orn0iFwJ:berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2003/12/02_kerr.shtml+clark+kerr+the+uses+of+the+university+athletics&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us, 1/9/10.

[24] For a study of the spillovers in the form of educated doctoral scientists, see Stephan et al. (2004).

[25] Shapiro (2005, p. 31).

[26] "Freebies Available to Pennsylvania from Movie and Football Tickets to Ski-lift Passes – All Courtesy of Grateful Lobbyists," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 16, 2006.

- Ohio State gives every state legislator the chance to buy, at face value, up to four season tickets for football.[27]
- Every member of the Alabama legislature, by tradition, gets two free tickets each year to the annual Auburn-Alabama football game. The governor gets two dozen tickets to every Auburn and Alabama home game.[28]

Athletic prominence seems to pay political dividends, as illustrated by the emergence of the University of Connecticut as a big-time sports powerhouse. In 1995 its legislature voted to allocate $1 billion to the university over the following decade. One legislator explained, "It was athletics that got people to think about UConn in a big way."

Governors and legislative leaders have shown in other ways they care, sometimes seeing to it that their favored state universities will not be disrespected when conference shakeups happen, as when Texas and Texas A&M were persuaded by political heavyweights to take Baylor and Texas Tech with them when they left the Southwest Conference in 1994 or, in 2003, when Virginia's governor pressured the University in Charlottesville not to oppose the bid by its country cousin Virginia Tech to join the Atlantic Coast Conference.[29]

All this suggests to me that big-time sports programs at these flagship campuses may well serve to protect the research apparatus by mollifying or distracting legislators who might otherwise have been inclined to cut research programs.[30] If so, such world-class state universities as UCLA, Washington, and Michigan, as well as Berkeley and Wisconsin, owe part of their

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http://74.125.47.132/search?q=cache:PGoc5OS6fc4J:nalert.blogspot.com/2006/04/freebies-available-to-pennsylvania.html+legislators+free+football+tickets&cd=12&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us, 6/21/09

[27] Ohio State took 485 guests to the national championship game in 2008. 45% went for free. Julie Carr Smyth, "Ohio Lawmakers Spend Thousands on Ohio State Football Tickets," *Kalamazoo Gazette*, August 1, 2008. http://blog.mlive.com/kzgazette/2008/08/ohio_lawmakers_spend_thousands.html, 6/21/09; Alan Johnson and Lee Leonard. "OSU Tickets Popular Gift for Lawmakers." *Columbus Dispatch (Ohio)*, April 26, 2003.

[28] "State Lawmaker Controls Football Tickets Through Marketing Deal," *Gadsden Times*, January 1, 2008, http://www.gadsdentimes.com/article/20080101/NEWS/801010305?Title=State-lawmaker-controls-football-tickets-through-marketing-deal, 6/21/09.

[29] Among those attending the meeting were Lt. Governor Bob Bullock (a graduate of both Texas Tech and Baylor), state senator David Sibley (Baylor), and chair of the senate finance committee John Montford (Texas Tech). Russell Gold, "Bullock Called Final Play of the SWC; Lieutenant Governor Quarterbacked Four Texas Universities' Entry into Big 12," *San Antonio Express-News*, May 25, 1997.

[30] Lowi (1974, p. 359) speculates that winning teams probably caused legislators to devote more money to state universities.

reputations to the protective armor created by state leaders' devotion to their athletic teams. Here, then, is one more reason college sports may have real policy significance, arising again because of its vast and enduring popularity.

Besides the costs of value conflicts and the potential benefits of the warm glow from politicians, a third reason to care about big-time college sports comes in the form of two beneficial spillovers that are rarely acknowledged.

One of these is the pride and sense of community fostered by college sports.

Whether the team wins or loses, the acts of following, cheering, and hoping produces that most important but elusive concept scholars like to ponder: happiness.

Consumers spend a lot on big-time college sports -- $1.5 billion to attend games, $1.3 billion in contributions, over $4 billion to subscribe to ESPN, for example. Add to that more than $4 billion from the licensing of all those sweatshirts and other logo-laden items. And these expenditures reflect only a portion of the enjoyment that fans and other consumers derive from watching and following big-time college sports. To get a full accounting, you'd have to add what economists call consumer surplus, that icing on the top of the cake.

What this means is that many American universities, by way of their sports enterprise, produce a thing of value that is enjoyed by a population much more numerous than its living alumni, or its current student body. For state universities, this benefit in fact has the nature of a public service. Notwithstanding the very real costs associated with the kinds of value conflicts I've discussed, what can be wrong with a state university providing to a large portion of its residents, through its football or basketball team, another reason to be proud of their state? In this way, state universities extend their reach beyond their accustomed domain of abstract ideas into the popular culture.

The other unheralded spillover is that big-time sports, almost in spite of itself, effectively teaches some important civics lessons.

One of these is the principle of meritocracy, a value most often honored in the breach in American higher education. In sports, we have a pretty good example of meritocratic competition. It's not perfect, of course, but on the athletic field, both teams must follow the same rules, the game starts with a 0-0 score, and sometimes David actually beats Goliath.

Probably the most important civics lesson for America in the 20th and 21st centuries has been the example that college sports provides of interracial cooperation. When we see teams of

racially or ethnically diverse players who not only tolerate each other but who work together for a common aim, it's a visible exemplar for a race-blind society.

Go back half a century, and you find in the American South a region whose devotion to football was so fervent that it even challenged the otherwise unassailable institution of Jim Crow segregation. Just a year and a half after the Supreme Court's historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision striking down segregated schools, the football team for Georgia Tech accepted an invitation to play in the 1956 Sugar Bowl in New Orleans. But the opposing team, Pittsburgh, had a black player. Georgia governor Marvin Griffin moved to repel this affront to the traditions of segregation by urging the state's board of regents to forbid Georgia Tech from playing the game. He stated, "The South stands at Armageddon." "We cannot make the slightest concession to the enemy in this dark and lamentable hour of struggle." But to this the all-white student body rose up in protest, marching on the governor's mansion and burning Griffin in effigy.[31] The Georgia Tech team did play Pittsburgh in that game.

In 1950 the list of college football All-Americans included not a single black player. By 1970, 23% of those selected as All-Americans were black, and by 1980 70% were.[32]

More important than percentages was the recurring visual enactment of equal treatment and cooperation provided by players and coaches on increasingly diverse teams. Beginning in the 1970s, fans old enough to have grown up using separate water fountains and segregated public schools witnessed college games that featured dozens of coaching decisions made with no apparent regard for the race of the players. Fans who watched a racially mixed team through a season witnessed countless gestures between players of different races that signified that team identity, at least temporarily, trumped racial identity. These handshakes, high-fives, and fist-bumps all heralded a new social order for a region and a nation in need of this example.

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[31] Pete Thamel, "Grier Integrated a Game and Earned the World's Respect," *New York Times*, January 1, 2006.

[32] The NCAA compiles lists of consensus all-Americans. For census years, the percentage of consensus all-Americans in football who were black was: 1940 and 1950, 0%; 1960, 9%; 1970, 23%; 1980 and 1990, 70%; and 2000, 68%. For basketball, the percentages were 1940, 0%; 1950, 25%; 1960, 30%; 1970, 60%; 1980, 67%; 1990, 100%; and 2000, 82%. Percentages are based on players for whom a racial identification could be made, which was virtually all such players. http://web1.ncaa.org/web_files/stats/football_records/DI/2009/2009Awards.pdf, 8/10/10; http://web1.ncaa.org/web_files/stats/m_basketball_RB/2009/Award.pdf, 8/10/10.

Conclusion

I've been focusing my attention on an aspect of higher education – big-time sports – that gets lots of attention in popular media and everyday conversation, but can't get any respect from serious scholars.

I say it's time to take seriously the commercial sports enterprises run by universities, to stop pretending they are some minor student activity.

As we sit here today, public higher education in this country faces daunting budgetary challenges. Over the last decade, the real value of state appropriations for higher education has declined by 20%.[33] But spending for college athletics is rising rapidly, at more than twice the rate for academic spending.[34] Based on calculations I made using data for 44 state universities, spanning the 24-year period between 1986 and 2010, the inflation-adjusted compensation for full professors increased by 32%. For presidents, the increase was 90%. For FB coaches, compensation increased by an astounding 650%.

To a surprising extent, big-time college sports is financed by student fees and direct budgetary subsidies, a fact that is jolting at a time of budget cuts and furloughs. On average, 18% of the revenues for these athletic programs comes from such subsidies, but for programs in the less prestigious conferences these subsidies are even more important. In the most recent fiscal year, more than 40% of Rutgers' athletic revenues came from subsidies.

When asked his opinion about this high rate of subsidy, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie declined to express an opinion, saying only, "This is a policy judgment that the university has made."[35] Again, sports policy is public policy.

And, despite the high costs of operating a big-time sports enterprise, there are more universities who want to join the top level of FB competition, among them Georgia State and UNC Charlotte.

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[33] State Higher Education Executive Officers, *State Higher Education Finance, FY 2010* (Boulder, CO: 2010) Table 3, p. 23. http://www.sheeo.org/finance/shef_fy10.pdf, 9/16/11.

[34] Between 2005 and 2008 in Football Bowl Subdivision institutions, real athletic expenditures per athlete rose 7.5% a year while academic spending per student rose 3.0% a year. Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, *Restoring the Balance*, 2010. See also, "Despite Faltering Economy, Donations to Major College-Sports Programs Increase," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 15, 2010. Donations to 54 public universities in 6 major conferences rose by 24%, 2007 to 201,. $805 M to $998M.

[35] Terrence Dopp and Curtis Eichelberger, "Governor Christie Says Rutgers University Athletic Spending 'Not Waste.'" Bloomberg, August 17, 2011; http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-08-17/governor-christie-says-rutgers-university-athletic-spending-not-waste-.html, 9/18/11.

Given all the costs and problems these enterprises can bring to an otherwise upstanding state university, there is a strong temptation simply to throw the rascals out, to drop commercial sports altogether. The problem is – unless the whole NCAA structure were to come apart as a result of some federal court ruling, which is possible but unlikely – the academic side of the university *can't* throw the rascals out, even if they wanted to. In big-time sports, our university presidents have a populist tiger by the tail, but this beast is entirely too central to the actual business of these institutions to consider getting rid of it, even if it were possible. The tradition of intercollegiate competition is too deeply embedded in these universities, and the link it makes to ordinary citizens is too strong.

Nor will it be a simple matter just to throw the money changers out of the temple. Commercialization has been part of big-time college sports for a century, and it's not the result of evil influences from outside the academy. In the words of the old comic strip Pogo, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

No, the source of the commercialization lies within the universities, in the paneled rooms where the boards of trustees and regents meet.

It might be possible to domesticate this beast, to toughen graduation requirements, perhaps, or reduce the size of rosters. The Army-Navy game proves you can have exciting games without draft-quality players. But removing commercial sports from our great state universities altogether – that's probably not going to happen.

But here is something that can be done, and we can start on it now. It is to bring these issues out and discuss the tradeoffs openly, in the best tradition of universities' pursuit of the truth. This must begin by candidly acknowledging the importance of big-time college sports and recognizing it as a creature of American higher education.

We will know we're on the right road when we stop thinking about teams like the Texas Longhorns or the Ohio State Buckeyes as free-standing sports franchises like the Cowboys or the Browns.

When you see the Texas coach or the Ohio State quarterback, think state government.

Think "public policy."

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