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Sports on Campus

On the surface and to the casual observer, intercollegiate athletics may appear to be a healthy segment of the American sporting scene. The NCAA men's basketball Division I championship is one of the most popular sporting events in the United States and attracts attention throughout the world. Big-time college football has long held the national limelight, and programs such as those at Notre Dame, Florida, and Penn State have national as well as regional followings. In the 2002–2003 season, the popular University of Connecticut women's basketball team set a record for consecutive wins by a women's team and, over the years, has contributed significantly to the growing attention received by women's college basketball, perhaps due to intense competitions with its rivals from the University of Tennessee. College athletics have provided sports fans with many thrilling moments, including the then relatively unknown Michael Jordan's shot that gave North Carolina the 1982 NCAA basketball championship over Georgetown and the memorable victories in football Bowl games, such as the last minute win by Ohio State over Miami in the 2003 Fiesta Bowl in a game that decided the national championship.

But are exciting contests and superb athletes the whole story about college sports? Is there an ethically questionable side to intercollegiate athletics? What about the scandals that continually seem to surface in college sports? Do intercollegiate athletics actually harm the academic and educational functions of the university?

Public criticism of intercollegiate athletics in the United States goes back at least to 1905 when President Theodore Roosevelt summoned the presidents and

football coaches of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton to the White House in an attempt to reduce the extreme level of violence then prevalent in the game. In our own day, criticism has focused on the scandal-plagued programs of the large Division I institutions that offer athletic scholarships and that tend to dominate intercollegiate sports. Such scandals have involved academic fraud, the alleged coddling of athletes who have behaved outrageously, and cheating in the recruiting of highly talented high school athletic stars. In contrast, intercollegiate athletics at the level of the Ivy League, the highly selective liberal arts colleges, such as those that are members of the New England Small Colleges Athletic Conference (NESCAC), and academically respected but athletically competitive universities such as Duke and Stanford are still thought of as relatively pure examples of what college sports at their best should be. But even that view has come under challenge.

Thus, only a few months after North Carolina's victory over Georgetown in 1982, the game that brought Michael Jordan to national attention, another national basketball power, the University of San Francisco (USF), which in the past had been represented by such great players as Bill Russell and K. C. Jones, announced that it had dropped intercollegiate basketball to preserve its "integrity and reputation." According to the Rev. John Lo Shiavo, then president of USF, people at the university (presumably in the athletic program) felt that they had to break NCAA rules in an attempt to remain competitive in big-time intercollegiate athletics.[1]

A particularly shocking and perhaps extreme example of abuse was provided by former Clemson basketball coach Tates Locke in the book *Caught in the Net,* also published in 1982. As Locke describes the situation at Clemson during his tenure there, there was tremendous pressure on him to win. Clemson is a member of the highly competitive Atlantic Coast Conference, which includes such college basketball powers as North Carolina, North Carolina State, and Duke. Some of these institutions not only have fine academic reputations but have locations that made it easier for them to recruit black athletes from the inner cities than it was for Locke in the somewhat more rural Clemson area.

It appeared to Locke that Clemson could not win as long as it abided by the recruiting rules laid down by the NCAA. As he acknowledges in *Caught in the Net,* Locke at the very least failed to prevent (and possibly turned a blind eye to) under-the-table payments to players by boosters. He also may have condoned deception in luring recruits to Clemson. To attract black athletes to Clemson, which was virtually all white, blacks from Columbia, South Carolina, were paid to pretend to be student members of a fictitious black fraternity on weekends when black athletic recruits visited the campus. A false picture of extensive on-campus social life for

blacks was created on what was then in truth a predominantly white campus. Locke confessed to his wrongdoing and wrote primarily to expose the pressures that may promote the violation of rules. But although Locke may have turned his career around, violations of fundamental principles continue to plague intercollegiate sports, particularly at the level of the elite Division I men's basketball and football powers.[2]

For example, in one of the most serious of recent abuses involving academics, an NCAA investigation of the University of Minnesota men's basketball program found that from 1994 to 1998, a secretary in the athletics academic counseling office, who was also employed as a tutor for the team, was involved in preparing about four hundred pieces of course work, including providing substantive material for papers, for student athletes in the program. The head coach of the basketball team, Clem Haskins, was found to be "knowledgeable about and complicit in the academic fraud" involved. According to the NCAA investigation, "The violations were significant, widespread, and intentional. More than that, their nature—academic fraud—undermined the bedrock foundation of a university and . . . damaged the academic integrity of the institution."[3]

Other problems have plagued college athletics as well. These range from low graduation rates for male athletes in major sports at many Division I institutions to the kind of not only embarrassing but also dangerous misbehavior and sometimes criminal activity of academically marginal athletes in some big-time intercollegiate programs. Although there are many fine athletes and coaches in major college sports, too often a concern for winning, and the status and income that go with it, have taken priority over the academic mission of the university. Thus, the 2002 NCAA Men's Championship game featured a win by the University of Maryland over the University of Oklahoma. But according to NCAA statistics, neither basketball program was able to graduate over 20 percent of its scholarship athletes, and Oklahoma did not graduate even one player out of the seven classes reported on by the NCAA, arriving as freshmen from 1989–1995.[4]

In his announcement in 1982 of the termination of the USF's basketball program (since reinstated at a lower level of competition), the Rev. John Lo Shiavo surely raised a fundamental ethical question about college sports when he asked, "How can we contribute to the building of a decent law-abiding society in this country if educational institutions are willing to suffer their principles to be prostituted and involve young people in that prostitution for any purpose and much less for the purpose of winning some games and developing an ill-gotten recognition and income?"[5]

It would be a mistake to think, however, that the problems with intercollegiate athletics simply involve outrageous behavior by athletes, recruiting violations, and academic fraud. Many critics believe the problem lies deeper. The moral questions that can be raised about intercollegiate athletics go well beyond an examination of violations of NCAA rules. We can ask questions about the rules themselves. For example, should colleges and universities be allowed to give athletic scholarships at all? Does the NCAA permit teams to play too many games to the academic detriment of the athletes?

At an even more fundamental level, we can question whether intercollegiate sports even belong on campus in the first place. After all, shouldn't colleges be educational institutions rather than minor leagues for professional sports? Is the academic mission of the university compatible with a commitment to intercollegiate athletics? Is commitment to excellence in athletics in conflict with commitment to academic excellence?

These questions suggest what might be called the "Incompatibility Thesis." This thesis states that intercollegiate sports are incompatible with the academic functions of colleges and universities. The strong version of this thesis asserts that the incompatibility is between academic values and *any* serious form of intercollegiate athletics. A weaker version holds that the incompatibility lies only between academic values and elite Division I athletic programs, those that offer athletic scholarships and whose teams, particularly in high-profile sports, regularly compete for national rankings.

This chapter is an examination of the Incompatibility Thesis, and more broadly, of the value, if any, of intercollegiate athletics. Its central question is what place an athletic program should have on a college or university campus. We shall be concerned not only with the proper role of athletics on campus but with the very nature and mission of the university.

The Role of Sports in the University

All Jocks Off Campus

Why should a university support an intercollegiate athletic program? After all, some distinguished institutions, including the University of Chicago, Emory, and the California Institute of Technology, have well-deserved reputations for academic excellence yet at various times in their history have not supported a full intercollegiate athletic program or, in some cases, have not had any such program at all.

In evaluating the role of intercollegiate athletics in the academy, it will be useful to distinguish three separate questions:

1. Is it wrong for colleges and universities to have an intercollegiate athletic program? Are any athletic programs morally impermissible?
2. Is it desirable for colleges and universities to have an intercollegiate athletic program?
3. If colleges and universities should have an intercollegiate athletic program, what kind of program is most justifiable?

It may be, for example, that it is not wrong for colleges and universities to support intercollegiate athletics programs, but such programs are undesirable because the money spent on them could be better spent elsewhere. Perhaps all sorts of intercollegiate athletic programs are not equally desirable. For example, intercollegiate athletic programs may be desirable if run along the lines of Ivy League or Division III programs but not if run more expansively.

Is there any reason for thinking that intercollegiate athletics programs are wrong? Should intercollegiate sports be prohibited? The question here is a broad one for many sorts of programs, ranging from those of Division III schools (such institutions do not offer athletic scholarships, they compete regionally rather than nationally, and they emphasize athletics less than schools in Divisions I and II) right up to the athletic giants such as Michigan, Oklahoma, Texas, and Notre Dame. One argument for the view that it is wrong for universities to support serious intercollegiate athletic programs rests on the Incompatibility Thesis. The wrongness arises from the corruption of academic values by athletic values.

Perhaps it is best to begin by considering an idealized but important model of what the university should be in our attempt to ascertain just what academic values ought to be regarded as fundamental. By assessing this model and seeing its relationship to various forms that intercollegiate athletics can take, we may be able to offer a judicious assessment of the proper role, if any, of intercollegiate athletics.

The University As a Refuge of Scholarship

Why have the college or university at all? What would be lacking in an educational system that devoted the elementary and high school years to imparting basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics? After high school, students would either seek employment or go on to specialized professional training. Does a college education serves a function that such a system would fail to satisfy?

Traditionally, the role of education in the liberal arts has been thought to fill an important gap that is ignored by merely professional training and that is not

approachable by those still mastering basic skills. Education in the liberal arts exposes students to "the best that has been thought and said" in their own and other cultures. By reflecting critically and analytically on the significant works, including artistic achievements, that the best minds have produced throughout human history, students should become better able to acquire a broad perspective on the human situation, learn to analyze difficult problems critically, and appreciate excellence in the arts, humanities, and sciences. And although there is often controversy about what works should be studied and what counts as "best," debates over that issue can themselves have enormous educational value.

Similar rhetoric can be found in the catalogs of most colleges and universities, for behind the language lies an institution that, though evolving, traces its heritage from ancient Greece, through the medieval universities of Europe, to the modern colleges and universities of our own time. The most important function of these institutions, it can be argued, is to transmit the best of human intellectual achievement, to subject different viewpoints to critical analysis, and to add to human knowledge through research.

Although today's huge "multi-universities" have many functions, including provision of professional training in medicine, business, education, nursing, and law, it can be argued that the most important function of the university still is to transmit, examine, and extend the realm of human knowledge. This function often places the university, or at least some of its members, in an adversarial relationship with the rest of society, because the university's function commits it to the often critical examination of popular ideas of a given time and culture. If that function were not performed, many bad ideas would not be subjected to criticism, and even good ideas would be less appreciated or understood because their advocates would never have to modify or defend them in the face of objection.[6]

Critical inquiry, then, is a major function of colleges and universities; it is fundamental to a democratic society because it gives citizens the information and skills they need to function as citizens. And by exposing ideas to critical scrutiny, it allows for the kind of correction of errors and checks on power that are lacking in tyrannies and dictatorships.

Accordingly, let us consider critical inquiry as a normative claim about what the principal function of the university should be. Can a case be made for the inclusion of an intercollegiate sports program in the university conceived not as a business or as a training ground for tomorrow's professionals but as a center of scholarship, critical thought, and training for citizenship in the democratic state? Is intercollegiate athletics at least compatible with the major

educational mission of the university? Can athletics actually contribute to or enhance that mission?

Athletics As Education: A Reply to the Incompatibility Thesis

Why are athletic programs thought to be incompatible with academic values, particularly the kind of education involved in critical inquiry in the arts, sciences, social sciences, and humanities? Some of the points already touched on support the Incompatibility Thesis, especially when applied to elite Division I athletics.

First, the enormous pressures to win, often generated by the need to keep jobs, produce revenues, and promote the visibility of the institution, all too often generate cheating. The academic fraud we have seen at Minnesota and other institutions testifies to the strength of these pressures and to the values associated with victory at all costs.

Second, even if we ignore the abuses in some major intercollegiate athletic programs, there seems to be a basic contradiction between the aims of education and the aims of athletics; thus, the time students spend on the athletic fields is time spent away from their studies. Likewise, athletes either uninterested in academic work or unprepared to do it undermine the academic mission of many institutions.

Finally, many of the values associated with athletics, such as obedience to the orders of coaches, seem at odds with the kind of inquiring and questioning minds professors attempt to develop in the classroom; indeed, some critics see athletics as a mindless activity in which only physical skills are developed. Thus, to many college and university faculty, athletics are at best a necessary evil, perhaps useful in allowing students to let off steam, but in basic conflict with educational values.

One way to reply to such criticism is to acknowledge the existence of serious abuses but maintain that academic and athletic values are much more compatible than critics acknowledge. In fact, the place of athletics in the university traditionally has been defended on educational grounds. If it could be shown that athletics, particularly intercollegiate athletic competition, has significant educational value, a strong case can be made that colleges and universities should support such activities. Whether such a case could support the major athletic programs of the elite Division I institutions that offer athletic scholarships is a separate issue.

If intercollegiate athletics can be defended as an educationally valuable element of the academic community, the Incompatibility Thesis would be called into question. Such a defense is normative, not descriptive, in that it justifies a position athletics *ought* to hold rather than describing the actual operation of all "big-time" intercollegiate athletic programs.[7] But an account does not lack value because it is

partially prescriptive; rather, it can be the basis for criticism because it tells us what ought to be rather than what actually is.

Let us consider such an argument and how it might apply first to "big-time" college athletics and, second, to schools in the Ivy and Patriot Leagues in Division I and the members of Division III, the largest division of the NCAA.

The Problems of "Big-Time" Intercollegiate Sports

The ideal of intercollegiate athletics as a model for excellence in the face of challenge is at best only partially adhered to, even by athletic programs that most resemble the ideal. When we turn to practices in major intercollegiate athletic programs, the resemblance may be minimal at best. In view of the abuses that have been detected within many such programs, we need to ask whether big-time college athletics can be justified at all. Many major college and university athletic programs are run honestly, and student-athletes in such institutions do get an education and develop athletically as well, but the reported abuses are sufficiently serious and the incentives for abuse sufficiently great to justify our concern.

The Corruption of Intercollegiate Sports

In many of the athletically prominent colleges and universities of our land, sports have become big business. Television revenues and the visibility and support accompanying success in the major "visibility sports," such as men's football and basketball, seem to many to undermine the educational ideal of sports. To gain visibility, and the revenues and support that go with it, a program must be successful. But "success" in this context means "winning," and so the temptation is to do what is necessary to win. For example, coaches who teach their athletes effectively and who recruit only academically qualified players may not be as valuable to an institution interested in athletic success as a coach who wins, who can handle the media, and whose scruples about recruiting are less strict. Corners get cut. Other schools feel they, too, must cut even more corners, just to be competitive, and soon real abuses become far too common.

Violations of NCAA rules and the misbehavior of athletes who are only marginally qualified as students get much of the publicity. However, perhaps the most significant form of abuse goes deeper: If the purpose of participation becomes winning for the sake of external goods, such as visibility and financial support, won't players come to be viewed as mere means to that end rather than as students to be educated? Indeed, to keep players eligible, athletic programs could view education as an obstacle that must be overcome; many players could be inadequately educated

and perhaps never graduate. Former star Minnesota Viking lineman Alan Page has described a meeting of eight defensive linemen to go over the team's playbook:

> We had each spent four years in colleges with decent reputations . . . and I remember that two of us could read the playbook, two others had some trouble with it but managed, and four of my teammates couldn't read it at all. . . . The problem seems to be that these athletes—and there are many more like them, blacks and whites—were never expected to learn to read and write. They floated through up to this point because they were talented athletes.[8]

Various reforms made by the NCAA in the last twenty years may have contributed to some improvement since Page was a player. The overall graduation rate for student-athletes at NCAA institutions is higher than for students at large. However, serious problems remain, particularly in the high visibility sports of men's football and basketball. Although highly regarded institutions such as Penn State and Duke report high graduation rates even in those sports, other programs seem to be a disaster area. For example, for students entering college in 1995–1996, the overall graduation rate was 58 percent. The graduation rate for all athletes was 60 percent and for all male athletes 54 percent. However, male basketball players graduated only at a 43 percent rate and African American basketball players fared even more poorly, graduating at a 35 percent rate (although that rate was comparable to the overall graduation rate for black male students). Some individual institutions did far worse; the University of Oklahoma and the University of Nevada at Las Vegas graduated no male basketball players, and Florida State and the University of Cincinnati graduated no male African American basketball players. In fact, forty-two institutions failed to graduate *any* black male basketball players between 1991–1992 and 1994–1995.[9]

Thus, perhaps the morally most damaging charge brought against major intercollegiate athletics is that it exploits the participating athlete. Such athletes are ostensibly offered scholarships to play their sport in return for an education, but too often, the athlete is expected to give everything on the field, sometimes to the huge financial benefit of the university, but little or no time or effort is taken to insure success in the classroom.

For example, football at major universities, and often at smaller schools as well, is virtually a year-round sport. Practice starts in late summer. The season can extend into December, and even further if postseason competition in the major

bowls is involved. The season itself may be followed by an off-season "informal" weight training program; this goes through winter and may, in turn, be followed by spring practice. Not only does the time devoted to practice leave athletes little time for the nonathletic aspects of university life but it also affects academic achievement and, as we discussed earlier, encourages academic fraud.

The Problems of the Black Athlete

The problems discussed above, especially those involving the alleged exploitation of athletes, may apply particularly to the black athlete. Although blacks constitute about 12 percent of the population of the United States, they constitute well over a third of college football and basketball players, about 40 percent of professional football players, and about two-thirds of professional basketball players. Disproportionate representation is even greater in the major intercollegiate programs and at the very top levels of major professional sports, where all-star teams often are dominated by black players.

What explains the disproportionate representation of black athletes in certain sports? Theories of innate or genetic physiological racial differences have been used to explain this phenomenon; however, explanations that are largely or entirely environmental seem simpler and more plausible. A plausible explanation for the unusual representation of black athletes in many sports is discrimination and lack of opportunity in inner city areas. If blacks perceive many doors as closed to them because of discrimination, sports may seem the best escape route from poverty and the ghetto. The effects of discrimination and the focus of the mass media on athletes may also lead to there being a dearth of nonathletic role models in the black community, a gap filled by successful black athletes. Or such alternate role models may exist but may be less appreciated than is warranted because of the attention focused on such black athletic superstars as Michael Jordan, Shaquille O'Neal, and Kobe Bryant. As a result, success in athletics may come to be more highly valued in the black than in the white community. Thus, blacks become disproportionately involved in athletics, especially such sports as basketball, track, football, and baseball, which normally do not require large investments in equipment and for which inexpensive facilities are widely available in urban areas. As one African American scholar has argued, "To assert that Afro-Americans are superior athletes due to the genetic makeup of the original slaves would be as naive as the assertion that the determining factor in the demonstrated excellence of white pole vaulters from California over pole vaulters from other states is the physical stamina of the whites who settled in California."[10] Just as the climate and facilities

available in California can account for the success of the pole vaulters, so can a different set of environmental factors account for the success of young African Americans in many sports.

The following quotations from interviews with black baseball players tend to support the environmental hypothesis:

> It has been an avenue for me out of the ghetto. Hadn't I played baseball, I probably would have finished school but I doubt seriously I would be doing exactly what I wanted to do. Blacks just don't get an opportunity to do what they always want to do.

> Very definitely, I escaped through sports. For poor blacks there aren't many alternative roads. Sports got me into college and with college I could have alternatives. . . . I've worked hard at baseball to get away from the way of life I led growing up.

> Yes. . . . It's helped a lot of blacks. There ain't too many other things you can do. There are other things, but you don't have the finances to do it.[11]

If it is true that sports are more often viewed as the path of choice to upward mobility in the black community than the white, we might worry whether black athletes are more vulnerable to the dangers of big-time college athletics, particularly the failure to get a rigorous education, than whites. For example, as many black youngsters might tend to see sports as the major and perhaps only avenue to success open to them, they may be more likely to neglect their studies than others. The hope of obtaining an athletic scholarship and of playing professional sports may interfere with developing the educational tools that make for success in other areas. Some writers have argued that, since it may disproportionately steer African American youngsters away from focus on education to focus on sports practice instead, the dream of success in athletics may be harmful to the African American community. Once in college, black athletes in football and basketball may overestimate their chances of making the professional leagues or not even be concerned about graduation because they hope or expect to be drafted early by a professional team.

Although athletic scholarships are available for many athletes, including underprivileged blacks and whites, the odds of obtaining them are not high. The odds of achieving a career in pro sports not only are even lower, they are astonishingly small. According to one estimate, the chances that an African American youngster will succeed at making a professional team in a major professional sport is roughly 1 out of 18,000.[12]

Unfortunately, it appears that African American youngsters have a greater tendency than whites to overestimate their chances of playing college and professional sports and so may assign a higher priority to athletic than academic success.[13] Not without reason, some writers argue that the athletics in the United States, often considered in popular thought as a road to equal opportunity for African Americans, has been harmful to them.[14] Although such a thesis may be overstated, for many of those who neglect educational opportunities, athletic talent may be far more likely to lead down a dead-end street than to the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow seemingly provided by professional sports.

The Case Against Major Intercollegiate Athletics

To review, the criticisms of "big-time" intercollegiate athletics arise from the change of emphasis from athletics as an educationally valuable activity supplementing the normal academic curriculum to athletics as a source of revenue, support, and high visibility. These benefits—revenue, support, and visibility—depend upon winning, which, in turn, depends largely on recruiting the best athletes. The pressure to win can become so intense that coaches and athletes as well as university administrations (often under pressure from influential alumni boosters) make decisions that reflect athletic rather than educational priorities. At their worst, the pressures lead to recruiting violations, to misbehavior, and even to crime and other abuses, all of which have too often dominated the sports pages of our daily newspapers. Moreover, athletes may be given the opportunity to get an education but lose the opportunity because of their own lack of educational commitment.

The kind of disrespect for the educational mission of the university, along with violations of NCAA rules and misbehavior by athletes themselves, undermines overall respect for the university. If the ideal of the university is that of an institution concerned for the discovery and preservation of truth and the recognition of human excellence, isn't that ideal compromised by sacrificing the education of athletes for athletic victories, and even more so by outright cheating? Even though it is true that the modern university has become what has been called a social service station, fulfilling a variety of social needs, its most important function is still to

formulate, test, teach, and evaluate achievement in the arts, sciences, humanities, and professions. How can the university claim to represent such fundamental values when it subverts them in its own practice?

Reasonable people may doubt, then, whether intercollegiate sports should be played at the level of national competition and intensity found in the major football and basketball conferences of our nation. Many would argue that the only reputable intercollegiate athletic programs are those resembling the Division III or Ivy League levels where no athletic scholarships are given, athletes are expected to be students, and competition is normally regional rather than national. Perhaps this level of intercollegiate competition is the only kind compatible with respect for the athlete as a person, with respect for the educational value of athletic competition, and with respect for the integrity of the university.

Reforming Major Intercollegiate Athletics

Before we accept the conclusion that major intercollegiate athletics at the national level are inherently unethical, important counterarguments need to be considered. In particular, proponents of major intercollegiate athletics maintain that providing entertainment for the campus community and for regional and national audiences is not inherently wrong, especially when it results in financial and other kinds of support for the university. After all, it can be said with considerable justice that many critics of intercollegiate athletics would not complain if the university's drama or dance companies received national recognition by providing a huge television audience and many evenings of enjoyment. If it is permissible for the university to be a social service station in other areas, why shouldn't it provide entertainment to society, in return for rewards, in athletics as well?

A Consequentialist Defense—Nonacademic Benefits

Can major athletic programs be justified by their good consequences? This appeal to consequences is utilitarian; it appeals to the greatest good of those affected by an action or practice as a whole. Utilitarian arguments, although arguably not the only moral considerations, are not irrelevant to moral evaluation. After all, we surely ought to consider whether major athletic programs promote more good than harm when morally evaluating them.

What are the consequences that defenders of major intercollegiate athletics programs might cite? First, there is the fun that major college sports provide not only for segments of the college or university community but for local, regional, and sometimes national audiences. Sports teams also may generate allegiance to a college or

university. Surely part of the support that large universities, such as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Penn State, Michigan, Notre Dame, and Duke, is due to the visibility and competitive success of their athletic teams. Visibility in turn may lead to increased applications, greater selectivity, support from state legislatures and sometimes from alumni, and overall indirect benefit to the institution's academic mission.

Moreover, highly visible men's teams in sports such as basketball and football, and some women's basketball teams such as those at Tennessee and Connecticut, may generate considerable revenue that can be used to support the rest of the athletic program or be applied to academic needs as well. Although, as we have seen in Chapter 5, there is doubt that most major college programs generate revenues, surely the most successful programs often do. Sometimes what counts as a profit and loss in this area is controversial: Should we stick to counting just gate receipts? What about sales of apparel bearing the institution's logo? (One can hardly go to a campus in the United States without seeing apparel with the logo of such schools as North Carolina or Notre Dame.) On the other hand, are expenditures counted properly, such as costs of stadiums and athletic facilities? Should all the costs be attributed to varsity teams if these facilities are shared with other students and faculty?

For the sake of argument, let us assume that some athletic teams at major schools do generate substantial revenue. If we add this benefit to the others mentioned above, is there a utilitarian argument sufficient to justify major intercollegiate sports in the face of the case against them?

The problem is that if defenders of major intercollegiate athletic programs are to appeal to utility, they must consider all the relevant consequences. Do the negatives outweigh the positives?

The issue becomes more complex if we don't restrict ourselves to purely utilitarian arguments, especially those that emphasize the alleged direct nonacademic benefits of intercollegiate athletics. As we have seen, utility alone does not normally override other ethical considerations involving fairness and individual rights. On the contrary, rights function as constraints on the direct pursuit of utility. Without the protection provided by individual rights, individuals could be unduly sacrificed for minimal gains in the good of society as a whole. Because one of the charges against major intercollegiate athletic programs is that they too often sacrifice educational values for athletic ones, or cheat and commit fraud for athletic advantages, utilitarian arguments alone will not carry the day.

This suggests that major intercollegiate athletic programs are morally required to operate within strict ethical restraints to be ethically defensible. But what restraints should be in place? Can educational values and respect for persons be

preserved in intercollegiate athletics without losing the quality of excellence and the levels of intensity and enthusiasm characterizing the NCAA basketball championships or Big Ten football?

Should College Athletes Be Professionals?

One proposal, defended by former Senator Bill Bradley, himself a former college and professional basketball star, and proposed most recently in 2003 by a member of the Nebraska state legislature (to apply to football players in the Big 12 Conference) is that college athletes playing major sports in "big-time" intercollegiate programs should be professionals.[15] According to one version of such a proposal, the athletes would be paid to play and need not be students. Such individuals could attend classes and obtain a degree if they fulfilled the normal requirements for admission to the academic program, but they would not be required to do so. Rather, they would be employees of the college or university for which they played.

This proposal would have several advantages. First, it would be honest. Since the athletes would be openly paid a fair salary, illegal payments to them would be unnecessary. Second, the fiction that all players are "student athletes" need not be maintained. Athletes not academically qualified to attend classes and those not interested in doing so would not be expected to perform academically. Third, athletes would not be exploited. They would share in the profits produced by their play, and their pay would be set by the market. Fourth, such athletes could enroll in classes and earn a degree if they wished to do so, but only by meeting the same academic standards of admissibility and performance as other students; thus, athletic excellence and the academic integrity of the university would be preserved.

Although such a proposal has virtues, it may be a matter of throwing out the baby with the bath water. If it were adopted, what we would have is not intercollegiate athletics but just another professional minor league. Critics might object that "just another professional minor league" is what we have now, but perceptions, and sometimes the reality, differ. In spite of the abuses, many, perhaps most, athletes in major intercollegiate programs are working towards degrees and are students at the schools for which they play. Many, perhaps most, institutions in Division I do not cheat, and their athletes also earn degrees in reputable areas of study. Female athletes, including female basketball players, have significantly higher graduation rates than other students, including female nonathletes. So even at the level of elite Division I athletics, the bleak picture presented by critics is far from the whole story.

Moreover, the enthusiasm of the crowds and the spectacle of college sports make them different from professional sports, and part of this difference arises

from the belief that college teams in some sense represent their institutions. Students, alumni, and other members of the university community generate enthusiasm because of their loyalty to their institutions and because they believe the players have a similar relationship to the schools. It is an open question whether the distinctive character of college sports would survive professionalization.

Of course, critics could object that the fans' perceptions are often distorted and that college athletes in high-visibility sports in major programs really are (poorly paid) professionals; however, the issue is whether we should further encourage this development, openly and honestly, or try to make college athletes comply with the academic mission of colleges and universities. The latter policy has the advantage of preserving the distinctive character of college athletics and the educational values of a good intercollegiate athletics program.

Another serious problem faces professionalization. Once the university enters professional sports with the primary goal of making a profit, isn't there even greater danger than at present to the educational priorities of the institution? Will favorite players be traded or let go if their salary demands are too high? Will games be scheduled off campus whenever possible to insure high attendance by those most able to pay high prices for tickets? Will students be treated as second-class spectators and have even more limited access to tickets than currently provided at some profit-hungry institutions because they can afford to pay relatively little for them? Will making a profit on high-visibility sports be regarded as so important that the educational lessons to be learned from good competition are lost? Won't winning be the bottom line, regardless of how it is achieved? Although some of these circumstances exist already in major intercollegiate sports, professionalization may only accelerate them even further.

Moreover, will professionalization really avoid the exploitation of athletes? Will universities be able to pay athletes large salaries without diverting funds from education? On the other hand, if salaries are low, won't athletes still be underpaid but have even less chance of getting an education than at present? And if, as critics claim, relatively few big-time programs actually do generate profits, where will the funds come from for salaries? Before we decide whether professionalization is the best alternative, other options ought to be considered as well.

The Academic Reform Movement

In the late 1980s, throughout the 1990s, and into the early years of the current century, widespread disgust with the state of major intercollegiate athletics led to a reform movement within the governing body of college athletics, the NCAA. Headed

by a commission led by selected presidents of NCAA institutions, a series of reforms were proposed, debated, and sometimes adopted. The goal of these reforms was to reaffirm the priority of educational values in intercollegiate sport. Although proposals arising from this reform movement undoubtedly will continue to be proposed and debated, reasserting the primacy of educational values over profits and won-lost records deserves examination as an alternative to professionalization.

The reform movement has focused on such goals as tightening academic standards for eligibility, restricting the amount of time that can be devoted to practice, and trying to control the length of seasons.

However, the difficulty of achieving incremental reform is significant. For example, a series of propositions were adopted by the NCAA in the 1980s and early 1990s requiring that freshmen achieve a minimal SAT score (or, in a later version, a combined index of SAT scores and grades in core courses) to be eligible for intercollegiate athletic competition. But, since African Americans tend to score lower on the SAT than others, such requirements proved highly controversial.

Are the SATs culturally biased against minorities? What are the effects of socioeconomic status on standardized test scores? A disproportionate number of African Americans are economically disadvantaged; therefore, as socioeconomic status tends to correlate with test scores, are the tests stacked against them? Some observers believe proposals to require a minimal SAT score for eligibility were unfair to African American athletes. Former Georgetown basketball coach John Thompson was so outraged by the NCAA propositions that he walked out of a game with Boston College in protest.

In opposition to such charges, some educators, including prominent and hardly conservative African American scholars, have argued that the standards set by Proposition 48 are too low. If, as suggested above, socioeconomic factors predispose black youngsters to overemphasize athletics at the expense of acquiring basic academic skills, the setting of a standard by legislation such as Proposition 48 may create an incentive for reversing priorities. As sociologist of sport Harry Edwards has argued,

> Rule 48 communicates to young athletes . . . that we expect them to develop academically as well as athletically. . . . Further, were I not to support Rule 48, I would risk communicating to black youth in particular that I, as a nationally known black educator, do not believe they have the capacity to achieve a 700 score on the SAT . . . when they have a significant chance of scoring

> 460 by a purely random marking of the test. Finally, I support the NCAA's action because I believe that . . . the black community must insist that black children be taught and that they learn whatever subject matter is necessary to excel on diagnostic and all other skills tests.[16]

Whatever the merits of the issue, the attempt to raise academic standards by working with limits on standardized test scores proved impossible to sustain. Attention has now shifted to requiring students to achieve minimum grades in core courses in high school and to maintain academic standing while in college. More promising proposals include depriving intercollegiate teams of athletic scholarships if their athletes do not graduate at approved rates. The problem with such proposals is that graduation or even grades themselves may not be significant markers of academic progress if the athletes are not enrolled in demanding programs (thus, the former emphasis on the SAT, which provided a standard separate from the grading practices of individual institutions).

Rather than focus on individual incremental attempts at reforming big-time intercollegiate athletics, it may be more useful for us to examine broader issues and themes. Such a discussion may generate principles that can be used as a framework for assessing proposals for incremental reform.

Awarding Athletic Scholarships: An Immoral Practice?

One possibility, not officially considered by the NCAA but well worth examination, is that all institutions conform to rules like those presently in place in Division III or in such Division I conferences as the Ivy League. In this view, there should be no special financial aid for athletes. Prospective athletes would then pick a college or university that would best fulfill their educational needs, not for the athletic scholarship they would receive. Financial aid would be awarded only according to need, not athletic ability. Moreover, although admissions officers might give special weight to a candidate's athletic talents, roughly similar weight would be given to the nonathletic talents of other applicants, such as ability in music or drama. Colleges and universities would look for true student athletes, not just those looking for cost-free exposure to professional scouts.

This is a very attractive proposal. It would avoid the objection that major intercollegiate sports exploits athletes because only athletes who are concerned with the education an institution can provide would enroll. Moreover, athletic programs would be run as part of the institution's educational program rather than as revenue

producers. For example, coaches might be given faculty status and be judged primarily as teachers rather than according to their record of wins and losses. Generating income and support would not be the program's primary purpose. Because athletes would be admitted on the same basis as other students, much of the motivation for the recruiting abuse and academic fraud that have plagued major college athletics would have been removed.

Nevertheless, although this proposal might express the most desirable framework for conducting intercollegiate athletics, it has serious defects. For one thing, it is impractical in the sense that it is unlikely ever to be adopted. Given the visibility and, sometimes, the revenue generated by the most successful big-time athletic programs, as well as entrenched support by alumni and fans for their favorite teams, a sudden radical de-emphasis of intercollegiate sports probably could not be achieved.

The policy of de-emphasis still might be morally justifiable even if is difficult or impossible to carry out. But even though there is much to be said for the moral justifiability of this approach, there are moral objections to it. According to these objections, some de-emphasis on athletics is justified, but radical de-emphasis, including the elimination of athletic scholarships, is not.

In particular, it is far from clear that the award of athletic scholarships or the use of athletic programs to generate revenue and support is inherently immoral. Athletic scholarships can be used to attract top talent to particular programs and make competition exciting. They also allow talented athletes to acquire an education that might otherwise be beyond their grasp. In addition to tangible benefits, such as money, athletics can enhance the visibility of the university, create cohesion within the university community, and create enjoyment for the region and sometimes the entire nation. Major college athletic events are entertaining, demonstrate a quest for excellence through challenge, and can generate a sense of pride in one's institution and loyalty to it that might carry over into support for it in many other ways. What is immoral in this view is not major intercollegiate competition but specific abuses resulting in the exploitation of athletes and the violation of academic ethics. Reforms should aim at cleaning up big-time intercollegiate athletics, not eliminating it.

How are these positions to be evaluated? Each seems to rest largely on empirical or factual assumptions that are difficult to confirm. The proponents of de-emphasis doubt whether incremental reforms can curb the abuses arising when money and status are at stake. Proponents of incremental reform are more optimistic. They believe that specific changes short of major de-emphasis, some of which will be

discussed below, can work. At present, it is unclear which of these factual assumptions is true.

In addition to consequentialist arguments about the effect of reform, there is another sort of argument for the view that awarding athletic scholarships is immoral. Why, a critic might ask, should an athlete receive financial aid to attend a college or university when an educationally better qualified student is turned away? Why should limited openings in a college class be filled by those whose primary talent is athletics, instead of by those who could do best in the classroom? Why should a disadvantaged but not athletically talented student be denied financial aid, and therefore denied an opportunity to receive an education, in favor of an athlete who may not even need the money and who may be uninterested in obtaining an education?

In particular, many athletic scholarships are awarded by large, generally unselective universities that enroll large student populations. Admission need not be a zero-sum game where each scholarship awarded to an athlete means that a needy academically qualified nonathlete is denied financial aid (although athletic programs that run up huge losses may well impose severe burdens on the rest of the academic community). Although it is widely agreed that athletes who are not educationally qualified should not be admitted, athletes can be given some special consideration in admission because of the overall goods they provide for the whole community. Similarly, if other kinds of students can provide similar benefits for the university as a whole, they should receive special scholarships as well. After all, it is unclear whether standardized test scores, high school grades, and class rank should be the only determinants of admissibility to even the most selective institutions. A diverse class, including the athletically talented, may provide educational benefits as well as enhance life in ways that benefit a broad segment of the university community.

Moreover, although some major intercollegiate athletic programs have poor graduation rates, particularly in men's high-profile sports, others have quite high graduation rates for athletes. Some groups of athletes, females and those in lower-profile sports, often do as well academically as other students. Finally, athletes in an entering class often are not given preference over academic superstars but are accepted instead of students who may not have vastly superior academic credentials and who sometimes might not have performed better in class than the scholarship athlete.[17]

These rejoinders may be defensible. In particular, if the benefits provided by high-visibility sports in major college athletic programs can also benefit other members of the university community, such programs, including the awarding of

athletic scholarships, may be morally permissible if the incremental reforms proposed by the NCAA are effective. In short, the practice of awarding athletic scholarships is open to serious question, but the questions may be answerable through an effective reform program.

Three Proposals for Reform

It is important to consider proposals for reform for, even if they are not ideal, they may constitute a second-best solution to the problems of intercollegiate athletics if the ideal solution proves unattainable. Let us consider the idea of reform further.

First, it seems entirely justifiable to set academic standards that prospective athletes recruited for elite Division I programs must meet to be eligible for athletics. These standards should in part consist of satisfactory grades in academically sound core high school courses in core subjects, such as English and mathematics. However, the courses offered by different schools can vary in quality, and sometimes there are legitimate concerns that athletes may not be held to the strictest standards so that they can remain eligible to play.

Thus, I suggest there is a role for the SAT to play, in spite of fears that it may unfairly disadvantage minorities. However, rather than require athletes to attain an across-the-board minimal SAT score, we could consider relativizing the score to their institutions. That is, athletes should achieve a score on the SAT comparable to that of, say, the lowest third of accepted applicants to that particular institution who are not athletes. Moreover, failure to achieve this relativized score could be overcome by evidence of superior academic achievement as shown by grades or class rank. Finally, failure to achieve the minimal SAT score would not prevent a prospective athlete from being recruited or being offered a scholarship, only from being eligible to play until academic achievement was demonstrated while in college.

Second, the strategy of restricting travel, length of season, and time devoted to off-season practice for Division I programs is a good one and should be extended further. In particular, it is hard to see how athletes can achieve the full benefits of a university education if they are constantly on long road trips playing games. Although specific proposals might differ from sport to sport, national nonconference competition should be restricted to vacation periods or postseason play in national championships.

Critics have complained about the amount of time today's college athletes are expected to practice out of season. Although the NCAA has restricted the amount of off-season practice that institutions can officially require, the critics charge that allegedly voluntary "captain's practices" held in the off season, supposedly at the

initiative of the players themselves, are in fact mandatory because coaches will penalize players who don't attend. This is a tricky issue, however, since many highly motivated athletes (some of them academically successful) do want to practice on their own in the off season. Isn't it an unjustified restriction on their liberty to prevent them from doing what any other student may do; namely, practice a sport on their own time? (Former Olympic swimmer Janet Evans, who carried a 4.0 or A grade-point average at Stanford, was said to have left school because she felt she could not prepare adequately for world class competition under the NCAA rule adopted in 1991 limiting required practices to twenty hours each week.) At a minimum, restrictions on the liberty to practice in the off season need to balance the protection of the athlete against the freedom to engage in a valued activity, and so must be drawn in a manner sensitive to both sets of values.

A third proposal is to hold institutions responsible for the academic progress of their athletes. Different versions of this proposal are under consideration, but the general idea is that athletic programs within an institution be penalized by loss of future athletic scholarships if the graduation rate and academic progress of participating athletes were deficient. This approach would have two desirable consequences: It would provide incentives for institutions to recruit only athletes who could succeed academically and to insure their athletes did learn once they matriculated.

All this presupposes that athletes are taking legitimate courses and are involved in academically satisfactory programs of study. To insure this, faculties need to exercise significant oversight on the courses chosen by athletes. For example, course selection for athletes should be handled the same way as it is for other students; that is, through faculty or academic advisers, not coaches or employees of the athletic department. Course selection by athletes should resemble that of other students unless there was an appropriate educational reason for the difference. For example, athletes might take more education courses than other students if they were interested in becoming teachers and coaches after graduation, or specialize more than others in economics if they had a greater interest in entering the business world. But faculty monitoring and control would do much to insure that the academic ethic was not being undermined by athletics. Surely the contribution athletics can make to the overall community in elite Division I programs should not be at the price of athletes' academic progress.

Finally, as noted earlier, athletes must take advantage of the educational opportunities offered them. The academic deficiencies of some athletes sometimes may not be the fault of the institution at all but of the athletes' priorities. Although

incremental reforms of the kinds suggested above might do much to make academics and big-time intercollegiate athletics compatible, reforms can only provide a better opportunity for individuals to receive an education; the individuals themselves must take responsibility for achieving it.

Can Athletics Enhance Academics?

At most, our argument so far shows that athletics at the level of major intercollegiate sports, given appropriate and effective regulation, can provide benefits such as a sense of community, fun, visibility, and perhaps revenue without undermining the central academic mission of colleges and universities. Skeptics may question whether regulations can be effective given the incentives to win and claim that the argument shows athletics to be a necessary evil, but that response may well be too bleak. Most athletes in elite Division I programs graduate, often, as we have seen, at higher rates than other students. Female athletes do particularly well, but many athletes in high-visibility men's programs also graduate at high rates at institutions whose athletic programs have achieved national prominence.[18] Although graduation rates are not always an indication of the rigor of the programs in which athletes are enrolled, greater faculty control would surely enhance the quality of education received by athletes at high-profile institutions.

But even if this limited defense of elite Division I athletics has force, an even stronger kind of argument should also be considered. This argument claims not merely that, under suitable conditions, big-time athletics and academics can be minimally compatible and so should be accepted for their utilitarian benefits, but that intercollegiate athletics in the right circumstances can enhance or contribute to the academic mission of colleges and universities.

Athletics As Education

In particular, if we consider the model of athletic competition as a mutual quest for excellence through challenge as developed in Chapters 2 and 3, it has several features that make it a desirable supplement to a broad liberal arts education. On this model, athletic competition can be thought of as a test through which competitors commit their minds and bodies to the pursuit of excellence. To meet such a test, they must learn to analyze and overcome weakness, to work hard to improve, to understand their own strengths and weaknesses, and to react intelligently and skillfully to situations that arise in the contest. In the sports contest, they must use judgment, make decisions that are open to reflective criticism (often known as second-guessing), apply standards of assessment, critically analyze play, and exhibit

perseverance and coolness under pressure. During a season, athletes can learn and grow by understanding their physical and psychological weaknesses and trying to improve.

Many of these same traits are also required for successful study in the humanities and sciences. An important part of education is learning to know and understand oneself, and that kind of self-knowledge is one of the most valuable kinds of knowledge that can emerge from participation in sports. In calling for the best that is within each participant, a good athletic program can provide educational experiences that are unusually intense and unusually valuable, and that reinforce and help develop many of the same traits that promote learning elsewhere. But even leaving aside such consequences, the good sports contest is a crucible in which important learning takes place and involves the discipline, understanding, and analysis that are related to learning in other parts of the curriculum.

Critics might object that even if these points are correct, they do not show that intercollegiate athletics is a necessary part of an educational curriculum. After all, if the same values are directly promoted, taught, and exemplified in the classroom, the additional indirect reinforcement provided by athletics is at best marginal and at worst distracts students from more academic pursuits where the most important aspects of education are dealt with. At most, critics might argue, intramural programs may well be warranted, but not the kind of intense activity found in varsity intercollegiate athletics.[19]

This sort of critical rejoinder is not decisive. As philosopher Paul Weiss has pointed out, students, particularly undergraduates, are novices in the academic disciplines they study. At best, the more advanced undergraduates may become apprentices by assisting professors in research, but they rarely have the chance to be at the cutting edge of achievement in a discipline until later in their careers. Athletics, along with the performing arts, are perhaps the only areas in most colleges and universities where students can achieve and demonstrate excellence—and not just as apprentice learners but in performances that rank among the best at a high level of comparative judgment.[20]

Perhaps more important, appreciation of achievement in athletics is widespread, far more so than understanding of achievement in mathematics, physics, philosophy, or other specialized disciplines. Because of this, athletics can and should serve as a kind of common denominator that allows people from vastly different backgrounds, cultures, social classes, and academic interests to experience together the lessons of striving to meet challenges. These experiences can be not only educationally valuable to the participants but also can inspire, teach, and

inform other members of the wider university community who also enjoy the competition. Moreover, because athletics is accessible to and attracts the interest of wide segments of the population, it can be a unifying force in an intellectual community often split along ideological, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and disciplinary lines. Although this function is perhaps distinct from its primary educational functions, intercollegiate athletics can help create bonds that allow communication to persist when it might otherwise break down because of differences within the university.

Thus, because of the intensity and high level of the competition, intercollegiate athletics can serve as a common medium through which large and diverse segments of the academic community can demonstrate and appreciate excellent performance and the struggle to meet challenge. Michael Oriad, a professor of English at Oregon State University, captured the effects of his institution's basketball program and its coach, Ralph Miller, when he wrote

> My colleagues and I recognize the most important functions of the university to be teaching, research, and service. . . . But on Friday or Saturday night from December through March, we cannot conceive of a finer place to be than in Gill Coliseum watching what the locals have termed the Orange Express. . . . These games are the major social events of our winter months, and our enthusiasm for the team is compounded of many elements. Some of us have had players in class and usually have favorable reports of the experience. . . . Most of us never appreciated the art of passing until we saw how O.S.U. executes it. . . . It is a particular kind of excellence that our basketball team exhibits and that most appeals to us. Ralph Miller speaks the truth when he calls himself not a coach but a teacher, and we teachers in other disciplines appreciate what his pupils have learned to do.[21]

Our discussion suggests, then, that although intercollegiate athletics are not strictly part of an education in the way the classroom experience is, they can and should add a desirable educational component to the university. Of course, our account has been highly intellectual and is not meant to deny that intercollegiate athletics can provide other benefits to the academic community as well. These benefits include opportunities for relaxation, to make new friends and meet different kinds of people, and to promote a sense of community on campus. Although these other

benefits are significant, it is important to consider the educational benefits of athletics as well if we are to determine their proper role in the university. For example, one might argue that if athletics have educational value, coaches should be evaluated primarily as teachers rather than according to their record of wins and losses or their ability to generate funds for the university.

In all fairness, this model of athletics does not easily fit the major intercollegiate athletic programs found at the athletic pinnacle of Division I. The institutions that come closest to meeting it most probably are schools like those in the Ivy League, perhaps major universities that do award athletic scholarships and have strong academic reputations—such as Duke and Stanford—and many of the institutions in Division III (the largest division within the NCAA), where athletic scholarships are not awarded, where athletes take the same courses as other students, and where athletics is regarded as an adjunct to the educational program.

But although it may be comforting to think of intercollegiate athletics at such schools as pure and pristine, at least compared to the kind of problems that have plagued big-time intercollegiate athletics, some recent criticism has called even that assumption into question. This criticism goes directly to the heart of the claim that athletics can enhance academics and has a significant educational role to play at many institutions of higher education.

Do Intercollegiate Athletics Fail the Game of Life?

In their recent book, *The Game of Life,* James L. Shulman and William G. Bowen, officers of the prestigious Mellon Foundation (Bowen is also a former president of Princeton University), use material from an extensive database comparing the academic performance of athletes and nonathletes as well as their careers after college and conclude that intercollegiate athletics is even more harmful at the Ivy League universities and highly selective liberal arts colleges.[22]

Critics point out that because the smaller, more academically selective schools tend to offer more intercollegiate sports than others, athletes constitute a high percentage of their student body, as much as 30 percent to 40 percent. In the late 1950s, athletes at the schools studied by Shulman and Bowen performed well academically, often better than their peers. This, they maintain, is no longer so. Rather, they suggest that if athletes are given too great an admissions advantage and if they perform much worse academically than their classmates, they can drag down the academic atmosphere of the whole institution. Moreover, they suggest that a "culture of athletics," a kind of "jock culture" exacerbates this problem and, apart from its consequences, may be inherently in conflict with academic values.

Although the highly selective schools in the book's database may not be typical of the majority of institutions of higher education, these schools have an importance larger than their numbers would indicate. Not only are they widely regarded as academic standard-bearers, but they also appear to have resisted the temptations inherent in major intercollegiate sports. Many observers will conclude that if intercollegiate sports are harmful even in such a context, nowhere in higher education can they be a positive educational and ethical influence.

Much of the argument of *The Game of Life* rests on statistical comparisons between the academic performance while in school or achievements after graduation of athletes versus nonathletes. Because the argument is based on an exhaustive analysis of a major database, it cannot fully be analyzed here; however, we can look at some of the questions about methodology that go well beyond one particular study.[23]

Although it may seem methodologically sound to compare the academic performance of athletes to those of nonathletes at colleges and universities, we need to be careful about what conclusions we draw from such a comparison. Suppose the athletes do worse than nonathletes. Does this mean the academic stature of the student body could be raised if we stopped giving preference in admissions to talented athletes who apply?

Not necessarily. Much depends, not only on how much preference is given, but on who would have been accepted if athletic talent was not taken into positive consideration in the admissions process. If schools are comparing academically less-qualified athletes not to potential academic superstars but to applicants who are academically weaker, then the applicants who would have replaced the athletes might not have done all that well either.[24] In other words, how strong academically were the candidates who would have been accepted had some degree of preference not been extended to athletes in the admissions process?

To assess the effect of athletics on the academic stature of the student body, we would also need to consider another issue (one not given significant attention in *The Game of Life*), namely, the extent to which a competitive athletic program might attract athletes who are outstanding students and who want to participate in intercollegiate athletics at a respectable level of competition. This was brought home to me in the spring of 2001 when an excellent student in my seminar, who was also a top player on our women's basketball team, remarked after I had summarized *The Game of Life* for the class that "I would never have come here if I hadn't been a recruited athlete." Thus, in evaluating the effect of athletics on academics, one must consider not only weaker students who would not have been admitted if they had not been

athletes but also top students who would have attended another institution if they had not been attracted by the opportunities for athletics, either as a participant or spectator, at the school where they matriculated.

Finally, it is important to remember that the academic performance of many, perhaps most, athletes does not differ significantly from the performance of other students, as suggested by data in *The Game of Life* itself. In fact, data from the book suggest that female athletes do as well academically as other students and that the academic performance of male athletes in sports other than men's football and basketball does not differ much from that of other students. The widest divergence from the performance of the overall student body probably is in male high-profile sports, where the population of student athletes is also more socioeconomically diverse than the student body as a whole.

This raises the issue of whether the recruitment of athletes might contribute to the diversity of an institution's student body. We have already seen, for example, that African Americans are disproportionately represented on the major sports teams of athletically elite Division I schools. In their analysis in *The Game of Life,* Bowen and Shulman find a much more modest contribution at the schools in their sample, presumably because less weight is given to athletics in recruiting at those schools than in big-time college athletics and because the majority of student athletes at such schools play lower-profile sports, such as golf, lacrosse, tennis, and crew, that historically have not always attracted or been open to minority participation.

However, by considering diversity among all athletes, the study may have underemphasized how high-profile men's sports can contribute to diversity. In particular, male athletes in high-profile sports such as football do disproportionately tend to come from different socioeconomic backgrounds than other students.[25] As we have seen, the high-profile men's sports are the very ones where the academic performance of the student athletes is least satisfactory. If athletes in high-profile sports do tend to do less well than others academically, this may be due to a complex combination of factors, including their somewhat different educational backgrounds combined with the amount of time required by serious commitment to intercollegiate athletics.

Our discussion suggests that measuring the effect of athletic recruitment at academically selective schools is complex. Because some of these complexities may not have been given adequate attention by the authors, the quantitative analysis underlying *The Game of Life,* while raising issues of concern, arguably is less than compelling. But rather than focus simply on quantitative analysis, important as it is, let us turn to more philosophical criticisms of the claim that athletics and academics can be mutually reinforcing.

The "Culture of Athletics" and Academics

At a large state university, athletes may constitute a small percentage of students simply because the institution is so large. As we have seen, that may not be true at smaller Division III schools, such as liberal arts colleges, or even at Ivy League undergraduate colleges. If athletes have different values and attitudes than other students, and these are inimical to the educational mission of the institution, a critical mass of athletes can negatively affect the educational atmosphere of an institution apart from their academic performance as individuals. In other words, "jock culture" and academics may be in conflict.

Thus, Bowen and Shulman identify a cluster of traits they identify with a culture of athletics. Although this culture is not precisely defined, it shows a tendency for athletes to socialize mainly with other athletes, to pursue majors in proportions different from the rest of the student population, and, male athletes especially, to focus more on financial success after college than other students. This culture of athletics has been fostered by youngsters' early specialization into particular sports, recruiting policies by admissions officers that reward such specialization (the search for a well-rounded class rather than well-rounded individuals), and the consequent estrangement of athletes from the academic mission of their institutions.

Although the idea that a culture of athletics adversely affects athletes' academic performance may be plausible as a partial explanation, it is doubtful whether it is the whole story, or even the most significant part. This kind of explanation suggests that athletes even at highly selective and academically demanding institutions lack a true commitment to academic success. But surely the picture may be more complex.

Institutional factors built into selective colleges and universities may also play a significant role, as might cultural factors having little to do with athletics. For example, athletes whose parents did not go to college or who attended different sorts of institutions may be unaccustomed to interaction with faculty, particularly during their freshman year. These are the very students who might be most in need of academic support from professors but may not know how to go about getting it.[26] Even worse, if too many faculty exhibit outright disdain for intercollegiate athletics or, more likely, are indifferent to athletes, players may sense this and be more reluctant than other students to seek help from those faculty. Again, because review sessions or outside lectures may be scheduled during practice or game times, athletes

may be more likely than others to miss them. Moreover, the amount of time and energy that goes into athletic training may be more demanding than many other kinds of extracurricular commitments. It is unclear, then, just how much "jock culture," assuming it exists, affects academic performance and whether it has a greater or lesser effect than other explanatory factors.

Should the culture of athletics be viewed primarily negatively, as in *The Game of Life,* or is a more positive assessment plausible? Is there an ideal distribution of students across concentrations, let alone of values or career goals, that institutions should seek to foster? If not, why should we regard the culture of athletics as negatively as the critics suggest?

The Game of Life suggests that athletes, both male and female, increasingly tend to have more conservative values than their peers; surely the different values attributed to some athletes can be a contribution to diversity on campus, at least if "diversity" is not understood in a narrow and partisan way. If so, athletic recruiting can contribute not only a degree of socioeconomic diversity, as suggested above, but also contribute to a potentially intellectually fruitful mix of values within the academic community as well.

Athletics and Educational Values

Let us return more directly to what might be called the academic defense against the Incompatibility Thesis. According to this defense, athletics, properly structured, is not only compatible with academic values but may enhance and reinforce them. This point was defended earlier when it was argued that an athletic contest, conceived of as a mutual quest for excellence through challenge, is educational or has educational components closely related to academic virtues. Let us return to this point from another direction.

Surely, a major part of intellectual inquiry is a willingness to question what often is taken for granted, including one's own cherished beliefs. I find that my own students, at least when they are new to philosophy, are quite good at articulating their own views but less than satisfactory at anticipating serious objections to their own positions and meeting the challenges that would be presented by a thoughtful critic. Similar behavior on the athletic field can lead to the serious underestimation of an opponent or overestimation of one's own ability, misjudgments that are often made all too visible to participants and spectators alike through exposure in competitive contests.

That is, the kind of intellectual honesty and respect for truths so crucial for intellectual inquiry are closely related to similar virtues necessary for athletic success

and personal improvement in sport. Participation in competitive athletics can require intellectual honesty and a concern for truth, including accuracy about one's own values and talents, in ways parallel to academic inquiry.

Thus, participation in competitive athletics conducted within a defensible educational and ethical set of requirements can be educational in its own right. And although there need not always be a causal relationship between the development of these virtues in one context (say in athletics) and in the other (say academics), there also is no reason why these qualities should not be mutually reinforcing, given the proper emphasis by coaches and professors. More generally, by emphasizing how the pursuit of excellence in athletics requires the development of virtues that also apply in academic pursuits, and by involving coaches more directly in motivating student-athletes educationally, athletics and academics might be seen more as mutually reinforcing than in total conflict. Perhaps if coaches made a more direct attempt to indicate how qualities that promote success on the athletic field also do the same in the classroom and professors encouraged student-athletes, particularly in the high-visibility men's sports, to apply the personal qualities that lead to athletic success to academics, athletics and academics might come to be seen as mutually reinforcing rather than antithetical to each other.

Our discussion so far may have assumed that we are all in agreement about just what the academic mission of undergraduate education in the liberal arts and sciences, which are central to the ideal of critical inquiry, should be. Our discussion has associated that mission with the promotion of critical inquiry, which involves understanding major achievements in different fields, mastery of critical tools needed to assess them, and the ability to apply those tools in evaluating and assessing major positions in a variety of fields and disciplines.

This does not mean, however, that colleges and universities should have as their primary role the replication of more and more professors. It is important and even essential that students develop enthusiasm for some intellectual pursuit or activity, but it does not follow that the goal of undergraduate education is simply to produce scholars.

Surely one additional major function is to train people to function as intelligent citizens in a democracy. If so, many of the skills learned in sport and developed through competition (and expressed to spectators through scheduled contests) can contribute to such a goal. These would include appreciation of teamwork, including cooperation with those very different from oneself in pursuit of a common enterprise, and learning to appreciate achievement (including that of opponents) as well as learning to view opponents as persons who contribute to one's own development.

Our democracy might be much healthier if many of the attitudes the ethical athlete would have towards a worthy opponent, as outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, were also applied toward those who engage in reasonable debate within the democratic process.

Finally, let me suggest, however tentatively, a contribution competitive athletics make to liberal arts colleges that in my view is too often ignored. The contribution I have in mind is *ethical.* Competitive sport is by its very nature a value-laden activity. If carried out properly, such sports involve fair play, respect for opponents, and understanding and appreciation of (even reverence for) the traditions, practices, and values central to one's sport. Sport at its best is an unalienated activity participants engage in for its own sake, as well as for whatever external rewards participation may promote. As many scholars of sport have argued, concern for external rewards crowd out the love of the game and its internal values often corrupt sport and lead to many of the excesses of commercialized big-time sport in the United States.

However, the kinds of institutions that are best equipped to promote harmony between athletics and academics, such as many of the institutions studied in *The Game of Life,* are just the ones where the participants play primarily for love of the game and where commercialization is minimal. Although it remains controversial whether participation in athletics at these institutions actually makes the participants more ethical than otherwise (whether in sport or in unrelated activities), competitive sport arguably can express or illustrate these values to a wider community. Thus, competitive sport at such institutions exemplifies the pursuit of an activity for its own sake and illustrates the attempt to meet challenges simply for the sake of testing oneself and learning from the test. As such, it stands in contrast to a crude sort of utilitarianism approach that asks what everything is good for in terms of immediate payoffs, or to a view that rejects achievement and standards of excellence as arbitrary or mere matters of opinion. Of course, other activities, especially in the arts, also do the same. The suggestion here is not that athletics is unique in the way suggested but only that its role in illustrating, expressing, and possibly reinforcing important values is significant and should not be ignored. The French philosopher Albert Camus was making an important point of general educational importance when he remarked that the only context in which he really learned ethics was sport.[27]

Concluding Comment

In this chapter, we have argued that although academic values and intercollegiate athletics may often be in conflict, especially at the athletically elite colleges and universities that pursue national recognition at the top of Division I, this conflict is far from inevitable. Athletics can too often be the tail that wags the academic dog, as was indicated by one university president who, when seeking funds before a state legislature, was said to have stated, "We need to build a university our football team can be proud of." But athletics, properly integrated into the academic community, can also fill important and valuable functions. In the proper context, intercollegiate athletics can even enhance and reinforce the academic mission of the institution.

This academic defense is probably best realized within the framework of institutions that do not offer athletic scholarships and that tend to integrate athletics into the overall academic community, perhaps by evaluating coaches primarily as teachers and insuring that students who are athletes take rigorous academic programs similar to those of nonathletes.

This does not mean that the athletic programs, even at colleges and universities that best exemplify the model, are fine just as they are. Perhaps too much weight is given to athletics in admissions even there, or seasons are too long, or preseason training has become too demanding. However, our discussion has also suggested that broad criticism of athletics at such institutions, such as found in *The Game of Life,* may draw a bleaker picture than is warranted of the academic consequences of intercollegiate athletics in the academy. The role of athletics in academia can and should continue to be examined, but criticism of athletics, although sometimes well taken, should not obscure the contribution a properly structured athletic program can make to the college and university community.