Athletic Scholarships?

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Abstract

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ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIPS?

No

COMPETITION, whether on the battle field or on the athletic field, has always been an activity where man could let off his excess steam. And athletic events, from the earliest Olympian games to the present time, have been a socially acceptable form of one of the greatest areas of athletic competition today is that of our schools and universities.

There seem to be two reasons why our schools support athletic programs; one for enjoyment, the other for prestige. In the schools where enjoyment is the rule, the athletes participate in the sports as an extra-curricular activity, primarily because they like the games. The spectators cheer for their teams because they like the atmosphere of the game. Hot dogs and racoon coats on brisk autumn afternoons with the fragrance of burning leaves in the air add to the excitement of a football games.

On the other hand is the prestige factor. Here the athletic events are a means of gaining fame for the school. When prestige is the rationale for athletics, the record of the school is intrinsically hinged upon the athletic prowess of the team. When the team has a winning streak, everyone who identifies himself with the school feels elevated, but when the team loses everyone feels let down.

Naturally, when prestige is the motivating force behind an athletic program, there is much more emphasis placed upon winning the event, and this has had some very important effects upon athletic spirit. The whole atmosphere of the athletic program becomes an obsession; the desire to win, at any cost. The main objective of the team is to win. The spectators will enthusiastically cheer a winning team, but they will scorn a team that has had poor luck.

The athletic policy of the school is affected by the pre-
stige motive. Much time, money, and effort is spent recruiting athletes that the school thinks will help them win. Coaches too, are hired on the record of their ability to coach a winning team. Everything is done with one eye upon the possibility of victory.

The victory directed policy has some definite repercussions. One of these is inseparable from the attitude toward winning. It is the self-contented feeling that everything is fine with the team, with the coach, and with the school, as long as they are winning. But when the teams aren't winning it is a different story. Even though players and coach may be the same, everyone feels miserable: the players, because they didn't get their coveted win, the spectators, because they can't point with pride to their team, the coach, because he hasn't coached a winning team. Everyone feels that he has been let down and that he has let someone else down.

Another repercussion is in the financial side of the athletic program. In order to attract players who, it is believed, can help the team win, the schools offer scholarships and other benefits to young men on the basis of their athletic ability and aptitude. The results, to a large extent, in a sort of informal competition between schools for outstanding athletes, which, although nominally controlled in most conferences, often results in cut-throat bargaining for the men.

These scholarships have to be financed, and it is very seldom that a board of Trustees or Regents will sponsor them. Consequently the burden falls to other hands, generally alumni or friends who will be willing to invest in a gamble for prestige. And when the gamble doesn't look too good, the whole system faces the dilemma of a team that doesn't gain prestige and is unable also to gain support. At this point, a school might well question the value of its athletics-for-prestige policy.

The Ivy League presents an interesting example of schools which have gone through a sort of evolution of athletics from pure enjoyment, to prestige athletics, to the cut-throat policies and the reasonable attitude which they have finally taken toward athletics. When intercollegiate competition began in the Ivy League, the contests were all
for fun. Then the notion of prestige crept slowly in and the emphasis upon winning became stronger and stronger until the schools were offering fine athletes more and more to entice them to the several schools. Finally, it was obvious how utterly ridiculous the fabulous amounts of money which were being spent actually were. The member schools then got together and agreed, in fact, that they would all stop their practices of hiring athletes in order to win and go back to competing just for the fun of it.

Once again the Ivy League athletes are participating in sports as extra-curricular activities and playing for the enjoyment of the sport. The coaches are permanent members of the faculty, not subject to replacement if they lose too many games. And the spectators still go to cheer their teams, to victory or defeat, and have a good time without being crushed at losing or rioting upon winning.

The prestige struggle changes athletic competition to hostility instead of its natural position as a substitute for it. The friendly competition system seems, to this writer, to be much more mature, much less expensive, and much more fun for all concerned.


Yes

NEWSPAPER headlines blared forth recently with, “Pacific Coast Football Powers Suspended by NCAA” and “Big Ten Re-Evaluates Own Recruiting Systems.” Those screaming headlines rocked an American sports public. It was another in a series of bombshells aimed at dishonesty of certain individuals toward athletics. When a college or university is cited for suspension in intercollegiate athletics, the average person places the blame squarely on the doorstep of the accused institution.

But, just a minute, let’s look at the problem at closer range. Was the institution really to blame? Did it deliberately defy the National Collegiate Athletic Association by
over-paying its athletes? Except for a few isolated cases, the answer is "No." In most cases of probation or suspension, the school has been victimized by an over-zealous alumni group which has subsidized an athlete directly. In other words, the group contacted the athlete personally and thus failed to channel its contribution in a proper manner through the institution.

The athletic scandals on the West Coast earlier this year resulted directly from abuses and subterfuge by certain "downtown booster clubs." The illegal financial aid mushroomed out of proportions when member schools of the Pacific Coast Conference did not take a realistic stand on the issue of legal scholarships for their athletes. Then the NCAA forcibly stepped in and levied suspensions and probations against several of the schools. Shortly, thereafter, officials of Big Ten schools announced re-evaluation of their athletic policies.

This uncomfortable situation need never recur anywhere in the nation if the major conferences follow the patterns of legal scholarships to athletes drawn up by the Southeastern Conference, Southwest Conference, and the Big Seven Conference. Since the Big Seven includes our own Iowa State, let’s take a look at the strict and enforced rules and regulations governing the eligibility and control of scholarships awarded to its athletes.

These regulations place all of the member institutions of the Big Seven on an equal basis in the matter of recruiting, financial aid and other practices generally approved by major athletic control agencies in the country. Present members of the Big Seven, or the Missouri Valley Intercollegiate Athletic Association, are: Kansas State College, University of Colorado, University of Kansas, University of Missouri, University of Oklahoma, University of Nebraska and Iowa State.

Don’t get the wrong idea—it is not easy to obtain an athletic scholarship from one of the member schools in our Big Seven. The prospective athlete must qualify for eligibility on the basis of scholarship, need, and athletic ability. Quoting directly from the basic principles governing athletic scholarships and other forms of financial aid, the rules booklet reads: "In order to make it possible for student
athletes to attend school, participate in athletics, and have adequate time for studies, member schools are permitted to give athletic scholarships and/or part-time work."

An incoming freshman must rank in the upper two-thirds of his high school class in order to qualify for a grant-in-aid. Or he must have an earned percentile rank of at least 50 on norms for the entering freshman class of the institution. When he becomes a varsity performer, the athlete must have passed 36 quarter credit hours during his previous school year at Iowa State or 24 semester hours at any of the other member institutions in the Big Seven. And he is required to have at least 60 per cent of the total 36 credits in the C range or above. A junior college transfer who moves to Iowa State will be immediately eligible for intercollegiate play if he meets the same academic requirements as the varsity athlete.

There are undoubtedly certain persons who continue to maintain that the issuance of an athletic scholarship is something that breeds evil. To them it is an underhanded means of building an athletic program at the expense of retaining academic standards at the institution. Before you proceed any further with this belief, however, just stroll into the Employment Service on this campus and scan the number of scholarships and awards that are available to the college student today. Business concerns and certain other benefactors have suddenly realized the importance of all types of college scholarships.

Rising living costs during the past decade have affected all forms of financial aid in our higher educational institutions. Alumni groups have made contributions and individuals or organizations have provided gifts and grants in order to lighten the financial load for worthy students—whether they be students in engineering, agriculture or athletics.

A growing interest in intercollegiate athletics has had much to do with the advent of grant-in-aid scholarships to athletes. Sports programs have become more intensified and the present-day schedule in collegiate competition covers a longer period each year than in the recent past. One sports personality noted that not too long ago "basketball season did not begin until after the first of the new year—now it
starts a whole month earlier. Football hardly ever started before the first day of classes—now practice gets underway around the first of September every year.” The earlier start in football naturally deprives the athlete of nearly a month’s summer work.

Here at Iowa State, the football sport receives the biggest proportion of the grant-in-aid budget. Approximately 65 to 75 varsity and freshman players are assisted by either full grants-in-aid or a partial grant. Twenty-five to 30 basketball varsity and freshman competitors are aided by scholarships. Eight to 12 players are given aid in baseball, swimming and wrestling. In tennis and golf, one or two players in each sport may be recommended for partial grants in fees. Recommendations for certain deserving athletes are entirely up to the decision of the individual head coach.

The athlete may receive approximately $800 a year for a full grant-in-aid if he lives in the state of Iowa. An out-of-state athlete will receive a little over $1,000 a year. These totals cover books, tuition, enrollment fees and room and board for the school year. An athlete may accept extra work anywhere in town on a pay scale of $15 a month.

The person who has seen and heard of the scandals that infiltrated athletics in the past has the misconception that any form of financial aid to an athlete is bad. The primary importance of the legal athletic scholarship today is to assist an athlete through school and accomplish this goal within the limits of honesty and clarity.

—Ray Kooser, T. Jl., Sr.