

Same Players Different Game: An Examination of the Commercial College Athletics Industry

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There arguably is not a more complicated and broader governing body in sport than the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Aside from the popular debate of whether to pay or not to pay student-athletes, there is much more depth to the NCAA and everything it is responsible for. In *Same Players Different Game: An Examination of the Commercial College Athletics Industry*, the author—John C. Barnes, a sport management professor at the University of New Mexico—examines different areas in college athletics including the role of college athletics, Title IX, maintaining academic standards (Academic Progress Rate [APR] and Graduation Success Rate [GSR]), and even The Cold War. Throughout these 229 pages and 7 chapters, this book provides plenty of information for any reader to become well informed on the past, present, and potential future of college athletics.

This book immediately sets a tone with Chapter 1 being titled, “Ivory Towers.” This chapter introduces the reader to power athletics has over institutions and commercial sport. Within the higher education landscape, colleges and universities have to now worry about retaining enough financial resources to survive amid social, cultural, and political instability across the United States, enter collegiate athletic departments. Top-tier college athletic teams are now one of the leading forms of entertainment, and as mentioned in this chapter, has an event (i.e., March Madness) that rivals the Super Bowl for consumption among sport fans and nonfans alike. It is no coincidence that each state’s highest paid employee is either a Division I men’s basketball or a football coach. This chapter stages the rest of the book well, as most of the topics covered are all rooted in some way to money and who is or who is not getting enough of it.

Chapters 2 and 3 combine to reveal an abundance of information about eligibility, the previously mentioned APR and GSR, and the differences between being a student and student-athlete. Freshman eligibility was one of the most complex developments in the NCAA’s history. This book goes into great detail explaining the academic and athletic eligibility requirements. To sum up, the two that I thought were most impactful include the evolution of the 1.600 Rule and the NCAA allowing freshman to participate in all sports in 1972 (i.e., Chapter 2). The 1.600 Rule received a lot of backlash for several reasons such as socioeconomic discrimination and invasion of private business. One of the most powerful quotes associated with the connotation of student-athlete comes from this chapter (i.e., Chapter 2), and it reads, “it was clear that at this time the leadership of the NCAA was more interested in allowing athletes to take seats in classrooms than

having students participate in athletics” (p. 34). The information about student athletics shifts to explain metrics used by the NCAA to measure academia of student-athletes. The APR and GSR are both academic-eligibility measures athletic departments are required to use included in NCAA Bylaw 14.8. To quickly explain these programs, APR tracks academic eligibility and retention of student-athletes. Schools can be penalized if they do not meet APR requirements. GSR, in dissimilarity, does not include punishment for schools. Both have their undesired characteristics, for example, students who transfer from the university are considered academic failures for the GSR. The APR is much more complex, but in terms of retention especially. If a student does not attend class in the spring, even if eligible, the school loses points. Because of when term grades are posted, football and basketball athletes with aspirations of getting drafted can skip spring semester while still completing their seasons and deducting APR points from their institutions. The resulting penalties range from suspensions, loss of scholarships and practice time, to restricted NCAA membership access and participation. Successfully succeeding this information, Chapter 3 includes information about characteristics and statistics surrounding these metrics. It then transitions to explain cognitive factors affecting athletes, such as their unique challenges and how social support has an impact on persevering while pursuing a degree.

Chapter 4 is perhaps the most important, confusing, and problematic chapter as far as material covered not because of the way the material is presented, but rather because of the topic covered. It starts by giving the definition of a word that has plagued and restricted student-athletes since around the 1850s: *amateur*. This term has been crucial in the NCAA’s judicial defense against paying student-athletes. This is the most watched, written, and talked about topic in college sport. Discussing the history and early struggles of amateurism is followed by Barnes explaining how Walter Byers took control and changed the culture of NCAA athletics to corporate mindedness. A well-known comparison that Barnes also makes in this chapter is that of the NCAA to a cartel. This comparison is often made because of the raw power and influence the NCAA has over a near uncountable amount of people and institutions. This chapter (i.e., Chapter 4) goes on to explain a multitude of court cases and how the NCAA seems to successfully defend every time due in large part to the definition of *amateur*.

As you are reading this review, you are probably still curious of how The Cold War fits into all of this. A term used from The Cold War has now been adopted by college athletic departments all over the country. This term is creating a nonsustainable model in college athletics that will eventually crumble, stakeholders just are not sure when. The term’s connotation that has drastically morphed from military advancement to athletic department spending is known as *arms race*. Chapter 5 provides a plethora of data related to revenue and spending of athletic departments, including reports on coaching compensation packages. On this report, 119 Football Bowl Subdivision coaches’ compensation packages were obtained, and 72 of the 119 packages were valued at over \$1 million. The lowest was New Mexico State’s Doug Martin valued at \$376,044. Compared with the highest of Michigan’s Jim Harbaugh valued at over \$9 million, it does not seem like a lot, but Barnes provides the average household income (\$39,902) of Las Cruces, NM, to show a more realistic framing of the situation. This chapter (i.e., Chapter 5) looks at the financials of every Power 5 conference, specifically