



An Athletic Director's Story and the Future of College Sports in America

By Robert E. Mulcahy III with Robert Stewart.
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Bob Mulcahy oversaw a period of national prominence for Rutgers University's intercollegiate athletics department during his tenure as Athletic Director (AD). Many of the university's athletic programs were competitive nationally, with student-athletes succeeding both on the field and in the classroom. As could be expected in an autobiography from an AD whose controversial termination was publicly perceived as both misleading (at best) or deserving (at worst), significant effort was taken to present his dismissal as the former. A 24 page foreword by Mulcahy's former colleague, John Samerjan, summarizes his career accomplishments with an excessive emphasis on his unwavering leadership and integrity. Without stating the specific circumstances that led to his dismissal, both claiming it was without explanation and scathing media allegations pertaining to his honesty and business practices were groundless, Mulcahy provides his own interpretation of the events surrounding his termination in chapter nine. The chapter concludes with him claiming he left Rutgers as he had come to it, "with dignity and integrity" (p. 149). Throughout the entirety of the book, Mulcahy reinforces his self-image of moral fortitude and character, continually positioning his management decisions as collaborative, dialogue-driven, and integrity-based.

An Athletic Director's Story and the Future of College Sports in America can be organized into two parts. The first nine chapters serve as a self-reflection of Mulcahy's career in the public service sector, with the primary focus being his time as Rutgers AD. The remaining two chapters, which represent one-quarter of the book's length, offers Mulcahy's thoughts on what he perceives to be the most pressing issues within intercollegiate athletics (chapter 10) and how he believes they should be addressed (chapter 11).

In the early chapters of the autobiography, Mulcahy elaborates on how his work experiences, and the subsequent professional and personal relationships established from those experiences, both positioned him for his role as AD and prepared him in fulfilling its duties. In chapter one, he highlights his political involvement in improving athletics facilities at Rutgers years prior to his appointment as AD and concludes it by including a *Star Ledger* article by John McLaughlin that introduces readers to his future nemesis, foreshadowing the group's involvement in his eventual dismissal: *The Rutgers 1000*. The group consists of more than 1,000

alumni and students who want the university to drop Division I-Football Bowl Subdivision (DI-FBS) level athletics.

Mulcahy shares his career path in the second chapter, one that is relatively unique among DI-FBS ADs. His initial career advancement occurred outside of the sport industry while functioning in different capacities as a public servant for the state of New Jersey. Upon his graduation from Villanova University in 1958, Mulcahy was commissioned as an ensign in the U.S. Navy. Following his peace time military service, he entered local government and served as the mayor of Mendham, NJ. Starting in 1974, Mulcahy would advance quickly through several state government appointments and was appointed Deputy Commissioner of New Jersey's Department of Institutions and Agencies. Two years later, he would become the state's first Commissioner of Corrections. After overseeing the state's correctional facilities for two years, he was appointed Chief of Staff for New Jersey Governor Brenden Byrne.

In 1979, Governor Byrne would appoint Mulcahy as the President and CEO of the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority (NJSEA). While Mulcahy served in the role, the Meadowlands Sport Complex would become home to the NFL's New York Giants and New York Jets. He was also instrumental in New Jersey hosting several 1994 Men's World Cup matches and the 1996 NCAA Men's Final Four. Prescient of his next appointment, in 1983, Mulcahy assisted Rutgers in securing state funds for upgrading its football facilities. In 1998, after a 19-year tenure with the NJSEA, Mulcahy became the AD of Rutgers University Athletics.

In chapter three, Mulcahy discusses immediate changes he made to the athletic department upon his appointment. These changes included transforming the culture, consolidating and centralizing offices on campus, positively adjusting perceptions of athletics among stakeholders (e.g., student-athletes, faculty, alumni, etc.), improving relations with the university's senior administration, and establishing a unified direction among its athletic programs—both revenue-generating and Olympic.

In chapter four, Mulcahy identifies key challenges he faced while serving as the Rutgers AD and the steps taken to overcome them. These challenges included achieving and maintaining NCAA compliance, cutting athletics programs, and financing the construction of conference-competitive athletics facilities. According to Mulcahy, the athletic department was only able to achieve national prominence by effectively addressing these institutional issues.

However, even after achieving success with the football program, financing was an ongoing challenge, particularly for facilities and competitive coaching compensation. Mulcahy devotes pages of chapter four to explain the athletic department's budgeting practices and the internal and external "checks and balances" employed. He implies claims of irresponsible spending by the "sensationalist-minded" media during his tenure were unfounded. He continued by stating that successful fundraising for capital projects during this time were the result of strong relationships between himself, the New Jersey state government, and many senior university administrators.

In 2007, near the end of Mulcahy's AD tenure, the Rutgers Women's Basketball team was in the national spotlight when its coach and players were victims of inflammatory remarks from media shock jock Don Imus. An entire chapter (chapter five) is committed to communicating the steps that he and the university took to protect both Coach Vivian Stringer and its student-athletes while mitigating possible long-term aftershocks from the incident. Mulcahy discusses the myriad of phone calls, conversations, and strategy meetings that occurred prior to providing a formal response by the athletic department regarding the incident, and the later coordination of an in-person apology from Don Imus to Stringer and her players.

While the sixth chapter is titled, “Upholding Traditions,” it communicates several traditions that were instituted during Mulcahy’s tenure. Examples of such traditions included the wearing of red to sporting events, the “Scarlet Walk” (i.e., a pep rally walk into the stadium) before home football games, and taking the marching band to one regular season away game and all bowl games. If anything, the chapter reinforces the embedded position that he had to rebuild the athletic program at its foundation including traditions.

In chapter seven, Mulcahy discusses the mid-2000s conference realignment which led to the discontinuation of Big East Conference football. He criticizes the athletic programs that exited the conference early (e.g., Miami, Virginia Tech, and Boston College) and expresses admiration for Big East Commissioner Mike Tranchese’s leadership. Ultimately, he conveys his conviction that television money led to the disbanding of the conference as it had been earlier constituted. While Rutgers did not accept an invitation to the Big Ten conference until 2012, four years after Mulcahy’s termination, he concludes the chapter by mentioning some exploratory discussions that occurred between him and Big Ten Conference Commissioner Jim Delany, and his belief that Rutgers joining the Big Ten Conference was the right decision.

Mulcahy discusses his approach in recruiting, collaborating, evaluating, compensating, and terminating coaches in chapter eight. While the chapter covers coaching decisions across all programs, the greatest attention is devoted to his decision for both hiring and retaining Greg Schiano, who received multiple National Coach of the Year Awards in 2006.

Mulcahy’s ten years as the Rutgers AD functions as a valuable case study for college students whose aspirations involve a career in intercollegiate athletics. Given his background in government, Mulcahy effectively communicates the challenges of managing an intercollegiate athletics department while weighing the needs of its various stakeholders. Moreover, he highlights an AD’s many responsibilities and the importance of creating strong professional relationships to achieve organizational goals. He clearly believes that high-profile athletic programs work as powerful marketing and recruiting vehicles for universities and benefitting academics. Corresponding to this conviction, he finds multiple occasions to challenge the perspectives of those who would suggest the de-emphasis of athletics on college campuses would axiomatically lead to improved academics.

In the final two chapters (i.e., chapters 10 and 11), Mulcahy shares what he perceives to be the most pressing issues currently affecting intercollegiate athletics: (a) the increasing influence of the Power 5 Conference commissioners; (b) the threat of student-athlete unionization; (c) the antitrust concerns surrounding athletes’ intellectual property rights; (d) the establishment of an NCAA due process for sanctioning partner school violations; and (e) student-athlete safety related to head trauma.

With an “insider” voice of someone who has recently exited intercollegiate athletics administration, his presentation of the issues considers multiple stakeholder perspectives. While acknowledging the political, commercial, and status quo challenges to some of the solutions he proposes, they are grounded positions. Both his experience with the NCAA and background in local and state government policy are evident in his recommendations. This book is a viable supplemental resource for an athletic administration, sport governance, trends and issues, or introduction to sport management course.