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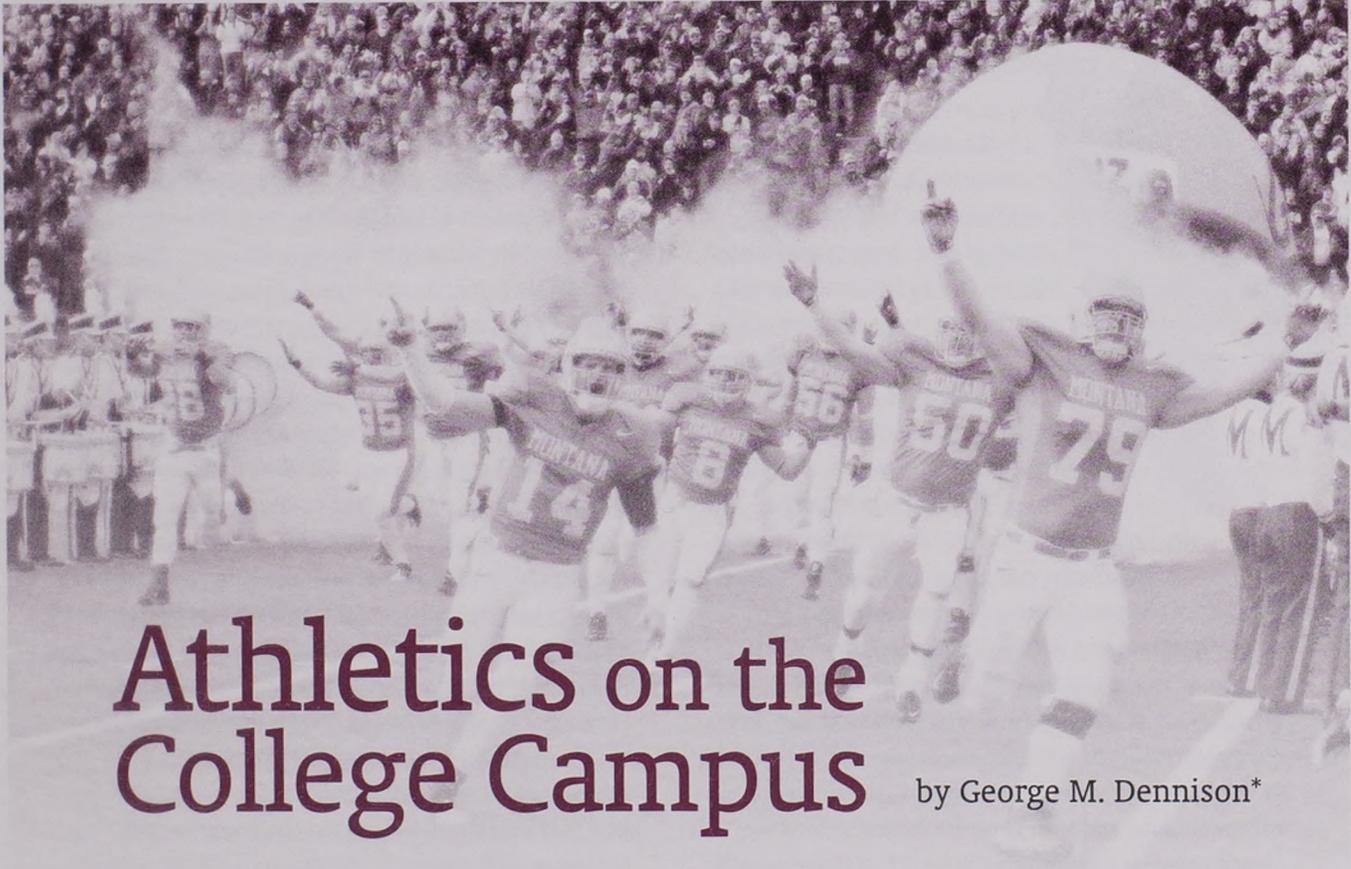
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Montana's Agenda

ISSUES SHAPING OUR STATE



Athletics on the College Campus

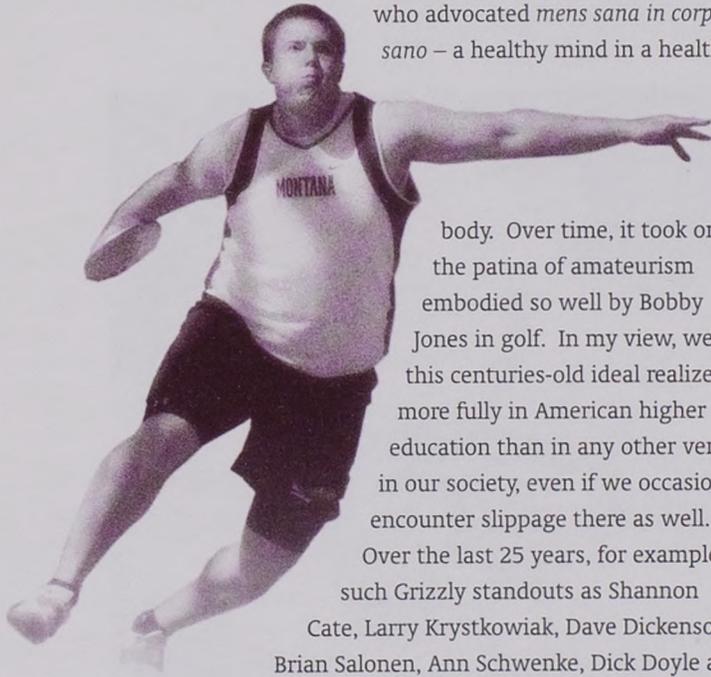
by George M. Dennison*

Introduction

In today's highly competitive and resource-constrained environment, college athletics faces threats, criticism, and a renewal of the decades-old discussion of its proper place on campus. During my 19 years as President of The University of Montana — two as a member of the old NCAA Council and three as a member of the new NCAA Division I Board of Directors — I have acted on the premise that college athletics provides one of several arenas to demonstrate excellence, and I have expected student athletes and their coaches to adhere to the highest academic and athletic standards. I believe that accomplishment in one arena raises the bar for success in the other, and that talented and motivated people can and should achieve success in both. I simply and straightforwardly deny that any University worthy of the name can afford to accept lower standards in either academics or athletics, and I insist that we must always seek to raise and not merely reset the bar for all concerned. When the serious misconduct of a small number of student athletes recently caused great embarrassment for the University, I took immediate steps to reaffirm our high standard of integrity in all aspects of athletics. When college athletics risks becoming crassly commercial, I have taken steps to ensure that athletics lives up to its finest traditions.

My philosophy concerning the relationships between academics and athletics is nothing new. Nor do I claim exclusive ownership of it. In fact, I find it distinctively American, although it clearly has roots deep in Western civilization. In part, it began with the ancient Greeks

who advocated *mens sana in corpore sano* – a healthy mind in a healthy



body. Over time, it took on the patina of amateurism embodied so well by Bobby Jones in golf. In my view, we see this centuries-old ideal realized more fully in American higher education than in any other venue in our society, even if we occasionally encounter slippage there as well.

Over the last 25 years, for example, such Grizzly standouts as Shannon Cate, Larry Krystkowiak, Dave Dickenson, Brian Salonen, Ann Schwenke, Dick Doyle and many, many others demonstrated convincingly the mutually reinforcing nature of success in organized sports and in the classroom. Because The University of Montana has recently experienced both successes and disappointments in athletics, I welcome this opportunity to think through with you the role of athletics on the college campus and to suggest corrective actions we should consider to maintain the health of this symbiotic partnership.

The Role of the National Collegiate Athletic Association

National governance of college athletics began in 1906 with the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States, established to prevent the injuries and deaths caused by football's "flying wedge" offense. That organization became the NCAA in 1910 and began to implement, through a steady stream of regulations, its overarching philosophy of amateurism, fair play, and academic integrity. Over the years, the NCAA expanded its membership, evolved into Divisions I, II, and III, and switched its governance structure from a one-institution, one-vote model to a confederated system. In recent years, the organization has emphasized the critical role

of presidents and chancellors to assure the integrity of college athletics. In fact, the confederated system of governance came as a direct result of the increased role of the campus executives, as did the requirement for reviews every 10 years of athletics programs, similar to accreditation reviews for institutions.

Some NCAA policy milestones calculated to benefit student athletes and college athletics alike have included adoption of Proposition 48 in 1983, which established a high school core curriculum that aspiring college student athletes must complete before participating in college sports; progressively more rigorous academic eligibility criteria for student athletes; and measures to assure implementation of Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments adopted by the U. S. Congress. That Act states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under an educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance," and it opened up the opportunities, rewards, and challenges of college athletics to women. Other important more recent policies created the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) and the Academic Progress Rate (APR) to chart the academic performance of every member school and team. Each of these reforms changed college athletics for the better, and the GSR and APR, which comprise the NCAA's Academic Performance Program, promise to have a revolutionary impact.

The systematic measurement of student-athletes' academic eligibility, persistence in school, and graduation rate has altered the priorities and behaviors of institutions, coaches, and players. These widely reported metrics entail a meaningful system of incentives and disincentives, and initial sanctions have included reduction of practice time and loss of allowable athletic grants-in-aid. As we enter the Academic Performance Program's fifth year, most observers anticipate that 40 to 50 Division I teams will suffer the third-phase penalty — bans from post-season competition. In ways that lead to altered behavior, the Academic Performance Program holds the potential to reform college athletics.

The Role of Campus Administrators

With the accelerating pace of new academic requirements, it became apparent to college administrators that Departments of Intercollegiate Athletics needed the services of academic advisors to help student-athletes through the regulatory

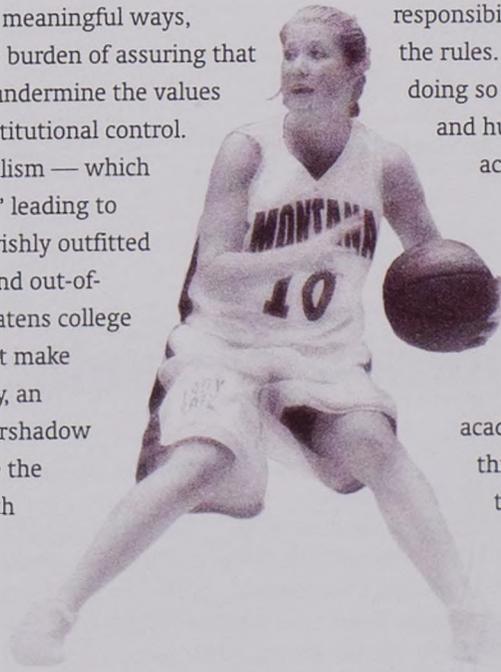
maze. To help member institutions pay for academic advising, tutoring, counseling and other services for student athletes, the NCAA was able to implement a revenue-sharing policy using funds from the television contract for the men's Division I basketball tournament. Although colleges and universities indicated the need for this kind of assistance, not everyone on and off the campuses agreed. Some charged that these services set athletes apart from the general student body and thus directly conflicted with the principle that athletes must not receive special treatment. In response, college administrators had to make sure that these services effectively compensate for the complex set of academic regulations that apply only to student athletes and for the time that student athletes must devote to practice, conditioning, and competition. They also had to do everything possible to integrate student athletes into the broader campus life. Critics question whether the gains equal the costs — whether the rampant commercialism of “March Madness” outweighs and overwhelms the academic benefits. In direct and meaningful ways, campus administrators carry the burden of assuring that sports commercialism does not undermine the values of amateurism, integrity, and institutional control.

Another aspect of commercialism — which some have called the “arms war” leading to multimillion-dollar stadiums, lavishly outfitted weight and treatment centers, and out-of-control coaches' salaries — threatens college athletics. If a university does not make academic success its first priority, an inordinate desire to win will overshadow academic success and jeopardize the benefits of college athletics. With academic success as the first priority, those responsible find it much easier to keep the issues of facilities and salaries in their proper place. To some extent, college athletics depends upon successful marketing, a form of commercialism. But, as with all things, excess brings consequences.

A win-at-any-cost mentality especially puts at risk the welfare of the student athletes and undermines amateurism. After World War II, the NCAA became aware of this danger and began to focus on questionable recruiting practices. As a result, the NCAA developed and sanctioned a “Sanity Code” to detect and check under-the-table subsidies to athletes and other unethical

practices. The Code aimed to standardize recruiting practices and achieve consistent administration of recruiting regulations. The NCAA repealed the Code in 1951, but the idea of monitoring and sanctioning recruiting practices had taken hold and continues in myriad recruiting regulations. Every year hundreds of coaches violate one or more of the regulations, usually inadvertently because of the complexity of the rules. Nonetheless, the NCAA enforces the regulations.

Recently, member institutions have struggled to address the temptations created by big money in college athletics. The desire to land the next shining star, the next national championship, and the next record coach's salary has created major challenges for campus administrators. To respond, each university must do what it takes to ensure that men and women student athletes receive the support and treatment they deserve as individuals pursuing success in academics and in athletics, rather than as commodities in the commerce of sports. This institutional burden involves a reciprocal responsibility on the student athlete to abide by the rules. For the institution and the individual, doing so involves both tremendous challenges and huge rewards in prestige and public acclaim.



The University of Montana Approach

As mentioned at the outset, The University of Montana has lived and will continue to live by the highest academic and athletic standards. To achieve this goal, we hold student athletes and their coaches — without exception — to the same high standards of ethical conduct we expect of all members of the University community. We regret very much the dark cloud cast recently by the reprehensible off-the-field conduct of a few student athletes and one or two coaches. But we have not tolerated and we will not tolerate such breaches of acceptable conduct. I view even one problem as one too many. I also accept the premise that accountability starts at the top and extends down the chain of command. In my view, the University President must accept the responsibility and exercise the ultimate authority in any matter of student discipline, athlete or non-athlete. Within this context, infractions by student athletes always involve extensive discussion

between Main Hall and the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics, followed by public reporting of all details allowed by federal and Montana statutes concerning individual privacy. The bottom line is we abide by the

Student athletes know their status and responsibility as role models subject them to heightened scrutiny and criticism. In this regard, they must always act as good ambassadors of the University or forgo the privileges of participating in Grizzly Athletics.

rules and require full accountability.

I have insisted on periodic reviews of athletics policies and procedures. Doing so has positioned the University well to deal with emerging challenges.

For example, last year we put into place a revised student-athlete recruiting policy that includes a Recruiting Advisory Board

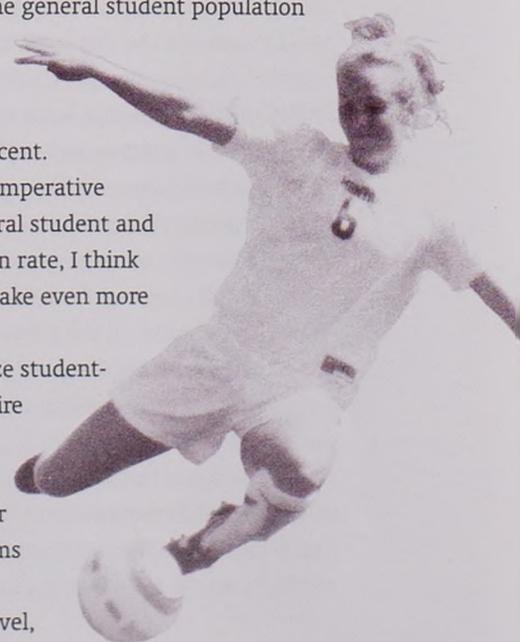
comprising the Associate Athletic Director/Senior Woman Administrator, the Faculty Athletic Representative, and another faculty member. This Board advises the coaches, the Director of Intercollegiate Athletics, and me concerning the admission of recruits who could present academic or behavioral problems. This year I also approved revisions to the Student Athlete Conduct Code to clarify and strengthen disciplinary policies and procedures, including the establishment of a new Student Athlete Disciplinary Committee. This Committee consists of an athletics administrator and faculty and student members, and recommends sanctions in situations not covered by the University Student Conduct Code or team rules. In addition, the Committee hears appeals of sanctions imposed by a coach, including suspension and expulsion from the team.

As a result of these periodic revisions, The University of Montana has become more explicit and predictable in disciplining student athletes. But these hard-nosed actions and our on-the-field success do not exhaust the noteworthy aspects of Grizzly Athletics. Because disciplinary rigor cannot prevent disciplinary problems and because our increasingly complex and diverse society can generate conflict, the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics takes seriously its responsibility of educating student athletes and staff regarding good conduct. As a result, our athletes, coaches, and administrators engage in the community and contribute to civic life. Coaches lend their talent, energy, and popularity to charitable events, and athletes visit schools to discuss the traits needed for success in college.

Student athletes know their status and responsibility as role models subject them to heightened scrutiny and criticism. In this regard, they must always act as good ambassadors of the University or forgo the privileges of participating in Grizzly Athletics. To help student athletes understand the consequences of their actions and make good decisions, the Department brings in national speakers each year. Also, it has partnered with the Vice President for Student Affairs to fund a mentor for all African-American students on campus who need assistance in becoming truly a part of a dominantly Caucasian campus and community.

I think it also noteworthy that semester-after-semester UM student athletes have established records of academic success in combination with their athletic successes. To date, The University of Montana has lost only 0.22 of one athletic grant-in-aid – in men's cross country running – because of failure to abide by the terms of the NCAA Academic Performance Program. Across the country, such losses have normally occurred in football, baseball, and men's basketball. I attribute this very good record to our commitment to recruit college-ready student athletes, our effective academic assistance program for the student athletes who accept our invitation to join Grizzly Athletics, and the commitment from our student athletes as a group, despite the few exceptions, to follow the rules. The current group of UM student athletes has attained a cumulative grade point average of 3.05, the highest in the University's history, compared to the average of the entire student population of 2.89. In addition, the graduation rate for student athletes exceeds that of the general student population — 55 percent compared to 42 percent, with a four-year average for student athletes of 59 percent. While I certainly feel the imperative to improve both the general student and student athlete graduation rate, I think we have made and will make even more progress.

The efforts to maximize student-athlete achievement require funding, and adequate budgets present the most serious challenge for Division I athletic programs today. As the costs of grants-in-aid, salaries, travel,



and facility construction and maintenance continue to increase, administrators sometimes yield to the temptation to trim student welfare, academic assistance, and recruiting expenses. Even considering the need to manage resources carefully, I view such actions as gross errors with predictably bad consequences. I have argued consistently and persistently that success in athletics depends heavily on recruiting good all-around student athletes and providing them with the means to become winners academically and athletically. If the University cannot afford the necessary expenses, then we will need to reduce our expectations and compete at a more appropriate level. I personally believe that The University of Montana can compete at the Division I level and assure adequate support. It makes no sense to me to go backward when it has taken us so long to achieve so much. Success comes with a price, but failure will cost even more. I have found that our alumni and friends expect us to compete at this level, and they also believe we can do so with the resources we have, if we manage properly. I agree.

Division I schools currently fund athletics through a combination of state support, student fees, game ticket sales (primarily football and basketball), donations, endowment income, corporate advertising, NCAA disbursements, television revenue, and other incidental income (parking, concessions, and the like). As a rule of thumb, the operational budget for intercollegiate athletics — excluding the costs of facility construction, but not maintenance — should never exceed 5 percent of the total operational institutional budget. The University of Montana has consistently applied this rule and never exceeded the upper limit. Unlike most schools competing at our level — Division I, but in the NCAA Football Championship Subdivision rather than the Football Bowl Subdivision — The University of Montana has maximized revenue from ticket sales, donations, corporate advertising, endowments, and incidental income because of the revenue-generating success of football and men's and women's basketball. Even more significant, unlike all but a few of our Division I peers, the Grizzly Athletics Program generates about 2/3rds of its overall revenue, compared to an average of 30 to 40 percent for our peers.

With regard to the so-called "arms war," we have followed a different course at The University of Montana. All athletics facilities require self-funding. The State of Montana, as most states, does not provide funds to

construct and renovate athletic facilities. However, no program can succeed at our level without providing not just adequate, but good, facilities. We have succeeded in constructing and renovating our facilities by asking our alumni and friends to provide the necessary funding, either through donations or the purchase of seats in the facilities. Over the years we have expanded Washington-Grizzly Stadium three times, each project beginning only after the sale of a sufficient number of seats to amortize the bonds secured to finance the construction costs. While we used a different approach with the Adams Center, even that essentially involved asking the private sector to provide the necessary financing.

Finally, all public universities face annual problems with revenue from state appropriations, student athletic fees, and televised games. Donations, endowments, and corporate contributions depend heavily on both the state of the economy and the success of the teams. All institutions must confront the prospect of even greater budget challenges with the expiration in 2012 of the current NCAA television contract for the men's basketball tournament, which accounts for 95 percent of the NCAA's budget and all of the NCAA distributions to Division I member institutions. If the economic conditions that affect society today persist too long, it seems clear that television royalties will decline, as will funds for student athlete welfare. If that happens, we at The University of Montana will seek other sources, since the welfare of the student athlete determines the vitality and sustainability of the athletics program.

Conclusion

Athletics at The University of Montana will continue to face challenges of many varieties. Even so, we will do our best to stay the course and respect the academic and athletic traditions we cherish, protect the welfare of student athletes, maximize revenue, and achieve the success Grizzly fans demand and support. As our institutional guide, we will rely on the philosophy of excellence in all pursuits. High-quality performance on the field will remain as much a part of campus life as high-quality performance in the classroom, laboratory, and theater. The University of Montana expects and will accept nothing less than high achievement by students, athletes, faculty, and coaches. I strongly believe that the best way to maintain integrity in college athletics requires having athletic teams perform in an environment where excellence stands as the watchword for all.

** George M. Dennison serves as President of The University of Montana.*



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