

Unpaid Professionals: Commercialism and Conflict in Big-Time College Sports

By Andrew Zimbalist

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Anyone possessing a vested interest in intercollegiate athletics and higher education will profit by reading *Unpaid Professionals: Commercialism and Conflict in Big-Time College Sports*. The author provides an in-depth examination of some of the major issues affiliated with the “big-time” athletic enterprises on college and university campuses. A majority of the problematic areas addressed by Zimbalist are, in fact, among some of the key change elements advocated by the reconvened Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics’ recent report, *A Call to Action*:

Reconnecting College Sports and Higher Education.

The book's chapters target a number of significant areas for critical review. Chapter one, while introductory in nature, broaches three cornerstone or pivotal issues: sport as an integral part of the institution's educational mission, academic integrity, and a distinction between amateur versus professional sport.

Chapter two is devoted to the student athlete. Chronological evolutions of academic standards and athletic scholarships are detailed. In addition, compensation benefits for "student-athletes," both positive and negative, are framed in view of the potential exploitation surrounding college athletes, especially those engaged in the major revenue-producing venues of football and men's basketball.

Two monumental gender equity issues, equal opportunities for athletes and equal pay for coaches, comprise chapters three and four. The reality and a documentation of major shortcomings associated with the intent of Title IX legislation are presented in a very clear and concise fashion.

The media and commercial connections affixed to college sports are detailed in chapters five and six. These two chapters lend understanding and clarity to just how rapidly 'big-time' college athletics have changed from an educational model of sport to a professional model of sport. The end result, obviously, is a fast paced demarcation of sport from being a viable part of an institution's educational mission to a chartered course aimed at revenue production and entertainment.

Chapter seven looks at the financial aspects inherent in "big-time" college sports. The author discusses some of the variable accounting procedures entailed in the budgetary processes in order to achieve balanced budgets, or more importantly, to show some type of net profit. The escalating costs required to adequately fund a "competitive" major college sports program, and some of the proposed reasoning why various institutions opt to venture into the arena of NCAA Division I competition are highlighted.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association is featured in chapter eight. This is an interesting treatise on how the NCAA has waxed and waned at the appropriate times to facilitate its growth and survival as an extremely powerful legislative magnate in the realm of intercollegiate athletics.

The final chapter in Zimbalist's book is devoted to a ten-point program of athletic reform measures. His suggestions for change are both realistic and feasible. The changes are guidelines basically targeted at the "big-time" sports of football and men's basketball versus any and/or all intercollegiate sports and athletic programs. Credibility underlying the writer's suggestions for change are heightened by the fact that the author has functioned in the capacity as a Faculty Athletic Representative, served on his institution's Athletics Committee, taught seminars on the economics of professional sport, consulted extensively in the sports industry, and is a distinguished Professor of Economics at Smith College.

Overall, *Unpaid Professionals* is a timely text that offers a solid foundation as to why change is needed in the "big-time" sports of football and men's basketball. The transition of sport from an educational role to an entertainment/revenue production role continues to gather impetus. Consequently, this book outlines a viable plan of action for

interested parties in higher education to aid in redirecting the path to which major college sport programs are presently racing.