

INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

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Sports in a State University: the University of Illinois, 1867-1998

The paper presents a comprehensive survey and evaluation of collegiate sports at a major state university in the context of regulatory agencies and an institution, individuals and teams, amateurs and professionals, participants and spectators, alumni and administrators, and advertisers and contractors. An understanding of intercollegiate sports requires an examination of the institutional setting of students in colleges and universities, especially the interests and investments of the individuals and groups involved.

The history of intercollegiate sports has been captive to legend and lore, sagas of popular personalities, quantitative analyses, and studies by individuals in the employ of the subject institutions or media dependent upon sports. Many volumes are episodic accounts of events illustrated with images of athletes. There are better ways to study sports.

Studies of personalities, traditions, and the application of theoretical constructs are less important in understanding the interactions between sports interest groups than a systematic investigation of the activities and interrelationships between these groups. Intercollegiate sports and physical fitness programs were developed to meet the needs of persons in the 17-30 year age group. Students, faculty, administrators, alumni, salaried officials, politicians, regulatory agencies and marketing organizations have shaped organizational efforts. Programs have been packaged to meet the needs of participants, spectators, and sponsors. Changes in communications technology have produced keen market competition, large budgets, and increased regulation.

We need to consider all of the sports activities within a university and their relationship to contemporary social, commercial, and technological conditions. Reform initiatives by interest groups will be unsuccessful unless the interests and records of all parties are understood. Action on the basis of historical understanding is long overdue and requires the systematic analysis of institutional circumstances and objectives.