

## CHAPTER 12

### INTERCOLLEGIATE SPORT<sup>1</sup>

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#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Summarize the history of intercollegiate athletics.
2. Identify the two primary lines of thought that guide practices in athletic departments.
3. Explain the role athletics play on college campuses.
4. Summarize how student-athletes are affected by participating in college athletics.

#### INTRODUCTION

Within the United States, few phenomena inspire as much passion and enthusiasm as intercollegiate athletics. Every year, millions of students, alumni, and fans spend large sums of money and countless hours attending games, purchasing memorabilia, and supporting their favorite university's athletic programs. Major broadcasting networks, such as ESPN and Fox Sports, devote numerous television and radio programming hours for covering high profile sports. Various websites document high school recruiting efforts for college football and basketball. Other websites, such as Texags.com, offer forums for fan interaction and "insider" coverage of their university athletic programs. Some universities have their own television networks devoted solely to providing coverage of their athletics teams. Proponents of college athletics contend that athletics are essential to the education process for both the athletes and the student body in general (Bailey et al., 2009; Hyland, 2008). Furthermore, supporters of intercollegiate athletics have asserted that athletic programs are important to the economic viability of universities because they help market and brand the university to the general public through media exposure (Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2010; Putler & Wolfe, 1999).

Interestingly enough, the US is one of the few countries in the world that houses and regulates sports within the higher education system (Beyer & Hannah, 2000). The dominant governing institution of intercollegiate athletics is the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA; Nite, Ige, & Washington, in press). According to the NCAA's website, there are more than 1200 NCAA member universities (NCAAc, n.d.) with more than 460,000 student-athletes competing in a variety of sports (NCAAc, n.d.). The NCAA is comprised of three divisions, each having different rules governing the affiliated athletic departments. The NCAA sponsors championships for sports in each of these divisions except for football programs competing in the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS).<sup>2</sup> Most universities and conferences in Divisions I and II offer athletic scholarships to their student-athletes (notable exception being the Ivy League), while Division III universities are not permitted to offer athletic scholarships to their student-athletes.

The NCAA is not the sole governing body for college athletics. The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) has approximately 250 members (NAIA, n.d.). The National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), which is comprised of two-year junior and community colleges, has more than 500 members. Both the NAIA and NJCAA provide scholarship money to student-athletes. Finally, the National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA) is comprised of almost 100 Christian/Bible colleges with many of these institutions having dual membership with the NCAA (NCCAA, n.d.).

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<sup>1</sup> Nite, C. (2019). Intercollegiate sport. In G. B. Cunningham & M. A. Dixon (Eds.), *Sociology of sport and physical activity* (pp. 161-172). College Station, TX: Center for Sport Management Research and Education.

<sup>2</sup> Even though FBS universities adopt NCAA rules regarding eligibility, the College Football Playoff National Championship provides the system for determining football national champions in the FBS.

The governing bodies of intercollegiate athletics provide the policies and procedures that organize athletic competitions for their members. They each have rules and regulations concerning athlete eligibility, proper procedural conduct of athletic departments and coaches, and policies regarding revenue distributions from common sponsors and media contracts. Further, universities within each of the aforementioned governing bodies are grouped into conferences. Each conference has additional rules and policies for their members. Some examples of athletic conferences include the Southeastern Conference, the Big XII, the Big Ten, The Lone Star Conference, and the American Southwest Conference. Finally, some universities have chosen to remain independent of conference affiliation. For example, the University of Notre Dame has remained independent with its football program (it is a member of the Atlantic Coast Conference with its other sports). Similarly, Brigham Young University (BYU) became independent with football in 2011 yet still competes in the West Coast Conference with other sports.

The role of intercollegiate athletics and the manner in which college sport is organized presents a myriad of different issues warranting examination. Such issues include the roles and purposes of athletics on campus, the manner in which universities manage commercialism, and the management of athletes and their development. In this chapter, I examine these issues from a sociological perspective. I begin with an examination of the history of intercollegiate athletics and how commercial interests shaped the organizing of intercollegiate athletics. I then discuss how the commercial and educational ideologies impact athletic department operations. I conclude with a look into how participation in intercollegiate athletics affects the overall development of college athletes.

## **HISTORY OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS**

Athletics have been a part of university life for the better part of the last 200 years. The first athletic competition *between* universities was a crew race that was held between students at Harvard and Yale universities in 1852 (Barr, 2009). The first intercollegiate baseball game was held in 1859, followed by the first football game between Princeton and Rutgers in 1869 (Barr, 2009). During these first few years, competitions were organized and operated by students from participating colleges. Through the late 1800s, competitions between universities became increasingly more popular among students and the general public, resulting in fierce rivalries between fan and alumni bases with more of an emphasis placed on winning (Barr, 2009; Beyer & Hannah, 2000). As a result, Yale was the first university to hire a coach, William Wood, for their crew team in efforts to realize better performance (Barr, 2009).

As intercollegiate athletic competitions increased in popularity and competitiveness, universities recognized the need to regulate intercollegiate athletics for safety and fairness reasons. The first regulatory body established to govern intercollegiate athletics was the Big Ten Conference in 1895 (Beyer & Hannah, 2000). Participation in athletics was limited to full-time students who were in good academic standing with their universities. Further regulations resulted from the events of the 1905 football season, which saw the death of 18 football players and at least 150 serious injuries (Beyer & Hannah, 2000). President Theodore Roosevelt pressured university presidents to get control of these athletic competitions. Thus, representatives from 62 colleges and universities formed the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS), which eventually was renamed the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (Barr, 2009). Despite the presence of these regulatory bodies, universities did not officially support athletics until the 1920s, at which point they integrated athletics into their physical education departments by appointing coaches to academic positions and providing university funds to support athletic teams (Barr, 2009).

In 1929, the Carnegie Foundation commissioned the first study of intercollegiate athletics. After visiting 112 colleges and universities, the foundation discovered the prevalence of recruiting and academic abuses along with the realization that intercollegiate athletics was highly commercialized (Barr, 2009; Thelin, 1994). Ultimately this report led to the evolution of the NCAA regulating more than just the rules used in competitions. The NCAA began regulating student-athlete academic eligibility, monitoring recruiting practices, and ultimately establishing rules for amateurism (Barr, 2009). Even though these steps were taken to slow

the growth of commercialism, the increasing popularity of intercollegiate athletics lent itself to heightened commercial appeal.

The evolution of the game of football in the 1950s and 1960s from a one-platoon system to a two-platoon system further increased the need for more funding in intercollegiate athletics (Byers, 1995). Prior to the 1950s and 1960s, football players played both offense and defense during games (one-platoon). Starting in the 1960s, football teams began using separate players for offense and defense (two-platoon), with players specializing their skills for certain positions on the football field. Football was already an expensive sport, but the implementation of the two-platoon system essentially doubled the cost of fielding football teams. With the rising costs of intercollegiate athletics, university leaders needed to find new ways to fund athletics on their campuses.

A new source of funding for intercollegiate athletics came through the selling of television broadcast rights for athletic competitions (Byers, 1995; Nite & Washington, 2017). Prior to the early 1980s, the NCAA regulated and negotiated the television deals for all of college football and limited the number of games that each university could have on television. The NCAA's television policy was eventually deemed illegal because it violated the Sherman Antitrust Act (*NCAA v. Board of Regents*, 1984). This ruling opened the door for individual universities and conferences to negotiate their own television contracts. Thus, it is important to understand that one of the key factors in decision-making for athletic directors and universities became the pursuit of television money (Nite & Washington, 2017). Since about the beginning of the 2000s, the revenue splits that universities had received from television deals were key factors in the conference realignments. Perhaps there is no greater example of commercialism in intercollegiate athletics than the presence of multibillion dollar television deals.

The commercialism of the intercollegiate athletics culminated in the formation of the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) for college football in 1992 (Byers, 1995). Originally, the BCS was a partnership between the top six intercollegiate athletic conferences, three bowls (Orange, Rose, and Fiesta), and network television. Initially the winners of each conference competed against the winner of another conference. This system evolved and expanded to five BCS bowls (Orange, Rose, Fiesta, Sugar, and National Championship), with the top six conference winners receiving automatic bowl bids and four other teams receiving "at-large" bids. The final iteration of the BCS National Championship Game took place in 2014, as universities implemented a new playoff format for determining FBS national champions. In 2015, a panel of supposed non-biased college football experts selected four teams to compete in the College Football Playoff.

College football receives substantial attention, but the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament remains the largest revenue generator for the NCAA. The NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament was first played in 1939, with the Oregon Ducks crowned champions (Wilco, 2019). The tournament has grown from 8 teams in 1939 to the current format that invites 68 teams. It has become the largest single revenue generator for the NCAA. In 2017, the NCAA topped \$1 billion in revenue for the first time, with \$761 million coming from the NCAA Division I men's tournament (Rovell, 2018).

Coined "March Madness," the tournament has become a cultural phenomenon that draws the attention of many sport and non-sport fans alike for the three weeks during which the tournament is played. Tens of millions of people engage in the act of "filling out brackets" whereby they pick winners for each tournament game. Often, the act of filling out brackets entails the placing of wagers. For the 2019 tournament, the American Gaming Association estimated that people bet nearly \$8.5 billion on the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament (Ginsbach, 2019).

The push to compete in the College Football Playoff, playing in high-profile football bowl games, and being included in the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament has led to universities spending millions of dollars on high-profile coaches and state of the art facilities. Though football is the primary revenue generator for athletic departments, universities have begun to invest millions of dollars into upgrading

facilities for other sports as well in order to attract top-level coaches and athletes. The excessive spending trend has shown no signs of slowing and is, in fact, probably gaining momentum. In fact, universities have been increasing their investments in athletics over the years to achieve higher levels of status and legitimacy among their peers and within public perceptions (Hutchinson, Nite, & Bouchet, 2015; Kelly & Dixon, 2011; Nite & Hutchinson, 2018).

In response to the increased commercialism of intercollegiate athletics, the Knight Foundation created the Knight Commission with the purpose of reforming intercollegiate athletics. The Knight Commission consisted of university presidents, corporate presidents and chief executives, and members of Congress (Barr, 2009). Initial studies conducted by the Knight Commission found that many of the problems first reported by the Carnegie foundation still existed in intercollegiate athletics (Barr, 2009; Byers, 1995). Further, the Knight Commission offered suggestions for regulating college athletics, which have led to many of the current NCAA regulations (Barr, 2009; Knight Commission, 1999). The Knight Commission is still active today and has recently launched a new database documenting the spending trends of Division I college athletics. As it stands today, commercial involvement with intercollegiate athletics is at an all-time high and numerous scandals and recruiting violations still occur.

### **COMMERCIAL AGENDA vs EDUCATIONAL VALUES**

The institution of intercollegiate athletics is paradoxical in nature with divergent ideas (i.e., logics) factoring into the decision-making of university and athletic department administrators. Management and organizational sociologists often term divergent logics of operation as “institutional complexity” (Greenwood et al., 2011). Institutional complexity makes for an interesting dynamic because it often leaves decision-makers in a position where values, whether they be commercial or educational in nature, may be compromised depending on which line of thought dominates decision-making.

The two primary lines of thinking that characterize intercollegiate athletics are commercial and educational (Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Southall et al., 2008). Both of these ideas have become so engrained within intercollegiate athletics that they are dependent on each other for the survival of the institution that is intercollegiate athletics. Simply, athletic departments would not be able to remain competitive or viable in the current climate without operating in a commercialized manner. However, completely ignoring or abandoning educational values would result in the demise of intercollegiate athletics because they are housed within the higher education system, which still requires at least a minimal commitment to educational values. Let us examine these two lines of thought and how they create tensions within intercollegiate athletics.

#### **Commercial Agenda**

Debates of commercialism versus amateurism has been an issue within intercollegiate athletics since the inception of athletic competitions. Dating to the early 1900s, pundits and scholars alike have struggled with the adoption of commercial, or market, values in intercollegiate athletics. Amateurism has largely been held, primarily by the NCAA and its members, as the primary ethos of intercollegiate athletics. However, the behaviors of universities and the NCAA suggests that commercialism is prominent. Commercialism can be seen in numerous aspects, including: conference realignments, television deals, athletic facilities expansions, and coaches’ salaries.

#### *Conference Realignments*

In the late 2000s and early 2010s, few events in intercollegiate athletics garnered as much attention as conference realignments. Conference realignment is the process in which universities disassociate with their current conferences in order to join other conferences. The changes are seemingly driven by commercial concerns, notably television (discussed in detail in subsequent sections). Notable universities that have switched conferences from 2009-2014 include: Maryland, Rutgers, Nebraska, Utah, Boise State, Colorado, Missouri, Texas A&M, Syracuse, Texas Christian, West Virginia, Pittsburgh, and Notre Dame (except for football). Many of these universities abandoned traditional rivalries for what they perceived to be a better financial situation for their athletic departments and universities. In 2018, SBNation reported the following

revenue distributions to each university in Power 5 affiliated conferences: SEC - \$40.9 million, Big Ten - \$34.8 million, Big 12 - \$34.8 million, Pac 12 - \$29 million, and the ACC \$27 million (Kirshner, 2018). However, most of the decisions surrounding conference realignments seemed to focus primarily on the benefits that would be incurred by football with little attention being paid to other sports. It would appear that universities have demonstrated little concern for the geographical fit and subsequent travel issues for other sports that were created by these realignments. Increased frequency of missed classes for student-athletes also seemed to matter little in conference realignments.

#### *Television Deals*

From the time that conferences and universities were allowed to negotiate their own television deals, the pursuit of television money has influenced numerous decisions for university and athletic department administrators (Nite & Washington, 2017). For instance:

- The SEC has television deals with CBS (\$55 million/year until 2023; Travis, 2018) and ESPN (\$2.25 billion for 15 years in 2008, extended in 2014 until 2034, terms not disclosed; Sandomir, 2013).
- The Big Ten Network's deal with FOX, ESPN, and CBS is worth approximately \$2.64 billion over the next 25 years (Ourand, 2016).
- The Pac 12 had secured a multi-network deal that is worth approximately \$3 billion for 12 years (Pucin, 2011).
- The Big XII had deals with ABC/ESPN and FOX that are worth approximately \$150 million a year (Associated Press, 2011).
- The ACC has partnered with ESPN through 2035-36 to develop a conference specific network/channel (ESPN.com news service, 2016).

Television contracts are important because conference television money is distributed to the universities that comprise each conference. Individual universities have also struck their own television deals. Notre Dame has a long-standing television contract with NBC, and the University of Texas partnered with ESPN to launch the Longhorn Network, which was worth \$800 million for 20 years (Kuriloff & Mildenburg, 2011). Brigham Young University also had a contract with ESPN until 2019 (Kragthorpe, 2018). Television money increases athletic budgets, which allows athletic departments to increase coaches' salaries and improve facilities.

The governing bodies of intercollegiate athletics also benefit from lucrative television contracts. The NCAA currently has a \$19.6 billion television deal with CBS and Turner Sports to broadcast the NCAA Men's Basketball tournament that runs until 2032 (Kim, 2017). The NCAA contends that majority of the revenue is dispersed to its members to support student-athletes (NCAA.com, 2016). ESPN currently holds the right to 35 of the 40 college football bowl games, including the College Football Playoff series. *USA Today* reported that ESPN pays nearly \$470 million per year for the media rights of the College Football Playoff (Schrotenboer, 2018). Similar to the NCAA, the money from the bowls is distributed to the conferences, which then distribute those funds to their member institutions. Each of the "Power 5" conferences (SEC, Big XII, Big Ten, ACC, and Pac 12) receive the largest portion of the money. Consequently, universities have tried to position themselves to receive invites to join the Power 5 conferences.

#### *Athletics Facilities Expansions*

Athletic departments and universities spend millions of dollars every year on facilities. In recent years, numerous universities have either built new athletic facilities or have renovated existing facilities in order to lure highly rated recruits and to increase the ticket sales to their events. Some have estimated that throughout the mid 2000s, athletic departments raised close to \$4 billion from private donors to fund athletic facilities (Sander & Wolverton, 2009). The University of Minnesota, Oklahoma State, and the University of Michigan all spent over \$250 million on upgrades and remodels to their football stadiums (Sander

& Wolverton, 2009). The money that was not raised through private donations was secured using debt financing (Sander & Wolverton, 2009). This is significant because it is another example of universities and athletic departments yielding to the commercial aspects of intercollegiate athletics. The financial burdens of athletic departments are typically absorbed by their universities, thereby diminishing the funds that can be used for other projects that would likely enhance the academic missions of universities.

It should also be noted that many athletic departments have been (or are in the process of) constructing multimillion-dollar academic facilities to support the academic growth of their student-athletes. These centers have been used to house study halls, computer labs, academic advisors, and academic tutors. Some have questioned the fairness of providing student-athletes with this level of support, suggesting that these facilities give student-athletes an unfair advantage over other students in the classroom (Wolverton, 2008). Despite this debate, it appears that athletic departments and universities are demonstrating academics are as important as the athletic endeavors of their student-athletes. However, critical examination of this issue suggests that these academic facilities are still meant to serve the commercial side of intercollegiate athletics. That is, these facilities and their personnel are meant to keep underachieving student-athletes eligible so that their teams can remain successful in their athletic competitions. These facilities may also aid in recruiting highly talented athletes who may be ill prepared for college academic life. Therefore, even the academic facilities in athletic departments may in fact serve commercial purposes.

### *Coach Salaries*

The final commercial issue that I highlight is the exorbitant coaches' salaries of intercollegiate athletics. Coaches' salaries have steadily risen over the past few decades to the point where many college coaches are compensated as well as professional coaches. In many cases (especially at the FBS and Division I level), coaches have salaries exceeding their university presidents' and athletic directors'. Furthermore, in some states, the highest paid government employees are coaches. Consider the state of Texas. The Texas Tribune reported in 2019 that the three highest paid state employees of Texas were Shaka Smart (Head Men's Basketball Coach at the University of Texas, approximately \$ 3 million/year), Tom Herman (Head Football Coach at the University of Texas, \$2.7 million/year), and Mike Elko (Defensive Coordinator of Texas A&M University's football team, \$1.8 million/year).<sup>3</sup> In comparison, the salary of the president of Texas A&M University that year was \$1 million while the Athletic Director made approximately \$935,000 (Government salaries explorer, n.d.).

The justifications for the excessive coaches' salaries are typically commercial in nature. Coaches are paid so well because their teams generate substantial revenues for their universities; therefore, just as any CEO at a successful firm, coaches should be compensated in relation to the amounts of money that they bring into the athletic department and university. Whether or not college coaches deserve these salaries could be an endless conversation. The point is that these salaries are supposedly driven by commercial principles with little regard given to the educative side of the coaching profession. In fact, one could argue that many coaches who have emphasized the educational aspects of participation in intercollegiate athletics have been fired from their jobs because they did not win enough games to satisfy the commercial aspects of coaching.

### **Educational Values**

For most sports and athletes in the United States, the highest level of amateur athletics is housed within the higher education system. Therefore, athletes, coaches, and other athletic administrators cannot focus solely on the athletic side of sports and must be attentive to educational values. Historically (and many argue presently), key constituents in intercollegiate athletics had ignored or minimized the academic aspect of intercollegiate athletics. Therefore, the NCAA and other governing bodies have tried to set baseline standards of academic requirements that all student-athletes must meet in order to participate in intercollegiate athletics. These measures were meant to ensure the educational values of the higher education

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<sup>3</sup> Note, too, that these figures represent state monies appropriated to the coaches' salaries, and other forms of compensation likely exist.

system were not neglected. Further, in order to root out professional influence and preserve amateurism, the NCAA has also set forth regulations governing the amateur status of student-athletes. These steps were taken to combat the commercial aspects of intercollegiate athletics and maintain, at the very least, a minimal adherence to educational values.

#### *Amateurism*

One of the principle purposes of the NCAA is to regulate and maintain the amateur status of student-athletes and intercollegiate athletics in general. This idea is the foundation for many of their rules and regulations. Amateurism is used to explain the NCAA's reluctance to compensate student-athletes beyond scholarships or financial aid agreements. Because of the adherence to amateur values, the NCAA also regulates the contact that student-athletes can have with agents.

Critics of this routinely point to the amount of money that is generated by football and men's basketball and have suggested that student-athletes are exploited (Donnor, 2005). Some would argue that the NCAA operates to protect the myth of amateurism in an effort to maintain their status as a not-for-profit organization (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). However, the NCAA has argued that most athletic departments, sports, and championship events typically operate at a deficit (NCAAc, n.d.).

Regardless, the NCAA has attempted to preserve some semblance of amateurism in intercollegiate athletics. A key aspect of amateurism for the NCAA is upholding the educational values of participation in sport at the college level. As such, the NCAA has defended its amateur model in court and in the media by framing challengers as antithetical to amateurism and as deviants from social norms (Nite, 2017). The NCAA has adopted extensive rules and requirements concerning academic eligibility, rules for participation, and institutional regulations in order to remain aligned with the educational values of higher education.

#### *Eligibility Requirements*

Historically, the NCAA has maintained the position that participation in intercollegiate athletics is an important part of higher education and that athletes are students, not employees, of their universities. In order to propagate this idea and avoid paying worker's compensation to injured athletes, the NCAA began using the term "student-athletes" in the 1950s to describe athletes who participate in intercollegiate athletics (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). Some have been critical of the term "student-athlete" because it "reflects the intention of the NCAA and college administrators to obscure exploitative practices that profited the institutions involved while violating the fundamental tenets of higher education and human rights" (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005, p. 107). Regardless of the original intent for its usage, the term "student-athlete" suggests that participants in athletics must at least feign some level of academic concern.

The NCAA has, therefore, taken steps to address certain academic concerns. One notable action occurred in 1983 with the adoption of Proposition 48 (NCAA, 2010b). Proposition 48 established that student-athletes must maintain a minimum grade point average of 2.0. Included in this, first-year athletes must also have scored a minimum of a 700 on the SAT or a 15 on the ACT. Further, entering first-year student-athletes must have also passed 11 core classes prior to enrollment. Eventually in 1992, Proposition 16 was adopted to heighten the academic eligibility requirements. Proposition 16 introduced a "sliding scale" that considered an entering individual's high school grade-point average along with the student's SAT or ACT scores (NCAA, 2010b).

In recent years, the NCAA has instituted further reforms to their eligibility requirements. The NCAA implemented the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) and Academic Progress Rate (APR) in order to instill accountability within athletic departments and universities in regards to the academic achievement of their student-athletes. The NCAA continues to update and reform its eligibility requirements for student-athletes and has also begun to penalize universities that frequently do not meet minimal GSR and APR standards. Beginning in the 2019-2020 academic year, a university's academic achievement will impact the amount of money distributed by the NCAA to the university as an incentive for academic success (NCAAA, n.d.). It

should be noted that the NCAA reports indicate student-athlete graduation rates far exceed those of other college students (NCAAe, n.d.).

### *Student-Athlete Development*

Both commercial and educational logics impact student-athletes and their overall development as people. Many of the challenges that student-athletes face while in college are not necessarily unique to their situations. That is, student-athletes encounter obstacles to their growth and development that are similar to other students. However, participation in intercollegiate athletics presents some unique challenges for student-athletes as they progress through college. Most notably, student-athletes must manage the pressure and fame that is inherent with intercollegiate athletics (Adler & Adler, 1991; Parham, 1993). Let us further examine some of these issues.

Student-athletes occupy many roles while they are in college, including that of student, athlete, and socialite (Adler & Adler, 1991). However, student-athletes tend to identify more with the athlete role than any of the others (Adler & Adler, 1991; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Valentine & Taub, 1999). This can be attributed to many factors. First, student-athletes spend most of their time and energy attending to athletic concerns rather than to the athletic or social aspects of their lives (Adler & Adler, 1991; Valentine & Taub, 1999). Specifically, they spend countless hours in practice, traveling to games, in team meetings, and watching film. To limit athletics consuming the lives of student-athletes, the NCAA has tried to regulate the amount of time coaches can spend with student-athletes. Yet, it is difficult to keep student-athletes from spending their own time practicing or thinking about their respective sports; therefore, the majority of student-athletes' time and energy is spent attending to athletic endeavors.

The glorification and positive affirmation that accompany participation in intercollegiate athletics also attribute to student-athletes focusing more to athletics than academics (Adler & Adler, 1991; Yopyk & Prentice, 2005). Once student-athletes step onto their respective campuses, they become somewhat public figures who are lauded for their athletic prowess. This fame and celebrity status lead many student-athletes to neglect their academic endeavors because it is their athleticism for which they are glorified.

Further, student-athletes tend to receive more positive feedback concerning their athletic performances than they do for their academic achievements. The media, coaches, family members, and even members of the academic community often focus on the student-athletes' athletic achievements, sending the message that athletics are most important.

Research has suggested that student-athletes often deemphasize the importance of academics and other non-athletic aspects of their lives because they receive limited reinforcement of these roles by important people in their lives (i.e. coaches and family members; Adler & Adler, 1991; Singer & Armstrong, 2001). Further, student-athletes (especially male student-athletes) often hold onto the dream that they are going to play their sport professionally. Despite indicators otherwise, they hold onto these dreams because of the fame, glory, and large salaries of professional athletes. This leads many student-athletes to neglect developing in areas that do not directly contribute to their growth as athletes.

Finally, student-athletes are often subjected to negative stereotypes concerning their academic abilities (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Many professors also hold negative feelings toward student-athletes because they perceive that student-athletes receive special treatment (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Valentine & Taub, 1999). Thus, the negative reinforcement from academic stakeholders further results in student-athletes identifying more as athletes rather than students.

Student-athletes often face developmental challenges, which can be directly attributed to them focusing so much of their time and energy on athletics (Valentine & Taub, 1999). Of primary concern, student-athletes often neglect their academic development because they focus their attention on athletics (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Truckenmiller, 1999). Student-athletes often enter college with lower SAT scores than the general



student body (Aries et al., 2004) and frequently maintain lower grade-point averages (GPAs) than their non-athlete peers (Robst & Keil, 2000; Simons et al., 1999). This is particularly problematic because student-athletes may also experience delayed career development (Murphy et al., 1996). Simply put, student-athletes often neglect thinking beyond their athletic careers and fail to think about their future employment. Perhaps this can be attributed to the belief that they will somehow be able to play their chosen sport professionally. This mindset is troubling because statistics have indicated that generally, less than 2% of student-athletes will become professional athletes (NCAAd, n.d.).

Despite these developmental concerns, student-athletes also realize notable advantages from competing in intercollegiate athletics. Relative to their counterparts, they score higher on measures of well-being (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1992), tend to experience fewer instances of depression and suicidal tendencies (Miller & Hoffman, 2009), and are more apt to remain physically active throughout their lives (Bailey et al., 2009). Further, many student-athletes receive some level of financial aid associated with their participation in athletics and the NCAA reports higher graduation rates for athletes compared to general students (NCAAa, n.d.). Thus, even though student-athletes may experience certain setbacks from competing in intercollegiate athletics, they still garner some benefits from their participation.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I discussed the two prevalent lines of thought that guide decision-making in intercollegiate athletics. Specifically, intercollegiate athletics operate with commercial and educational intents. Stakeholders within intercollegiate athletics must appease both commercial and educational ideals in order to remain viable. Commercialism has permeated intercollegiate athletics to the point that athletic departments and universities have been forced to pursue commercial endeavors in order to remain competitive in athletics. However, stakeholders in intercollegiate athletics must also adhere to the educational values of the higher education system, or they risk sanctions from governing bodies that will limit their ability to compete in athletics. The NCAA has used the concept of amateurism as the foundation for committing to education in athletics. Finally, competing in intercollegiate athletics presents numerous developmental issues for student-athletes. Student-athletes often neglect academics and their future non-athletic careers while competing in intercollegiate athletics. Even though student-athletes do realize certain benefits from competing in intercollegiate athletics, some have questioned whether these benefits outweigh the setbacks.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the presence of two divergent lines of thought affect administration and management decisions within athletic departments?
2. How could these commercial agendas and educational agendas impact student-athletes from a developmental standpoint?
3. Should intercollegiate athletics still operate under the guise of amateurism?
4. What would be some of the drawbacks and benefits to compensating student-athletes?
5. How can stakeholders slow down commercialism within intercollegiate athletics and reemphasize the educational values of higher education? Is this even possible?

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Adler, P. A. & Adler, P. (1991). *Backboards and blackboards: College athletes and role engulfment*. New York: Columbia University Press. (This foundational work conducted by two sociologists examined the impact of intercollegiate athletics on the development of student-athletes.)
- Gerdy, J. R. (2006). *Air ball: American education's failed experiment with elite athletics*. Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press. (The author examines the place of intercollegiate sport in higher education.)
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