

mike leonard



The Right Thing to Do

When Indiana University announced its Student-Athlete Bill of Rights last summer, news organizations and sports outlets from coast to coast took note of the IU initiative and praised it.

“I was surprised, but pleased, at how much attention we got,” said Director of Athletics Fred Glass. “It’s kind of fun to be on the front page of *The New York Times*.”

A wry smile then broke out over the athletics director’s face. “I got lots of calls, but I haven’t gotten any calls from my colleagues in the Big Ten,” he said. “From what I hear, there are people who think it gives us a recruiting advantage. That’s not why we did it, but I am unapologetic if it is a recruiting advantage. I simply see it as the right thing to do.”

Among the commitments spelled out in the Bill of Rights is a pledge to cover the full cost of an undergraduate education and a lifetime degree guarantee. “Even if a 60-year-old third baseman from the baseball team wants to come back, his tuition is free,” Glass said. All student-athletes also receive “cutting-edge technology” such as a free iPad or tablet to help them get schoolwork done even when they’re traveling.

To look presentable out of uniform, student-athletes, male and female, now also get a custom-fitted blue blazer and tailoring services if they grow or bulk up. “It’s a wardrobe staple, which is why we chose blue,” Glass said. “Some of these kids don’t have anything to wear if there’s a bat mitzvah or a wedding or a funeral. They really appreciate them.

“We’ve been balancing the books on the backs of our student-athletes for years now,” Glass said. “This is not a reaction to the O’Bannon case (the NCAA

using athletes’ images for profit) or unionizing at Northwestern. It is about listening to concerns about how we treat our student-athletes in general.”

Some criticisms about how colleges treat student-athletes have been overstated. As the NCAA likes to point out, the overwhelming majority of college athletes do not go on to play professional sports. But they do get an education, which is no small thing. According to IU Athletics’ figures, the one-year value of a full-ride scholarship is \$22,098 for in-state students and \$44,950 for out-of-state. The four-year value is \$137,329 and \$241,837, respectively. And with tutoring and other academic support, every student-athlete has the opportunity to leave IU with a bachelor’s degree that is estimated to be worth \$1 million over a lifetime, when compared to a person with no college degree.

Glass wears his IU education and affiliation on his sleeve, literally and figuratively, and proudly points to the school’s bold legacy of academic freedom (support of pioneering sex researcher Alfred Kinsey) and affirmative action (breaking the color barrier in Big Ten men’s basketball). He sees his Bill of Rights initiative as a continuance of that tradition and hopes other schools will follow IU’s lead.

“If this ends up being the *Miracle on 34th Street* and Gimbel’s follows Macy’s, then I’m all for it,” Glass said. “Did I mention it’s the right thing to do?”

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