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University of Nike: How Corporate Cash Bought American Higher Education

By Joshua Hunt. Published 2018 by Penguin Random House, New York. (304 pages).

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In *University of Nike: How Corporate Cash Bought American Higher Education*, author Joshua Hunt offers a well-researched review of the relationships between the multinational footwear and apparel corporation, its founder Phil Knight, his alma mater the University of Oregon, and its fifteenth president Dave Frohnmayer. The book begins with a biographical sketch of Phil Knight's childhood from growing up the son of a state representative to his matriculation at the University of Oregon as a track athlete under legendary coach Bill Bowerman. Knight later attended Stanford's Graduate School of Business where he created a business plan for a unique shoe design. Knight secured funding to form Blue Ribbon Sports, eventually renamed Nike after the Greek goddess of victory. The company grew in market share, originally by selling shoes made by the Japanese company Onitsuka Tiger before eventually manufacturing their own. Knight attempted to secure athletes as endorsers from the beginning. He started with 70's track icon Steve Prefontaine and his securing basketball star Michael Jordan in the 1980s propelled sales.

Hunt offers a parallel story about Dave Frohnmayer's origins, from son of immigrants to his terms in the Oregon House of Representatives and as attorney general. He was lauded in his role as the state's chief legal officer for avoiding a deadly situation similar to Waco during a standoff between ranchers and a religious colony attempting to establish a city for their 200,000 global followers. Yet he lost the race for governor in 1990 and left politics to become dean of the law school at the University of Oregon. He ascended to the presidency, where he served from 1994 to 2009, all while having three daughters suffer and ultimately die from the debilitating disease Fanconi anemia.

Hunt offers plenty of criticism toward both men, Oregon, and Nike. Knight became a major donor during the era when Frohnmayer became the school's president. Hunt suggests at the height of this relationship, the school's public relation efforts prioritized protecting and strengthening the Nike brand, creating fear among university employees. This included redesigned athletic logos, to more serious things such as diffusing and redirecting sexual assault scandals involving student-athletes.

Knight is pegged as unscrupulous since the beginnings of his company when he sent a mole to identify his partner's subcontractors. This allowed Knight to eliminate the middle man and sell the same shoe minus the brand name. Knight admitted to other acts of corporate espionage in a trial involving these partners. Hunt also describes Knight as frequently circumventing rules on his donations to the University of Oregon. Knight would open a limited liability company, lease the land from the school, construct a building, and return it to the school. This process allowed Knight to avoid bidding, unions, and public input.

Hunt also depicts Knight as a cruel man who withdrew his support when the University of Oregon joined the Worker's Rights Consortium (WRC) that denounced Nike's labor practices. A furious Knight also apparently significantly decreased his monetary support for the Fanconi Anemia Center as punishment for Frohnmayer signing the deal. The university left the WRC within the year after the Oregon State Board of Higher Education, with Frohnmayer privately prodding behind the scenes, ruled such agreements adopting "limits on eligibility to enter business agreements or otherwise conduct business unless based on the ability to perform, evidence of illegal activities or other criteria required or allowed by statute or Board rule". Knight did pledge \$10 million a year to the Fanconi Anemia Center after Frohnmayer's death in 2015.

Readers will struggle to find anything positive about the shoe conglomerate within the text. They may also grapple on how to proceed at their respective institutions, counsel their students, and change their own personal consumption behaviors. Though Hunt rightly does not over-report what is already well documented, he does offer a history on the controversies surrounding Nike's labor practices, such as underage workers, forced overtime, and dangerous conditions.

Yet at times Hunt stretches in connecting things back to Nike and Oregon, and the reader is either left wondering when the link will be made or whether Hunt is merely offering historical context. An example of such a stretch occurs when Hunt describes the history of higher education's relationship with government and business. Chapter five describes the importance of the Morrill Act and the GI Bill on higher education and changes post Second World War, beginning with the CIA's first dab into university research with behavioral science programs that included drug use and torture. The U.S. Government eventually took much of their research to think tanks and corporate America, aided by the Bayh-Doyle Act, was willing to step in. This legislation gave universities and professors automatic ownership of the federally funded research they produced and according to Hunt, led to several conflicts of interest in research in the tobacco, drug, and soda industries. At the end of the book readers learn that Knight has donated \$500 million to Oregon for the Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Acceleration Scientific Impact, something Hunt implies is cause for concern.

Another of Hunt's tenuous connections is what he identifies as the facility and salary arms race in college athletics. Sonny Vicaro is identified as the person who helped start this race by paying coaches to feature the Nike brand, and by hosting showcases for top high school players where only programs and coaches using the product were invited. Hunt later identifies Rick Neuheisel's rise from assistant football coach at Colorado, to the highest paid coach in the NCAA (without much accomplishment), to his ultimate departure from the University of Washington, as a predominant example of this arms race. Nike's sponsorship of college athletics is an additional form of lucrative revenue for departments, but any connection between Nike, Neuheisel, and the overall arms race is vague.

Chapter seven focused on Oregon's participation in this "race" and its subsequent rise in athletics. The Ducks first Rose Bowl berth in 37 years in 1995 led Frohnmayer to realize the impact a successful athletic team can have on donors, at a time when the tax revenues the university was collecting from the state were at a significant low. Quarterback Joey Harrington and the football teams around the turn of the 21st century offered Oregon a taste of success that was further quenched when Chip Kelly was named head coach in 2009. This is when Knight donated funds for the state of the art John E. Jaqua Academic Center for Student Athletes, a facility like no other in the country. Oregon, nicknamed the University of Nike by its own athletic department, became a power in football (as well as other sports) and a national brand.

University of Nike is a worthy read for sport business professors and students interested in careers in intercollegiate athletics or entrepreneurship. It would make for an excellent selection in a specific graduate-level topics course on intercollegiate athletics, and a strong supplementary selection in sport business classes diverse enough in topics. It would not be ideal as a primary text in an undergraduate sport governance or similar course due to the rather one-sided critical view of college athletics.