

Your Control

College CEOs Must Drive Athletic Reform

As college presidents — one the father of two student-athletes — we disagree on some issues, but one matter on which we are in agreement is the importance of college athletics, both to the institutions who sponsor them, and to the student athletes who benefit from participating. We are also in accord on the need for reform in NCAA Division III athletics.

Too many scandals abound in college sports today because of a lack of institutional control. In recent years, there have been reports of misbehavior by players, coaches and even college presidents, all for the sake of winning.

Although Division III institutions confront fewer issues than their Division I counterparts, some exist at all levels. At Wesley College, intercollegiate athletics reports directly to the president. This is unusual for a Division III institution. The reason for this organizational structure at Wesley is simple: to properly “frame” the context of intercollegiate sports to the student population. The president chairs the Athletic Management Council, consisting of the chief academic officer, the faculty athletics representative, the chief financial officer, athletic director and associate athletic director. Priorities are set at these meetings, and athletic schedules are reviewed to minimize missed class time.

Through the years, we have come to know many college athletes. Several are now successful in business and the professions. Many former student-athletes point to rewarding experiences on fields and courts during their college years. However, they also say that, because of athletics, they missed out on experiences that are an integral part of college life. They say, “I wish I

had had more time to be a regular student.”


In their book *Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Values*, Bill Bowen and Sarah Levin note that even at some of the finest colleges in the country, student-athletes are being isolated from the mainstream student populations. Often, students’ lives are dictated by their coaches’ demands for practice and workout sessions. As a result, college athletes often pass up promising internship opportunities, study abroad programs, internships and other extracurricular activities that could have broadened their horizons and expanded their career options.

Efforts by the NCAA leadership and college CEOs are well intentioned; however, they have not gone far enough. College and university leadership must work together to restore credibility to college sports that contribute to the learning experience of student-athletes. Some additional recommendations for college presidents, based upon our combined experience, follow.

- Colleges must more carefully monitor their admissions procedures — no longer granting exceptions for athletes who lack the normal requirements. More attention needs to be given to standards of the college and the academic philosophy of the NCAA Division III.
- Colleges must address the scheduling of intercollegiate contests. Conferences must take a stronger position on in-week games. A policy supporting primarily weekend competition would result in less missed class and lab time.
- Colleges must work to curb the commercialization of intercollegiate sports. The need to remain competitive in college athletics has forced commercialization

and “keeping up with the Joneses” in athletic facilities. Athletic venues should be of reasonable size and quality and safe for practice and contests.

- Colleges should not vacillate on the issue of sportsmanship. This not only includes on-field behavior of participants, but also, crowd behavior as well.
- Colleges must place a greater emphasis on the physical readiness of student-athletes. Stories abound of students rushing back to play following injuries.
- Colleges must place a stronger emphasis on balancing expenditures. Too frequently, new athletic facilities are given higher priority over libraries, classrooms and labs that often are in a state of disrepair. The disparity between athletic and academic facilities sends the wrong message to students and alumni, and may alienate prospective donors as well.

Placed in their proper context, college athletics can and should add value to the total college experience of student-athletes. These guidelines could help institutions maintain a better academic/athletic balance for both the student-athletes and the colleges and universities. 

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