

Hart-Nibbrig, Nand, and Cottingham, Clement, *The Political Economy of College Sports*. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1986. Pp. xii, 126. Notes, bibliography, index. \$19.00.

There is an old saw that college athletics were once amateur and non-commercial; that American institutions of higher education should once again return to that model. The myth of a period of pure amateurism in college athletics has little truth to it. Nand Hart-Nibbrig, a public administration professor at West Virginia University, and Clement Cottingham, a political science professor at Rutgers, use this myth as a basis for attempting an economic and political examination of big-time college athletics in the 1980s. Using the notion that "amateurism was central to college sports before the second World War" (p. 1), they look to the rise of "corporate athleticism" (an emphasis on corporate values) which followed it. Central to their view of "corporate athleticism" are the impact of television, the involvement of boosters, and the power of the NCAA. As "corporate athleticism" has grown, they believe, the ruin of amateurism and the rise of student athletic exploitation have occurred.

The title, *The Political Economy of College Sports*, is intriguing. Chapter

titles such as the historical perspective of commercialism to corporate athletics, the economic base of corporate athleticism, the media and the transformation of college sports, and the politics of sports administration spark the reader's interest. Yet, the interest is not sustained, for there is a lack of political and economic analysis which is exacerbated by disregard for historical accuracy. In the introduction, Hart-Nibbrig and Cottingham open their volume by stating: "This book traces the evolution of college sports . . ." (p. 1). Not only is the book not a history, but the facts and their interpretation are inaccurate throughout the volume. To pick a few examples: The authors state that "the rise of television marked the end of amateurism in college sports" (p. 15). College athletics were not amateur, except in name, from before the NCAA was created in 1905. Among other professionalizing activities in the nineteenth century, there were paid performers (athletic scholarships); paid coaches, which pretty well destroyed amateurism from the time of the Civil War; collected gate receipts; and participation against professional players and teams. It did not take TV to destroy amateurism. It was destroyed before the first telecast of a college game in 1939, before radio was invented, and before the common use of the telephone. The authors also make the assertion that "as television contracts were incorporated into college sports, presidential control over athletic activities steadily weakened . . ." (p. 94). This supposes that presidents had control over college sports at some earlier date. There is no evidence that presidents once had control of athletics. In fact, there is much evidence that presidents never controlled intercollegiate athletics in either the pre- or post-television era.

Careless historical statements exist in areas outside of television. The authors claim that the 1920s gave birth to professional trainers and full-time athletic coaches (p. 23). Not true. Professional trainers began in the 1860s with the hiring of William Wood at Yale, and full-time coaches were in existence by the 1890s, as evidenced by Charles Courtney at Cornell and Amos Alonzo Stagg at Chicago. The authors note that "universities originally granted the NCAA regulatory authority in 1906 so that each campus would not have to regulate intercollegiate sports individually" (p. 84). Wrong again. The NCAA was formed on the principle of "home rule" so that each institution could set its own policy. The NCAA merely gave guidelines so that individual institutions might be persuaded to follow them. Hart-Nibbrig and Cottingham argue that money has dominated all other concerns and thus football emerged as the first of the major sports following that of crew, as the sports "generating less money were labeled minor sports" (p. 19). The fact is that baseball was a major sport at nearly all colleges before football came to dominate. More significantly, crew, which has no gate receipts, was dominant for a period in the 1860s and 1870s. Major sports in colleges appear to be created by the prestige they produce, not necessarily the amount of money they generate, as evidenced by two indigent sports, crew and track and field. Thus, crew, which was almost always a deficit-producing sport, was at one point capable of creating front-page news and over 30,000 spectators.

Notwithstanding the historical inaccuracies, the analysis of more recent

events does not stand the scrutiny of closer examination. The impact of television on college sports is a case in point. One would have expected the authors to examine college sport through a political and economic analysis. This, unfortunately, is not the case. What the reader gets is unsubstantiated statements, to wit: "Television has in fact replaced universities and colleges as the producer of intercollegiate sports" (p. 34). While it is obvious that television has had a significant effect upon the college games, the nature of intercollegiate athletics was well defined before the advent of television. Athletics were effectively commercialized, professionalized, and rationalized a half-century before television came on the scene as an economic and cultural force. If television has had a strong impact, as most would agree, the reader needs to know something of the financial impact of television and the political machinations behind decisions affecting college sport. The volume produces no analysis based on facts. If television produces college sport, as the authors claim, how is it that big-time hockey has arisen without television being an important factor? Isn't it more likely that after college sport has become big-time, commercial television moves in when it sees an opportunity to make a profit. If "television, not universities, is ultimately the producer of college sports" (p. 50), why then do the statistical figures indicate that income from television ranks below both ticket sales and donations? Donations, not television receipts, are the fastest growing source of income, according to the two authors. Their own figures tend to cast doubt upon their evaluation.

While much of *The Political Economy of College Sports* is unclear and based upon opaque facts, there are glimpses of clarity. In their concluding chapter on possible reforms, they state: "Although the concept of amateurism no longer plays any real part in college athletics, the public retains a strong symbolic attachment to the idea of games unadulterated by raw commercial values. In other words, the idea of amateurism perpetuates a residual[,] symbolic attachment between athletes and spectators inasmuch as it softens the commercial edges of college sports" (p. 108). Yet, when one looks at the book in total, there is too little politics, too little economics, and too much questionable history.

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