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**Shulman and Bowen: The Game of Life**

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## *Preface*

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AS WE HAVE SEEN in the Prelude, sports are taken very seriously in this country, and not just by those who cheer for professional teams. We recognize, of course, that other countries take their sports very seriously as well. As we began this project in 1994, Colombian soccer star Andres Escobar was murdered after he had inadvertently deflected a ball into his own goal during the World Cup finals. But no other country has anything resembling America's college sports programs. In this book, however, we are less interested in how seriously Americans take sports *as sports* than in the question of how intercollegiate athletic programs affect not only colleges and universities but also the signals that these important institutions send to prospective students and their parents, secondary schools, and society at large.

Our title, *The Game of Life*, is—like “the level playing field,” “hitting a home run,” or “overcoming hurdles”—one of the many images that link sports and the larger society. Life in general is, in many ways, structured like a game, and although colleges have a major impact on who wins and who loses in this game, they also play a more fundamental role. Beyond admitting students, educating them, and sending them into the world with impressive credentials, these institutions help to shape our collective interpretation of what the game itself is all about, what its rules are, and how we as a society define winning and losing.

### INTENT, SCOPE, AND METHODS OF THE STUDY

“Intercollegiate athletics” is not an abstract subject. The story of college sports is an amalgamation of the memories, scars, and passions of thousands upon thousands of teams, players, and fans. For us at least, insight into the questions we examine in this book is conveyed most immediately through episodes like the ones recounted in the Prelude. These episodes crystallize many of the issues that this book explores. We see that intercollegiate athletics programs spark emotionally charged debate at every point in the range: from campus playing fields at Division III colleges like Swarthmore and Oberlin to celebrity programs at Division IA universities like Stanford and UNC–Chapel Hill. The issues vary, but when conflict arises—be it over rescheduling exams to pursue a lacrosse championship or constructing luxury skyboxes—emotions run high, and the school is

forced to ask whether the proposed direction is in line with, or in conflict with, its core institutional mission.

These introductory stories also introduce a number of the myths that are associated with athletics. (While in colloquial usage *myth* means a false tale, a “myth” is better understood as a belief that powerfully captures the imagination and may or may not be rooted in fact. Hence, the mythical reputation of Warren Buffet in the investor community is different from the myth of the fountain of youth.) Without getting ahead of the research that we present in the rest of the book, we can see already in the Prelude some of the myths that permeate college sports and the facts that pull those myths back to earthbound realities:

- “College sports programs make money.” If the University of Michigan can lose money on sports, this myth certainly deserves a closer look.
- “Playing sports builds character.” Many of us admire the integrity, work ethic, and social commitment exemplified by the Bill Bradleys of this world. At the same time, widely publicized incidents of cheating and violent behavior, as well as conflicts like those at Williams and Princeton, remind us to consider exactly what kind of character organized athletics either builds or at least promotes.
- “Schools worry about their sports programs for the sake of the alumni/ae.” In the Princeton wrestling episode, we saw that one specific group of alumni/ae does indeed care a great deal about the sports program. But are they representative of the alumni/ae in general?
- “Good schools can play the game differently.” The Northwestern experience shows that it is difficult for any school to be insulated from competitive pressures, both on the field and in building and maintaining the field house. The attitudes of former Princeton wrestlers and Williams lacrosse players (and their parents) indicate that sports is taken seriously at all levels of play; intensity is not limited to big-time programs.
- “Gender equity is giving women new opportunities.” This statement is unquestionably true, as we see from both the increasing number of women’s teams and the highly visible success of outstanding women athletes. The wrestling episode is, however, one reminder of the tensions that arise when a rationing of opportunities is necessary. In the Williams episode, we see that there are two sides to having created new opportunities for women to take sports as seriously as the men have.
- “Today’s athletes are like those of the past.” This myth, implicit in the defense of their program by former Princeton wrestlers, argues

that the paths followed by athletes of the past can be used to predict the outcomes for a different group of students who play sports today. Since so much else has changed in 50 years, it is worth asking whether the athletes of the past are similar to or different from the athletes of today. Are the values of the “good old days” still evident? And were the “good old days” really so good?

The goal of this book is to present data that bear on these myths, before drawing conclusions about how schools might best take advantage of the positive emotions that sports evoke without endangering the core of their educational missions. These episodes remind us that colleges and universities are dependent upon a broad range of constituencies (students, parents, fans, alumni/ae, staff) and that, over the long term, policy decisions affecting admissions play a crucial role in *creating* one of these constituencies—the alumni/ae of the future. The students who attended a college, had various experiences while they were there, and continue to identify with the school throughout their lives constitute an important reality of the institution, in the same way that the buildings, the faculty, and the fight songs do. In part for this reason, we spend a great deal of time in this book on the students who attended the institutions in our study—from the time that they opened their acceptance letters to the times, long after they left the campus, when they sent either checks or angry letters to the president’s office.

In order to understand how intercollegiate athletics, in its various forms, affects the ways in which colleges and universities discharge their missions, we decided to study a set of schools that are, in many ways, similar as educational institutions but that have chosen to compete athletically at different levels of play. A woman interested in studying political science might elect to go to Bryn Mawr or to Duke, and such a choice need not entail any dramatic difference in the curriculum available to her. But if she happens also to want to play basketball, it is clear immediately that the two worlds she is considering are radically different.

The schools that make up the institutional population of our study are all academically selective. Being selective means that they receive many more applications from well-qualified students than they have places in their entering classes and thus must pick and choose among applicants on a variety of criteria, including athletic talent. By national standards, the freshman classes that they admit have very strong academic qualifications (with average SAT scores, for example, that are well above national norms, and with large numbers of high school valedictorians and National Merit Scholarship winners). The 30 schools represented in the study are grouped below by type:<sup>1</sup>

*Division IA private universities*

Duke University  
 Georgetown University  
 (basketball only)  
 Northwestern University  
 Rice University  
 Stanford University  
 Tulane University  
 University of Notre Dame  
 Vanderbilt University

*Division IAA Ivy League universities*

Columbia University  
 Princeton University  
 University of Pennsylvania  
 Yale University

*Division III universities*

Emory University  
 Tufts University  
 Washington University  
 (St. Louis)

*Division IA public universities*

Miami University (Ohio)  
 Pennsylvania State University  
 University of Michigan  
 (Ann Arbor)  
 University of North Carolina  
 (Chapel Hill)

*Division III coed liberal arts colleges*

Denison University  
 Hamilton College  
 Kenyon College  
 Oberlin College  
 Swarthmore College  
 Wesleyan University  
 Williams College

*Division III women's colleges*

Barnard College  
 Bryn Mawr College  
 Smith College  
 Wellesley College

This book focuses on these academically selective schools for several reasons. First, despite the great differences among them, all of these institutions participate in a collegiate athletic culture that is tied to Little League and high school sports and is related as well to the shared sports values of our national culture. Second, whether in terms of debates over “the Great Books” or in discussions of how to provide opportunities to women and minorities, many of these institutions are looked to for leadership within higher education. We believe that athletics provides a portal of sorts into other issues affecting this set of colleges and universities. In the end, this book is as much about educational values and the missions of these institutions as it is about sports.

There is also a third reason for focusing on these schools. Working intensively with this particular group of academically selective institutions has the important advantage of permitting us to compare the nature and

effects of radically different kinds of athletic programs (for example, football at Vanderbilt versus football at Oberlin College) without leaving a world of shared academic expectations and requirements. That is, although the admissions standards and academic programs at these schools differ in many respects, they are sufficiently similar that reasonable comparisons can be made across types of schools and, as it were, “levels of play.” Thus we can examine how much it matters if a school elects to compete at the Division IA level or in Division III, and whether the Division IAA Ivies really are an intermediate case. One thesis of the study is that there is more continuity along this gradient than is generally understood, with, for example, patterns of recruitment, admissions, and coaching spreading from the big-time programs to the Ivies, and then on to the Division III coed liberal arts colleges.

But at the same time that we want to emphasize many of these similarities, we also want to recognize that the most wrenching issues that confront presidents and trustees are very different at the different levels of play. As the president emeritus of Northwestern University, Arnold Weber, pointed out in commenting on the manuscript, “The practices and leading issues in the Division IA schools are qualitatively different from those of the other institutions [in the study].” Weber is referring, of course, to the fact that big-time athletic programs involve greater risks of scandals and harm to institutional reputations than the corresponding programs in the Ivies and at the coed liberal arts colleges; on the other hand, the recruitment of large numbers of athletes can have more serious effects on admissions and on campus ethos at the smaller schools. These two themes, of similarity and difference, run through the study.

We are very much aware that these 30 colleges and universities are by no means representative of American higher education. They were not chosen with that aim in mind. One of the enormous advantages of this country’s system of higher education is its institutional diversity, and the analysis presented here is relevant only in small part to the large number of academic institutions that are less selective than this group. Many of these other institutions offer excellent academic programs and outstanding athletic programs. One reason for limiting the study to a group of 30 institutions is that sharpening the focus in this way has allowed us to work with extremely detailed data on some 90,000 undergraduate students, athletes and others, who entered these colleges at three points in time: the fall of 1951 (thought of by some as “the good old days”), the fall of 1976 (after the composition of the classes at many of these schools had been altered in the wake of the civil rights movement and the spread of coeducation), and the fall of 1989 (the most recent year for which we could collect data on entering students who then could be followed through college and into the early stages of their careers and post-college lives).

The institutional component of the database was compiled from individual student records and contains detailed data on admissions qualifications, fields of study, grades received, and whether or not a student graduated, as well as such demographic data as race, gender, and family background. For many of these same students, we also have extensive survey data that track graduate education, career choices and earnings, civic involvement, family circumstances, and retrospective expressions of attitudes toward the education they received. All of this information and more is contained in a restricted-access database called “College and Beyond” that was built by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation with the cooperation of the 30 individual schools and the former students who participated in the survey in very large numbers (overall response rates were over 75 percent).<sup>2</sup> We have also made extensive use of linked sets of data provided by the College Board and by UCLA’s Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), which surveyed many of these same individuals when they entered college in 1976 or 1989.

As is evident from this brief description of the database, this study is highly quantitative. The episode of the angry wrestlers illustrates why this approach is needed. When the crisis erupted, the contestants on both sides naturally sought to frame their arguments in as convincing a manner as they could. What they found was a wellspring of strong emotions, powerful anecdotal testimony, long-accepted mythology—and a surprising dearth of facts, let alone empirically driven analyses. In a realm like sports, where schools compete intensely, there is often a reluctance to share data (and sometimes even to collect them). As a consequence, policy makers have generally had to settle for impressionistic answers to key questions.

From the start, one of our primary objectives has been to test various assumptions and myths against a large set of reliable data not heretofore available. We wanted to do all that we could to move beyond what might be called “the anecdote range.” At the same time, we recognize the power of myth in our lives, and certainly in the way all of us think about sports. We have tried, therefore, to combine an empirical analysis of propositions that can be tested<sup>3</sup> with a qualitative examination of ideas and feelings that are no less important because they live in a different realm. Both our interpretation of the data and that of the reader will undoubtedly be shaded by which myths about college sports—and about “the Game of Life”—hold us in their sway. To deny the power of myths and even of their cousin, prejudice, would be foolish, and we certainly do not suggest that, despite all of the data presented, this book contains “just the facts.”

In the main part of this book, we examine some (but not all) of the myths that feed our collective passions about college sports by bringing empirical data to bear on the questions at hand. Other myths we simply

leave alone since we are unable to prove or disprove their validity. Although we are no more capable than others of checking our personal prejudices at the door before pursuing empirical research, we have done our best to reserve most normative judgments and our proposals for future directions until the last two chapters.

Next, a brief word about language. We have chosen to resist some of the standard terminology associated with college sports. So, for example, whereas the NCAA is adamant about referring to students who play college sports as “student-athletes,” we do not use this term, since everyone who is enrolled at a college or university is a student. Also, the sports of football and men’s basketball (and sometimes ice hockey) are often referred to as “revenue sports,” but since these sports do not always generate revenue (especially at the coed liberal arts colleges in our study), we do not refer to them in this way. Rather, we refer to them as “High Profile” sports and to all of the other sports as “Lower Profile.” Of course the characteristics of various sports will change over time, and women’s basketball and perhaps both men’s and women’s soccer give every indication of moving into the High Profile category. Still, during the period covered by this study (the mid-1950s through the early 1990s), football and men’s basketball clearly garnered more attention than other sports, and we see in the data clear differences between the athletes who played these sports and other athletes.

### ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 reviews the historical development of intercollegiate athletics at the types of colleges and universities represented in the study.

The next three chapters examine the characteristics and experiences of male students at these colleges, comparing those who played football, men’s basketball, and men’s ice hockey with those who played other sports as well as with the rest of their male classmates. Chapter 2 profiles male athletes and other students at the time of admission (in 1951, 1976, or 1989). It describes the numbers of recruited athletes and includes estimates of the substantial changes over time in the “admissions advantage” enjoyed by recruited athletes as well as the increasing gaps in SAT scores. Chapter 3 analyzes the experiences of these men in college, with special attention paid to how they have fared academically and their choices of major field of study. We also discuss the degree to which athletes are integrated into the campus community or largely isolated from other students. Chapter 4 examines the differences in jobs and earnings of former athletes and other students and explains these differences in terms of both factors present when students were admitted and their ex-

periences in college (including the number of years they played intercollegiate sports and the level at which they competed).

The next group of chapters poses similar questions about women athletes at these schools. Chapter 5 is a short history of opportunities for women to play college sports. Chapters 6 to 8 chart the admissions records, the in-college, and post-college experiences of women who entered college in 1976 and 1989. In their totality, these chapters offer a look at the very early years and adolescence of the gender equity movement. A key question that runs through this section is whether women athletes are mirroring the experiences of the men who went before them, or whether the increased emphasis on women's athletics has been marked by different approaches and different outcomes.

Chapter 9 examines the leadership contributed by the male and female athletes who attended these colleges and universities, both in their vocations and more generally. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between self-perceptions of leadership and actual contributions made by various groups of athletes and their classmates.

Chapter 10, "Giving Back," first examines the gift-giving histories of alumni/ae who were and were not intercollegiate athletes. It then considers the attitudes toward intercollegiate sports of the small group of alumni/ae who contribute a very large fraction of the dollars received by leading colleges and universities. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the proposition that winning records of football teams affect the overall rates and amounts of giving by graduates.

Chapter 11 addresses the complex but important issues that collectively define the financial equation for intercollegiate sports. Central questions include: What does it really cost to mount an intercollegiate program at different levels of competition (Division IA versus the Ivies versus the coed liberal arts colleges)? How costly are the Lower Profile sports as compared with sports like football and basketball, and how do these differences vary by level of competition? To what extent do additional revenues generated by big-time programs offset their expenses and even help defray other costs? How have the sources of revenue changed, and are the financial prospects of intercollegiate athletics improving or worsening?

The concluding part of the book consists of three interrelated chapters. Chapter 12 summarizes the book's empirical findings that make up the factual bedrock of the study. In Chapter 13, we step back and take stock. We begin by providing our interpretation of the meaning of the underlying patterns, noting especially what we see as growing points of conflict between the athletic enterprise and educational values. Then we discuss the underlying forces that, in combination, have led to increasing intensification of intercollegiate athletics and to an ever-widening "ath-

letic divide.” Finally, in Chapter 14, we consider the impediments to making changes of any kind and then, against this backdrop, present a series of propositions describing future directions that we believe deserve consideration.

The first appendix contains a series of detailed “scorecards” to which we refer in presenting data for separate groupings of schools, different types of sports, and different time periods. This level of detail will appeal to some readers (as box scores do!), but not to everyone. A second appendix contains tables of additional supplementary data.

### OUR PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON SPORTS

Everyone who talks or writes about athletics starts out with certain preconceptions, and we would not want to begin presenting facts and arguments without declaring ourselves. Both of us have long enjoyed sports immensely, as players and as spectators. One of us (Shulman) won the prize for being the most active intramural athlete in his residential college at Yale. The other author (Bowen) was captain of his Denison University tennis team and the winner of various Ohio championships—albeit at a time when the quality of play was nothing like what it is now. Today we share a passion, as spectators, for college basketball, pro football, Mets-Cardinals games, and U.S. Open tennis championships.

One of our great concerns is that some of the directions in which intercollegiate sports have been moving in recent years threaten the pleasures (and the values) that we associate with playing, competing, and—at least on occasion—winning. We recognize, and respect, the different interpretations that can be placed on the data that we assemble, and we recognize too that some readers (perhaps especially recruited athletes) will disagree with our point of view and our conclusions. But we want to be explicit in stating that we think of ourselves as “pro-athletics,” not as “anti-athletics” (to the degree that anyone wants to put us in one or another of these oversimplified compartments). In our view, the main threat to the continuing vitality of college sports is its increasing professionalization, not its neglect, and it is our hope that this book will strengthen the role that athletics plays on college campuses. There are, we believe, respects in which current practices and trends should be reconsidered and in some instances modified, but we also believe—and believe strongly—that changes should be made within a framework that recognizes that many people derive great pleasure from throwing balls, working hard as part of a team, glorying in a hard-fought win, and, yes, reflecting on the inevitable disappointments that are also part of competing.