

College Athletics, Commercialism, and Controversy: The Beer Hall T.V. Incident and Hypocrisy in Higher Education

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From the first intercollegiate athletic contest in 1852, a Harvard-Yale crew meet completely sponsored and financed by a railroad, colleges have been continuously accepting lucre from commercial concerns. The trip on the commercial "gravy train" was not always smooth nor free of insincerity. One such instance was the 1976 Ohio State Beer Hall television incident. It represents the conflict between questionable advertising practices in NCAA televised football contests on the one hand and protecting the integrity of higher education on the other. The Beer Hall incident symbolizes the hypocrisy in one aspect of the continuing commercialization of higher education.

The NCAA decided to move away from its traditional Home Rule with its 1951 policy to limit, collectively, live telecasting of college football to one game per week. NCAA institutions were only interested in protecting football gate receipts, not

in producing revenue from television. The NCAA could thus prohibit such advertising as alcohol, tobacco, laxatives, habit forming drugs, and feminine hygiene products to protect the image of higher education. The prohibition of alcohol advertising on football telecasts occurred early, despite the demographics that showed that those interested in college football were younger, better educated, wealthier, and male, a likely group for alcohol advertising. The banning of all alcoholic beverage advertising continued until the end of the 1960s when pressure from ABC-TV to allow beer advertising and the NCAA TV Committee suggested the change to the NCAA Council.

The NCAA opening to "intoxicating malt beverages" advertising began in 1968 when the NCAA TV Committee suggested that ABC be allowed to use advertising in pre-game and post-game shows but not during the contests. It was a proposed one-year experiment to test the reaction of viewers and the NCAA membership. ABC agreed to show no more than 50% of the proposed pre and post-game beer ads. The beer commercials had to originate *away* from the campus and stadium and be disassociated in time from showing the NCAA seal. In other words, ABC could get additional revenues if it appeared that the NCAA and its member institutions could be insulated from the negative image portrayed by alcoholic advertising. Before final acceptance, the NCAA decided to have a referendum on the controversial issue. While nearly 2/3 of NCAA member institutions voted for beer advertising and additional dollars, the "no" vote in 1968 of the minority of over 1/3 prevented the policy change. But by 1970, the NCAA had reversed its decision and allowed beer advertising.

Within four years of beer advertising, ABC chose to produce a half-time feature filmed at a local beer hall near the campus of the Ohio State University. When it was shown during the Ohio State-UCLA telecast, the picture of the Ohio State students as "football-crazy beer drinkers" placed the image of Ohio State in jeopardy. The comment "Well, that's how some of the students spent their Thursday night prior to a big game in Columbus, Ohio," raised the ire of Ohio State president Harold Enarson. Enarson led a three-year campaign against allowing television networks to portray negative images of colleges.

This research is part of a larger project looking at the influence of radio and television on the development of Big-Time athletics in America. It helps to clarify the uses and abuses and paradoxes and hypocrisies of commercialism in intercollegiate athletics and in higher education. The history of commercialism in the telecasting of American college sport fits nicely into my theory that in a country with no federal control of education, an institution of higher education will do in a pragmatic way what is best, first for its survival individually, and secondly for its growth and development. Presidents of American universities have used commercialized television of athletics to raise the image of their institutions, and they have been the first to criticize television if their image was tarnished through the same medium.

The sources for this research come from three principle archives: the Ohio State University Archives, Walter Byers Papers at the National Collegiate Athletic Association, and the NCAA Television Committee Minutes. Other institutional archives useful to this study are the University of Notre Dame Archives, the University of Oklahoma Archives, and the University of Pennsylvania Archives. Various newspapers are also used.