

Extravagance

12-3-2015

Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Other History Commons](#), [Sports Management Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Extravagance" (2015). *On Sport and Society*. 76.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/76>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Public History at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in On Sport and Society by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact lee.dotson@ucf.edu.

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
December 3, 2015

In a recent analysis of the money flow in intercollegiate football, *The Washington Post*, laid out in considerable detail the not so surprising conclusion that revenue at the Power Five Conferences has increased dramatically over the past decade, while spending has exceeded the growth of revenue. Nationally between 2004 and 2014 some 48 athletic departments increased their income from \$2.67B to \$4.49B. Despite the apparent windfall 25 of those departments ran a deficit in 2014, and two of them, Auburn and Rutgers, lost more money in 2014 than they did in 2004.

The ability to finish debt free seems to be an endangered talent, while the extravagant tastes of athletic departments seem insatiable.

Several years ago this tendency was described as an "arms race" and involved such things as bigger and better workout facilities, practice facilities, number and quality of trainers, and more assistant coaches. There were new stadiums, or refurbished and expanded stadiums with more luxury boxes for corporate use or simply for the care and feeding of politicians and donors.

In recent years the arms race has come to the training table where the team dietitian has been replaced by a team of dietitians, and gourmet chefs have been hired by athletic departments. A recent survey by the Collegiate and Professional Sports Dietitians Association (yes, there is such an organization) found that at the top athletic programs average spending increased on food and beverages by 145 percent in the past year going from \$534,000 to \$1.3M. This followed the NCAA decision to lift limits on meal and snack spending on athletes.

The operative rule seems to be if you can do it, you must do it.

At Ohio State, always a leader in these matters, there is now a team of four registered dietitians funded by a budget of \$1.5M, double what it was one year ago. Ohio State also has added "fuel zones" in its training facilities where athletes can find sandwiches, chips, fruits, yogurts, and hummus. What? No caviar?

New kitchens have been added across the athletic landscape where the best available chefs display their talents for the benefit of the student athletes. Auburn, the university that can easily claim to be the biggest spender in the intercollegiate arms race, added three dietitians, a Greek yogurt bar for its fueling stations, and a \$6.6M wellness kitchen. These chefs also serve the luxury boxes, special events, and a plethora of the culinary needs of the athletic department.

It is interesting that in most of the discussions of their programs for nutrition the phrase "fueling the athlete" is used. Is the athlete being equated to a machine? Is this simply another objectification of the college athlete? Maybe not, but it does come close, and reveals another unhealthy tendency in sportsworld.

Perhaps nothing says excess as well as the remodeling of the Texas A&M stadium. For a mere \$485M dollars Kyle Field has added some distinguishing appointments to the décor. There is a football shaped 100 yard atrium, the Heritage Lounge done in dark wood to highlight the black and white photos of football heroes and games past, and for the truly generous of supporters there is the Founder's Club. It consists of 12 suites set at the 50 yard line and houses those who were willing to fork over from \$5M to \$12.5M. over the next five to 20 years. Oil paintings of the generous adorn the suite along with personalized furnishings all done up in what I am sure is the best of taste. The Club itself has two bars, a baby grand piano, and a chandelier hovering over the proceedings. The new seating capacity of the stadium is in Michigan, Ohio State, and Penn State territory at close to 103,000.

This wonderful addition at A&M has set off a mad race of expansion elsewhere. Notre Dame, Arizona State, and Oklahoma have all announced plans for luxury additions at their stadiums. One can only presume that many others will follow as athletic departments seem to have more money than they can imagine how to spend. Perhaps some creative Athletic Director will think to purchase the exclusive rights to Emerill, the person, for the care and feeding of athletes, alumni, and boosters.

In the meantime these budget breakers will have to content themselves with driving up the price of coaches. The top ten salaries now start at over \$4M and run up to Nick Saban

who along with Jim Harbaugh are north of \$7M dollars. Urban Myer is just under \$6M in third place. Clearly something must be done about that as Meyer could be in danger of being paid less than OSU's four dietitians.

Coaches' salaries have doubled over the last decade and they show no signs of slowing the pace. In addition the assistant coaches have seen their compensation shoot upward with the updraft of coaches' salaries. Assistant coaches now pull down from \$250,000 to \$1.5M a year at the major football schools, while the number of assistants has increased geometrically.

Add to the salaries the perks such as use of airplanes, cars, houses, country club memberships, and anything else the A.D. or coach can think of, and soon you are talking about real money. Then of course there are the parting gifts. A few weeks ago the University of Central Florida pushed its coach out the door giving him \$200,000 per year for the next five years to serve as a consultant for twelve days a year. That seemed excessive to some until it was learned recently that if Les Miles lost his job at LSU his parting gift would be in the \$15 to \$20 million dollar range. The rewarding of failure has of course become commonplace in this country of golden parachutes and buyouts.

And one more salute to Auburn from *The Washington Post* study. In September Auburn unveiled a new 11,000 square foot HD video screen that is the height of a five story building. At night it produces a glow that can be seen across the plains of Alabama for thirty miles. The cost was \$13.9M spent with batting an eye by an athletic department that posted a \$17M debt in the previous year.

All of this fiscal mismanagement comes courtesy of those who insist that the athletes, the main attraction in the intercollegiate athletic show, should not be paid lest they suffer the curse of no longer being amateurs.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

Copyright 2015 by Richard C. Crepeau