

CHAPTER 15

INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

PROBABLY in no other phase of the college or university are things both so well and so poorly done. The instruction and training of the major athletic teams is likely to be the best, the most individual, and the most expensive teaching done on the campus.

Regardless of the size of the institution, its major intercollegiate teams involve about 200 men. Each man is very carefully selected for his special fitness for the team and the position on the team in which he will play. He is given individual coaching and supervised practice in his special field, and plays eight to twenty intercollegiate games under the critical eye of his teacher. His diet, sleep, and all habits bearing on his health are carefully watched. Very often this superb training and experience in good sportsmanship contribute largely to the personality and later success of the student.

But no matter how many thousand men the institution may enroll, only about 200 receive this superb training, and usually the fine training of the 200 is done very largely at the expense of all the others. Of these 200 men some 30 in football bring in an income of from a few thousand to \$500,000 a year, the amount depending largely on their team's success.

Intercollegiate athletics are an excellent thing for the most brilliant athletes on the campus in that they have the opportunity to meet their equals or superiors from other campuses. So far as they involve large gate receipts, intercollegiate athletics are undesirable. They put the emphasis far too strongly on winning, as winning teams attract the biggest

gate receipts, and they bring great pressure on the alumni, the coaches, the athletic director, and on the college administration to hire brilliant athletes.

As intercollegiate athletics are now handled it is difficult to fix a policy which is wholly good. Almost all who officiate at games today are capable and fearless, and intercollegiate athletics are quite free from unfair practice or play dangerous for well-trained men. The games themselves are not usually open to much criticism. The rule prohibiting the playing of a freshman or a first-year transfer has reduced the hiring of players somewhat. Scholarship rules, where rigidly enforced, put a further check on hiring players. In spite of all this it is very difficult to be certain that every player on a team is a real college student, on his way to graduation, who came to college for an education and not to play football. The fact that everyone knows that a winning team takes in many thousand dollars more than a losing team greatly increases the pressure to secure able players at any price and also provides the money unless the latter is closely guarded by careful auditing.

Another serious objection to present-day intercollegiate athletics lies in the tremendous claim it makes on the time and vigor of the men on the teams. Strenuous practice for several hours almost every day during the season, usually classes at night on strategy and rules, with one or two major games each week, with the travel and time away from college involved, all make it extremely difficult for the student to maintain his scholarship. Add to this that most players are inevitably poor boys and must be dependent on some means of earning a part or all their expenses, and you have another reason for subsidizing players.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology does not play intercollegiate football. Chicago withdrew from the Conference in which she played for many years and now plays such teams

as she elects. Swarthmore has an athletic system including all students and plays several football teams without great concern for gate receipts. Unless some concessions are allowed major athletes in financial aids, nominal work, easy scholarship requirements, or in other ways, it is rarely possible to maintain a team that can win half her games with institutions of equal class and equal enrollment.

The trustees and the administration are clearly faced with three alternatives: 1. To give various concessions to a certain number of major athletes. This will include financial aid directly or indirectly. 2. Accepting willingly the inability of the team to win half her games with institutions of her class. 3. Give up intercollegiate athletics in football altogether or at least in the Conference in which the institution would normally play and with this the hope of any considerable gate receipts, and play teams in the class with the team maintained.

There are a few definite recommendations that can be confidently made. The head football coach should not be paid more than a full professor. Cases are on record where the coach was paid more than the president. Indebtedness should not be incurred for a stadium, fieldhouse, or other capital investment in excess of a conservative estimate of the net income from athletics for two or at most three years. Otherwise, the institution sells out its control of its coaching staff and its team to those who made the loan.

Intercollegiate athletics have so much good in them and yet involve so many problems, difficulties, and temptations, that it will be long before a fully satisfactory system for America is evolved.