

## 40. A Healthy Dose of Outrage

August 1, 1986

Len Bias, a University of Maryland senior, was a personable young man on the way to making more than a million dollars a year as a professional basketball player. The unexpected and shocking death of this outstanding athlete from an overdose of drugs earlier this summer has focused the spotlight once again on intercollegiate athletics and spurred urgent outcries in the United States that something be done to control the scandal.

Bias' death quickly became a symbol of abuses in college athletics on American campuses that have involved corrupt recruiting practices, shoddy academic standards for athletes, and - as in Bias' case - an unholy alliance between drugs and athletics. Just last week, three players who formed the core of the University of Virginia's 1985 football team were charged by federal prosecutors with conspiring to distribute drugs. The announcement was made by Attorney General Edwin Meese III.

Today, on many ranking university campuses leading athletes get the recognition of movie stars, and coaches exert more influence than the president of the institution. Outstanding high school basketball and football players are recruited in a manner that suggests that varsity sports have a higher priority on the campus than academics.

There is also in this country a tawdry linkage of college sports to gambling, commercial television, and professional sports, all of which have their own profit-making agendas. Student athletes are the essential element in the mix - the raw material. Without their athletic ability and the training they receive on campus, students would be of no use to those who exploit their talents. And universities are active partners in the process.

But the death of Bias, amid allegations of his possible ties to drug dealers and his team's involvement with gamblers, has raised to a new level the concern that college playing fields are simply training grounds for professional sports. More to the point, it has raised the issue of how our universities can sustain high academic standards if their ethical standards are in question.

There are hopeful signs. Finally, righteous indignation is gaining ground on American campuses, buttressed by a healthy dose of outrage on the part of the public and Congress as well. Campus concern and national awareness are the essential ingredients of any promising effort to bring about badly-needed reforms.

Eight major research universities recently announced the formation of a new athletic conference whose basic principle is that sports should not be permitted to eclipse the educational mission. The eight institutions are all private, independent research universities: Carnegie-Mellon University; Case Western Reserve University; the University of Chicago; Emory University; John Hopkins University; New York University; University of Rochester; and Washington University.

These universities have taken a worthy stance, but they are not typical of those that mount the large-scale athletic programs that have often lent themselves to abuses. Still, this signal from an important sector of higher education serves to remind other institutions that sports should be kept in proper bounds.

Outside the university another group, Citizens Concerned about Collegiate Athletics, has been formed. This Washington, DC-based organization, comprised mainly of young businessmen, reflects the belief that curing the ills in collegiate athletics can no longer be left to educators and coaches with vested interests. As

Walter Leonard of Howard University, a founding member of the group, states: "They're our children, not theirs."

The concerned citizens go to the heart of the problem posed by big-time sports programs in American higher education. They oppose what they call the "glorification of athletics to the denigration of academic performance," and call for colleges and universities to take "genuine responsibility for the education of student athletes," rather than using them "merely as performers."

Meanwhile, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, which is charged with overseeing ethical behavior in intercollegiate sports, has been trying to limit the amount of time college athletes devote to training for and participating in sports. Today it is not uncommon for sports competitors to spend four or more hours a day in training. When added to the extensive travel time to and from games, these students often find themselves missing classes and having little time for homework. Their academic program is almost incidental.

Adding to the tragedy, many athletes come to college with poor academic preparation. Many get low grades and fail to complete their collegiate education. They are sacrificed to sports. The level of national concern is also reflected in the fact that the US Congress is considering its own investigation. Representative Tom Luken, an Ohio Democrat, has called for the creation of a congressional commission to recommend changes in the intercollegiate system of sports that would "decommercialize" college athletics.

"In the quest for the sports college, college programs often produce celebrated athletes who are non-students . . . unprepared for life and vulnerable in many ways," Luken said.

The proposed congressional commission would recommend minimum academic standards for athletes, bar freshmen from the playing field, ban segregation of athletes in separate dormitories, reduce demands on the student athlete's time and require athletes to make demonstrable progress toward a degree. Unhappiness with what he views as "past failures" by the NCAA prompted Luken's proposal for the new commission.

Nearly sixty years ago, The Carnegie Foundation issued a scathing report on the "demoralizing influence" of big-time sports in American higher education. Since that time the "athletics industry" in America has grown more powerful and the responses of universities to the problems have become more elusive. This time it may be different.

The ethical compromises on the campus and the tragic loss of talented students have jolted both educators and private citizens alike. As academics affirm their allegiance to their students rather than to the mercenary benefits of a corrupting system, overdue reforms may finally come to pass.

## 44. Remedy for Lethargy in Language

November 21, 1986

During the past three years we at The Carnegie Foundation have been looking at higher education in the United States. This large and comprehensive study has now been completed and formally released this month. It has added further fuel to the growing national discussion about the quality of education in the United States.

~~We surveyed 5,000 faculty and 5,000 students, 1,000 academic deans and 1,000 high school students and their parents. We spent several thousand hours visiting 29 representative colleges that ranged from an Ivy League institution in New England, to a small church college in the South, to a large, land grant university in the West.~~

We found that, in America, higher education is still highly prized. This faith was captured well by a student who said to one of our researchers: "I want a better life for myself. That means college."

Continuously, we were struck by the great diversity of American higher education. No two campuses are alike. And yet, we found striking similarities, as well. We were impressed repeatedly by the degree of intellectual freedom on the campus; by the openness of ideas; and by the integrity of those who direct the work of American higher education.

At the same time, we found that many baccalaureate programs - the heart of American higher education - have been overshadowed by graduate and professional schools and that the priority increasingly has been more on credentialing students for jobs than in providing a quality education.

Here again, however, we found wide gradations from one institution to another. Perhaps a half dozen of the colleges and universities in our sample were in good health with clear goals, a curriculum with a purpose, and effective teaching. At the other end of the spectrum, several colleges we visited were barely hanging on. In between, at the majority of institutions, the picture was mixed. Overall, we characterized these places as "troubled" institutions.

In the Carnegie Report we focus on the full range of "the undergraduate experience" - from enrollment to graduation. But we begin with the conviction that proficiency in the written and spoken word is the first prerequisite for an effective education. All college students, we say, should be able to write and speak with clarity and to read and listen with comprehension.

While it is almost embarrassing even to suggest that such proficiencies are college-level skills, we heard repeatedly during our study that many students do not have the language proficiency needed for academic study. One mathematics professor put the problem this way: "There's a lot of talk around here about preparing more scientists and engineers, but the biggest problem I have with my students is getting them to read and write."

In our nationwide survey we found that more than half the faculty at US colleges and universities rated the academic preparation of incoming students as only "fair or poor." This negative rating has increased 8 percentage points since 1976. And in large measure the concern relates to language. Eighty-three percent felt that today's high school students should be academically better prepared. And two-thirds of the faculty surveyed agreed that their institution "spends too much time and money teaching students what they should have learned in secondary school."

As a way of overcoming language difficulties, most US colleges have remedial courses. More recently, many have also introduced basic skills tests for entry into the upper division - the last two years of baccalaureate study. We found it disturbing, though, that most of these screening tests focus far too much on the mechanics of language rather than on its meaning. In this manner, they contribute to the continuing inadequacy of language development.

At one university where a statewide language test is being given to college students at the end of their sophomore year, the head of the English department said: "The test devastates the content of our composition program. Because the Regents Test is primarily designed to establish a minimal level of literacy, our teaching of this test tends to make the minimum the goal, a circumstance that guarantees mediocrity in the end."

In the Carnegie Report we argue that if college students are to achieve language proficiency the solution lies not in junior or senior level testing but in better *precollege* education and in intensive remedial work at the *beginning* of the college experience, when something can be done. We recommend, therefore, that every college and university work closely with surrounding school districts to improve the teaching of English in the nation's schools. We cite in our report the National Writing Project based at the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Michigan's statewide writing project, as examples. Both have been particularly successful in assisting teachers and students in the schools with narrative, descriptive and report writing.

Further, because we believe that all students must have the capacity to think critically, to draw inferences, and to convey, through effective written and oral communication, subtle shades of meaning, we have proposed a Basic English course - with emphasis on writing - for all freshmen, preceded by an intensive remedial course for those who come to the college with only minimal levels of proficiency.

And we recommend that every college educator insist that high order intellectual and linguistic qualities be assessed in *every* class and throughout the whole of the undergraduate experience. In this sense we have borrowed from our British colleague, Ron Britton, who proposed quite a long time ago, "Language Across the Curriculum." We also discuss in the report the University of Texas at Austin which has an English language sequence for all students that extends from the freshmen to the senior years.

Our point is that language is not just another subject. It is the means by which all other subjects are pursued. And it is our position that as undergraduates refine their linguistic skills, they hone the quality of their thinking and become intellectually and socially empowered.

The full range of issues we discuss in the Carnegie Report - language, curriculum, teaching, campus life - are not new. But we conclude that they are also points of unusual opportunity. And we were enormously encouraged that on campuses all across the country we found renewed interest in general education, in the quality of teaching, and in better evaluation of the student.

The undergraduate college in America has never been a static institution. For 350 years, it has shaped its program to the changing social and economic context. As we look to a world whose contours remain obscure, we conclude the time has come to reaffirm higher learning in America, a system of education that is so central to both the economic and civic vitality of the nation.