


7-16-2001

## Knight Commission: Another Futile Attempt to Reform College Athletics

Richard C. Crepeau  
University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Other History Commons](#), [Sports Management Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)  
Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety>  
University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

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 [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Knight Commission: Another Futile Attempt to Reform College Athletics" (2001). *On Sport and Society*. 140.  
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/140>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
JULY 16, 2001

Once again the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics has issued a call for reform. As was the case with the Jeremiad Sermons of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Puritans, the call for reform has become a ritual whose primary function is to cleanse the sinner so that they might go forth and sin again. Any real prospect of reform and change is as remote in intercollegiate athletics today as it was for the debauched sinners in the Massachusetts of the Mathers. Or as they used to say in rural America, the horse has long since left the barn.

The most important step needed, the Commission said, is the formation of a "coalition of college presidents whose prestige and influence would give individual presidents the support to carry out the changes." Admitting that the "good intentions and the reform measures of recent years have not been enough," the Commission describes the college sports environment as "abysmal" and "disgraceful." True enough, but hardly a new observation.

Then the usual reforms are listed. Graduation rates must be improved, athletes must have the full student experience, time spent on a sport must be reduced, minor leagues should be created as an alternative route to professional athletics, universities must get control of scheduling, and bring the television and commercial apparatus surrounding college sport under control.

The commission wants coaches to understand that their jobs should be "primarily to educate young people," and that failure to graduate fifty percent of their players by 2007 would result in banning from conference championships or post-season play.

Over the past two weeks, since the issuance of the report, there have been several stories crossing the sports pages of America, which expose the futility of these calls for reform.

-The NCAA quickly expressed its opposition to the notion of post-season bans based on graduation rates and publicly doubted the advisability of turning over power to a coalition of presidents.

-ESPN and the NCAA announced they had agreed to an 11-year contract worth more than \$200 million to televise 21 collegiate national championships. The big winner was the women's basketball tournament. The new contract will however require

scheduling changes for games. Time and day of competition will be dictated by television, not by student needs.

-The University of Minnesota is suing to have fired coach Clem Haskins return much of the \$1.5 million he received in a buyout after being fired in the wake of the academic fraud scandal uncovered in the men's basketball program in 1999.

-Rick Pitino signed a new deal with Adidas believed to be in the range of \$250,000 annually. That does not include "standard" merchandise allowances for Pitino's summer basketball camp and personal use, or \$150,000 worth of equipment for the University. In March, Pitino signed a contract with the University of Louisville worth \$12.25 million over six years if coach stays long enough to collect a \$5 million "loyalty bonus" at the end of the 2006-07 season.

The Adidas contract boosts Pitino's earnings to \$1.325 million next season and to \$1.525 million when his university salary increases in 2003. With the loyalty bonus figured in, average annual earnings could be \$2.2 million with performance and academic bonuses adding \$550,000 annually.

-The NCAA informed Tennessee last month that there would be no continuation of its investigation into allegations of academic fraud involving the athletic program.

In the face of these routine stories of money and corruption, it is more than amusing that the Knight Commission proposes that colleges "work to minimize commercial intrusions in arenas and stadiums so as to maintain institutional control of campus identity." More telling, the Commission did not suggest eliminating advertising agreements or doing away with naming-rights deals for stadiums.

Earlier this year Bob Stoopes football coach at the University of Oklahoma had his annual salary increased to two million dollars for winning the national championship. This still leaves him behind his mentor Steve Spurrier at the University of Florida. No similar salary increase has been reported for any coach, football or otherwise, who has increased the graduation rates for the university, raised the academic performance of their players, or declined endorsement contracts out of loyalty to their university.

In short the levels of corruption of the academic mission of the

university will continue to be jeopardized by the highly commercialized nature of the intercollegiate entertainment industry. In the current system the reward structure guarantees this. The Knight Commission is no match for the powers that be which include boosters, alumni, television, sponsors, elected officials, trustees, students, some faculty and many university administrators.

As for reform by Presidents, Knight Commissions, or any other body lamenting the condition of American Higher Education, it is no more likely than it was to think that the young people of 17th century New England would give up drinking and sex.

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 2001 by Richard C. Crepeau