

920 Redbud Drive
Redding, CA 96001
March 26, 1991

Rev. Theodore Hesburgh
@ University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556

Dear Father Hesburgh,

I am writing in connection to your work with the Knight Foundation Commission in Intercollegiate Athletics, and at the outset, let me say that I wholeheartedly support the Commission's efforts. Due to my particular experience, I feel compelled to join in the dialogue, and to express some things directly to you which I perhaps should have long ago.

In 1971-72, I played and averaged 17 points and 6 rebounds a game for the Notre Dame basketball team. At the end of the season, I informed Coach Phelps that I was quitting the team, and I left the University as the end of that, my sophomore year. (I'll enclose an article for reference).

My reasons for leaving had to do with the conditions of intercollegiate athletics as I experienced them at Notre Dame. In the press accounts of my quitting, I focused on the emphasis on competition as a way of life. As an idealistic 19-year-old, this was primarily how I viewed the situation. Perhaps I would have been better-advised to come out with some specifics, as I will do now.

In about my second week at the University, I was directed to report, along with all other freshman athletes, to the Administration Building, for an evening tutoring session in calculus, put on by Professor Mike DiCicco's office. There, graduate assistants passed out a sample calculus test, and proceeded to give the answers to it. It was with great surprise and shock that when I went to take my calculus test the next day, that this very same test was the one distributed. Needless to say, this was a considerable advantage.

That was the last such "tutoring session" I ever went to, though I learned from my teammates that they continued in a similar manner. I learned that it was the responsibility of Professor DiCicco's office to "keep the athletes eligible" for competition. I heard stories of term papers being written for athletes, and of players being placed in classes with teachers which would give an athlete a sympathetic grade. My own teammate, Bob Valibus, bragged to me about not having read a single book his freshman year (what a thing to brag about!). He was eligible

the entire time.

Under these conditions, it is perhaps unnecessary to say that a claim regarding graduation rates takes on a whole new meaning. That Kevin Ross was eligible for four years at Creighton without being able to read, and that seven CSU Los Angeles athletes successfully sued that institution for failing to provide an education, would indicate that this is not an isolated incident. While I may hope that conditions have improved at Notre Dame, I don't really have proof that this academic hypocrisy has abated.

I don't really believe that money is the root of all evil, but its use may sometimes be an expression of evil. During my first road trip freshman year, to Marquette, the team manager walked down the aisle of the bus and gave each team member an unmarked envelope full of cash. It wasn't much, about \$30, but when I said, "What's this?", I received a Serpico-like response, "Take it and shut up."

This came to euphemistically be called "meal money." Euphemism, because all of our meals were paid for. This same team manager (it may have been Bob Lundgren, but I would have to check that), told me in March of 1971 that he had distributed over \$800 per player, from the coaching staff, in a like manner, to the varsity that season.

I have bank records which show a series of deposits during the course of my sophomore season. I have friends who would testify that I mailed them money that year, because I claimed to have, "so much more than I needed." This was cash money received from the athletic department, obviously in excess of the grant-in-aid.

The only other explanation for the deposits that I can think of is that I was hoarding the money which was to be used for meals. As a 163-lb. forward averaging about 37 minutes per game, I can assure you that I did not miss any meals (to do so would have been to risk evaporation!). As the University was willing to fabricate reasons for my quitting (I will discuss this later), perhaps this string of deposits would be explained by my having a secret job, or selling drugs, or some other way of getting money. None of these things, or course, happened.

I was aware of other methods of generating money for student-athletes. I remember seeing Collis Jones outside the football stadium one football Saturday, selling tickets. Athletes had their own source of laundry script, and their own bookstore in the ACC; I was aware of scams involving these sources.

Of course, outside of direct control of the University were the boosters, constantly hanging around the locker room. Although I enjoyed a number of good meals at these peoples' expense, I can see how this was not something available to regular students.

When I informed Coach Phelps that I was quitting, he asked me to work with Sports Information Director (SID) Roger Valdesseri on the release of the story. I also met with Athletic Director Ed "Moose" Krause. The release of the story kept getting delayed, and it was finally done on a Saturday afternoon in the spring, probably in an attempt to minimize its impact. Despite repeated calls from me to the SID's office, none were returned, and I was given no advance notice of the timing, nor the content.

And no wonder! The story was a complete fabrication of Roger's mind, perhaps worked out with the help of the writer, Forrest "Woody" Miller. The line was that I was quitting basketball to go do social work in Los Angeles. The fact that this misrepresented my position was wrong enough; but in the article were quotes attributed to me, i.e., Tom O'Mara said, "...."

My problem with this is that I was never, ever interviewed by Woody Miller. I hope that being quoted when you were never interviewed is against the law in this country. My one regret in this whole incident is that I did not go to Small Claims Court, and ask Mr. Miller to produce the date and time of interview. Hopefully, it would have coincided exactly with my Great Books seminar.

Other than this last point, I have no regrets involving my quitting; I needed to do it to become the person I needed to become. I learned some hard lessons, and Notre Dame got its money's worth. I still love the pure athleticism of sport, but I do feel bad, as I see young people working and developing a skill as I did, to know what they will experience if they go on to major college athletics. I get pretty offended if somebody mentions it in the same breath with "character building."

I think many of these ills are errors of omission, or excesses by well-meaning people. The rationalizations abound: "It's not really much money;" "He'll benefit from being in the college environment, anyway;" "Everybody cheats;" "We're just helping him out;" "It's good for the university, so it's ok;" and so on.

The reality differs from the rationalizations. It's not good for the universities. I wrote to Dr. Harry Edwards last year, and suggested that college athletes be paid at market value, and that they simply be hired to represent the university, with no academic requirements related to that job whatsoever. If the Knight Commission is unable to clear this situation up, that is what I would like to see happen.

It's not my style to bring accusations of this type without proof. The bank deposits and the article fabrication would be fairly easy to prove; the academic cheating (particularly as I stopped participating in it) and other things would take more work, but could be done. A number of these things happened before

Coach Phelps' tenure; some of the other folks mentioned are still at Notre Dame, and some are not. Nevertheless, to the best of my recollection, this is what happened to me at Notre Dame.

I might add that I don't feel that Notre Dame has a lot to worry about from me. For better or worse, I can report that after 19 years, nobody wants to hear anything bad about Notre Dame! Rather, I would think that Notre Dame and college athletics would have the most to fear from inside, if what I experienced represents in any way the current conditions. The fall of Rome and other lessons of corruption and excess come to mind.

But I wanted you to know that this was my experience, because I believe you have tried to exert moral leadership in your life, and this is what is needed here. I also know that administrators sometimes don't know things unless people tell them. I hope the conditions I have cited are no longer present at Notre Dame, although I feel the burden of proof is on it and all universities.

My question to you, and to the Knight Commission, is, "Why are colleges involved in this kind of thing? What does it have to do with education?"

I congratulate you for your work with the Commission, and wish you great success. I hope my comments will in some way be of help. Best of luck!

Sincerely,

Tom O'Mara

University of Notre Dame

Notre Dame, Indiana 46556

President Emeritus

Theodore M. Hesburgh Library
13th Floor

April 12, 1991

Mr. Tom O'Mara
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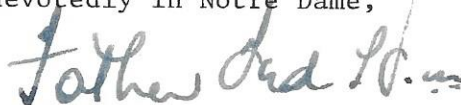
Dear Tom:

Thanks for your thoughtful letter which I appreciate took some courage to write. I am sharing it with Father Ned Joyce who was chairman of the Athletic Board at the time that this happened. He may wish to write to you as well.

I have the impression, although I am now out of the administrative part of the University, that many of the things you write about have been cleared up in the interim. Father Ned will know more about this than I.

I trust that things continue to go well with you. With my thanks I send you all best wishes and prayers for all success in the future.

Ever devotedly in Notre Dame,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Father Ned Joyce". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

(Rev.) Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.
President Emeritus