

Book Review

Gurney, Lopiano, & Zimbalist (2017). *Unwinding Madness: What Went Wrong with College Sports - and How to Fix It.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

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In *Unwinding Madness: What Went Wrong with College Sports – and How to Fix It*, college sports reformers Gerald Gurney, Donna Lopiano and Andrew Zimbalist critically examine the commercialization of intercollegiate athletics and the role that the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) plays in governing college sports. Unlike other recent reform-minded books on college sports, this book focuses on the role that the NCAA, rather than individual institutions, plays in shaping the current landscape of sports in higher education. This book contributes to the growing debate about the future of intercollegiate athletics. Due to the impact that commercialism has on college sports, the authors state that “the opportunity to influence the reform debate and the future trajectory of college sports is too alluring to pass up” (Gurney, Lopiano & Zimbalist, 2017, p. viii).

Gurney, Lopiano and Zimbalist bring nearly a century of combined experience working in higher education and college sports and weave together their broad range of experiences, disciplines, and perspectives to flesh out the challenges in collegiate athletics. Gerald Gurney, an assistant professor of education at the University of Oklahoma and former president of the Drake Group and National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletes, has more than three decades of experience working with college athletes as a NCAA administrator and reform advocate. Donna Lopiano is the president of the consulting firm Sports Management Resources, the former Director of Women’s Athletics at the University of Texas at Austin, the former president of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, and is widely recognized as a leading advocate for gender equity in college athletics. Andrew Zimbalist is the author of more than twenty books and dozens of articles on the intersection of sports and economics, has previously written on the challenges facing college athletics in *Unpaid Professionals: Commercialism and Conflict in Big-time College Sports* (1999), and was co-editor of a collection of essays with Nancy Hogshead-Makar titled *Equal Play: Title IX and Social Change* (2008). Zimbalist’s research on the public funding of college sports has informed much of the recent research into collegiate athletic spending and his work on amateurism has helped frame the discussions and legal arguments of student-athletes as university employees. All three authors are members of the reform-minded Drake Group, whose goal is to protect the “academic integrity of higher education from the corrosive aspects of commercialized college sports” (Drake Group, 2017).

The book itself is split into three overarching parts, each with a distinct focus on the historical roots of the current issues in intercollegiate athletics or the pragmatic changes

necessary for meaningful reform to occur in college sports. The first part of the book introduces the evolution of the NCAA from a commercialized perspective, highlighting the roles that university athletic departments and college presidents have historically played in undermining amateurism, controlling labor costs, and promoting financial excess among member institutions. The authors use extensive financial breakdowns to describe how the historical structuring of the NCAA into hierarchical divisions has evolved as the economic landscape has shifted and has served to keep revenues in the hands of the largest, wealthiest colleges at the expense of smaller schools in lower divisions. The second chapter of Part 1 introduces the topics that are addressed in greater detail throughout the second half of the book. It begins with a lengthy discussion of the historical evolution of the NCAA's governance structure and its role in shaping the ways in which each member institution's voice in association-wide decision-making has changed over time as wealthier athletic institutions have worked to crowd out the voting power of smaller schools to shape association policy. The chapter continues by discussing the association's history of academic misconduct and its relationship with the association

In Part 2 the authors discuss the broken aspects of NCAA governance and leadership in college sports. Chapter 3 focuses on issues related to the NCAA's role in promoting academic integrity, specifically what the authors refer to as the "flawed" academic metrics that create chances for fraud among coaches, athletes and institutional staff, and the lack of transparency or consistency of the association to enforce its own rules on academic misconduct when such events occur. The fourth chapter on governance focuses on the failures of college presidents and NCAA leaders to guide the association in a way that is fair and equitable for all universities and college athletes. The authors argue that the leadership has allowed the largest, most profitable, athletic departments to gain control of NCAA decision-making, leaving smaller schools and their presidents, faculty, and students, to deal with whatever structure favors rich institutions. Chapter 5 focuses on athlete health and welfare and specifically focuses on student-athlete time demands, poor insurance protections, the lack of mandated medical protection from the NCAA or college coaches, and the limitation on athletes' ability to earn revenue from their own image likenesses. The sixth chapter covers the continuing trend in college athletics of discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, and disability, a trend the authors refer to as "a continuing disgrace," by discussing the abuses of federal Title IX legislation in female participation in athletics, coaching and administration, the low representation of minorities in coaching or administrative positions within college sports, and the nearly complete lack of athletic opportunities for athletes with disabilities to compete in intercollegiate sports (Gurney et al., 2017, p. 143). Part 2 concludes with a thorough investigation of the unsustainable economic model on which all of college sports is built on, and specifically focuses on the growing revenue gap between the have and have-not schools and the shrinking financial future for traditional sports through cable broadcasts and other vanishing media outlets.

The third part of the book brings together the earlier discussions as the authors describe meaningful paths toward sustainable reforms in college athletics. Chapter 8 discusses the likelihood that the NCAA embrace one of two possible futures: either a market-driven approach to college sports to allow athletes to operate in an open labor market, or a completely education-centered amateur approach that would hold schools more accountable to the academic, health, and safety concerns of their athletes while controlling for the commercialized aspects of athletics and providing a portion of revenues back to athletes. In order for either path of reform to be executed successfully, the authors conclude that meaningful anchors for reform must take place

within the NCAA, and the association must modify its governance structure to better represent the needs of all colleges and athletes, not just those that serve the commercialized purposes of college sports.

The most unique contribution in this volume is the authors' focus on the NCAA as a trade association, operating as an organization of "athletics directors, conference commissioners, and coaches rather than a large association of institutions gathered to ensure an educational sport philosophy" (Gurney et al., 2017, p. 16). Discussing their arguments within this description, the authors place the NCAA in its profit-centered context, looking to specifically grow college sports revenues, especially those of coaches, athletic directors, and conference commissioners, rather than support the educational mission of higher education in general. Even though college presidents have long held formal oversight roles within the NCAA, the authors argue that they:

have chosen repeatedly to take a back seat and allow athletics directors and conference commissioners run the show. Meanwhile, the meteoric growth of big time college sports has led the NCAA and its leadership to behave like a protective trade association for coaches and athletics personnel rather than advocates for college athletes and students (Gurney et al., 2017, p. 85).

Unwinding Madness is a timely contribution to the growing body of research on commercialism and its role in shaping the path college athletics has paved in recent years away from the broader academic mission of higher education in America. The book fits neatly beside other recent critical assessments of the NCAA like Joe Nocera's *Indentured: The Inside Story of the Rebellion Against the NCAA* (2016), Jay Smith and Mary Willingham's *Cheated: The UNC Scandal, the Education of Athletes, and the Future of Big-Time College Sports* (2015), Gilbert Gaul's *Billion-Dollar Ball: A Journey Through the Big-Money Culture of College Football* (2015) and Howard Nixon's *The Athletic Trap: How College Sports Corrupted the Academy* (2014). The book will appeal to university leaders, college athletics practitioners, and opponents of commercialized intercollegiate athletics. This book could be integrated seamlessly into a course dealing with contemporary issues in higher education, issues in college athletics, sports law, or the history of college sports.

Considering its relatively strong critique of the existing commercialized structure of the NCAA and college sports leadership, the challenge for readers of this work will be to identify the benefits that intercollegiate athletics provides to campus communities and to the collegiate experience. Instructors hoping to use this text in their classroom must be sure to contextualize the findings of the authors and perhaps provide counterpoints to this book's arguments to better situate this work in the broader field of college athletics scholarship.

The reader is left with a newfound understanding of the ways in which commercial entities such as the NCAA, television executives, collegiate athletic directors, conference commissioners, and other collegiate sports leaders have colluded to control the landscape of college sports and its amateur participants. Following the completion of this book the reader will be empowered to engage with university stakeholders in discussing the role that intercollegiate athletics plays on their campus, the cost of college athletics, the health and wellness of student-athletes, issues related to gender equity and Title IX, and the ongoing struggles to situate college sports within the increasingly commercialized university setting.

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