

THE DECLINE OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL

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It was not long ago that college football was an honest and respected part of our American life. For some, it was as much a part of our society as hotdogs and apple pie. The nation would sit back and watch as Army would square off against Navy in their annual gridiron battle. Sports writers would gather every year to pick the nation's best college football player, who usually had the All-American looks and innocence of the boy next door. This player represented everything that was good in all of our lives. In short, college football was a reflection of what many people perceived as the "American dream". Success in the classroom, which would lead to a bright and prosperous future, and success on the playing field, which would lead to fame and glory, went hand in hand. Yes, it was not too very long ago that these were the images conjured up by the term college football, but it seems as if it were an eternity ago. The complexion of the game has changed drastically over the past few decades. It has lost its boyish innocence and has become a major business. College football has become a big money spectacle. something must be done to give the sport back the innocence it once had and to put the amateur back into the student-athlete. But what can be done to remedy the various problems which plague college football?

As with any problem, the first step in reaching a solution is to define exactly what is wrong. Probably the biggest problem in college football, and the one from which all others stem, is the tremendous pressure for teams to win. The pressure comes not from within, as in the players or coaches, but from outside sources such as alumni and fans. Teams are expected to win. Once a team has reached the top they are expected to stay there by whatever means necessary. This is not a view which is restricted to college football alone; it is consistent with the view of our whole society.

Winning at all costs means that college coaches will try to stock their team with the country's best players. To do this, coaches sometimes use illegal methods. One of the most common methods is illegal recruiting. A college can offer a student-athlete a full scholarship that will cover the total cost of school; anything beyond that is considered illegal. In many cases players receive cash bonuses for attending a certain school; they are then given a salary during their time at the school. Other



Has College Football Lost It's Innocence?

"perks" such as free cars and airline tickets are commonplace in recruiting. In most cases money does not come from coaches, but from alumni who are more than willing to help a winning cause. According to Brian Bosworth, linebacker for the Seattle Seahawks of the National Football League, his bank account never fell below two thousand dollars while he was a player at Oklahoma University. He openly admitted that his main source of income during his college days came from alumni who wanted to keep him happy. He also added that he knew of many other players that were receiving the same type of treatment. Bosworth also said that the coaches knew about the illegal payments, but they would just turn their heads and look the other way. After all, if you have good football players that are going to win, why rock the boat.

Another source of pressure comes from the school's own administration. With large crowds, lucrative television contracts, college football has become a multi-million dollar business. Coaches are asked to fill the stadium in order to create revenue for the school. In order to do that, coaches must win games. If they do not win games, the administration is always more than happy to find someone who will, regardless of his methods or morality. With these types of demands, coaches feel it almost necessary to do whatever it takes to win. In some cases, the entire institution shares this type of attitude.

When an entire institution is willing to put up with a win or die attitude, the effect on academics can be devastating. In fact, the academic aspect of the student-

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athlete's life is all but forgotten. The athlete is pushed through school being kept eligible by taking the easiest of courses, and having the coaches talk to administrators whenever necessary. The athlete is used for four years like a piece of meat to help his team win. When the athlete's last game has been played, he is usually notified that he has not earned enough credits and will probably not graduate. That is why graduation rates for big time college football are so low.

Another problem that has arisen from the tremendous pressure to succeed in college football is the use of anabolic steroids. Due to increased competition, athletes feel they must use steroids to keep up. Steroids are a synthetic form of the hormone testosterone. These steroids can make a person bigger, stronger, faster, and more aggressive. The tragic part is that steroids can cause kidney failure, liver damage, heart disease, and impotence. The tremendous increase in size and strength that steroids can cause is extremely obvious, yet coaches do very little to discourage the use of these deadly drugs. The reason that they do not stop their players from taking steroids is simple; steroids can help a team win. In some cases, the coaches themselves are supplying the players with the drugs. The thrill of victory is one thing, but when it starts to cost lives, something must be done.

If college football is to shake its tarnished image, and regain some of its old glory, something must be done immediately. There are no clear cut answers for each problem, but with hard work and knowledge, some progress can be made. One positive step that the NCAA has taken is the installment of Proposition 48, which says a player cannot play his freshman year in college if his high school G.P.A. was not over a 2.0 and his SAT's were not above a 700. This is a step in the right direction, but I think it should be carried one step further as in the Ivy League, where freshman are not eligible to play varsity football regardless of how well they did in high school. This gives the student a chance to get accustomed to the rigors of academic life without having to worry about playing in front of 100,000 people each Saturday. This rule enables them some time to get their priorities straight.

Another possibility to relieve some of the pressure would be to give coaches tenure or more job security, so they would not be as compelled to cheat to win. Limiting the number of scholarships a college can give to coincide with the number of football players that they graduate could also be helpful.

Still another solution would be to cut down the tremendous amount of money that goes along with winning in major college football. Teams that make it to the post-season bowl games can make as much as six-million from one game. This money should be



OK, so there are Problems. Are there Solutions?

distributed equally among all college football teams across the country. This would eliminate the desire to cheat. Winners and losers from across the nation would share the winnings from all of college football equally. This would mean the only difference between a winning and a losing program would be the pride and recognition. This pride and recognition would be enough incentive for teams to want to win, but not nearly enough incentive for teams to feel the need to cheat. Schools would no longer risk tarnishing their reputation, and the game could once again become an extra-curricular activity, instead of a business.

The last solution is to have the National Football League form a minor league, just as professional baseball has. This would allow the players who are only interested in playing football to do so. This would weed out the players who have been ruining college football. Let's face it, some players go to college just to play football. Let these non-students play and legally earn some money, and let the athletes that would like to earn an education while playing football do just that. It's time to put the college back into college football and the student back into the student-athlete.

All of these solutions could work if they are properly applied, but all of the solutions in the world will do nothing unless the school administrators and coaches take a long, hard look at themselves and decide to make a drastic change from within. They must realize that they may be winning a few football games, but in the long run, they are ruining the lives of many young men. This is just too high a price to pay for victory. All those involved must redefine their principles and priorities. Once this is done, the solutions can be put to work, and the game can once again become a respected part of college life.

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