

Under Cover

By David Burr, '50

The editor takes a look at college athletics and underscores the program of moderation now being proposed by President George L. Cross. The time has come for sobriety in the sports situation that has developed almost fantastic proportions.

Never in the history of collegiate athletics has there been such a season of moralizing and soul-searching. Never has there been a better reason for it. Beginning with the basketball fixes, and moving through such sordid spectacles as the West Point case, it has become apparent to even the most rabid fan that college athletics are hardly as pure as the driven snow.

Leading the way toward a house cleaning were the sports writers. They felt it time to discharge a grave trust that the public had bestowed on them. Theories on the steps necessary to hide the carnage became a daily ration. In general, the theme was, "This thing has gotten too big." The solution, "Let's discourage bigness."

Then the football season began and the same sports writers confessed in several thousands words their admiration for winning ways by voting on the best teams in the country and by glamorizing to Hollywood proportions every fast-footed half-back that had a good Saturday afternoon. Now the theme was, "This thing isn't big enough." The solution, "Let's encourage bigness."

Apparently we are back where we started. And though it sounds ominous, more sports scandals are certainly in the offing. Recently *Look* carried a sports story telling of a bribed football hero. The editors pointed out that the story was false but used it to illustrate their point that football would be next on the scandal list. I do not doubt for an instant that *Look* is right. I also believe that President George L. Cross' prediction that the next sports scandal will come as a result of a bowl game is a good one. Too much betting money depends on the outcome, and if the bettors can assure themselves of a sure thing, they are going to do so.

Of course, the people really responsible for a clean up are not the sports authors (they contribute, however, to public opinion which in the end largely determines the outcome of any cleanup), but the college presidents and their boards of control who

must take the lead if any program is to become operative.

Recently several Southern Schools have approached the problem of de-emphasis, or moderation, with no results as yet. And at the University, Dr. Cross has been pegging away at a plan for modification of the athletic program. To get the picture first hand, I talked with Dr. Cross and asked him exactly what he had in mind. For as silly as it may seem, many people are wondering if the program of de-emphasis expounded by the president means there will be a de-emphasis in the desire to field winning teams. I can assure you that Dr. Cross likes the teams to win as much as any other enthusiastic fan. Then what kind of a program does he suggest.

He reiterated to me the plan of attack that he believes will be the only way of handling de-emphasis and the door through which he will pour his ideas. He thinks that if any de-emphasis is to occur at all it must be welcomed by the nation's colleges, not one or two, but by all of them through the NCAA. Unless it is operated collectively, de-emphasis would penalize those schools who try it and he is not interested in penalizing Sooner teams. But by using the good offices of the NCAA the following will be proposed at their next meeting.

- 1). No extra seasonal practices or competition. This would eliminate bowl games and spring practice. The end result would be that football would be held roughly to 3½ months as compared to the 5-plus now common.

- 2). Reduce number of contests per season—especially in basketball and baseball. He believes that the 8-10 game football season is about right but that the twice-weekly basketball and baseball games frequently matched take too much time from scholastic effort.

- 3). Reduce time of practice. A hard thing to regulate, naturally, but the idea is to discourage sports from swallowing the athlete's time for class home-work.

- 4). Require as a condition of eligibility

for each player progress toward graduation. In short this means that the boy who was eligible to play in the past with a "D" average, would be ruled out. One hundred twenty hours of "D" won't get a University student out of University College. Therefore a "C" average would be automatically called for at the University. Other colleges would determine the average in accordance with the existing graduation rules.

- 5). Present each contest as a campus event. The basketball fixes started a back-to-the-campus movement which is not necessarily fool-proof from a bribe standpoint but does return the sport to the students and fans who could not see it otherwise.

If these rules are applied, the president believes that the fan will miss none of the thrills he is presently enjoying. Since the de-emphasis would be a relative thing, no team would have the advantage.

I asked the president before hearing his outline what degree of de-emphasis he had in mind. He replied, "The only de-emphasis that must occur is in the minds of the public." To lose a game is a poor way to de-emphasize football, the president believes. (At this point I thought of all the current, tired jokes. It is now stock to reply to any discussion of de-emphasis at Oklahoma, "Whata ya mean, de-emphasis. Look at the Texas and Texas A.&M. scores. We've already de-emphasized.") In fact, he thinks that losing tends to encourage the fans to demand more wins, and thereby counters any form of de-emphasis.

"To lose a game is not necessarily de-emphasis," Dr. Cross said. "But to lose a game and have the fans still support the coach and team, that's de-emphasis."

It is apparent that the plan presented here will have difficulty in being realized in the whole or, for that matter, in part. We all fall prey to succulent rumors about bowls. But this is a time when those responsible for collegiate athletics must make up their minds to a program of sobriety. The public had drunk too often at the watering trough of sports spectacles. If the good citizen doesn't see that there is a need for moderation in all things, sports included, there can be no moralizing about college sports scandals. For we are by our over-enthusiasm contributing factors.

I have heard or read of no other program of de-emphasis, or as I prefer to call it moderation, that is as complete as that presented by Dr. Cross. Until I do, I will, in my own fashion, support him in his endeavors to get collegiate athletics back in line. I believe that every alumnus will do likewise.