

Thelin, John R. *Games Colleges Play: Scandal and Reform in Intercollegiate Athletics*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. Pp. xviii, 203. Notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.

Few educational historians have looked at the development of the extracurriculum in American institutions of higher learning. John Thelin, professor of history of higher education and philanthropy at Indiana University, has chosen the most prominent aspect of the extracurriculum, intercollegiate athletics, focusing on the period of the past six decades. His volume, *Games Colleges Play*, clearly reveals 60 years of the century-and-one-half-old problem of trying to make extracurricular intercollegiate athletics part of the educational process. Thelin's book, subtitled *Scandal and Reform in Intercollegiate Athletics*, is based on primary sources and emphasizes the reform efforts of four independent agencies from 1929 to 1991: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1929 American College Athletics Report); American Council on Education (1952 President's Report); American Council on Education (1974 George Hanford Study); and Knight Foundation (1991 Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics Report).

The theme of Thelin's book appears to be that institutions of higher learning have not been successful in balancing academics and athletics. Despite reform efforts, Big-Time college sports have been continuously prone to athletic scandal. Thelin indicates that, at various points of the twentieth century, presidents and athletic authorities of powerful sport institutions have purposefully separated athletics by making them special and preferential and at the same time withdrawing them from the educational mission of the institution. This has resulted in scandal and the need for reform. The irony, though *not* pointed out by Thelin, is that presidents have been asked to do the reforming by each of the four reform groups, supposedly changing the scandalous conditions to which they so heavily contributed. A second irony, pointed out by Thelin, is that when reforms have occurred, the changes have been based upon the professional model, for example in the creation of full grants-in-aid for athletes.

Thelin is as much the moral philosopher as he is the historian. He discusses in historical terms what "is" and has been in college sport, but he appears to be more interested in what "ought" to be the role of college sport in higher education, "College sports ought to be fused with scholarly

programs” the author reiterates throughout the book. If Thelin desires to reconstruct intercollegiate athletics within an educational model, it would seem logical that only one group, policy makers, could accomplish his goal. Unfortunately, Prof. Thelin almost entirely overlooks American higher education policy makers, governing boards. Governing boards, not presidents, make policy. The professional-commercial model of college athletics that Thelin and the outside reform agencies abhor had been accepted by Big-Time “Ivy League” schools in the nineteenth century. The task of changing the professional-commercial model to the “ought” to be amateur model that Thelin and the reformers have desired would have to be done by policy makers, governing boards, not by those who carry out policy, presidents—or by the forgotten and impotent influencers of intercollegiate athletics, faculty and students.

Thelin is ambivalent about the role presidents have played in intercollegiate athletic reform. He notes that “presidents lacked an effective means by which to implement reform” (p. 127), indicating that the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s commercial model was ineffective. Thelin might well have emphasized that the NCAA is run by faculty representatives, who are primarily appointed by presidents, and thus is representative of colleges across America. The irony that presidents appoint non-reforming representatives, if indeed presidents favor reform, should not be lost to the historian. Some may see in this a touch of presidential hypocrisy. If history is a judge, presidents are much more prone to being athletic “boosters” than athletic reformers, a point made clear by Thelin’s chapter on “College Sports and the ‘Booster’ Campus.” Thelin’s own data from reform efforts either calling for presidential-led reform (Carnegie Report of 1929, Hanford Report of 1974, and Knight Commission Report of 1991) or actual presidential reform documents (ACE Commission of 1952 and Knight Commission Report of 1991) would tend to show that presidents have not been nor will they likely be reformers in making college sports an integral part of higher education rather than a dominating auxiliary part of university life. *Games Colleges Play* is concluded with a question from a college president: “Are we here to teach and learn or are we here to house big-time athletics?” The quote tends to confirm the paradoxical nature of college sport, for it was made by Robert Maxson while he was president of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas. Maxson was neither able to prevent scandal while Jerry Tarkanian coached basketball for the Running Rebels, nor was he able to reform Big-Time, commercialized athletics at his own institution. Maxson, however, was able to rather remarkably survive as president long enough to get another presidential position at a lesser Big-Time institution, California State University, Long Beach.

While Thelin conducts a more thorough analysis of twentieth-century reform efforts than anyone has previously, it may be unfortunate that he began in 1929 rather than with arguably the most notable and successful

reform movement in college sport history, the creation of the NCAA in 1905-06. The NCAA, which often gets criticized for moving intercollegiate athletics toward the professional model and away from Thelin's and outside reformers' amateur model, was begun by the initiative of college presidents and has been led by presidentially appointed faculty ever since. The NCAA, unlike the four reform efforts noted by Thelin, was actual reform in action rather than principally rhetoric. That it did not produce, in the long run, the kind of reform in the amateur tradition of British upper class universities at Oxford and Cambridge favored by some reformers, may tell a great deal about the nature of American higher education. Nearly four decades ago, Virgil Hancher, Oxford-educated president of the University of Iowa, pushed for the professional rather than amateur model for American colleges, not because he was enchanted with it but because he understood forces in American society. Arguing against a "needs" based scholarship program for amateur athletes (favored by Thelin), Hancher proposed full aid based upon athletic talent. "In athletics," Hancher argued, "we have consciously or unconsciously attempted to carry into the American way of life much of the British distinction between the gentleman and the professional in the field of sport. As a result," Hancher believed, "we are acting hypocritically and making hypocrites of our athletes all the way from the high schools to the Olympic games" (University of Wisconsin Archives). Reformers might well take into account the desires of the larger culture of America when attempting to reform an aspect of that culture, intercollegiate athletics.

Games Colleges Play is thoroughly footnoted, and it has a fine bibliography; however the index could have been more complete. There are only a few errors of fact or interpretation. For instance, the intrusion by the federal government into college sport is not a "new wrinkle" in the 1990s (p. 4). There are numerous instances of federal government involvement in the area of college sport: Taxation of gate receipts (1932); Department of Justice inquiry into antitrust violations of the NCAA network television contract (1951); Internal Revenue Service favoring the transportation tax (1963); Congressional proposal for a National Amateur Sports Foundation to control amateur sport against NCAA desires (1972); Congressional pressure to eliminate the NCAA 1.600 grade point rule (1972); passage of Title IX (1972); IRS attempt to tax Cotton Bowl television revenues (1977); Federal Communication Commission investigation of restrictive network television contracts (1977); passage of the Amateur Athletic Act of 1978; and Congressional inquiry into the freedom of college athletes to sign professional contracts while in school (1983). Knute Rockne, strangely one of Thelin's heroes, for Rockne favored the commercial-professional model opposed by Thelin, had a career record of 105-12, not 105-21 (p. 90). It is not true that in the period from 1960 to 1980 "there were no major scandals" (p. 155). One striking example was the college basketball bribing scandal of 1961 that led to the 1964 federal law prohibiting interstate bribery schemes. The College Football

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Association was not formed in 1981 (p. 185), but it began in 1975 as a steering committee and became official in 1976. The CFA, in 1981, financially backed the Oklahoma-Georgia television antitrust case against the NCAA.

Games Colleges Play will likely be remembered for identifying and analyzing the four major twentieth-century outside agency reform documents in college athletics. While Thelin would like to have athletics reformed by presidents and faculty, his research would tend to suggest that faculty are forgotten in the reform formula, and presidents are generally “boosters,” not reformers. Thelin’s work should be read, but it will not likely be remembered for offering a successful reform solution through presidents and faculties. They may be the irrelevant variables, if history and his book are our guides.

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