"When I got here, the academic center [for athletes] was a hallway in Assembly Hall. Kids were sitting there on the floor with their laptops. It was awful . . ."

"The super commonality in all these athletic program scandals is that good people didn’t say anything and/or people who were told didn’t do the right thing."

"Multiple coaches said to me, ‘Why would a guy who seems like he could be doing something else, come here to do this?’"
ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

FRED GLASS

LOOKS BACK ON TEN YEARS AT THE HELM OF IU SPORTS

On October 28, 2008, Indiana University President Michael A. McRobbie held a press conference to announce the appointment of George Frederick (Fred) Glass as vice president and director of intercollegiate athletics. Glass replaced Rick Greenspan, who had resigned in the aftermath of the Kelvin Sampson recruitment scandal. He would become the fifth IU athletic director in eight years.

Lore has it that McRobbie told the search committee he had one requirement and one only—that the successful candidate have experience as an athletic director. Glass had none. But he did have an impressive resume.

Born in Indianapolis, Glass earned his undergraduate degree at IU–Bloomington and a law degree at the IU Robert H. McKinney School of Law in Indianapolis. He worked as a corporate and business attorney and as chief of staff for Indiana Governor Evan Bayh. He served as president of the Marion County Capital Improvement Board, which owns and operates the Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium. He was president of the Indianapolis 2011 Super Bowl Bid Committee and also sat on Indianapolis organizing committees for NCAA and Big Ten basketball tournaments.

On January 1, 2009, Fred Glass, then a 49-year-old father of four, began his first day on the new job. Considering the rapid turnover of athletic directors at IU, few people would have predicted that a decade later he would still be at the helm of IU Athletics. Clearly, he has exceeded all expectations.

_Bloom_ Editor-in-Chief Malcolm Abrams sat down with Glass in his spacious office in the north end zone of IU Memorial Stadium to talk about all that’s transpired in the past 10 years.

By Malcolm Abrams • Photography by Rodney Margison
Very early on, you established five priorities for IU Athletics that athletes tell me became your mantra: Playing by the rules. Being well in mind, body, and spirit. Achieving academically. Excelling athletically. Integrating with the university. Where did this come from and why did you feel these priorities needed to be spelled out and constantly repeated?

GLASS: When I was announced [as athletic director], I was able to take the time to try and climb the learning curve because I didn’t know anything about intercollegiate athletics. So, I interviewed tons of people—150 people, including all the sitting coaches—and multiple coaches said to me, “Why would a guy who seems like he could be doing something else come here to do this?”

I was really taken aback by that. I wasn’t scared by it, but I was surprised because, to me, Bloomington, Indiana, is the quintessential college town, the most beautiful campus in the country, great college sports, my alma mater. What’s not to like?

But then I started reflecting on what I was walking into, and it became clear that I was the fifth athletic director in eight years, which has its own set of challenges. We were still less than a decade removed from Bob Knight being fired and all the acrimony that had created. It had been a very short period of time since Terry Hoeppner had died, who we thought was going to lead us to the promised land in football. And the reason I was there was Kelvin Sampson had been cheating, and he had issues with academics.

It made me feel like we really had to heal the department and try to create esprit de corp, something to rally around, because most people were like, “This guy’s not going to stay.” I mean, their experience was five athletic directors in eight years. I wanted to try to change that history and all this acrimony and the kinds of behaviors you’d expect.

BLOOM: What was the behavior like?

GLASS: Everybody kept their heads down. They didn’t want to get noticed. They didn’t want to try anything new or innovative. They just kind of wanted to survive, and they didn’t realize that this wasn’t normal.

So, I blatantly stole the idea of the Grad at Graduation. Jesuit colleges and high schools have this thing called the Grad at Graduation, and there are five characteristics that they want every student to have when they graduate. It’s being religious,
loving, intellectually competent, committed to social justice, and open to growth.

I went to Jesuit school and my four kids did. So, I thought we needed to have our rallying point. What are our priorities that everyone should know? And I think most people around here, if you stop them in the hallway, they would roughly know what they are. The kids would know what they are, and that’s been a central feature of what I’ve been trying to do.

BLOOM: Let’s talk about what may be your most significant initiative—the Student-Athlete Bill of Rights. To me, the two big commitments in it are the lifetime degree guarantee and the scholarship commitment regardless of injury. What was your motivation in offering these advantages?

GLASS: I had sat on that couch and talked to a family of a potential recruit. She was a freshman in high school, a volleyball recruit. And they were just starting their process. First of all, it just struck me how ridiculous it is that we’re recruiting freshmen in high school, because I have four kids, and even when they were juniors and seniors in high school they had no idea what they were doing looking at colleges. And we’re talking to eighth graders and freshmen, and I find it funny, but this family really had no sense of the benefits of being a student who participates in intercollegiate athletics. They had some questions like, “What if she gets hurt?” And we told her, that’s okay. That’s not her fault. We take care of that. And this is an environment where people are openly questioning what student athletes get and are they being exploited. I think that was around the time the cover story in *The Atlantic* [October 2011] came out with the headline, “The Shame of College Sports.” It was comparing slavery to competing in intercollegiate athletics. I thought we had to change the narrative a little bit about what we do for our students.

Being a lawyer, I know we’re all products of whence we come, so I think about things like contracts and the Bill of Rights and saying what you’re going to do and publishing it for the whole world so you’re held accountable. I started thinking about it in terms of a Bill of Rights, and I drove my wife crazy because, over spring break, we sat by the pool and I sketched it out. It was an awesome exercise, and I was still a fairly new AD [athletic director]. And what I found was, in a lot of the cases, we were doing like 88 percent or 72 percent of some good thing, so I thought why don’t we just take it all the way to the top and tell people we’re going to do it.

I agree with you that one of the most important things is the lifetime degree guarantee, Hoosier for Life, in which we say, “Hey, if you come here and participate, and you leave for any reason and if you’ve been a good citizen, you can come back and we’ll pay for your education.”

BLOOM: I was surprised that this benefit was grandfathered, that any athlete who’s ever been here in the last 50 years, if he or she left in good standing and didn’t transfer to another school, would be eligible. Have some former athletes come back?

GLASS: Yes. I don’t think he’d mind me saying, but Tim Wilbur, [cornerback 1978–82] who was a great football player, is back. He was on the Holiday Bowl team, the hero of that team, but he never finished his degree. And I ran into him, and he said, “Does that apply to old guys like me?” And I said absolutely, so he’s coming back and getting his degree at 57.

BLOOM: Have other universities adopted rules similar to IU’s Student-Athlete Bill of Rights?

GLASS: I haven’t looked in a while, but right after we did it, the University of South Carolina did Gamecock Promise, which looked eerily—even down to the graphics—similar to our program. And you know imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. I thought more would.

BLOOM: You’re considered one of the most progressive athletic directors in the country, often cited in *The New York Times*. I’ve always thought that you’ve had an idea of the future, and you’re trying to get ahead of a lot of other places to get there. Am I right?

GLASS: Well, I hope so. I think there are a couple of things that play into that. One
“Basically, my view is the ultimate goal of Indiana University Athletics is to develop our kids academically, athletically, and personally better than any other school in the country. That’s our big idea and what we want to do. In some ways, that’s reflected most in the three major facilities we have here.”

is that I’m not a product of intercollegiate athletics. I just don’t think that way, and sometimes that’s a negative. But I also think that’s a positive because I’m not limited by old, conventional ways of looking at things. Also, one of the things I learned in government and politics is that if you’re not thinking about what you want to accomplish [in four or eight years] and what you want your legacy to be as you come in, it’ll be over before you’re going to accomplish it. So, I think the combination of being untethered by conventions and being impatient to make a difference probably, I hope, leads to some innovative thinking.

BLOOM: It’s unusual for an athletic director to be a lawyer, not to mention someone who had been at the forefront of bringing the Super Bowl to Indianapolis. You have a very different background. How’s that playing with other athletic directors in the Big Ten and elsewhere? Are you part of the club or outside of it?

GLASS: Well, first of all, I had no sense of what it’d be like to be an AD and go to AD meetings. I figured the guys would be kind of snarky and territorial, and that’s not been the case. It’s a really good group of men
and women who more or less check their institutional views at the door and try to do conference-related things. And I’ve formed some good relationships. But, having said that, I think I’m a little bit threatening. I mean, most of them coached or worked their way through to the athletic director chairs, so when someone takes the express lane around and pops in, I think that’s a little threatening, and sometimes I feel a little bit like I’m not in the club. But that’s okay. It’s collegial, and I’ve got good relationships and I think it gives me the ability to color outside the lines a little bit.

BLOOM: Can you give me an example? What’s something you’ve proposed at Big Ten athletic director meetings?

GLASS: I’m very proud of our policy regarding prohibiting athletes from coming to Indiana University who have had incidences of sexual misconduct that have been proven. I tried to get the Big Ten to adopt that as a conference-wide rule, but they didn’t want to. They said we’ll leave it up to the institutions, and so we did, and a lot of ADs are telling their presidents and their general counselors and their Title IX coordinators, “Well, you can’t do that.” Well, we did it. I think that’s forward thinking. A lot of people have not followed us, which is surprising me.

BLOOM: How important is the Student-Athlete Bill of Rights in recruiting?

GLASS: It’s funny you ask that because I never really thought about recruiting with it. I thought it’d be an internal document to hold ourselves accountable to do the right thing vis-à-vis our students and be a counter-narrative to this idea that all the big, bad athletic department wants is to get the eligibility of the kids, wring it out of them, and then throw them away. And we were really trying to say, “No, this is a Hoosier for life thing. This is a big commitment.”

It’s been really big in recruiting. Moms and dads come with the thing printed out and hanging out of their back pockets, asking, “Does this really mean this and does that really mean that?” And it distinguishes us from our competition. We do these things—the five priorities, Bill of Rights, Excellence Academy, being proactive on sexual assault matters. Advocates call it the Indiana Rule and advocate for this to be adopted by the NCAA.

BLOOM: You mention the IU Athletics Excellence Academy. What is it exactly?

GLASS: Basically, my view is the ultimate goal of Indiana University Athletics is to develop our kids academically, athletically, and personally better than any other school in the country. That’s our big idea and what we want to do. In some ways, that’s reflected most in the three major facilities we have here. Underneath us is the Wilkinson [Hall] training facility. It’s dedicated to athletic development, performance development. The Ames Shuel Academic Center has new technology. The kids love it. That’s where we really have our academic world going on. The Excellence Academy is the personal development piece—health and wellness, nutrition, career counseling, leadership and life skills, student-athlete leadership and government. For me, that’s the three-legged stool of athletics, academics, and personal. And nobody else is doing that personal development like we do.

BLOOM: I’m sure you know the statistics that most athletes, especially in the money sports, come in thinking they’re going to play professionally. And it’s somewhere around 1 to 2 percent that actually make it. So, do you try to be a little more realistic with them and prepare them for careers other than professional sports?

GLASS: Absolutely. That’s a lot of what the personal development program is about, and the Excellence Academy. Toward the end of their time here, we have a career boot camp where we take them through resume building, interview skills, networking, all that stuff. When they’re sophomores, we make everyone do a resume so that they understand what a resume looks like. But the real method to our madness is for them to realize how little they have on their resumes. We say, “Yeah, that’s great. You can say you’re on the tennis team, but where’s your leadership skills?” We do this while they’re still time to fix it. And then we provide programming, like emerging leaders. We do speed dating with employers. We have the job skills boot camp. Part of that is, how do you work your way around the dinner table? And then, in addition to the job skills, we do a financial literacy boot camp because kids don’t check their checkbooks, and they take money out of the bank machine. We try to teach them what a security deposit is and what a lease is like, and lease versus buy, and all these fundamental things that you’d hope that they know, but a lot of times, they don’t.

BLOOM: Is this kind of tutoring all new or was some of it here before you arrived?

GLASS: When I got here, the academic center was a hallway in Assembly Hall. Kids were sitting there on the floor with their laptops. It was awful, so we renovated and did about 20,000 square feet in the academic center over here, computers, casual study area. We also dramatically increased the salaries of our academic advisors because what we were paying them was criminal, and we were getting a revolving door, and you just can’t develop what you want to develop with that. We quadrupled our tutoring budget. That was one of the best increases in expenditures I ever endured because it was helping those kids.

I’m not going to say there’s a straight line, but when I got here, our graduation success rate was 74 percent, which is bad. And we were toward the bottom of the Big Ten. We’ve improved it every year for the last seven years, and our rate is now 90.6 percent, which is an IU record and has us way above the average for the Big Ten. When it’s all said and done, it’s about graduating these kids in a way that they can actually get a job, and not some rinky-dink goofy degree that’s not going to help them.

BLOOM: How did you get Mark Cuban to shell out $5 million for the Mark Cuban Center for Sports Media and Technology?

Businessman and IU alum Mark Cuban sporting a Bloom ball cap at an Indiana Pacers game. Cuban donated $5 million for the sports media and technology center that bears his name. Photo by William Foley

magbloom.com | December 2018/January 2019 | Bloom 115
GLASS: Any athletic director would have to make Mark Cuban a target. He’s a huge IU sports fan, IU guy, lots of money. So, I went down to see him in Dallas, talked to him about what his interests are, and he was like, “No, I have zero interest in facilities.” His view is that if you give money to build facilities, you’re building in cost to education, and it ultimately comes out of kids’ pockets. I tried to explain to him why that might be the case in anthropology but that’s not the case here because we don’t get any academic support and tuition support. He wouldn’t buy that. He said, “Fred, I’m not doing that. I don’t want to do facilities.” So, I asked, “Well, what do you want?” And that’s the key to connecting with donors. He said, “I want to produce kids I want to hire someday.”

What we really wanted to do is to tap into the young people, especially at The Media School, who know how to do all the new stuff, and to try to get on the front-end of technology so we can be the place that you want to go to produce these things.

We decided to pitch that to Mark as part of the redevelopment of Assembly Hall, and everybody said, “Yeah, that’s a great idea, but we need around $5 million.” My stuff came and said, “We’re going to have this awesome dog and pony show. We’re going have all these kids with laptops. We’re going to shoot this stuff out. We got this.”

But I had read this article about Cuban, and they asked him on Shark Tank what does he like most and what does he not like. And he goes, “I hate the background. I hate the backstory. I hate all the little cute stories about where they figured out whatever. I just want to know the idea.” So, I literally wrote on a 3-by-5 card the three points I was going to make, and we flew in and went to a conference room in the Dallas airport. He pulls up in his car, driving himself. He’s got shorts on.

I get about halfway through my second point, and he puts his hand up as if to tell me to shut up, and he says, “I can get behind that. I’ll give you $5 million.” And that was it.

It’s been awesome. And he didn’t want to put his name on it. Later, I met him at a Pacers game in Indianapolis, and I said, “Brother, you’ve got to put your name on this place because you personify excellence in athletics. You personify excellence in media. You personify excellence in technology. And that’s what it’s all about.” And he would open doors for us because Facebook, virtual reality companies, whatever, they all want to associate with his name. They want to try stuff out so they can say they’re at the Cuban Center in Indiana. And it has just exploded. Our kids are making games, making names for themselves, getting hired by the Kennedy Center, all these places just out of school.

**BLOOM: You’ve been here 10 years. There’s been a lot of ups and downs, so I’m going to ask you some questions about your perception of things. To start, what do you consider the major successes in the last decade?**

GLASS: Overarching I think, this sounds awfully immodest, but I think changing the culture here to one of a positive student-centered culture drives everything else. Part of it is driven by initiatives like the five priorities, 24 Sports One Team, Bill of Rights, and hiring coaches who buy into our philosophy, because if they don’t, you’re sunk. I think the biggest determinant of a successful athletics department is your coaching.

Oh, and rebuilding the infrastructure.

When I got here, it looked a hell of a lot like 1981 when I left here. The $270 million worth of new projects, I think, really puts us in good shape for another generation of being competitive because we were in danger of falling back with our infrastructure. You can’t compete in the Big Ten with that.

**BLOOM: I imagine you’ve had your share of disappointments?**

GLASS: Well, absolutely. All the time. Especially when you’re aggressively trying to get things done, sometimes you get your hands slapped or your feelings hurt a little bit, so there’s been plenty of disappointments.

I think the most significant period was that 100 days when I separated first from [head football coach] Kevin Wilson and then from [head basketball coach] Tom Crean. That was really hard and disappointing and was physically and emotionally draining for me.

**BLOOM: What are you most proud of?**

GLASS: I tend to be a look-forward, not reflective sort of person, but I’m staring at it now and thinking maybe the Excellence Academy. That program, that was sort of my baby, and converting it into something that is literally and figuratively concrete was a big moment for me.

**BLOOM: Toughest decisions?**

GLASS: It’s been making changes with coaches. I talked about those two that were very high-profile and close in time. You pour your blood, sweat, and tears into trying to make these folks successful, and you’re trying to make all those connections and have connectivity. And at some point, for different reasons, you’ve got to make a change, and that’s just awful.

**BLOOM: I imagine letting women’s basketball coach Felisha Leggett-Jack go was hard.**

GLASS: Oh, that was awful. I loved her. She was dynamic and funny and I enjoyed her company, and I really thought she was going to have it happen, but it didn’t.

**BLOOM: She’s done well at the University at Buffalo.**

GLASS: She has. I’m really glad for her.

**BLOOM: Who are the athletes who have impressed you most, not just for their athletic ability but for their total person?**

GLASS: That’s a really tough one because it’s like picking among your children.

**BLOOM: Let’s narrow it down then to the big team sports—men’s and women’s basketball, football, baseball, men’s and women’s soccer.**

GLASS: You’re not going to take no for an answer on this one are you?

**BLOOM: No, I’m not. I think all fans want know what’s Juwan Morgan like,**
“We’re just blessed with really awesome kids, and it’s so frustrating when some bad apple or some knucklehead will do something somewhere, and people will paint with this broad brush about entitled athletes. If they just came here and talked to these kids they’d see that they’re truly extraordinary.”
what’s Lilly King like. I’m not saying you have to mention those, but just talk about some of the really outstanding people.

GLASS: With the caveat that you put bamboo shoots under my fingernails to pick among students, there’s many who maybe come to mind the most. You mentioned Lilly King [Olympic gold medal–winning swimmer]. She’s awesome. Whenever a kid is named Swimmer of the Week or Athlete of the Week, I shoot them a little email, and some respond and some don’t. You think Lilly wouldn’t respond because she’s so big-time, but she always sends an email right back, very positive.

The thing that I think is most fascinating about Lilly is what an incredible competitor she is. If she were sitting here, she’d say, “I’m not that talented,” but she’s super competitive, and inspirational in what you can do if you really work hard and have that drive. Allison Jorden is one of those awesome kids. She started Everybody Plays after an injury and really thinking about, “Who am I? I want to be more than No. 14 starting midfielder for women’s soccer. I need another identity.” [See story on page 66]. And she’s so selfless about the community of people with disabilities. She’s extraordinary. By the way, straight-A student in finance in Kelley, and people would love to have her at any Thanksgiving dinner. She’s extraordinary. A kid like Rashard Fant [football wide receiver] who wrote that beautiful thank you letter when he graduated. Here’s a kid who could’ve immediately gone pro but didn’t because he got into the graduate SPEA program. He spoke at our groundbreaking for the Excellence Academy and people were tearing up. J-Shun Harris [punt returner and receiver] also spoke at the dedication of the Excellence Academy. Your readers know him. Three ACL tears. Great, great kid, getting a graduate degree in, I think, management.

There’s Kyle Schwarber. He’s become larger than life. And he’s just a regular Joe Knucklehead. He loves having fun, would do videos with [baseball coach] Tracy Smith’s kid. Very dynamic and a great baseball player. Kids like Cody Zeller who come here, are so humble. Like he’ll come up to my kids and just say, “Hey, I’m Cody,” not assuming they know who he is or anything like that.

We’re just blessed with really awesome kids, and it’s so frustrating when some bad apple or some knucklehead will do something somewhere, and people will paint with
BLOOM: There are a lot of controversies swirling around college sports. I want to ask you about some of them. Earlier this month, The Associated Press reported on a study about diversity at top-level college sports programs that found white men overwhelmingly rule. Racial hiring got a C. Gender hiring got an F. Overall, college sports got a D. What are your thoughts? What’s going on here?

GLASS: Well, not the right things. The coaches and administrators need to look like the players who they’re leading, and all too often it’s too male and too white, and we recognize that and really try to improve. I’m proud of the fact that very recently the Minneapolis Star Tribune did a survey of major coaches and senior leaders in the Big Ten, and Indiana was third out of the 14 schools in the Big Ten. But we have a lot of work to do, and that’s sort of like graded on the curve. It’s not that great in intercollegiate athletics. I think there’s been a 25 percent increase in African Americans in senior level positions since I’ve been here because we make that a point of emphasis.

BLOOM: How about women?

GLASS: We were one of the first schools in the country to have a woman as our administrator for football when Julie Cromer was here. She oversaw football, and I think that sends the right message.

BLOOM: And she’s not here right now?

GLASS: No, she’s in Arkansas.

BLOOM: Scandals—there’s been a lot of them in college sports. Using prostitutes to recruit, shoe company payoffs, phony college courses, coaches that cheat. And this is at some really good schools. I know that keeping a clean program is right at the top for you, but how do you know for sure? And what do you think the NCAA can do to clean things up?

GLASS: There’s no magic wand and no silver bullet, so you’ve got to have a multifaceted approach. We do at least a couple things. The first big scandal was the tattoos for gear at Ohio State, which seems almost quaint now, but Jim Tressel lost his job over that.

The next big thing was at the University of Miami involving prostitutes and drugs. That made my head spin off. What could be worse than that? And then Penn State happens [child sex abuse scandal]. And it’s like, that could be worse. After Penn State is when I came to grips with this view.

I’m not smart enough to know what the next big scandal is going to be. I mean, your imagination can run wild. But I predict that it’ll be either caused by or perpetuated by good people that didn’t say anything. They don’t think the athletic director wants to know or they think he does know, or they think they’re going to get into trouble. But for whatever reason, the super commonality in all these athletic program scandals is that good people didn’t say anything and/or people who were told didn’t do the right thing.

Here, we put a super emphasis on what we call our openness-and-teamwork initiative. We don’t want to call it the rat-out initiative. We call it the openness-and-teamwork initiative, which is a little countercultural in athletics, where it’s like what happens in the locker room stays in the locker room, and it’s us against the world, which is fine when it’s about sports. But it’s not fine when it’s about sexual assault or recruiting or academic misconduct, so we talk about it all the time.

Not only are you allowed to tell me about something that’s going on, but if you know something and don’t tell me, you’re in trouble. You’re in trouble like the guy who’s doing the bad stuff.

BLOOM: It’s so hard to understand that an assistant football coach can make more money than a Nobel Prize winner at the same university. How does that compute?

GLASS: Look, it’s just the market. It’s just the market, and you can’t justify it on merit, but things are worth what people are willing to pay for them.

BLOOM: I’ve heard this from some ex-athletes, that the university is great when they get injured and while they’re at the university, but afterward, if your injuries persist, you’re on your own. What’s your opinion on extending medical care?

GLASS: I've heard things from some ex-athletes, that the university is great when they get injured and while they’re at the university, but afterward, if your injuries persist, you’re on your own. What’s your opinion on extending medical care?

BLOOM: Earlier in this conversation you talked about your legacy and knowing what you wanted it to be right from the get-go. When the history of the Fred Glass era is written, what do you want it to be?

GLASS: Well, first of all, for better or worse, we never get to write our own legacy, so it sort of lives in the hearts and minds of the people you touch. And I hope they feel good things. Again, this may sound immodest, but what I’ve desired to do is to be a part of a new golden age of Indiana University Athletics. I feel like the last golden age was when I was a student here in the ’70s and ’80s. And when you’re in a golden age, you don’t think you’re in one. You don’t sit there and think, “Wow, this is a golden age. Look who our coaches are—Sam Bell, Hobie Billingsley, Bob Knight, Jerry Yeagley.” I could make a case that that was the last golden age of IU Athletics, and I want to be part of the next one.

I think increasingly, we can lay claim to that distinction because a lot of the things we’ve accomplished haven’t been done in 30 years, 40 years. I know that’s a little mushy, but we talk about that with our kids. I think in 25 or 30 years, people may say, “Wow, that was a time of really laying the groundwork to be special.”