

College of Business book review by Kadie Otto, Ph. D.

Title: "Unpaid Professionals: Commercialism and Conflict in Big-Time College Sports"

Author: Andrew Zimbalist

Publisher: Princeton University Press

Length: 252

Price: \$29.95

Reading time: 7 hours

Reading rating: 9 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 4 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

#### AUTHOR EXPOSES THE EXPLOITATIVE REALITY THAT COMMERCIALIZATION HAS ON BIG-TIME COLLEGE ATHLETICS

With the recent passing of the college football bowl season, reviewing Andrew Zimbalist's book, "Unpaid professionals: Commercialism and conflict in big-time college sports," seems apropos. This year there were 32 bowl games. The broadcast rights for just the Fiesta, Orange and Sugar Bowls from 2007-10 equates to a \$320 million/4-year contract with Fox Sports to be shared amongst the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) conference members.

The commercialization of big-time college athletics is certainly not a new revelation; rather, it has steadily evolved since the inception of the NCAA in 1905. In his book, Zimbalist sheds light on the problems that exist in college athletics due, in large part, to the commercialization of what was once an educational activity. As a result of the shift from college athletics as 'educational' to college athletics as 'commercial,' problems such as unethical conduct, improper recruiting, extra benefits and exorbitant coaches' salaries have left those concerned calling for an overhaul of the business entity otherwise known as the [non-profit] NCAA.

Zimbalist begins by reminding his readers that a student's participatory status in college athletics is to be that of 'amateur'. The reality, however, is that athletic requirements placed on elite athletes more accurately reveal their status as that of 'professional'. On a legal level, Zimbalist points out that the NCAA's use of the term "student-athlete" was deliberately constructed to carefully side-step the issue of athlete as 'employee' under the National Labor Relations Act.

What's more, Zimbalist notes that the NCAA is engaged in lucrative television contracts selling the rights to exclusively air the Division I basketball tournaments to the tune of \$6 billion over 11 years with CBS for the men; \$200 million/11-year with ESPN for the women. In 1992, the base fee for financial contracts between the NCAA and corporate sponsors (American Express, Gillette, Rawling, Pepsi, RCA, Oldsmobile, Taco Bell, etc.) was \$1.6 million/year. Currently, the NCAA's marketing rights deals with CBS have been purchased by mega-corporations such as Coca-Cola, AT&T, Pontiac, The Hartford, Lowes, and State Farm Insurance for the hefty price tag of \$500 million for 11 years (\$45 million/year).

In the last few chapters of his book, Zimbalist offers suggestions for reform. First and foremost, Zimbalist states that reform must be sincere (i.e., the NCAA, its member conferences and individual universities must value a student's education over the financial gain acquired when a student's athletic talent is exploited). His proposals include: professionalizing the team or allowing a quota of non-matriculated athletes, shortening the length of playing seasons and the number of hours athletes spend practicing each week, giving coaches long-term contracts based on academic success, and eliminating freshman eligibility.

While adhering to the capitalistic model has certainly grown America economically, it has, on the flip side, polluted other facets of our society (specifically education and athletics) which originally thrived under a philosophical model. Today's athletic model has allowed itself to be engulfed by Capitalism; whereby, winning has been elevated to the status of 'ultimate goal'. This win-at-all-cost mentality has led to the de-emphasis of core educational and character building values that were once an outcome of athletic participation. Capitalism has, indeed, permeated big-time athletics so as to manufacture the athlete as 'product' instead of athlete as 'productive social being'.

For more information regarding reform movements in college athletics visit the following websites: The Drake Group at <http://www.thedrakegroup.org/>, The Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA) at <http://www.neuro.uoregon.edu/~tublitz/COIA/index.html>, and The Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics at <http://www.knightcommission.org/>. For previously reviewed books, visit our Web site at [www.wcu.edu/cob/](http://www.wcu.edu/cob/).

Kadie Otto, Ph. D., is an assistant professor and director of the undergraduate sport management program in the College of Business at Western Carolina University. Her research interests include the commercialization of, and unethical conduct in, college athletics as well as the issue of state action as it relates to the NCAA. For previously reviewed books, visit our Web site at [www.wcu.edu/cob/](http://www.wcu.edu/cob/).