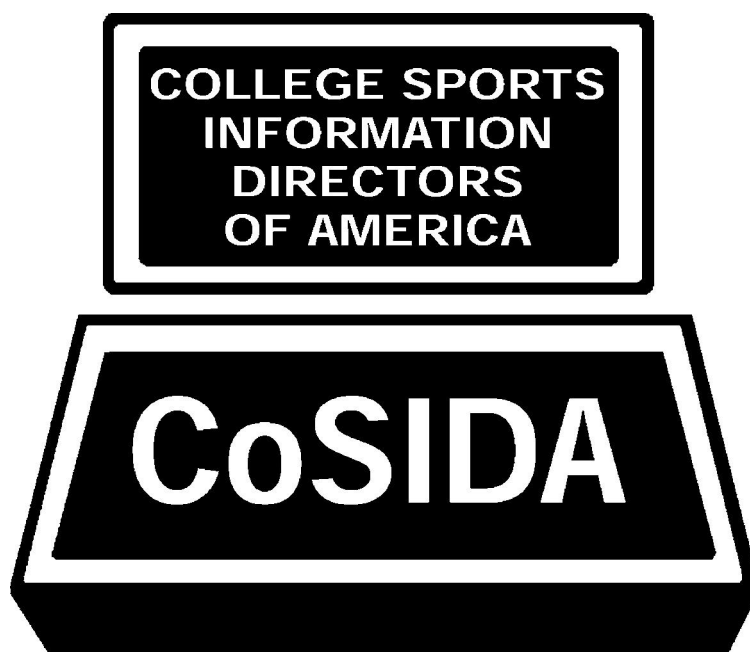


CoSIDA NEWS

Intercollegiate Athletics News from Around the Nation



March 13, 2007



THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

An unjustified criticism?

The Boston Globe

March 21, 2007

Day 1 of a dialogue between Derrick Z. Jackson and Victor Matheson, an economist at Holy Cross, on graduation rates and college athletics. Read Derrick's column on graduation rates [here](#).

Derrick,

We seem to read the same discouraging story every year during March Madness. These big-time basketball programs appear to do a whole lot better with the "athlete" part of "student-athlete" than they do with the "student" part.

I just read the University of Central Florida's Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport annual report on the graduation rates of teams in the NCAA's Division I men's basketball tournament. Like your column last week, the study grimly notes that only 30 of the 65 teams in this year's NCAA men's basketball tournament graduated at least 50 percent of their athletes within six years, and not a single team managed to graduate all of their recent players. (Although I might add that local Patriot League champion Holy Cross lead all participating teams this year with an 86 percent graduation rate.)

As you noted as well, the situation among African-American players is even worse. Seven teams failed to graduate a single black player over the most recent three seasons, and overall African-American basketball graduation rates trailed the graduation rates of white players by 14 percentage points, 40 percent to 54 percent.

I did a little more digging, however, and it looks like these statistics do not tell the whole story. They neglect to mention the fact that nationwide, graduation rates for male nonathletes are a mere 57 percent. While basketball players do perform relatively worse than the general student body with a 44 percent graduation rate, the difference is not nearly as large as one might suspect given the level of attention athletic graduation rates receive.

Among African-American males who are not athletes, the overall graduation rate is just 36 percent. Despite the contention that athletic departments fail to educate their minority students, African-American basketball players at division 1 schools actually graduate at a higher rate than their nonathlete peers.

Doesn't that make the criticism leveled on college sports a bit unjustified?

VICTOR MATHESON
Department of Economics
College of the Holy Cross ■



THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

Worst offenders risk ruining a sport's image

The Boston Globe

March 21, 2007

Day 2 of a dialogue between Derrick Z. Jackson and Victor Matheson, an economist at Holy Cross, on graduation rates and college athletics.

Hello Victor, First of all, congratulations on teaching at a true student-athlete college!

You are absolutely right about the overall picture of Division 1 men's basketball players not being as grim as depicted in my annual brackets. The problem, and the reason I do the brackets every year, is that the overall statistics for Division 1 disintegrate when it comes to the top teams in the land.

First, the good guys. There are a handful of schools in the Associated Press Top 25 where the black male player graduation rate is dramatically more than for all black males on campus. Using federal graduation rates, currently the most apples-to-apples comparison, these teams include Southern Illinois (75 percent for black players to 26 percent for black students), Butler (71 to 50), and Winthrop (75 to 55). Defending national champion and third-ranked Florida and fourth-ranked North Carolina should be noted as the only other schools in the Top 25 to have at least a 60 percent graduation rate for both black basketball players and black men in general.

It is all downhill from there. A subset of schools in the Top 25 have awful graduation rates for black male players that merely mirror the sad rates for the black male student body. This is true for top-ranked Ohio State (40 percent for black male players, 38 percent black male students), second-ranked Kansas (33 and 33), fifth-ranked Memphis (29 and 22), 15th-ranked Nevada (25 and 25), 16th-ranked Louisville (17 and 22), and 19th-ranked Nevada-Las Vegas (17 and 25).

The worst is yet to come. As you point out, the overall Division 1 graduation rate of black male players is higher than the rate for black male students, 5 percentage points better, to be exact, in the federal stats.

But among the Top 25, 15 schools have black player graduation rates so far behind those of black students that the average black-on-black gap is a whopping 26 percentage points!

The top offenders are Maryland (0 and 52 percent), UCLA (14 and 58), Georgetown (38 and 80), Texas A&M (13 and 54), Oregon (0 and 39), Southern California (30 and 66), and Tennessee (8 and 41).

As long as colleges allow such disparities amongst the best teams, even among just black students, they risk ruining the image of sports for everyone else.

Victor, thank you for reading my column and I look forward to your next thoughts on this.

Go Holy Cross (next year)! -DERRICK Z. ■

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THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

Poor performance not limited to athletics

The Boston Globe

March 21, 2007

Day 3 of a dialogue between Derrick Z. Jackson and Victor Matheson, an economist at Holy Cross, on graduation rates and college athletics.

Derrick,

I'm certainly not going to defend the Marylands and Oregons of the world that haven't managed to graduate even a single black basketball player over the past few years. These schools undoubtedly deserve all the criticism that you and the rest of your colleagues can heap on them. Still, I have two big concerns about the annual emphasis placed on the low graduation rates of the March Madness teams.

First, I worry that these reports, intentionally or not, tend to tar all athletes with the same brush. Basketball graduation rates, especially those at some of the highest-profile schools, clearly trail those of the regular student body. In other sports, however, the average graduation rate for white male athletes is within 1 percent of the graduation rate for the general student population, and among African-American males the graduation rate is over 10 percent higher for athletes than non-athletes. As you note, a few of the worst offenders in basketball risk ruining collegiate sports' entire image, and it is all too easy to unfairly saddle any player with the label of "dumb jock" when, in fact, most scholarship athletes are "student-athletes" in the truest sense of the term.

Second, with the attention placed on athletic graduation rates, the general public may believe that the problem of poor academic performance by African-Americans in higher education is confined to athletes. Here we are debating whether top basketball programs fail their black players when the real story is how often these schools fail the other 99 percent of their black students who don't play hoops.

Southern Illinois (and I'm not picking on them just because they knocked my Holy Cross Crusaders out of the tournament!) made your "good guys" list by graduating 75 percent of their black players compared with a 26 percent graduation rate for the rest of their black students. I think we would both agree that it is a bit absurd to give any school a "good" rating

that manages to graduate only one in four of their African-American students even if their basketball team does relatively better. Similarly, we shouldn't be outraged at the 29 percent graduation rate among black players at fifth-ranked Memphis or the 17 percent graduation rate at 16th-ranked Louisville, but instead we should save our criticism for the 22 percent graduation rate that blacks in the general student population have at these two schools.

Cheers,
Victor ■

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THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

DERRICK Z. JACKSON

The Boston Globe

Role models for greed?

March 23, 2007

Final day of a dialogue between Derrick Z. Jackson and Victor Matheson, an economist at Holy Cross, on graduation rates and college athletics.

Hi again, Victor,
Thank you for the "catch" on Southern Illinois! The Salukis should have been in my doghouse - pun intended!

I was too bedazzled by their being tied for first place with Winthrop for graduating black basketball players to remember to register the 49-point percentage gap from all black men on campus. On the bright side of oversight, no one can accuse me of always seeing the cup half empty (smile).

I agree with you that in sheer numbers, the national graduation gap for all African-American students, particularly men, is a scandal. I agree with you that it is reassuring that on average, Division 1 athletes graduate as well as, or even better than, nonplaying students. I recently gave a speech at Curry College titled "The Student Athlete: A Lost Ideal?" I said that the answer is no. I cited the many New England schools, such as yours and Boston College, where the ideal is alive and well.

To help you make your point (this is an outer-body experience to help a semi-critic!), 62 percent of athletes graduate, compared with 60 percent of the student body, in the older federal statistics. In newer statistics kept by the NCAA that allow for colleges to claim credit for transfers who graduate from their school and does not penalize them for players who leave early in good academic standing (such as those who go pro), the Division 1 graduation rate is 77 percent. There is not yet a comparable figure for the general student body.

But I will keep doing my Final Four brackets and my football Graduation Gap Bowl for these

reasons:

1: College basketball and football at the very top is insane. I am often told by critics things that can be summed up as, "Dude, stop whining. Whose responsibility is it for a student to graduate, anyway? Nobody helped ME graduate when I was bustin' my fanny at 7-11 and drivin' a '67 Chevy to class."

The problem is, the root reason we entrust our children to colleges is that they are not fully learned, fully mature people we wish to unleash to the "real" world. How can we expect athletes at the top to take school seriously when, in too many cases college presidents,

athletic directors, and coaches are role models for greed?

The world of schools fighting for the Top 25 in basketball and football is one of a \$6 billion Final Four television rights contract between the NCAA and CBS until 2013, an estimated \$3.2 billion in advertising for the tournament since 2000, and college football coaches now cracking the \$4 million-a-year barrier (the average for college presidents is \$360,000).

Coaches are making serious noise about expanding the 65-team basketball tournament, and the football bowl season has exploded from the Rose, Orange, Sugar, and Cotton bowls of my childhood to 32 games and payouts estimated to reach \$2.2 billion in the coming years.

Nick Saban is surely not being paid \$32 million for the next eight years to jack up the graduation rate of Alabama's football team. The 20 coaches in the men's 65-team tournament who make at least \$1 million a year are surely not getting paid for grade points,

but points on the scoreboard. For everyone but the athletes, this has become a professional bonanza.

Too many schools, under fan and alumni pressures that sometimes exceed those of the NBA and NFL, exploit athletes,

particularly heavily-recruited African-American athletes, on the relatively cheap labor of scholarships with no serious commitment to graduation (the Globe reported this week that Ohio State freshman star Greg Oden took only two courses last semester).

African-American athletes respectively make up 63 percent and 55 percent of Division 1 basketball and football scholarship players, even though African-Americans are 13 percent of the nation's population. Their performance is disproportionately and vastly responsible for these billions of dollars passing between the networks, Madison Avenue, the NCAA, and down to the colleges and their multi-million-dollar coaches.

Do athletes bear significant responsibility to graduate? Sure. But the appalling gaps of most of the top-ranked teams, not just between black players and white players, but black players and other black students, make this a sophisticated segregation that rots from the university president down. If the NCAA does not soon start banning chronic offenders, the coddling of the top teams may very well corrupt the rest of Division 1.

Thank you for the back-and-forth, Victor. It has allowed me to more fully explain why I do the brackets. I hope to keep you as a reader of my column.

All the best and I will always root for Holy Cross (unless they play the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee!). ■

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Column: Need a New Name for "Mid-Majors"

By NANCY ARMOUR

ST. LOUIS - For too long, the Butlers, Gonzagas and George Masons of the world have been dismissed as "mid-majors" — cute, cuddly teams who'll be sent on their way soon enough.

Enough.

Anybody who watched Southern Illinois give Kansas all it could handle and Butler do the same to Florida a night later knows these teams are every bit as good as the big boys. It's time we ditched that "mid-major" label. And it's long past time we got rid of the patronizing attitude that teams can't really be good unless they're playing in a power conference.

"People want to put into boxes what this league is and what that league is and this is who you are. You're a high-major, you're a mid-major," Florida coach Billy Donovan said.

"I think that's something that's not reality."

Go back 20, 25 years, and sure, teams in the Big East, ACC, Big Ten, SEC and Pac-10 played heads and shoulders above everybody else. They had the best players and coaches, and when it came time for the tournament, they beat up on any of the little guys who crossed their paths.

When Kevin Garnett and Kobe Bryant decided to blow off college and go straight to the NBA, they not only struck a blow for independence-minded teenagers, but for all the little guys in college hoops.

After years of the Dukes, the Carolinas and the UCLAs having rosters so loaded with talent it seemed as if they were growing blue chippers out back, the best players weren't automatically going to college. If they did, they didn't often stay all four years. The top schools weren't exactly hurting for stars and difference makers, but a lot more water was added to the talent pool.

Add in the NCAA's 1992 decision to reduce the number of scholarships from 15 to 13, and the smaller schools and conferences gradually closed the gap on the basketball factories.



Butler coach Todd Lickliter shouts instructions to his team during the second half of an NCAA men's basketball tournament Midwest Regional semifinal against Florida on Friday, March 23, 2007, in St. Louis. (AP Photo/Ed Reinke)

"You've seen there being not such a difference as maybe there once was," Donovan said. "There's a lot of really good programs."

The knock on the mid-majors is their conferences aren't as strong top to bottom as the power conferences. To a degree, that's true. But the company they keep doesn't make the team. Good players _ good teams _ can be found anywhere.

Little Valparaiso stunned Mississippi in 1998 thanks to Bryce Drew's unbelievable 3-pointer, and the 13th-seeded Crusaders went on to the round of 16. A year later, Gonzaga went one better, losing to eventual champion Connecticut in the regional finals.

From then on, March Madness has run amok. Each year, a couple of "mid-majors" knock off a big-name team they supposedly can't shag rebounds for. Kansas, Duke, UConn, UCLA _ all former national champions, all losers at the hands of a little guy.

Last year, George Mason went all the way to the Final Four, and it wasn't a fluke. The Patriots knocked off Michigan State and North Carolina _ half the Final Four the previous year _ in the first weekend, then beat UConn, a team some expected to win it all, in the regional finals.

Kansas knew full well Southern Illinois was going to drag it down with good, old-fashioned defense Thursday night. Yet even with a run-all-day offense and roster filled with NBA prospects, the Jayhawks were stuck playing Southern Illinois' game.

Kansas pulled out a 61-58 victory, but it was one of the closest in its 14-game winning streak and certainly the ugliest.

"I know how good we are," Southern Illinois' Jamaal Tatum said afterward. "I don't know what we're going to have to do to get that attention. Hopefully we'll get it sometime soon, because everybody on this team deserves it."

"We put in a lot of work. We work in the summer. We are up early. We condition hard. This team deserves a lot of respect."

They're not the only ones.

Butler beat Notre Dame, Indiana, Tennessee, Gonzaga and Purdue during the regular season, then beat Maryland in the second round. It flustered top-seeded Florida all night Friday with its tight defense and court savvy, finally being done in by the Gators' size in the 65-57 loss.

Winthrop had only four losses going into the tournament _ North Carolina, Maryland, Wisconsin and Texas A&M _ and beat Notre Dame before falling to Oregon.

Drexel, which didn't even make the NCAA tournament, won road games at Villanova and Syracuse. And on and on.

"We really don't address labels at all until someone asks us," Butler coach Todd Lickliter

said. "We're Butler University, the Bulldogs. We play the game the way we want to play it, to the best of our abilities."

So let's drop the mid-major tag and call these schools what they really are: Good teams.

Nancy Armour is a national sports columnist for The Associated Press. Write to her at narmour@ap.org

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THE PLAIN DEALER

Signs of an academic rebound

Saturday, March 24, 2007

We don't have to wait for the Final Four to know the nation's No. 1 men's college basketball team - at least when it comes to graduation rates.

And, in a pleasant change from past years, one of the nation's top-ranked teams is formidable in the classroom, too. Yes, the University of Florida, this year's top seed in the Midwest bracket, boasts a 100-percent graduation rate. At the bottom end of this year's Sweet 16, at least in the academic sense, was the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, at 17 percent.

As for Ohio State University, the Buckeyes don't have much to brag about in the classroom; they're at an unimpressive 38 percent.

The NCAA developed its Graduation Success Rate calculation, or GSR, because federal figures fail to account for a student who transfers out and graduates elsewhere or who transfers in from a junior college and earns a degree.

Each year, the University of Central Florida crunches these numbers for football teams participating in bowl games and basketball programs invited to the NCAA tournaments. Both sports' reports provide plenty of data to make observers question how some university officials can say "student-athlete" with a straight face. But they also detail some progress.

Nearly two-thirds of this year's basketball tournament teams graduated at least 50 percent of their young men, and more than half post GSRs above 60 percent. Those statistics reflect modest improvements over last year and substantial gains over a decade ago.

Much of the credit for these more promising results goes to the accountability initiatives that NCAA President Myles Brand has launched over the past four years. Still, as this year's report highlights, much work remains: For example, nearly half of the tournament teams have at least a 30-percent gap between the graduation rates of white and African-American players. In addition, men's basketball continues to have the lowest graduation numbers among all athletic programs.

Still, these results show that the right kind of attention to academic performance can yield better outcomes. The NCAA and its member institutions must continue the reforms so recently begun, even if some individual coaches and leaders balk at the consequences.

Universities are obligated to see that their players have the best possible chance to succeed after the final horn sounds.

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Illustration by Andi Cooper / The Fresno Bee

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Can Fresno State keep up?

The school's athletics department is struggling financially to stay on the major-college playing field.

By George Hostetter / The Fresno Bee

03/25/07 06:28:46

Top officials with Fresno State athletics are working overtime this spring. Their task: solve the financial crisis in Bulldogs sports.

After rising nearly 31% from fiscal years 2001 through 2004, the program's revenue has stopped growing, averaging increases of less than 1% annually over the past three years.

The Bulldog Foundation, a booster group that raises more than a third of the program's operating revenue, has struggled, too. Revenue growth was essentially flat from 1999 through 2005, then jumped about 10% last year.

This year's growth expectation: a tepid 1.3%.

Yet the pressure to spend to stay competitive in major-college athletics is as relentless as ever. Western Athletic Conference rival Boise State, for example, expects 4% revenue growth this year not counting its multimillion-dollar payday from this year's Fiesta Bowl football game.

Fresno State athletic director Thomas Boeh says the program can't go on this way. "Revenues are going to have to go up at some point in time," he says.

Can Fresno State, whose athletic program has traveled an immense distance in a relatively short time, find a way to renew its quest for national glory?

Or should this dream, almost taken for granted since the football team moved into Bulldog Stadium in 1980, be scaled back to meet a new fiscal reality?

These questions are much on the minds of top policymakers.

Boeh plans to unveil this summer a new strategic plan for his department.

Fresno State President John Welty has appointed a commission of university and community leaders to explore an overhaul of athletics' finances, with a preliminary report due in June.

Bulldog Foundation Annual Fund president John Wallace is pushing the 57-year-old booster organization to raise a record amount of money and expand its membership throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

And WAC commissioner Karl Benson expects to meet with Welty and Boeh on campus in early April to discuss revenue-growth benchmarks and other goals in the WAC's new five-year strategic plan.

The Bulldog Foundation's challenges explain only part of Fresno State's flat financial picture.

Other reasons include:

The Bulldogs play in a conference with no automatic berth in the lucrative Bowl Championship Series football bowl series. The conference also lacks a lucrative TV contract, unlike high-profile conferences such as the Pac-10.

Only about one-seventh of athletics' budget comes from the state, and university officials see little chance of more taxpayer help.

About two-thirds of ticket revenue comes from football. But there's little opportunity for revenue growth because home crowds at Bulldog Stadium already average about 95% of capacity. And raising ticket prices is hard because of the central San Joaquin Valley's generally modest income levels.

Few dispute the need for more money if Fresno State is to continue pursuing its dream of big-time athletics renown.

There's inflation and ever-escalating scholarship costs. Intercollegiate athletics now pays chief executive-level salaries to many coaches. And top recruits often go to programs with the best facilities.

Fresno State's projected \$22.9 million budget in fiscal year 2006-2007 is the WAC's largest. But the university says revenues (and expenditures) are running behind projections.

Easy answers to the Bulldogs' money woes? There are none.

Penny-pinching is often mentioned, and some sports have already been cut. There's hope the Internet will allow greater efficiency and create new marketing opportunities.

Everyone hopes the football team bounces back. Walk-up ticket sales at the last two home games fell about \$200,000 short of expectations, but because the team went 4-8 the coaches weren't paid bonuses.

And Fresno State officials are hopeful about several efforts to attract large donations.

The Green V Society is for donors giving \$10,000 or more per year. Donors to the "First Team" program fund scholarships for starting positions in football, men's and women's basketball and volleyball. Another program encourages growers to contribute bales of cotton, which are sold to benefit athletics.

But it's too early to tell whether these three ideas will catch fire. University officials hope to raise about \$2.3 million this fiscal year; about \$1.1 million had been raised as of early March.

And adding to athletics' money woes is a budding civil war. The university is consolidating its control of booster groups, and many boosters resent what they see as a loss of independence and influence.

What's clear is that the decades-long ascent of Bulldogs' finances has stopped.

Wallace sums up the mood among those who care about the Bulldogs' future: "It's a watershed time."

Welty says the next three to eight years "will be very important for the future of Fresno State athletics."

Benson says the Bulldogs' program has no choice but to invigorate its money-making machine - because "our competitors are growing all around us."

Pressure will only grow

Without a doubt, the Bulldogs are one of intercollegiate athletics' success stories.

Think back 30 years.

There was no Bulldog Stadium, no Bulldog Diamond, no Save Mart Center.

There were no Top 25 football rankings for Fresno State, no NCAA championship softball team, no national TV coverage in any sport.

All this became reality due in large part to community -- make that regional -- sacrifice.

But this success only highlights how much further Fresno State must travel to be comparable to major-conference schools such as Oregon State and Colorado, two of seven programs that the WAC strategic plan sets as yardsticks by which Fresno State is to compare itself.

The athletics budgets at Oregon State (\$36.1 million in fiscal year 2004-2005) and Colorado (\$36.6 million in 2004-2005) are about two-thirds larger than Fresno State's.

The WAC strategic plan, completed last year and endorsed by chief executives at each of the nine member schools, declares in frank terms that the conference's success depends in part on revenue growth.

But in the race for revenue, Fresno State finds itself falling further behind the big-time programs it hopes to catch.

The NCAA released a report two years ago that found that schools playing Division 1-A football saw overall revenue grow about 17% in fiscal years 2001 through 2003. In the same period, Fresno State's revenue grew 8%.

In a study of conferences for fiscal years 1997 through 2002, the NCAA found that revenue for programs in the Big 12 grew an average of 72.4% during those six years. In the Pac-10, the average was 54.7%. In the same period, Fresno State's revenues grew 24.1%, less than half of the WAC's average.

A 2005 report commissioned by the NCAA found no clear connection between spending on football and basketball and winning.

Then someone like Boone Pickens comes along.

The oilman gave \$165 million to Oklahoma State athletics in 2006, and suddenly the studies became irrelevant to a hundred years of college athletics reality: Money counts.

No one at Fresno State is hinting at major philosophical changes, such as de-emphasizing athletics or abandoning the university's football ambitions so aptly captured in coach Pat Hill's vow to play "anyone, anywhere, anytime."

Yet the Bulldog Foundation's Wallace says Fresno State's financial challenges may force the program's hand: "Maybe we reach a point where we say, 'You know, we don't want to keep up with the Joneses.' "

And veteran Bulldogs fans know that a weak financial foundation can overwhelm a school's dreams. Long Beach State, Cal State Fullerton and University of the Pacific -- conference rivals of Fresno State only two decades ago -- dropped their football programs in the 1990s because revenues couldn't keep up with costs.

Bill Shumard, Fullerton's athletics director when it dropped football, says financial pressure on the Fresno States, Boise States and Nevadas -- schools with Division I-A football programs in non-Bowl Championship Series conferences -- will only grow.

"There continues to be an extremely wide gap between the haves and have-nots," says Shumard, now chief executive of Special Olympics Southern California, and previously athletic director at Long Beach State.

"The bottom line is you have to generate the revenue."

Meeting the challenge

Each plan at Fresno State figures to tackle a part of the challenge.

Boeh, who came to Fresno State from Ohio University in mid-2005, says his plan will deal with basics: budgeting, staffing, priorities.

No more rosy revenue guesses when building a budget, Boeh vows. He promises conservative

estimates so there's less chance of year-end surprises.

Budget surprises used to be the norm at Fresno State. From fiscal years 1997 through 2005, Bulldogs athletics spent nearly \$6.7 million more than it took in. The program was bailed out in part by the Bulldog Foundation.

University officials tout their stricter policies, noting that the 2005-2006 budget was balanced and this year's is on track for a \$202,000 surplus.

Yet both would be in the red if planned payments to rebuild the reserve and repay a portion of a budget loan are factored in. This year's budget also was blessed with a \$300,000 payout from Boise State's unexpected appearance against Oklahoma in a BCS football game.

Boeh says he must prioritize dozens of proposed capital projects, and find a way to pay for them. They include renovation of the North Gym into a first-class practice facility and replacing Bulldog Stadium's grass surface with artificial turf.

Expansion of Bulldog Stadium also is "on the list," Boeh says. "It's not on the top, it's not on the bottom."

Hill has long championed expanding the stadium's 41,031-seat capacity, suggesting a bump to 70,000 several years ago. Boeh says the 50,000 range is more practicable.

And what about Hill's compensation package? It totaled \$1.23 million -- including outside income from deals such as TV and radio programs, benefits and deferred compensation -- in fiscal year 2004-2005, according to Fresno State Athletic Corp. documents.

According to Boeh, Hill's compensation was slightly under \$1.1 million in 2005-2006 and is projected to be slightly under \$1 million in 2006-2007.

Boeh says Hill's compensation is in line with other Division 1-A coaches with similar résumés. Hill, in his 10th year at Fresno State, led the Bulldogs to consecutive bowls from 1999 through 2005. He is the highest-paid coach in the WAC, according to a USA Today survey through November 2006.

Hill says the pay scale of Division I-A coaches is driven by market forces: "I'm not saying that's right or wrong. It's just what has happened in our industry."

Says Welty: "We're probably at the high end of what we can afford to pay a football coach."

Another worry for Boeh: Revenues in this year's projected \$22.9 million budget are expected to grow an anemic 1.9%. Department salaries and benefits, on the other hand, are expected to grow 4%.

"Over a period of years, you can't continue to have a 2% increase in revenue and a 4% increase in personnel costs," Boeh says.

The WAC strategic plan encourages member schools to boost revenues at least 4% a year as they try to catch midlevel programs in higher-profile conferences.

More ominously, WAC rival Boise State, with an annual budget of about \$17 million, expects revenues to grow at twice Fresno State's pace -- and that doesn't include the \$3 million-plus that the university expects to make after expenses from the Fiesta Bowl. This financial contrast could widen the gap between a Broncos program that has become the WAC's national star and a Bulldogs program that once thought it would fill that role.

"Two-percent growth is just keeping up with basic inflation," says Boise State athletic director Gene Bleymaier.

Making sacrifices

To cut costs, Boeh has curtailed out-of-state recruiting and limited long-distance road trips for some sports.

Many cuts have added anger to an already stressful situation. For example, the university suddenly killed wrestling last summer, in part to save its approximately \$76,000 in operating expenses.

Former wrestling coach Dennis DeLiddo calls any suggestion that balancing the budget

depended partly on wrestling's few thousands of dollars "a bunch of bull."

Softball, one of the school's most successful programs for decades, has to cut nearly 2% in operating expenses this year. It is not the only sport facing projected cuts.

Softball coach Margie Wright says she understands the need to tighten belts in tough times: "My only hope is that everyone is sacrificing the same amount."

The pain probably is far from over. Fixing Fresno State's budget woes could take three to four years, Boeh says.

Much will depend on the Bulldog Foundation. Executive director Pat Ogle says annual membership renewals were mailed recently. A four-week drive begins April 19, during which volunteers will recruit new members and lobby those who decided not to renew.

Foundation and university officials emphasize they no longer use "goal" when discussing the drive's efforts. Their preferred word is "hope." The hope this year is \$8 million: about \$4 million in donations for scholarships, about \$4 million in ticket sales that help fund daily operations.

Peter Smits, vice president for university advancement, told the Fresno State Athletic Corp. board on March 7 that the university may need \$4.3 million to fund all of next year's scholarships.

Near-flat revenue growth isn't the Bulldog Foundation's only challenge. Membership is now about 5,000, down from about 6,000 in 2002.

Both stem in part from member outrage over past upheavals in the men's basketball program, including NCAA rules infractions under the reigns of former coaches Jerry Tarkanian and Ray Lopes and the 2004 murder of Rene Shannon Abbott by former men's basketball player Terry Pettis.

This only puts more pressure on Wallace, morning news show anchorman at KGPE, Channel 47. He began reporting sports on Fresno radio in the late 1960s, and his daughter, Cassandra, is married to San Francisco 49ers quarterback Trent Dilfer, a former Fresno State standout.

Wallace says the foundation wants to expand its membership among women, young people and fans from the Valley's diverse ethnic groups. One idea: Receptions at Bulldogs games so foundation members can explain their organization, Wallace says.

"As closely as possible, we have to make sure we reflect the fabric of the community," Wallace says.

Even if membership grows, Wallace says, foundation generosity has its limits.

"We'll help [Fresno State] as much as we possibly can within reason," he says. "But don't think that we can be the end-all, be-all bailout."

Structural overhaul

The Welty-appointed commission on finances could hold the key to Fresno State athletics' future.

University officials recognized several years ago that the program needed a structural overhaul. They hired Greg Walaitis as associate athletic director in charge of fundraising, redefined the role of booster groups for specific sports and (with cooperation of the group's top officials) restructured the Bulldog Foundation to bring it more under the university's control.

Some longtime foundation members question this concentration of power in the university's hands and loss of their group's independence.

"The feeling is [university officials] are squeezing the old guys out," says Jim Winton, a former foundation president and a member for more than 40 years.

Smits, who oversees fundraising, says a few foundation members "are reacting to change." He says the university has no intention of "leaving the stakeholders in the dust."

Part of the commission's charge is to create a blueprint for these changes already set in motion.

The commission also must find a way to reconcile a conflict at the heart of Bulldogs athletics.

On one hand, the commission is inspired by a recent NCAA national report Welty helped write -- "The Second-Century Imperatives" -- that calls for stronger presidential control of a university's athletics program.

On the other hand, only about 15% of the Bulldogs' annual budget comes from the state.

The rest comes in various forms from a public that, according to Winton and others, is being asked to give more and talk less.

Can Fresno State increase its authority over athletics at the same time it puts more responsibility for funding on supporters who worry they have less influence on the program's direction?

Commission members are aware of this dilemma and are debating whether to hold public hearings about the future of Bulldogs finances.

"We haven't decided yet," says Athletic Corp. board chairman and commission member Paul Oliaro.

One thing is certain, Welty says. Without moderation in intercollegiate athletics' race for money, "there will be a crisis."

Could the university's students be called on to help? It wouldn't be the first time.

In 1999, students by better than a 4-to-1 margin voted to raise student fees to help fund sports and services such as financial aid.

Earlier this month, several Fresno State students advised caution.

Laurie Patterson, a junior majoring in political science and history, says administrators may do as they please with sports "as long as they don't take money from academics."

Sophomore Swentrol Harvey, an undeclared major, says campus officials shouldn't look to the student body if they can't solve athletics' problems: "When everything goes topsy-turvy, it's their fault, not the students'."

The reporter can be reached at



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Bee File Photo

Softball, long one of Fresno State's most successful athletics programs, is cutting nearly 2% in operating expenses this year. Softball coach Margie Wright says she understands the need to tighten belts in tough times.

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Article published Mar 25, 2007

An ongoing struggle

BY ALAN HINTON

Southern Miss athletic director Richard Giannini says every team has its peaks and valleys.

He points to the Golden Eagles' football program, which won the Conference USA East Division championship, as one of the few in the entire country that has had a winning record each season for more than a decade.

Yet, it seems that many of the eight Southern Miss women's sports programs are in valleys. Certainly, they have not had the type of seasons they would want.

"Our women's teams have struggled," Giannini admitted.

- The women's basketball team went 15-15 overall and 9-7 in Conference USA, but lost in the first round of the C-USA tournament this season. Its last non-conference postseason tournament came in 2000, in the WNIT.
- The softball team won the Conference USA regular-season title in 2004, but has had losing records overall and in conference play since then. This year, the Lady Eagles are 10-23.
- The soccer team went 4-14-1 overall, and was 0-9 in Conference USA.
- The volleyball team went 15-18 overall and finished 6-10 and in ninth place in C-USA.
- The women's golf team has third, fourth and fifth place finishes this year, but also 12th, 13th and 16th place finishes in tournaments.
- The women's track team was seventh in the Conference USA Indoor Championships, but usually fares better during the outdoor season.
- The cross country team had two second places in meets, but finished 12th - last - in the Conference USA meet.
- The tennis team is the top performing Southern Miss women's sport right now. It opened the season with seven straight victories and is 14-2 overall. One of its wins was over Loyola-Marymount, which was nationally ranked at the time of the match.

Reasons for the tough times vary. Some would seem to be short term; on others, the verdict is still out.

"We lost some kids and had some injuries," Lady Eagle third-year basketball coach Joye Lee-McNelis said. "To go 15-15 with six scholarship players, one walk-on and a cheerleader, I think we accomplished a great deal there."

Giannini also sees such silver linings in his teams, and believes there will be better days.

The soccer and softball programs are young, he said, having been in existence only about a decade.

The players on the softball and basketball teams are young, but talented, he said, and coaches for those teams have signed outstanding recruits.

The track team has consistently finished in the upper half of Conference USA, Giannini said, and the golf team is holding its own.

"It goes down to recruiting," Giannini said. "So much of being successful in college athletics is coaching and recruiting. You've got to have the players.

"We've got quality coaches. They work hard."

Reasons are many

So why aren't they winning championships? Why aren't they advancing to postseason tournaments? Why aren't they creating enough excitement that fans will attend their games in droves?

Injuries and defections have plagued the two most high-profile Southern Miss women's sports, basketball and softball.

The women's basketball team did not have enough players to go through 5-on-5 scrimmages.

The softball team's No. 1 pitcher declared herself homesick and quit the team, and another injured her shoulder.

Money is always an obstacle. But the women's budgets are comparable to the men's sports budgets and in compliance with Title IX and NCAA guidelines, Giannini said, and coaches seem satisfied with them.

"I've been at Kansas, Texas Tech, even at those Big 12 schools, having Richard Giannini as my AD, none of those compare to what I've got," Southern Miss women's tennis coach Randy Rowley said.

Rowley's team recently completed a week-long trip to California to play three matches. Obviously, a trip to California costs more than matches in, say, Alabama or Louisiana, simply because of the travel costs.

The women's golf team goes to Mexico and the women's basketball team will trek to Hawaii within the next few seasons.

"They all have good budgets, they get to compete about anywhere they want to compete," Giannini said. "We're giving them an opportunity to be successful."

Former Southern Miss women's basketball coach Kay James, whose teams advanced to eight NCAA tournaments and who is now a radio analyst for Lady Eagle basketball, said the current teams have been given a first-class travel budget.

"They stay in nice hotels, they eat good meals, they take the best flights," James said. "When you're making the dressing room nicer, you can tell recruits that six months from now it will be a nice facility.

"I think it's a process. It's going to take five years for anybody to come in and get a program up to its best. Very few can do it in two years."

Lee-McNelis knows that first-hand. Her first season at USM as the head coach, the Lady Eagles went 9-19 overall and 3-11, in 12th place, in Conference USA.

Her second year, USM went 14-15 and 10-6, and this past season it went 15-15 and 9-7.

She said she was not worried about getting fired that first year.

"Oh, no, that didn't enter my brain," Lee-McNelis said. "I think if you make strides, you're OK. But if you are given resources and don't make improvements, that would put pressure on the situation."

McNutt is not complaining about her softball budget, but that doesn't always figure in to wins.

"We have a pretty decent budget as far as softball," she said, "but the players don't know that. They're more interested in knowing what kind of stadium they're going to be playing in and what uniforms they're going to wear."

That comment is an important one.

Most athletes want top-notch stadiums to play in or locker rooms in which to dress.

And money to build those kinds of facilities, according to state law, cannot come from state funds. The money must come from individual donations.

The good news is that Reed Green Coliseum, where the Southern Miss basketball teams play, is being refurbished. Dressing rooms and coaches' offices are being improved.

Money for this project did come from the state, which authorized it because the coliseum also is used for non-athletic activities, such as graduations and classes.

Other good news is that the softball team plays on an absolutely beautiful field, and the track team runs and the soccer team plays at the Marshall Bell Track and Field and Soccer Complex.

A bathroom please

The bad news is that the tennis team doesn't even have a home court. In fact, the Lady Eagles are hosting the Lady Eagle Classic this weekend in Gulfport.

And the softball stadium has stadium seats that are completely worn out, and fans at the games must use a portable toilet.

"They put those beautiful port-a-cans up and call it good," McNutt said. "There's nowhere to wash your hands. People get disgusted with that, and therefore, they don't want to come to the games."

Therein lies a problem.

No fans, no donations. No donations, no extra or improved facilities.

The softball team sold raffle tickets to help pay for an \$80,000 indoor batting building. The tennis team is holding a celebrity tennis jamboree April 27-28 to help raise money for a new complex.

On the bright side, the tennis team is having success despite playing at the Tatum Park Recreation Complex or other local courts, and the 1999 and 2000 softball teams that advanced to the Women's College World Series did not have their own park and had to play on recreation fields.

So facilities aren't everything. But there's no doubt they help.

"I played at Texas A&M where we won two national championships and we played on an intramural field," McNutt said. "Now it's keeping up with the Joneses. If you want to win consistently and want a consistently successful program, you've got to keep up with the Joneses. That's the bottom line."

To the Southern Miss football team, that meant getting a new field house several years ago. To the Southern Miss baseball team, that meant building a new field house a few years ago.

To Rowley, that means playing tennis in the school's own varsity stadium.

To McNutt, that means dressing in something other than a double-wide trailer that is "about to fall down."

"(USM baseball coach) Corky Palmer said it best when they got their clubhouse," McNutt said. "He said that his ballclub started winning when they built that clubhouse. He had the same players, but it made them feel good about themselves, it gave them something to be proud of. They walked into a beautiful clubhouse, a beautiful dressing room, and it gave them a sense of pride."

Giannini doesn't disregard that theory. He knows it helps; otherwise there would have been no organized effort to revamp football's M.M. Roberts Stadium or basketball's Reed Green Coliseum or baseball's Pete Taylor Park.

But it takes people giving money to those programs for new or upgraded facilities.

"It's tougher for women," said Giannini, who also said \$400,000 has been sunk into softball facilities and \$900,000 has been raised for a tennis complex.

All of that money has been donated for those programs, just like money was raised for the football and baseball stadiums.

Since 1999, Southern Mississippi's athletic programs have received approximately \$51 million in donations.

"That's what it's all about, getting the dollars," Lee-McNelis said. "Our athletic department, with Mr. Giannini's vision, has made tremendous strides. That's one of the reasons I came back home. I believed in his vision."

Up, up and away

Lee-McNelis said one stretch during this past season nearly exhausted her team. The Lady Eagles went to Tulane on a Friday and played that night.

They boarded a flight on Saturday to go El Paso, Texas, for a Sunday afternoon game against UTEP.

They returned to Hattiesburg on Monday, then left on Wednesday to play a Thursday game at Tulsa. But because of a snowstorm, they were stranded in the Memphis airport and bused to Tulsa.

They got back to campus Saturday and played a home game on Sunday.

"That's brutal," she said. "On long-distance trips like that, a charter (flight) would be the answer."

Of course, no one has contributed \$165 million like Boone Pickens did recently to his alma mater, Oklahoma State.

"We do as much at Southern Miss as we possibly can do," Lee-McNelis said.

Women's sports used to be an afterthought. Not any more. While men's sports like football, with its revenue from attendance, pay many of women's sports bills, some university women's programs, like Tennessee basketball, are turning a profit.

Giannini sees the bottom line of his programs, but also realizes the importance of women's sports.

"Women's athletics is essential in this day and age on any level," he said. "Over the years, dating back to the early 1900s when they started organized sports, you talked about the values of organized sports - building team camaraderie, all working toward a common goal, working to be successful. Athletics had all those benefits.

"They always talked about men, but now they have the same benefits for women. I think if you ran a survey of women in this day and age who have become successful business leaders, CEOs, you'll probably find a majority of them competed in women's sports growing up.

"I think they're very important, a real positive part of what we have here. And I think people have an interest in it. They may be different. You see a big difference between a men's basketball crowd and a women's basketball crowd, but still, you see a tremendous interest in our women's basketball program.

"The key to Title IX is to offer an opportunity for women to participate. We've done that."

Fans are prone to blame the coaches a lack of immediate success.

"Fans want a winner instantly," said James, who coached at USM for 21 years.

But if that were solely the case, coaches would never receive contracts that went more than one year.

No rush to terminate

Three women's coaches have been head coaches at Southern Miss for three years. Track and cross country coach Wayne

Williams has the longest tenure at USM, nine years.

"I want to have solid coaches who are solid people who treat the athletes right and they have a good experience," Giannini said. "Ultimately, you want to win, but if you're educating them and they are having the right experience and doing it the right way, I don't know that we need to keep firing coaches."

Lu Harris guided the Southern Miss softball team to two regional titles and appearances in two Women's College World Series. She left Southern Miss after two seasons to become head coach at Georgia.

Giannini said it was a combination of money and facilities that caused her departure.

He insists that the rumor that monetary donations from softball fans would go toward building the field house, where athletic officials' and most coaches' offices are, along with the weight room and football locker room, and not a softball facility, are false.

"That's never been the case," he said. "One thing I've learned in fundraising: you can't tell a donor where to give their money. If they want to give it to women's softball, they're going to give it to women's softball. They're not going to give it to football."

"The way we operate, if people want to give money for women's softball, that's where the money is going to go. If they want to give it to football, that's where it's going to go. If you tell them we're going to give it to women's softball, they're going to tell you 'No, I'm not going to give it to you.'"

On another positive note, an anonymous donor has committed \$500,000 for the construction of a new tennis complex.

Giannini, or any of the coaches, won't turn their backs on those kinds of fans.

"I'll meet with them anywhere, anytime," Giannini said.

Until then, the coaches and players must head their programs in the right direction.

It isn't easy. Just ask Kay James.

"If they're looking for just a good time," she said, "go play intramurals."

Posted on Sun, Mar. 25, 2007

From grid to goal

Forget separation of powers. Many football schools are proving they can be basketball giants, too.

By BLAIR KERKHOFF
The Kansas City Star



Photos by Andy Lyons (top) and Streeter Lecka (ABOVE) | Getty Images

The Florida Gators have gotten celebrations down to an art form after a year of national championships. The football Gators (top) beat Ohio State for the national title. And this year's basketball Gators, who celebrated their SEC tournament title, are trying to pick up their second straight championship.



The story that best defines the us-versus-them nature of basketball and football coaches originates in 1951.

Kentucky's football team, coached by Paul "Bear" Bryant, finished 11-1 in 1950 and upset top-ranked Oklahoma in the Sugar Bowl. Three months later, Adolph Rupp's basketball team won its third NCAA championship.

Lexington was ecstatic. The city renamed a street Avenue of Champions. But the alumni didn't hide their favorite.

At a sports banquet, Rupp received a Cadillac for his accomplishment, Bryant a cigarette lighter.

That's how Bryant told it while regaling audiences at Alabama during a career that produced six national championships.

But today, the question — are you a basketball school or a football school? — seems so 20th century.

Alive in the NCAA Tournament are the same schools that met for the Bowl Championship Series title game — Florida and Ohio State.

Traditional football power Southern California reached the Sweet 16, and three-fourths of the South Regional in San Antonio looked like an old New Year's Day bowl lineup with the Buckeyes, Tennessee and Texas A&M. Lindsey Nelson could have been calling the action.

The crossover in excellence, at least in one direction, has taken root. Football schools are winning in hoops, and some wonder why it's taken this long.

"To me, it's such a no-brainer," Southern California basketball coach Tim Floyd said. "There's no reason why a school that can have 80 scholarship athletes and play for national championships in football can't find 10 or 12 in basketball."

Floyd did, guiding the Trojans to a school-record 25 victories in a season that ended with Friday night's loss to North Carolina in East Rutherford, N.J.

Same for Texas A&M, which won a school-record 27 games.

But the most balanced program these days carries a Gainesville, Fla., dateline. No school dances the two-step better than Florida.

...

The Gators, first to be defending national champions in football and basketball, are setting up a sports empire.

Florida would be the first to win both titles in the same school year.

"It's a source of pride because it's never been done before," Florida athletic director Jeremy Foley said in February.

All it took was commitment.

And resources, a favorable recruiting environment, a few fortunate bounces, a new offense in football, a budding star like Joakim Noah in basketball.

But mostly people who are committed to the idea that basketball and football don't have to exist as polar opposites.

Coaches Billy Donovan and Urban Meyer bought into it.

Donovan, in his 11th year, maintained a friendship with previous Florida coaches Steve Spurrier and Ron Zook. Things wouldn't be different with Meyer.

"He recruited me to Florida," Meyer said.

Meyer and Donovan live two houses apart. They attend the same church. They have spoken to each other's players.

When Donovan's team reached last year's national title game, he invited Meyer to Indianapolis. The football coach followed the basketball team into the locker room after the Gators' victory over UCLA, and the two coaches just stared at each other.

"I grabbed him and said, 'You just won the national championship,' " Meyer said. "For 30 seconds, we just stared at each other and said, 'Holy cow.' "

Last summer, Meyer included a clip of the basketball title moment, among other great championships, in a film to motivate his team.

Donovan also spoke to the football team before the Southeastern Conference championship game.

This year, Meyer spoke to Noah and company about the role of the "hunted."

Ohio State also has kept open the communication lines between coaches.

After the Buckeyes edged Tennessee in a regular-season game, basketball coach Thad Matta brought in football coach Jim Tressel to speak on handling the weight of expectations.

"When he talks, you listen because he's been through it," Ohio State guard Jamar Butler said.

Tressel's message that day was to stay focused and not lose the edge. He told the players that might have happened to his football team, which waited seven weeks to play in the BCS title game after the end of the regular season.

Throughout the postseason, Matta has been receiving text messages from Tressel.

"I don't think he sleeps," Matta said. "He sends a text message like at 3 in the morning."

Florida, which faces Oregon today in St. Louis, is trying to become the first program since Duke in 1991-92 to repeat as national champions. If that happens, basketball will have as many national championships as football — Florida would become the first school with multiple titles in each.

But will basketball ever win over the hearts and minds of a fan base so devoted to football? The notion that it may not is why Donovan's name has prominently surfaced in the Kentucky basketball search.

Donovan talks about building the Gators' hoop identity.

"Tradition is good because it shows consistency over a long period of time, and that's what we're trying to do," Donovan said. "In Florida's program there have been pockets of success. I think if you try to do the best job you can by taking advantage of what's in front of you, that leads to building tradition."

...

The odd thing is, where some traditional football powers are living hoop dreams, the basketball powers can't seem to break their endless cycle of football follies.

The best gridiron records among basketball's most tradition-rich programs last fall belonged to Kentucky, which finished 8-5 and won its first bowl game in 22 years. UCLA went 7-6. Kansas (6-6), Indiana (5-7), North Carolina (3-9) and Duke (0-12) played like, well, schools that have combined to win 32 national championships and appear in 78 Final Fours. UCLA's split championship in 1954 is the lone football trophy.

The Tar Heels are the latest basketball power to renew a commitment to football, as they fired coach John Bunting after last season and signed Butch Davis to an annual \$1.8 million contract, a compensation package close to that of basketball coach Roy Williams.

Williams, the former Kansas coach, would like nothing more than to see football pick up steam.

"Our football program has a chance to really do some big-time things," Williams said.

"I love it when people talk about how well the football team is doing instead of asking when basketball season is going to start."

The history book says the relationship between basketball and football coaches in Chapel Hill has had its frosty moments.

In an autobiography, former North Carolina basketball coach Frank McGuire said not everybody was happy when his Tar Heels outlasted Kansas in triple overtime for the 1957 national championship, starting with football coach Jim Tatum.

"Shortly after we had won the NCAA final in 1957, Jim came over to my office to talk to me. He told me that he had a confession to make, and it was really a surprise. He admitted that he had been silently hoping we wouldn't win the tournament.

"As a matter of fact, he told me: 'After the game against Kansas was over, I kicked a hole in my television set. I was so mad, I broke two chairs in my living room. But I've decided that I can't beat you, so I'm going to join you.' And we shook hands right there, and that was it. He even started coming to basketball games."

...

The football schools getting hot in basketball have a few things in common. Most are large-stadium, big-budget programs. They can afford some of the best facilities in college sports.

Also, as Southern California's Floyd knows, the places with good football prospects are the same ones with top basketball talent.

"I've been in Los Angeles throughout my career in recruiting," Floyd said. "This area is rich in talent. I go to high school games right after practice. I can drive 10 minutes and I'm seeing a guy that's in the top 25 in the country. We have four of them in next year's class."

By contrast, it's difficult for Kansas or Indiana to load up on area football prospects.

Floyd called out Southern California and Penn State as two of the leading football programs that haven't gotten it done in hoops. He could have added Nebraska.

Others like Texas, Oklahoma, Alabama, Notre Dame and the ones that reached this year's Sweet 16 have winning hoops programs. Michigan is one of seven schools that has won an NCAA basketball title and finished first in a final football wire-service poll.

"There's no reason why we can't do it on a consistent basis," Floyd said.

North Carolina says the same thing.

"There are so many more good players in basketball now than there were 15 or 20 years ago, you can build a program easier now," Williams said. "With the right commitment, you can do it in football also."



<http://www.latimes.com/sports/la-sp-insurance26mar26,0,2934163.story?coll=la-home-headlines>

Oklahoma State Univ. insures sports future

Billionaire T. Boone Pickens steers the school to insure the lives of 25 aging, wealthy donors. Expected payout: \$250 million.

By Greg Johnson
Times Staff Writer

March 26, 2007

Billionaire T. Boone Pickens is being credited with a novel — some would say morbid — financing plan that his fellow Oklahoma State University fans hope will lift their beloved Cowboys football team to the top of the Big 12 Conference standings.

Over the course of the last year, Pickens, 77, steered his alma mater's athletics department to buy life insurance policies for himself and a posse of aging Cowboys donors. The department hopes to net about \$250 million from the proceeds by the time the last donor dies.

The insurance program is in addition to about \$200 million in cash that Pickens has donated in recent years so Oklahoma State can better compete against rival Big 12 football powerhouses Texas, Nebraska and Oklahoma.

Although the Cowboys have won 48 national NCAA titles in such sports as wrestling and golf, that record isn't good enough for the many Cowboys fans who care only for Oklahoma State's performance on the gridiron.

The Pickens-inspired life insurance plan is seen as a way to help keep the university's athletic department funded over the next few decades.

"Until Boone Pickens entered the picture for OSU, we were merely a participant in the Big 12 — not a competitor," said Mike Holder, Oklahoma State's athletic director.

Oklahoma State's insurance plan, which took about a year to piece together, underscores the sometimes controversial methods that colleges are considering to find new sources of revenue to fund coaches' salaries, athletic scholarships, capital improvements and other expenses generated by major college sports.

Many wealthy donors remember college athletics in their estate planning. But having a university bundle up a group of donors and buy life insurance on them is a new twist.

"In recent years, there's been a flurry of new charitable-related products coming from the insurance field," said Chris Yates, director of planned giving at Stanford University. "I've had to scramble just to keep up with how they work."

Stanford has yet to consider a Pickens-like insurance plan and probably would not unless it could outperform alternative investments, Yates said. That would mean matching or exceeding Stanford's 14.8% average annual return over the last decade.

The Cowboys borrowed \$20 million from a booster association to pay the premiums for \$10 million in whole-life insurance policies for each of the 25 or so carefully selected donors, including Pickens, who are between the ages of 65 and 85.

Pickens got the idea about three years ago after a doctor judged him to be young and healthy enough to qualify for additional life insurance. Pickens, who made his fortune as a corporate raider, investor and oil man, did not need more coverage. But the 1951 Oklahoma State graduate — with a geology degree — soon was itching to leverage the newly discovered "asset."

After learning that some churches were generating revenue from life insurance policies that had been purchased for aging members, Pickens floated the concept to Holder, a fellow alumnus who served for decades as golf coach before being named athletics director in 2005.

Oklahoma State's donors were selected because their age, gender and health "best matched the university's needs," said John Lee, chairman of Dallas-based Management Compensation Group, which is managing the insurance program. To put it less delicately, the donors selected are expected to die in a timely manner to generate the \$250-million payout.

Only two of the prospective donors hung up when Larry Reece, Oklahoma State's executive director of major gifts and development, broached the subject.

Mark Mallady, executive vice president of Collegiate Financial Services, a Williamsburg, Va.-based firm, agrees that other college athletic department fundraisers soon will be working the phones.

"Their thinking is that 'we've got donors giving us millions of dollars each year,' " he said. "But what happens when the donors die? Is there a plan or a policy to replace what they've been giving?"

Pickens concurred: "You will see other [similar] deals in the near future" at other nonprofit organizations.

Cowboys fans are betting that Holder can do for football what he accomplished on the golf course. His teams won eight NCAA national championships, and the program used donations from Pickens and others to build a Tom Fazio-designed course on the Stillwater campus, plus a multimillion-dollar golf endowment.

The \$200 million that Pickens has donated is funding a large part of the \$250-million athletic department building boom on OSU's campus. Pickens' name is now on the 1920s-era Oklahoma State stadium that before an ongoing renovation was jokingly called Rustoleum Stadium. The Cowboys also are adding indoor practice space for their baseball, softball, track, soccer, tennis and equestrian teams and a village where athletes will live.

Even with this spending spree, the Cowboys still have a way to go. The University of Texas, a Big 12 rival, generated \$97.8 million in sports-related revenue during its most recent fiscal year, including \$60.8 million from football, while Oklahoma State generated \$53.6 million in revenue, including \$16.9 million from football.

Oklahoma State isn't alone in its heavy spending. During the next two years, Michigan, Texas, Illinois, Louisville, Maryland and Washington State will complete college stadium renovations with price tags of at least \$50 million each, according to Sports Business Journal. That kind of spending drove the NCAA to convene last fall a blue-ribbon task force of college presidents and chancellors to identify threats that face intercollegiate athletics.

The Pickens insurance plan passed muster with Oklahoma state regulators, but Oklahoma State's Gift of a Lifetime Program is generating controversy.

U.S. Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R- Iowa), who has been investigating the tax-exempt status of major college athletics programs, last week told Congressional Quarterly that he had questions about the Pickens program.

So do many college professors in Stillwater who are frustrated by the athletic department's spending spree when faculty salaries and benefits are at or near the bottom among universities in the Big 12 conference.

"The comments I've heard range from morally bankrupt to outrageous," said longtime chemistry professor Lionel Raff. "It's totally inappropriate for any organization to be betting on how long its alumni will live."

Robert Lew, a life insurance agent in San Francisco who regularly looks at new insurance programs, questions whether Oklahoma State will get the financial windfall it expects because of the cost of borrowing the money to buy the policies and because the donors might live a long time. His studies of somewhat similar insurance investment programs suggest that "the money just ain't going to be there."

Pickens and executives at Management Compensation Group, however, say that Oklahoma State will clear \$250 million by the time the last donor dies.

Pickens' money and financial savvy clearly enchant many Cowboys fans. But the athletic department has learned that it does not exist in a vacuum.

Former Stillwater Mayor Bud Lacey said he was voted out of office last spring after questioning the university's use of eminent domain to seize 200 homes and businesses to make room for the athletic village.

Pickens' many supporters say that Oklahoma State's academics also have benefited from his largesse. The campus is home to the Boone Pickens School of Geology, a Pickens-endowed professorship in geophysics, the Boone Pickens Scholars Fund in geology and other scholarship, fellowship and professorship endowments.

"I'm not going to say that the response has been all positive," Reece said. "But we believe that athletics is the front porch of the university. That's how you advertise nationally. Right, wrong or indifferent, you don't see the science bowl on ABC. You see the Cotton Bowl and the Final Four."

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Tide AD schedules football opponents with caution

By [Tim Gayle](#)
Montgomery Advertiser

March 26, 2007

TUSCALOOSA -- Demand is greater than ever for football tickets at Alabama, so athletic director Mal Moore is a little hesitant to tinker with the schedule.

Watered down in the face of severe NCAA sanctions a few years ago, Moore made a couple of cosmetic changes by adding Florida State and Georgia Tech to future schedules but isn't ready to recognize the Crimson Tide's emergence from the black cloud of NCAA probation.

"A lot of teams in this league, most all of them, play freshmen but their freshmen have been redshirted, their sophomores have been redshirted, their juniors have been redshirted, their seniors have been redshirted," Moore said. "The majority of ours are true freshmen, true sophomores, true juniors and true seniors. There's an age difference it's going to take us a period of time to overcome."

Moore recently moved up a home-and-home series with Penn State and pushed back the one with Georgia Tech, but isn't sure he's ready to put big-name programs on the non-conference part of the Crimson Tide's schedule.

"Teams like Oklahoma, Notre Dame, Penn State, you'd like to play them in a bowl game," Moore said. "Getting into that BCS game is the big trick, so scheduling is important. A lot of thought goes into it. Our fans want to play in different parts of the country and so do we but we've got a tough, tough conference (Southeastern) we have to face and all of that has to be taken into consideration."

Former athletic director Bob Bockrath created some enthusiasm among fans when he scheduled home-and-home series with UCLA, Oklahoma Penn State and Notre Dame in consecutive years beginning in 2000. The first wave of an NCAA investigation into recruiting violations started in 2000 as the Crimson Tide's season under Mike DuBose unraveled.

In the seven seasons that followed the investigation, three coaches were fired and another left; the school dealt with NCAA sanctions that included the loss of 21 scholarships, appeals, federal investigations into boosters and civil suits filed by boosters and former assistant coaches; and the program drifted toward the middle of the conference standings as the loss of players and the changing of coaches took a toll.

Moore, watching his team lose all four games with UCLA and Oklahoma, faced the dilemma of a new SEC schedule implemented in 2002 compounded by a struggling program and made the decision to reschedule the Penn State and Notre Dame series.

"When we were involved with the NCAA and the penalties came," Moore said, "I felt like the first year or two years (we'd be OK). The effects of the penalties were coming right after that. We had a lull with the (scholarship) numbers and I felt I had to give our team a chance. I appreciate Penn State supporting me in that approach and moving the game.

"Toward the end of the penalties, Dave Braine, the athletic director at Georgia Tech at the time, and I were together at an outing and talked about starting back the Georgia Tech series and I'm excited about that."

The series with Penn State, against their wishes, was pushed back to 2013 and 2014. A Notre Dame series was canceled after the new SEC schedule left Alabama with a slate that included road games at Arkansas, Florida, Notre Dame and Tennessee in a five-week span and could not be rescheduled.

The addition of a 12th regular-season game to the schedule following the 2005 season gave Moore the opportunity to add Georgia Tech to the schedule. The Yellow Jackets were scheduled to play Alabama in 2009, but new athletic director Dan Radakovich wanted the series pushed back and now it's scheduled for 2012 at home and 2014 in Atlanta.

The Penn State series, as a result, was moved up to Sept. 11, 2010 in Tuscaloosa, with a return trip scheduled for 2011.

"They originally didn't want to move it from 2004 and 2005, so we wanted to get it back on the schedule earlier, both of us," Moore said.

Penn State athletic director Tim Curley, said he was "pleased that we were able to move up the series from the years we had initially agreed upon two years ago. We've had many memorable games with Alabama. We look forward to renewing a great series and giving our alumni and fans in the South and opportunity to see our team play."

One other recent change to the schedule was switching the Mississippi State and LSU games. Alabama traditionally played LSU, followed by Mississippi State and Auburn. But the change in scheduling by the SEC office in 2002 put LSU and Auburn back to back. Alabama is 1-9 in those games.

"I just wanted it back the way it was in years past," Moore said. "This is something (Mississippi State athletic director) Mr. (Larry) Templeton wanted at Mississippi State and agreed to it, and so did LSU."

Moore hasn't put any more big-name opponents on the schedule, but promised the Tide was close to announcing a pair of future opponents.

"There are several teams that we have talked to that have just not been able to work it out," Moore said. "One was Notre Dame, one was Ohio State. We've shopped ourselves around several times. Ohio State really wanted to play but it was just difficult for us to work it out on the dates they could play."

"You've got these games scheduled by the SEC, then you have to fit these in."

Moore said new coach Nick Saban would be involved in future scheduling decisions, something previous coach Mike Shula shied away from.

"He's going to have some input, no question," Moore said, "and I think he's really got some good thoughts on it. I would like to see us play in different parts of the country. I think that is important to exposing the team."

Women's college basketball has grown into big-time event

By [KYLE NAGEL](#)

Cox News Service

Monday, March 26, 2007

DAYTON, Ohio — The Immaculata University players and their 24-year-old coach crowded around a Horton Field House pay phone in Normal, Ill. These wool-wearing forerunners who practiced in a nunnery struggled to decide which supporter should first learn that the Mighty Macs were the women's college basketball national champions of 1972.

Time was short. The eight players and coach Cathy Rush soon would breeze 130 miles to Chicago so they could fly standby back to Philadelphia. They couldn't afford another overnight stay.

"Can you imagine that?" Rush said. "We're fighting to find out which player can tell her mother she's a national champion."

Instead of a national television broadcast with hours of publicity surrounding it, Immaculata's Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women tournament championship was sent out on a weak radio signal to the few who even knew the game was being played. After years of Amateur Athletic Union and invitational national titles, the '72 tournament was the first to officially crown a collegiate champion.

In the 35 women's basketball seasons since, the game has grown from sideshow to main event. After struggling through long van trips and sack lunches, the pioneers of women's college basketball laid a foundation on which the game's current popularity and support stand.

In the 1960s, if colleges had teams at all they hired women's coaches more for convenience than skill. Those coaches often found low budgets, low interest and high school players eager to show campuses that their game was as skilled or entertaining as the men's. After the enactment of Title IX, players who once would have been forced onto AAU or semipro teams after high school found themselves representing some of the country's major academic institutions, with scholarships to boot.

Now, the women's NCAA tournament sells out its Final Four as the swift and dramatic upswing in women's basketball brings the game closer in off-court extras to the men.

"There's a future in it now," said Dawn Staley, the Temple University coach who was a two-time national player of the year at Virginia in the early 1990s. "We couldn't always say that."

Humble beginnings

The first intercollegiate women's basketball game, according to Pamela Grundy and Susan Shackelford in "Shattering the Glass: The Remarkable History of Women's Basketball," took place in the San Francisco Armory between Stanford and California-Berkeley on April 4, 1896.

But largely because college administrators didn't feel women could handle the rigors of athletics, the game remained unpopular or unsupported on college campuses. It did, however, grow in some key high school areas, such as Iowa, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Texas.

By the 1940s, the Amateur Athletic Union girls basketball tournament gained popularity, but the teams were mostly all-star squads with sponsors, such as the successful Vultee Bomberettes (whose benefactor changed from the Vultee Aircraft Corporation to Goldblume Beer) and the Hanes Hosiery Girls.

The Harvest Queen Mill in Plainview, Texas, started its support for the Wayland Baptist College women's basketball team in the '40s. Later, a local aircraft company took up sponsorship and the Wayland Flying Queens became, in 1954, the first four-year college to win an AAU national championship, which in effect made them the first national college power. In the 1950s, the team won 151 straight games.

Opponents, though, were hard to find. Without many intercollegiate opportunities, Wayland began a rivalry with a team sponsored by the Nashville Business College and the two teams — one full of college players, the other supported by a college — ruled women's basketball.

"Women all over the United States were watching us play and heard about our team," said Harley Redin, who coached Wayland Baptist to a 431-66 record from 1955-73. "I think we inspired a lot of young girls to play basketball."

The college game

In four years at Louisiana's Delhi High School, Mickie DeMoss helped her teams to two state championships and a runner-up finish. When she graduated in 1973, with few scholarships available, her basketball career suffocated.

It was the calm before the storm. When President Nixon signed into law the Education Amendments of 1972, the section labeled Title IX was not yet famous,

but it eventually would help create innumerable opportunities for basketball players who didn't want their careers to finish with high school state titles.

"I felt at the time like I could do a lot more," said DeMoss, now the Kentucky coach.

In 1974, DeMoss joined the first Louisiana Tech team after three female students petitioned president F. Jay Taylor to begin a program. The school hired Sonja Hogg, a recently appointed professor in the College of Education, as coach.

Other colleges founded programs to meet new non-discrimination guidelines. Plus, with the establishment of the AIAW tournament in 1972, teams could compete for a true national championship.

Immaculata won the first three AIAW titles before Delta State won the next three. That ended the run of smaller schools as larger universities increased funding and support for the women's teams.

Louisiana Tech, which started its program with a \$5,000 budget, was the first NCAA champion when the association stopped fighting Title IX legislation and adopted a women's tournament in 1982.

"And darlin'," Hogg said, "we were ready to shine."

Major differences

Early in her coaching career, Pat Summitt would take the Tennessee basketball team to a tournament at the Mississippi College for Women each season. There would be two vans, one for the team and one for the luggage and equipment.

Summitt, who drove the team van, was sure to leave her window down to stay awake for the eight-hour return trip on Sunday night.

"I don't miss that van, that's for sure," Summitt said. "I wouldn't have been doing this for 33 years if every year was like the first eight or nine."

Even for coaches such as Summitt — who has won 942 of the 1,122 games she has coached with the Volunteers — the early years involved, in retrospect, silly methods of running a team. When Tennessee traveled to Louisiana Tech, for instance, Hogg would host Summitt at her home afterward to do the teams' laundry.

The highly successful Immaculata teams of the 1970s wore one-piece wool uniforms that the school dry-cleaned just once a year. The Mighty Macs and coach Rush couldn't even afford transportation. She had to rely on those with cars to be de facto team taxis.

But as the women's game has grown in popularity and television exposure — last year's Final Four sold out for the 14th consecutive season and was seen in an average of 1.32 million homes, a tournament record — coaches said they've gained previously unrealistic perks.

In other words, women's college basketball has gone from brown bags to steak houses in a little more than three decades.

"You wonder if the men's programs had to do the same things when they first started," said Maryalyce Jeremiah, the former Cedarville University and University of Dayton coach who later served as chairperson of the NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Committee. "Me? I doubt they did what we did."

Kyle Nagel writes for the Dayton Daily News.

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Big Ten considers schedule changes

By Sam Ross Jr.
TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Sunday, March 25, 2007

Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany sees member schools divided three ways on the topic of potentially increasing the number of conference football games from the current eight per team each season.

"I think there's some sentiment, a minority, to go to 10 and some sentiment, a minority, to stay at eight," Delany said. "I think there is a majority to go to nine, but the problem is that with 11 members playing nine games, it doesn't work mathematically."

Sentiment for more conference games owes to a desire by some schools to play Big Ten competition on a more frequent basis. The current setup has teams playing eight conference opponents annually, with other conference foes rotating on and off the schedule. With eight conference games, there are two teams each school does not play each season.

"I think some people like the idea that you're in a conference and you play each other as much as you can," Delany said. "You balance that vs. the opportunity to play a national schedule, BCS strength of schedule implications, and, for programs trying to get stronger, scheduling a weaker opponent to get to 6-6."

If that conference game total is bumped to nine, it would require each year that one of the 11 Big Ten schools would play just eight games in conference and the other 10 would play nine to get an even number of conference games necessary for scheduling purposes.

"We've got some issues with math, like that and the imbalance of a five and four, or four and five home and away with nine games," Delany said.

Extra conference games also could affect teams reaching bowl eligibility with six wins.

"We tend to win 65 to 70 percent of our nonconference games," Delany said. "If you add conference games, by definition you can only win 50 percent of those - half win and half lose."

Penn State has no firm position on the subject, which will be discussed further at the coaches and athletic directors meetings in May.

"To date, I have been in the zone of keeping it the same, but in this past year I have moved into the category of willing to listen and evaluate and take another look at a ninth game," Penn State athletic director Tim Curley said. "I'm not in favor of a complete (10-game) round-robin."

Playing every other conference school each season would lock in 10 games and allow schools just two open dates on a 12-game schedule to fit in nonconference rivals and inter-sectional games.

Penn State coach Joe Paterno would rather talk about reinstituting a bye week, which was eliminated when the regular-season schedule was expanded to 12 games last year, but the Big Ten kept its tradition of concluding its season before Thanksgiving.

"It's an ordeal to ask those kids to do what we're asking them to do now," Paterno said, noting that in 2005, with a 11-game regular season, there was a bye week. "I think we ought to give the kids a week off somewhere during the (season)."

As for expanding to nine conference games, Paterno said: "I'd have to hear how you would arrange nine games. That's a little tricky. I know there are some people that want to do it. I just have not really had a chance to discuss that with anybody. The one thing in my craw is the (lack of an) open date."

Delany said no official action would be taken before the school presidents meeting in June, and even if more conference games were approved, it would be the 2009 season or later before the change could be implemented.

After disappointing bowl outings by Big Ten heavyweights Ohio State and Michigan, it's been suggested the Big Ten ends its season too early, leaving too long a layoff for its bowl teams. Other conferences tend to play on past Thanksgiving, and often they have conference championship games, too.

"I don't think there's a causal relationship there," Delany said, referring to the layoff time and bowl losses.

Penn State's Curley didn't see a problem for his team, which beat Tennessee in the Outback Bowl on Jan. 1.

"If you win like we did, you don't feel it as bad," he said. "If you lose, you're looking for all kinds of reasons why it didn't work."

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When coaches leave, players are left behind

PAUL WOODY

TIMES-DISPATCH COLUMNIST

Sunday, March 25, 2007

The dominoes will start to fall now.

Tubby Smith has left his job as coach of the University of Kentucky basketball team to take the job as coach at University of Minnesota. Steve Alford has left Iowa to coach at New Mexico.

Both will be replaced. And the coaches who replace them will be replaced and so on and so on and so on.

There will be tearful farewells as coaches state how hard a decision it was to leave State U to go to Kentucky or Iowa or wherever.

Players will address clusters of reporters and bravely say they understand that "coach" has to do what's best for his family.

Yes, the family, it always comes down to the family. It is so hard to support a family on a mere \$350,000 or \$600,000 or \$1 million per year, plus incentives.

The Kentucky job paid Smith close to \$2 million per year. The man who replaces him can count on a similar package. The Iowa job will be similarly lucrative.

Smith is not only free to leave Kentucky with four years remaining on his contract, the school has stated it will give Smith a \$1.5 million retention bonus it would have had to pay him had he still been the coach on April 3.

Maybe the folks at Kentucky are just kindhearted. Maybe they saw that as cheaper than buying out four years of Smith's contract.

Maybe that was Kentucky's way of saying, "Sorry we overwhelm coaches with our impossible expectations."

When a player signs a letter of intent, his expectations are that he and the coach will have a beautiful friendship that will last four seasons.

Now, any players who wish to follow Smith or Alford, or the coaches who replace them, may do so. But those players must be released from their current scholarship, then sit out one year before playing basketball again.

Or, they can leave without a release. However, they will be ineligible for a scholarship for a year and must pay their own college expenses.

Or, the new coach can come in, evaluate the talent, determine a player the previous coach valued, if not for his talent, then for his attitude and practice contributions, isn't needed anymore. The player's scholarship will not be renewed. Instead, it will go to someone else.

It's not a pretty part of the college scene. It doesn't happen every time there is a coaching change, but it does

happen.

College basketball players, male and female, as well as football players, should have some rights in all this.

Some players choose a college based on the school. Most choose a school based on the coach.

The athletes should be permitted to follow their coach or find another program and not be penalized by sitting out a year when there is a coaching change.

And then there are the recruits who have signed letters of intent with Kentucky and Iowa. They now must receive permission from the new coach to be released from those obligations.

It doesn't matter if the recruit never would have played for the new coach under any other circumstances. It doesn't matter if the player is a bad fit for whatever "system" the new guy runs.

All that matters is whether the coach still wants the player.

What should matter far more is whether the player still wants to play for the school and the new coach.

The player made a commitment to a particular coach. If he's not there, the player's commitment should be voided at his discretion, not that of a coach he doesn't even know.

NCAA administrators oppose such ideas because they see it as roiling college athletics. But every other year, it seems, the lives of numerous college athletes are roiled when the musical chairs coaching game begins.

Perhaps if athletic departments faced rebuilding an entire team every time a coach left, fewer coaches would be permitted to leave and fewer promises to players would be broken.

Contact staff writer Paul Woody at pwoody@timesdispatch.com or (804) 649-6444.

Trentonian.com

03/26/2007

Why is all the excitement limited to basketball?

Column by Al Morganti

After a dizzy weekend of basketball, the Final Four is set with the University of Florida Gators ready to arrive in Atlanta later this week to defend their national title.

Once again, the NCAA has provided sports fans across the country with a magnificent tapestry of sports entertainment, and you can only wonder what is going through the minds of the people who make the annual decision to forego all of this drama when it comes to college football.

For a bunch of people who are supposed to be associated with institutions of higher learning, this situation with college football is just plain stupid. In case they need the spelling, that is S-T-U-P-I-D.

All right, if you start with the premise that money rules, maybe you can make a case for keeping the football situation the way it is, but when is enough money enough money? It seems no matter how much money a college football program generates, most of the money goes right back into -- you got it -- college football.

Otherwise, how can you explain all of these schools with great football programs making the tough decision to cut some other sports. You can blame it all on Title IX if you like, but you can also make a far better intellectual argument that Title IX is the single most important sports story of the past and future generation, because it really did bring about some equality.

No, this should not be an argument about money. Rather, these dunderheads at the NCAA ought to take some classes in simple logic. Where they take those courses is of little matter, because any professor should be able to explain to them the simple logic of having an NCAA football tourney.

Let's see, for starters they might want to get some video of the NCAA basketball tournament over the past couple of weeks, or even the past couple of decades.

You want to promote the sport? You want the names of your member schools scrawled across the nation in a great setting? Then what you want is the NCAA basketball tournament. For the past few weeks, you could not send a better message about college athletics and the spirit of the colleges than what has taken place on big screens from sea to shining sea.

This year there have not been the monster upsets, but usually some small school, such as St. Joe's, will get a huge boost in applications because the school has become so visible as a result of the basketball tourney.

In football, there is very little chance of that happening. The mish-mash of voting in the national polls takes away the chance for a small school to really make any noise when it comes to winning a national championship.

More than just that, the NCAA basketball tourney takes the sport front and center for at least two weeks. People can follow what is happening, and every game matters.

Compare that to football, where the Bowl setup basically has about 25 consolation games, and then one game for a national championship -- a game which has no relation to any Bowl game that was played beforehand.

You could luck into a great game between No. 1 and No. 2, but what you have done along the way is minimized every other team. You have taken away the underdog, and you have taken away both the drama of victory, and the agony of defeat.

It is always amazing to try and follow the thinking that allows the NCAA to forego the chance to have a tournament in football. But after you watch the NCAA basketball tourney, the manner in which a national football champ is crowned turns from amazing to just plain stupid.

Al Morganti is a Comcast Sportsnet commentator.



Tucson Citizen

FINAL FOUR: FLORIDA VS. UCLA, OHIO STATE VS. GEORGETOWN

Gimino : Get used to Gator nation

Florida spends more, but payoff is NCAA titles

[ANTHONY GIMINO](#)

Published: 03.26.2007

Arizona was still in its postgame locker room when the Florida Gators stormed down the hallway at the New Orleans Arena.

They had just finished their warm-ups before a first-round NCAA Tournament game against Jackson State, and forward Joakim Noah probably was loud enough to be heard even where the Wildcats wallowed after falling to Purdue.

Stomping down the hall, Noah, overflowing with typical bravado and zaniness, yelled, "THIS IS OUR . . ."

He didn't finish the thought with the word "time" or "moment" or "house," choosing instead a four-letter expletive that didn't make as much sense but seemed to underscore his point perfectly.

In big-time college athletics, it sure does seem to be Florida's . . . uh, moment.

The Gators are the defending national champs in men's basketball. They are the national champs in football. Unless I miss my mark, they will be cutting down the nets on another national title in basketball a week from today.

It's Florida's world. Everyone else is just playing for second, as Oregon found out Sunday in an 85-77 loss to the Gators in the Midwest Regional final.

Man, it's time to start working up a good hate for these guys.

"Everybody kind of wants us to lose because everybody usually cheers for the underdog," Florida guard Corey Brewer said. "I know I used to cheer for the underdog in the NCAA Tournament."

Some of us still do, and Florida is a big dog that takes a big bite out of the financial pie chart.

The athletic department revenues for the most recent fiscal year were \$82.4 million - slightly more than double that at Arizona. Of course, spending was about double, too, which is exactly the point.

Florida has arguably the two best young coaches in their respective sports - basketball's Billy Donovan, 41, and football's Urban Meyer, 42 - and the deep pockets to fend off the green-backed advances of any suitors.

"It's kind of easy to win there," said UA assistant softball coach Larry Ray, who took over a brand-new Florida softball program in 1995.

"When I was starting that program, I was really given a blank check. We were building a stadium, and I said, 'Do you have any parameters?' They said, 'No, just do it right.' "

Imagine.

Now imagine the culture of pressure at Florida.

"They give you every resource to be successful," Ray said. "They have a right to expect championships."

Florida athletic director Jeremy Foley does just that.

Ray had a 169-102 record in four seasons at Florida, earning SEC coach of the year honors and guiding the start-up program to the NCAA Tournament.

He was fired.

Arizona baseball coach Andy Lopez spent seven seasons as the Gators' head coach, going 278-159-1 and winning two SEC championships. His teams advanced to the postseason five times and the College World Series twice.

Not good enough, he was told. He was fired.

"It is an interesting place to work from the standpoint where they say, 'Here is everything you need. Now win.' In so many terms, that is how it comes out," Lopez said.

"In some respects, it is a great environment. (But) I have always had a philosophy that while I wanted to make a living, I also wanted to make a life. My wife, my kids,

friendships, things like that.

"It is one of those things where sometimes you feel like you have to give up your life in that kind of setting."

Good or bad, everything comes with a price.

The average salary for a head coach of a men's team at Florida: \$582,298. Arizona: \$269,244.

The average salary for a head coach of a women's team at Florida: \$179,631. Arizona: \$82,201.

Florida's women's basketball program just ended 9-22 in coach Carolyn Peck's fifth season. You can guess what decision Foley made about her before the season ended.

"It's a very well-run business there," Ray said. "It's all about money. When you have that, you can do whatever you want."

Such as win more national titles.

Meyer's football program is the only one to rival USC in recruiting in the past two seasons. Donovan brings in a top-five class for next season.

More titles could be on the way. No other school (we're talking Division I-A football and Division I basketball) has a pair of coaches who have each won championships in the most major of college sports.

It's as Noah, in his own special way, was yelling at the end of Sunday's game: "We win, we eat!"

Chow down, Gators.

We could get tired of these guys really soon.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

SEMIFINAL STORY LINES (Saturday, CBS)

Georgetown (30-6) vs. Ohio State (34-3), 3 p.m.

Greg Oden: In his first, and maybe last, Final Four, Ohio State needs the freshman center to stay out of foul trouble. He's averaged only 21 minutes in the past two games.

Hoyas' legacy: Georgetown has coach John Thompson III on the bench and Patrick Ewing Jr. on the floor.

UCLA (30-5) vs. Florida (33-5), 5:30 p.m.

UCLA defense: The Bruins are allowing only 50 points a game in the tourney, with Kansas the only team to shoot better than 40 percent. But can the Bruins stop Florida without being whistled into oblivion? Florida has gone to the free-throw line 129 times, outscoring its foes 94-44 in four games. Pressure to repeat: Defending champ Florida is trying to do something no team has been able to