

Book Review: Unpaid Professionals: Commercialism and Conflict in Big-Time College Sports

Michael J. Mondello

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/sportslaw>



Part of the [Entertainment and Sports Law Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Michael J. Mondello, *Book Review: Unpaid Professionals: Commercialism and Conflict in Big-Time College Sports*, 10 Marq. Sports L. J. 165 (1999)

Available at: <http://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/sportslaw/vol10/iss1/11>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Marquette Law Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact megan.obrien@marquette.edu.

*UNPAID PROFESSIONALS: COMMERCIALISM AND
CONFLICT IN BIG-TIME COLLEGE SPORTS*

Andrew Zimbalist

[Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1999]

xv/ 252 pages

ISBN: 0-691009554: \$19.95

Because of their visibility and tremendous influence in our society, intercollegiate athletic programs' potential to promote educational excellence and provide leadership is enormous. In his latest book *Unpaid Professionals*, economist professor Andrew Zimbalist offers empirically based research providing a solid foundation to answer some of the ongoing questions associated with collegiate sports over the past seventy-five years. Unfortunately, many of these ideas reiterate what is quickly becoming public knowledge, that major college athletics are big business. In addition, Zimbalist further examines the perception of the "student athlete" in today's higher education environment and offers ideas to help reform college sports as they enter the new millennium.

The framework of the book is established in chapter one with an introduction that includes the debatable purpose of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Specifically, the NCAA manual states that the basic premise of the NCAA is "to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and the athlete as an integral part of the student body and, by doing so, retain a clear line of demarcation between intercollegiate athletics and professional sports."¹ Clearly, this definition is tenuous at best.

Next, the significant television revenues accrued through coalitions with the major networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC and their contracts with the Bowl Championship Series (ABC), the NCAA Men's Basketball tournament (CBS), and the exclusive television rights to broadcast Notre Dame's home football games (NBC) are discussed. Accordingly, with an excessive operating manual, profitable television contracts with numerous networks, and the intense pressures to win games in the two revenue producing sports of football and men's basketball, collegiate athletic programs currently struggle to differentiate themselves from professional sports. Zimbalist is quick to note that although commercialism and corporate interest have saturated collegiate sports, two additional factors are responsible for the changing perceptions of college sports. First, dis-

1. NCAA CONST. art. 1 § 1.3.1, 1998-99 NCAA DIVISION I MANUAL, CONSTITUTION, OPERATING BYLAWS, ADMINISTRATIVE BYLAWS.

similar from their coaches and athletic directors, college athletes are not financially compensated. Secondly, the NCAA and its membership do not pay taxes on the millions of dollars collected from deals, sponsorship, licensing, or Final Four tickets. The author contends that intercollegiate athletics are at a crossroads, and *Unpaid Professionals* is a blueprint for tackling some of the difficult choices that lie ahead for those involved in the administration of college athletics.

Chapter two discusses the student athlete, provides a historical perspective on the academic eligibility requirements established by the NCAA including propositions forty-eight, forty-two, and sixteen and chronicles a number of specific cases where athletes were admitted into universities with significantly lower academic qualifications than the precedents established by the NCAA or the institution. In addition, Zimbalist acknowledges that the graduation rates of student athletes are actually higher than the graduation rates of all students, although neither number is impressive. Chapter two concludes with an assortment of cases involving student athletes who have committed crimes such as assault, gambling, and drug abuse.

In the next chapter, gender equity and Title IX are examined, including detailed information on the historic *Cohen v. Brown* lawsuit. Also, compliance with the Office of Civil Rights mandates and the level of financial assistance made available to both male and female student athletes. Zimbalist concludes, that public opinion notwithstanding, gender equity will continue to be contested in the courtroom, in Congress, and in the locker room.

Chapter four also focuses on gender equity but from the standpoint of the major disparity, which exists in the salaries earned by college coaches based on gender. In one example, Zimbalist chronicles the legal battles involving Marianne Stanley and Southern California over her coaching compensation package. In addition, the author details other lavish coaching contracts where total compensations commonly exceed a million dollars annually, and are often times substantially higher than the majority of an institution's faculty members.

The media is the focal point of chapter five. Specifically, Zimbalist discusses issues including the Supreme Court legal challenge of the CFA and television broadcast rights, how the major athletic conferences including the Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten, and Big Twelve have altered their memberships, the financial impact generated by the established Bowl Championship Series, and the enormous monies resulting from a universities participation in a bowl game.

In chapter six, Zimbalist focuses on the commercial connections that have become so commonplace in Division I-A athletics. For example, issues such as government subsidies, booster contributions, expansion and upgrades of existing facilities, sponsorships and licensing, and the recruiting networks established between major companies and high school, AAU, or summer camps teams are detailed.

College athletics and finances are the subject of chapter seven. In particular, this chapter was of extreme interest to the reviewer as his doctoral dissertation published in 1999 was an extensive financial analysis of Division I-A athletic programs and focused on similar content. Zimbalist proposes the question, "Do intercollegiate athletics drain or support university budgets?" He also accurately points out that one of the biggest dilemmas in correctly answering this question revolves around one major problem. There is virtually no uniformity in the application of the accounting methods conducted among the institutions reporting their financial figures. For example, although the revenues and expenses accumulated by two separate athletic departments may be equal, there is a strong likelihood that these figures will be reported significantly differently. Consequently, the promulgation and interpretation of these reports may indeed be questionable.

Chapter eight investigates the regulating processes employed by the NCAA. These policies are established to provide a framework of rules to operate an athletic department, discipline coaches for committing violations, and also decide an equitable punishment for programs conducting their business outside the boundaries of NCAA rules. Unfortunately, Zimbalist notes that the NCAA lacks adequate resources to effectively fund their enforcement agency. Similarly, they have granted exceptions to universities on a majority of occasions, and now allow athletic departments to investigate themselves, often times resulting in lighter penalties levied against the institution.

In the final chapter, Zimbalist provides a series of proposals, including an established criteria for student athletes, the elimination of freshman eligibility, a reduction in football scholarships, controlling summer camps, and providing coaches with long term contracts.

Unpaid Professionals is conveniently structured to create independent sections that collectively interrelate with one another. The layman's language allows the reader to understand key concepts without the ambiguity often times associated with other books. This book would serve a variety of professionals. Specifically, university presidents, athletic directors, coaches, professors, and student athletes would represent a sample of individuals that may benefit from the text. Presidents and athletic

directors attempting to have their institutions comply with Title IX, coaches interested in the welfare of the athletes, and student athletes themselves who have an interest in understanding the framework of the NCAA, could profit from reading this work. *Unpaid Professionals* is well written, straightforward, and educational. Ideally, current and future student athletes will take the necessary time to read and understand the messages which Zimbalist is attempting to convey, which ultimately could enhance the overall image of college athletics.

MICHAEL J. MONDELLO, PH.D.
Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences
University of Florida