

Zimbalist, Andrew. *Unpaid Professionals: Commercialism and Conflict in Big-Time College Sports*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. Pp. 252. Notes, index. \$24.95 cb.

Andrew Zimbalist, Professor of Economics at Smith College and author of *Baseball and Billions*, turns his critical eye toward intercollegiate athletics. Zimbalist offers expert economic analysis and generally brings insights unique to his area of expertise. When he strays out of that area, he offers sharp and witty prose, but his analysis can occasionally become petulant and at times lacks historical perspective.

Unpaid Professionals is organized into eight chapters each addressing areas of concern in the intercollegiate sports industry. The final chapter offers a program of reform.

In his introduction Zimbalist deftly makes the point that there is little to distinguish professional from intercollegiate athletics. Only two differences are clear: The universities do not pay their athletes a salary and universities do not pay taxes on their revenues. Beyond that, Zimbalist details the enormous flow of money and suggests that somehow the corruption has gotten worse in the wake of the growth of the income.

In Chapter Two, "The Student As Athlete" Zimbalist points out that athletes generate massive income, but generally do not benefit themselves. The surplus goes largely to coaches and athletic directors, who are vastly overpaid. They are also the ones directing and preserving the system that feeds them so well. The vast majority of athletes can benefit economically from their experience in college only if they happen to leave with a degree and with some education. Unfortunately, many depart campus with neither.

On Proposition 48, 42, and 16, Zimbalist concludes that for all the reforms, academic standards have not significantly changed. In addition, the statistical record indicates that class is as significant as race in terms of the impact on athletic admissions. There are still too many under-qualified and unqualified students being admitted to college to play sports. In his discussion of academic standards, Zimbalist hits at the heart of the problems besetting intercollegiate athletics. He does not doubt the sincerity of the NCAA reform effort, but believes that "they are trying to reconcile an ideal of amateurism with the commercial juggernaut that big-time college sports has become" (36).

Zimbalist decries the treatment of athletes as privileged figures on campus, leading to problems with alcohol, drugs, gambling and violence. Richard Lapchick has recently challenged this view, claiming that athletes are statistically less prone to these problems than the average member of the population. A study last year by Alfred Blumstein and Jeff Benedict in *Chance* magazine, which is published by the American Statistical Association, reported that the crime rate among professional football players was much lower than that of other people of the same age and racial background.

Zimbalist's discussion of gender equity and Title IX correctly shows that, after the success of the AIAW threatened NCAA control over intercollegiate athletics, the NCAA moved to destroy the AIAW and take over women's athletics. Zimbalist claims that although participation rates have improved for women, other things such as financial assistance, scholarships, practice facilities, and travel and its amenities have lagged behind. His comparison of Marianne Crawford's success at the University of Southern California and

George Raveling's failures, both as head basketball coaches of the women's and men's teams, is stunning. Raveling was rewarded richly for failure, while Crawford's success was largely ignored.

Chapters Five and Six treat the massive infusion of money and commercial values into football and basketball, raising the level of corruption in intercollegiate athletics. As he follows the money, Zimbalist reveals an athletic establishment at the NCAA, in the conference offices, and in athletic departments which has reaped the benefits of this financial bonanza. Zimbalist presents the ego trips and extravagance financed by television, bowl money, and sponsorships in nauseating detail. These chapters are rich in analysis of television contracts, revenue sharing within conferences, the bowl games and the distribution of bowl money, and the development of the Bowl Championship Alliance despite the threat of antitrust action. Zimbalist also discusses recruitment and its methodologies, the booster organizations, a government subsidy of college sports via tax law, and sponsorship and licensing arrangements.

Zimbalist is particularly harsh on coaches who have enriched themselves with shoe contracts and other endorsement arrangements, while the athletes who must wear a certain product to play on a team are given little or no benefit from the arrangements. The amounts of money being hauled away is no small matter, and Nike even arranged stock options for some coaches who reaped millions. Zimbalist's accounts of summer basketball camps detail further corruption. Here again coaches are implicated in a burgeoning commercial network that further muddies the waters of college athletics. Here one finds the shadowy figures from the street and from gambling circles, operating on the fringes of these camps beyond the purview of the NCAA—or anyone else.

In Chapter Seven, "The Bottom Line," Zimbalist tries to unlock the complexities of accounting and the mysteries of budgeting to determine if college sports make or lose money. He explains why it is nearly impossible to do this, and he explains it with considerable skill. He then tries to examine a number of areas which will give some indication of the profitability or lack thereof. Zimbalist concludes that about a dozen schools consistently produce abudget surplus, while another two dozen do so occasionally. These are top programs only, and may explain why so many schools try to make it to the top echelon. He demolishes the idea that winning programs increase contributions and applications to universities which ultimately improve the quality of students. He does say that schools that move from obscurity to fame may get a short-term boost, but it fades quickly.

The final chapter of *Unpaid Professionals* consists of Zimbalist's recommendations for the reform of intercollegiate athletics. He begins by observing that the history of the NCAA is the history of failed reform (189). Two things need to be asked of Andrew Zimbalist's proposals. Do they constitute radical reforms and are they likely to be implemented? History tells us that if they are radical, they will not be implemented; if they are moderate enough to be implemented, they will be no more effective than what has gone before. All of what Zimbalist has written points directly to that conclusion, as does the history of intercollegiate athletics generally. His ten propositions for reform offer some interesting ideas and creative approaches. However, given the array of problems and the powerful commercial forces shaping intercollegiate athletics—let alone all of the internal forces that are aligned against meaningful change—Zimbalist's remedies would fight a forest fire with garden hose.

Unpaid Professionals is superb in detailing the problems and corruption of intercollegiate athletics, although that has been done many times. It is insightful in tracing the economic and power relationships which shape this institution. However, it is remarkably naïve in assuming that the suggested reforms could ever change the nature of the beast. As Zimbalist himself notes, intercollegiate athletics has become a “commercial juggernaut” well beyond the power of NCAA reformers.

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