

Time to expose faculty corruption in college sports

By Jon Ericson and Bruce Svare

Let's give credit where credit is due: The NCAA puts on a hell of a basketball tournament. Credit also the athletics directors, the coaches, and the players who make March Madness one of the premier sporting events in the country. Missing in the hoopla is attention and credit to those who make it all possible: the faculty.

As hair is connected to skin, accompanying each tournament are reports of academic corruption in college sports. The feature story this year is pretend prep schools providing academically unprepared athletes for our universities.

Connecting the dots is a task that reform groups such as the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics avoid. The Commission is made up primarily of university presidents who know full well the implications of allowing public viewing of the remarkable story of what goes on behind the closed doors of their universities.

What the public sees and applauds are coaches who recruit highly talented, athletically prepared athletes; coaches who insist that the athletes attend every practice, coaches who insist on discipline, work ethic, and the highest of standards. March Madness provides the stage for the public to see, to applaud, to salute the results of their work. It is an eye-popping show. Good for the coaches and the players.

What the public does not see is the professor who can take a student who is academically unprepared for *higher* education, a student who has a job that requires 20 to 30 hours a week that causes him to miss numerous classes and come dead tired to others, and provide him with a *university* education. To borrow a phrase, theirs is a story that deserves to be told. It too would be an eye-popper.

Fans of big-time college sports can find relief in Harvard University President Derek Bok's comment that "Curiously, university faculties are very eager to do research on every institution in society except their own."

While Academic Progress Rates (APR) computed by the NCAA are touted as truthful assessments of academic achievement, they reveal nothing about the quality and rigor of an athlete's education. What they will do is increase the pressure to choose eligibility over education for the athlete.

That is why the only remedy to the academic corruption in college sports is disclosure, transparency, truth-telling. For courses taken by members of sports teams, universities should make public the names of the professors with their course titles and course GPA.

University presidents will be quick to point out that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prevents disclosure of such information. They will say they are protecting the privacy of students. Disclosure is not however, about student behavior; it is about faculty behavior; it is about institutional behavior. The law was not intended to shield institutional behavior. That story can be told: The law permits making public academic records of student groups sufficient in number to protect the privacy of individual students.

In the 1997 NCAA Division I Graduation-Rates Report, 1996 classes, for Duke University, the SAT average for all students was 1,392. For the men's basketball team: 887. [University of Nebraska men's basketball: 920.] On ESPN Outside the Lines, former Duke point guard Jason Williams said that "People are more than welcome to come with me and sit down in the courses I take and take them with me and take the tests I do." We should accept Mr. Williams' invitation. Duke Magic is a story that deserves to be told.

During Maurice Clarett's allegations of academic fraud, an Ohio State professor let slip reference to "faculty members that are devout fans and gave any grade they want."

In *Bright College Years: Inside the American Campus*, Anne Matthews writes: "Higher education is a remarkably unwatched industry. . . . Trust us, the campus has always said, we command secrets, we know best. . . . What's going on in there?"

Well, what *is* going on in there? Making public the names of these *devout fans* and their courses with their course GPAs would allow them to share with players and coaches the public acclaim for the team's success; would connect public accountability with academic integrity; and would be consistent with the purpose of a university: To search for the truth, *wherever it may lead*.

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