

## ***Journal of Issues in* Intercollegiate Athletics**

### **Unwinding Madness: What Went Wrong With College Sports and How to Fix It**

By Gerald Gurney, Donna Lopiano, and Andrew Zimbalist. . Published 2017 by Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC. (300 pages).

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*Unwinding Madness: What Went Wrong With College Sports and How to Fix It* takes aim at the commercialization and its ill effects on big-time intercollegiate athletics in the United States. The authors, Gerald Gurney, Donna Lopiano, and Andrew Zimbalist, are members of the Drake Group, a collection of faculty and outside advisors whose stated mission is “to defend academic integrity from the corrosive aspects of commercialized college sports” (Drake Group, 2017). This is important for the reader to know as it helps provide context for the authors’ approach to this subject.

The book is an accurate account of the problems that exist in intercollegiate athletics, but only discusses the negatives associated with NCAA Division I FBS athletics. If this book were to be used in a class revolving around college sports it would need to be balanced with materials that present some of the arguments for the positives of intercollegiate athletics. Additionally, the authors tend to paint with a broad brush when it comes to the administrators of college athletics, depicting them all as being involved with college sports for the wrong reasons.

Despite the one-sided approach, this book does an excellent job of enumerating the failings of intercollegiate athletics at the highest level. The reader is presented with a succinct history of the growth of the commercialization of college sports and in what ways it has affected the student-athletes’ experience. As mentioned previously, if it were presented with additional materials, it would make for a great resource in a sport management class centered on college sports.

The book is broken into three sections. The first section, consisting of two chapters, presents the history of the NCAA and past attempts at reforms. The second section, consisting of five chapters, offers the reader an in-depth look at the major problem areas in college sports. The third and final section, made up of two chapters, consists of the authors’ suggestions for how to fix what they view as a broken system.

In chapter 1 the authors provide a concise history of intercollegiate athletics in the United States. They use this chapter to help frame the commercial nature of college sports by explaining

that it has been that way since the very first competition. They go on to discuss the creation and evolution of the NCAA and how it is structured. Specifically, they highlight the historical lack of involvement by university presidents, as well as an imbalance of power which mostly resides with the institutions that comprise what is now known as the Power 5 conferences.

The authors continue with the history lesson in chapter 2. In this chapter they focus on the history of NCAA revenue distribution and reiterate the control the Power 5 conferences possess. Additionally, they discuss the record of balance, or lack thereof, between academics and athletics. Specifically, they highlight some of the significant attempts at academic reforms and describe some of the notable academic fraud scandals. They finish the chapter by suggesting some of the areas in which intercollegiate athletics has lost its way, transitioning the reader to the second section of the book.

Chapter 3 is the opening chapter of the second section. In this chapter the authors focus on academic integrity and why it is in need of reform. They outline the problems with both initial and continuing eligibility rules and how current enforcement of these rules is ineffective. They also offer some suggestions for improving the eligibility criteria currently used by the NCAA.

In chapters 4 and 5 the focus is on the governance structure of the NCAA and the current state of student-athlete welfare. They use these chapters to describe the presidents' role in fostering the commercialization of athletics despite it being in conflict with the academic goals of higher education. They point to the oft cited advertising benefits of successful athletics as the rationale presidents use to explain the current approach to college sports. The authors then go on to illustrate how the pursuit of successful athletics teams, especially football and men's basketball, is harmful to student-athletes. Specifically, they point out the barriers to a quality education for student-athletes who are recruited to campus solely based on their athletic abilities and then told to prioritize their athletic endeavors over academics.

Gurney et al. devote the sixth chapter of the book to discrimination in college sports. It is the largest chapter and focuses on gender equity issues, lack of racial and ethnic diversity, and the dearth of opportunities for students with disabilities in the NCAA. The authors begin the chapter discussing Title IX and how its lack of enforcement has contributed to the continued unfair treatment of female student-athletes. This treatment comes in the form of fewer opportunities than their male counterparts, less funding for their teams, and an unfair distribution of athletic financial aid. The theme is then continued when the issue of underrepresentation of women and people of color in coaching and administrative positions is reviewed. The authors make good use of statistics and tables to reinforce their points and the reader is left with the inevitable conclusion that there is significant progress left to be made in the treatment of underrepresented groups in intercollegiate athletics.

The final chapter of the second section describes the economics of college sports and how they are unsustainable. The authors point out there are only 24 profitable athletic departments and the efforts by the rest to keep up causes irresponsible spending. They go on to construe that the designation of these athletic programs as "nonprofit" adds to the problem by allowing for the focus to be on winning as opposed to being profitable for the sake of stockholders. They predict this lack of accountability to investors and the resulting deficits it creates, will force most institutions to have to choose between eliminating sports, raising student fees, cutting back on student-athlete financial aid, or reducing the academic budget.

The third and final section of the book consists of chapters 8 and 9. The authors use this portion of the book to outline their suggestions for how to fix the multitude of problems they diagnosed in the first seven chapters. They begin in chapter 8 by offering two approaches to

reform. The first approach, labeled marketization, would entail creating a free labor market for student-athletes. This approach however, presents as many problems as it aims to solve. The second approach and the one the authors would suggest taking is an educationally centered approach. In this approach, Gurney et al. suggest the granting of a partial antitrust exemption to the NCAA and its member institutions. This exemption would be tied to academic integrity and fair treatment of student-athletes.

Using the idea of a partial antitrust exemption as the basis, the authors use chapter 9 to detail their vision for how a new national governing body for intercollegiate athletics should be structured and to what principles it should adhere. They suggest having Congress implement a federally chartered organization to replace the NCAA. They go on to outline what functions the organization should perform and finish the chapter and book with 21 guidelines they feel would anchor this new organization allowing it to properly fit in higher education and support the athletic and academic endeavors of student-athletes.

Despite the one-sided approach and the occasional offering of opinion as fact, this book provides a comprehensive look at the issues facing big-time college sports. Anyone interested in teaching or researching intercollegiate athletics will find this book to be a useful resource. If used in the proper context, it can help students and scholars better understand intercollegiate athletics and how they fit in the field of sport management.