

COLLEGE SPORTS IN CRISIS

By Mike Leonard

Joyous Hoosier fans stormed the court in celebration after Indiana University's victory over top-ranked Kentucky at Assembly Hall in December 2011. Fan passion fuels the big money in major college sports. Photo by J. Scott Photography



Frank Deford is a commentator for National Public Radio, a senior contributing writer for *Sports Illustrated*, and a correspondent for HBO's *Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel*. Courtesy photo HBO

Renowned sportswriter and commentator Frank Deford is unsparing in his criticism of intercollegiate athletics. “It is an inequitable system. It is immoral, un-American, and can’t be justified in any form,” he tells *Bloom*.

“Look at the money we make off predominantly poor black kids,” former Louisiana State University basketball coach Dale Brown has said. “We’re the whoremasters.”

The Big Ten Conference’s own, in-depth report, released last April, is almost breathtaking in its assessment of the current state of college sports. “We are at a critical moment in the evolution of intercollegiate athletics. Intense pressure has been brought to bear by media scrutiny, Congressional scrutiny, litigation, and unionization efforts. Central to much of the criticism is the notion, particularly in the sports of football and men’s basketball, that the purported educational mission of intercollegiate athletics is a façade — that the true mission is to make money off the efforts of players who ‘get nothing’ and serve as minor leagues for the NFL and NBA.”

The report, *Education First, Athletics Second*, concludes, “Disagree as we may with such an assertion, the importance of criticism cannot be overstated. If we cannot defend — through an examination of actions and results as opposed to words — that education is the paramount factor in our decision-making process (rivaled only by the health and safety of our student-athletes), then the enterprise stands as a house of cards.”

It’s a tall stack of cards. The NCAA’s revenue for 2012–13 (the most recent, audited figure) was \$912.8 million. The money generated by the Football Bowl Subdivision (formerly called Division 1-A) was \$3.4 billion in 2013, according to *Business Insider*.



IU's take on the controversy

It is difficult, if not impossible, to find anyone who says the status quo in college athletics is acceptable, and that includes Fred Glass, vice president and director of intercollegiate athletics at Indiana University. Glass gained national attention — most

of it positive — for adopting a groundbreaking Student-Athlete Bill of Rights in June 2014, which guarantees such things as a four-year scholarship commitment regardless of injury, illness, or athletic performance, and a lifetime tuition waiver for scholarship athletes who leave the Bloomington campus without graduating but want to return to complete an undergraduate degree.

But Glass says IU and other institutions can and should do more. Yet even the

harshest of critics acknowledge that there are probably more questions than answers when it comes to what to reform and how to do it without creating different inequities and undesirable or otherwise unintended consequences. “We don’t want to throw the baby out with the bathwater,” says Glass.

Fueling the big money in major college football and men’s basketball is the passion fans have for the teams of their favorite school or alma mater. Video clips and



(above) IU’s Christian Watford won the ESPY (Excellence in Sports Performance Yearly) Award for Best Play of 2012 for his last-second 3-point shot to beat top-ranked Kentucky, but to date, his aspiration to play in the NBA has gone unfulfilled. Photo by J. Scott Photography

(top right) Fred Glass, IU director of athletics, says the value of scholarships isn’t fully appreciated in the discussion about compensation for college athletes. Photo by Shannon Zahnle

photographs of the delirium inside IU’s Assembly Hall when the Hoosiers upset No. 1 Kentucky in 2011 speak volumes about the joy fans derive from college sports. When IU’s Christian Watford sank a 3-point shot with 1.4 seconds remaining to beat the undefeated Wildcats, so many of the more than 17,000 spectators poured onto Branch McCracken Court that the images of pandemonium they created have entered the pantheon of iconic moments in college sports.

Addressing the criticism of how college sports feed professional leagues, Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany has said that the National Basketball Association (NBA) and National Football League (NFL) should either allow athletes into their leagues right out of high school or develop models like Major League Baseball (MLB) that create paths for young athletes who aspire to play professional sports but do not care about going to college. “Why is it our job to be the minor leagues for professional sports?” he asked in 2013.

Glass agrees to a point. “Let’s face it, though,” he says. “People just don’t care about the Fort Wayne Mad Ants (an NBA developmental league team) the way they care about the Indiana Hoosiers, and they never will.”

IU President Michael A. McRobbie, a native Australian, often points to the value of intercollegiate athletics in the United States serving to bond alumni to the university in a

way that happens nowhere else in the world. “It’s one of the ways they stay engaged, and tens of thousands of alums stay in touch with the university and keep a sense of identification with the university through athletics,” he says. “And when they stay connected to the university, they’re more likely to stay involved with their discipline or the art gallery or the school of music or something like that.” That engagement, in turn, results in monetary donations to the school’s alumni association, foundation, or specific departments and schools.

The NCAA’s future

Some that the problems pervasive in college sports are so intractable that the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA), which oversees intercollegiate athletics, should be disbanded or substantially reconstituted. Last year, when the NCAA granted more autonomy to the Power Five or Big Five conferences to increase monetary stipends for scholarship athletes to the “full cost of attendance,” authors Donna Lopiano and Gerald Gurney wrote in *Inside Higher Ed*: “The NCAA has once again demonstrated that it is incapable of self-reformation and in need of a complete overhaul from Congress.”

Unlike Glass, who sees the NCAA move as a good thing, the authors decry “a plutocracy in which a minority of the wealthiest institutions controls a constant escalation of wasteful

spending and extravagance.” The Power Five or Big Five conferences include the Big Ten, the Southeastern Conference, the Atlantic Coast Conference, the Big 12 Conference, and the Pac-12 Conference.

A senior contributing writer for *Sports Illustrated*, a correspondent for HBO’s *Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel*, and a commentator for National Public Radio, Frank Deford says, “I think as it’s presently constituted, it’s ridiculous to have an Indiana or Ohio State or Alabama in the same organization as some little religious school of 300 people in the middle of Nebraska. It’s too large for its own good,” he says. “How that proceeds, I don’t know. But I am confident within five years it will be a different organization.”

The O’Bannon case

The contemporary flashpoint in the discussion about whether college athletes in revenue-generating sports should be paid is the O’Bannon case — a lawsuit filed in 2009 on behalf of former UCLA basketball player Ed O’Bannon. A member of the school’s 1995 national championship team, O’Bannon agreed to be the lead plaintiff against the NCAA and Electronic Arts (EA) and The Collegiate Licensing Company after seeing his likeness used in an EA Sports video game that created profits for EA Sports and the NCAA but not the athletes depicted. Later, other high-profile athletes joined as plaintiffs in the class action suit, including basketball stars from previous generations such as Oscar Robertson and Bill Russell.

In August 2014, Judge Claudia Wilken of the U.S. District Court in Oakland, California, ruled in favor of O’Bannon and the plaintiffs, writing that rules limiting compensation to college athletes unreasonably restrain trade and violate antitrust laws. And, in a controversial twist, the judge set a cap on the money the NCAA could pay athletes at \$5,000 a year for players in the (largest) Football Bowl Subdivision schools as well as the large, revenue-generating men’s basketball programs.

No one is quite sure how the judge reached the \$5,000 per year figure or why she directed that the money be placed in accounts in which disbursements are deferred until the athlete exhausts his collegiate eligibility. The decision has been appealed by the NCAA.

But in late July, Wilken changed her preliminary ruling to eliminate the \$5,000 maximum per player and declared that all plaintiffs filing claims will draw from \$60 million provided by the NCAA and EA Sports. The settlement affects athletes whose names, images, and likenesses were used in popular EA video games from 2003–13, and payouts will depend on how prominently each athlete’s image was used. Athletes had until July 31 to join the class action, which will affect the amount paid to each player who is a part of the lawsuit. The NCAA immediately appealed that decision.

The plaintiffs were quick to declare victory, however. “We are pleased with the decision from Judge Wilken

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—Jeffrey Kessler,
sports labor attorney

to approve the \$60 million combined settlement that will be distributed to hundreds of student-athletes. This landmark decision marks the first time that student-athletes will be paid for their likeness or image, and stands as a huge victory in the ongoing fight for student-athletes’ rights,” plaintiffs’ attorney Steve Berman said in a news release.

Anti-trust suit to create an open market

Also looming is an anti-trust suit filed by powerful sports labor attorney Jeffrey Kessler, which looks to essentially create an open market for athletes in the only sports (with a few exceptions at specific schools) that generate income: football and men’s basketball. “The main objective is to strike down permanently the restrictions that prevent athletes in Division I basketball and the top tier of college football from being fairly compensated for the billions of dollars in revenues that they help generate,” the attorney told ESPN. “In no other business — and college sports is big business — would it ever be suggested that the people who are providing the essential services work for free. Only in big-time college sports is that line drawn.”



Indiana University quarterback Nate Sudfeld prepares to pass in a game against Maryland last year at Memorial Stadium. Sudfeld missed half of last season with injuries. Photo by Mike Dickbernd/IU Athletics

Value of a scholarship

“I don’t want to seem like an apologist for the system or an ostrich with its head stuck in the sand, because I think Indiana University has been pretty progressive in addressing some of the challenges in intercollegiate athletics,” says IU’s Fred Glass. “But I do think the value of scholarships is undervalued in

this debate. Intercollegiate athletics have generated what is probably the second-most significant scholarship program ever in this country, second only to the GI Bill. Intercollegiate athletics make it possible for lots and lots of people to go to college, including many people who are first-generation college students.”

Glass and other supporters of amateurism in college athletics point to the U.S. Census Bureau report *The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings*, which claims those with bachelor’s degrees will make, on average, \$1 million more in a lifetime of work than high school graduates. And Glass has put together figures that place the direct value of an IU scholarship (tuition and fees, room and board, and books) at \$22,098 per year for an in-state student and \$44,950 for an out-of-state student. Add in the expanded “cost of attendance” stipend now allowed by the NCAA, and an estimated 5-percent annual increase in costs, and those figures grow to \$30,299 and \$54,546 a year, or \$135,766 and \$240,274 per player during a four-year span.

A full-scholarship student-athlete at IU also has access to “training table” — two full buffet-style meals a day. “Kids not on scholarship still have access, too,” Glass says. Additionally, he points out, every student-athlete has access to “nutrition oasis” areas throughout IU athletics facilities where beverages, fruit, and healthful snacks such as granola bars are available at no cost. “You could get close to living off these if you did nothing else,” he says.

“So you have athletic training and strict nutritional training, lifelong leadership and life skills training, positive travel experiences, the necessary per diem, and I don’t think these students are wanting for too much,” Glass says. Student-athletes also receive academic monitoring and tutoring. And, at IU, student-athletes receive a custom-fitted blue blazer for general use (weddings, funerals, etc.) and an iPad or tablet to assist with their studies at home or on the road.

“To me, the secret sauce in this whole thing is college and the college experience,” Glass says. “I think, by and large, with some notable exceptions, kids are going to class and writing their papers and taking their tests.”

No-show classes

There’s no more notable examples of students not going to class or not taking valid classes than what has been alleged to have occurred at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill, a school with a solid academic reputation. *The New York Times* reported that “from 1993 to 2011 thousands of students, almost half of them athletes, took classes that did not require work or that

didn't really exist. Students signed up for 'independent study' courses in which they never met their professors and for lecture classes that never took place."

"If anybody thinks UNC is singular in what they've done, they've got to believe in the tooth fairy, too," says sportswriter Deford. "The system invites corruption."

Not many make the pros

It doesn't enhance the NCAA's carefully crafted message that student-athletes are indeed students, first and foremost, when, as NCAA President Mark Emmert points out, "athletes often have incredibly unrealistic perceptions of their professional prospects."

The NCAA's own survey figures are admittedly incomplete, because they don't have good numbers on athletes who go on to play internationally or even return to win professional roster spots in the States. But using a solid if not all-encompassing measure — the number of draft positions available in U.S. professional leagues compared to the number of athletes vying for those positions — in Division I football, 52 percent of players believe they will likely play professionally, yet only 1.6 percent are drafted by teams in the U.S. and Canada. In men's soccer, 46 percent of college athletes believe they'll play professionally when 1.9 percent are chosen out of college.

The overestimation phenomenon is not just limited to men. In women's basketball, 44 percent of players say they'll likely turn professional when just 1.9 percent are selected on draft day.

But it's men's basketball players who win the prize for overinflated expectations: 76 percent think they could be headed to the pros when just 1.2 percent are drafted by the NBA. The number playing professionally rises significantly when international and developmental league numbers are estimated and added in — 11.6 percent. But that still means that little more than one-in-10 will earn money playing basketball after college.

"When you do the math, it should be obvious to anybody that it's highly unlikely you're going to go pro and get rich," says Zach Davis-Walker, a former IU football player and recent graduate of the IU Maurer School of Law. "I was lucky with my upbringing. My father and my grandfather played college sports. I have cousins and uncles who played college sports. One thing my dad impressed upon me was making sure I made my time here worth it and leaving with a meaningful degree. Unfortunately, some guys put all their

eggs in that basket and think they're going to go pro, and they leave here with no degree or a degree that doesn't hold much weight. But I have no qualms with academics here," Davis-Walker says. "They've always fostered growth for the people who wanted it."

Medical issues

Davis-Walker, a Florida native, says he also has no complaints about the medical care he received as an IU athlete. A speedy, shifty running back, he tore a shoulder labrum twice in high school and then suffered another tear in spring practice his sophomore year at IU. "The surgeons compared it to trying to sew wet toilet paper together; it was so bad. But IU paid for it and took care of a foot injury I got as well."

The studious ex-athlete says his attitudes have evolved on monetary compensation to athletes since he earned his undergraduate degree, however. As an undergraduate, he thought his scholarship and medical care was compensation enough. Now, he says, additional recompense seems warranted. "I'm 27 and I go to sleep at night with some significant aches and pains. I'm probably going to have to live with that for the rest of my life."

In an unprecedented development last spring, the Pac-12 Conference directed its member institutions to prepare to pay post-college medical costs for injuries sustained while playing intercollegiate sports. But the proposal only covers medical care for four years after graduation or separation from the university, so ongoing problems such as those Davis-Walker will suffer for the rest of his life would not be covered by the Pac-12 proposal.

The racial component

"We'd be remiss if we had this discussion without discussing race," Davis-Walker says. "A lot of people don't like to talk about that."

Kevin D. Brown, a professor in the IU Maurer School of Law, says from a purely race-neutral point of view, elite college athletes provide more market value to colleges and universities than they receive in return and "a good case" could be made that they're being exploited. Digging deeper, he notes, a 2013 study showed that between 2007–2010 "black men made up 2.8 percent of the full-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students in the universities that formed the ACC, Big East, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac 12, and Southeastern Conferences. However, they made up 57.1 percent of the football players and nearly two-thirds of basketball players."

The numbers could point to exploitation



(above and right) Former Indiana University running back Zach Davis-Walker carries the ball during an IU football practice. "We'd be remiss if we had this discussion without discussing race," he says. Photos courtesy IU Athletics



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—Kevin D. Brown,
IU Maurer School of Law professor

or opportunity, depending on one's point of view. "If people want to talk about whether elite athletes should be paid or not, I am saying that is a separate conversation from one about black male athletes being exploited by the system," Brown says. "My point is, to determine whether the current system is racist requires a broader conversation about the impact of college athletic scholarships on the entire black community. It would be both disheartening and ironic to change the current system, in large part, because it is racist, if the result is a substantial reduction in the numbers and percentages of black male college graduates."

The groundbreaking 2011 cover story in *The Atlantic* magazine by historian Taylor Branch, "The Shame of College Sports," suggests a "plantation mentality" is in place in intercollegiate athletics, and quotes former sports marketing executive Sonny Vaccaro as saying that 90 percent of NCAA revenue is produced by 1 percent of the athletes, and of that 1 percent, 90 percent are African American. "The least educated are the most exploited," says Vaccaro, who worked for Nike, Reebok, and Adidas.

Davis-Walker expresses a related view. "A lot of black people come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and when you come from that world, you don't see that education is going to be your way out. How are you going to take advantage of a college education if you don't have that baseline understanding

that education, and not athletics, is going to be what determines your economic future?”

The overrepresentation of black athletes in revenue-producing sports is difficult for anyone to ignore but also seems to be one of the toughest from which to draw conclusions. Many say it just feels wrong that African Americans, discriminated against for so long, are primarily the ones helping college sports generate billions in revenue. IU Athletics Director Fred Glass argues that “first-generation students of any color can come here without fully understanding the implications of getting their education.” And Brown, the IU law professor, acknowledges that despite a heavy time commitment in athletics, black athletes have a higher graduation rate than black students who do not play sports.

But is that higher graduation rate the result of athletes working harder or is it that they are benefitting from the counseling, tutoring, and mentoring they receive? It could also be that athletes sign up for easier courses or that professors grade them more leniently. At this point, there are no clear answers.

A seat at the table

Tom Bowers is an associate professor of business law and co-director of the Sports and Entertainment Network in IU’s Kelley School of Business MBA Program. The first words out of his mouth, when asked whether collegiate athletes should be paid, are, “They’re already paid. The question is how much they should be paid. They receive scholarships for playing. There’s no way to characterize athletic scholarships as anything other than that. They’re being paid because they play sports.

“A greater issue to me is not whether athletes get paid or how much but whether they should have a seat at the table regarding their working conditions. That’s the thought behind what the Northwestern University athletes did (in 2014) in trying to get certified as a union,” Bowers says.

A judge ruled in favor of the athletes, but that, too, is being challenged in court by the NCAA.

Bowers says there’s no question in his mind that the explosion in popularity of college sports needs to be re-examined. “In the ‘60s, (football) players played 9–10 game seasons. Today it’s a 14–game season, a conference championship game, and if you get to the final playoffs you could wind up playing another couple of games. Now you’re



(above) Indiana University running back Tevin Coleman is swarmed by Michigan tacklers in a 2014 game at Michigan Stadium. An All-American, Coleman finished seventh in the Heisman Trophy voting but wasn’t drafted by the NFL until the third round, the 73rd player overall. Photo by Mike Dickbernd/IU Athletics



IU law professor Kevin Brown says any changes in scholarship rules should consider the impact on the entire black community. Photo courtesy Indiana University



Thomas Bowers says athletes deserve “a seat at the table” when issues concerning college sports are discussed. Bowers is co-director of the Sports and Entertainment Network in IU’s Kelley School of Business MBA Program. Photo courtesy Indiana University



IU women’s volleyball Head Coach Sherry Dunbar-Kruzan says that with the Power Five schools offering cost-of-attendance stipends, volleyball coaches at mid-majors are worried about the future of their sport. Photo by Mike Dickbernd/IU Athletics

looking at a 17–game season,” he says. “That’s just more games in which you could suffer concussions or other debilitating injuries. The effects of continual hitting, we know, are quite severe. I think players deserve more say on the length of the season, the time away from class. I don’t know the answers, but I do know that the athletes should be in on the discussion, whether it’s decreasing the demands or increasing the compensation.”

Advocates of pay-to-play

Frank Deford also defers on how to pay players or how much. “I don’t know how it would work. For me it would just be an open market,” he tells *Bloom*. “Maybe if you’re a school like Alabama, you have to pay your quarterback \$1 million. I don’t know, but I see all that money flying around, and I can’t believe that everyone profits except the players.”

As a sportswriter and commentator, Deford counts himself among the people who earn money because of the efforts of unpaid athletes. “It’s just silly for a guy in the press box covering the game; he’s making a nice salary. Certainly announcers for the major networks are making huge salaries off students who aren’t making money.”

And coaches? “When you have college coaches making as much as many professional coaches, how do you defend that?” Deford asks. “Does that sound like amateur sports to you?”

According to *USA Today*, the highest paid coach in college football is Alabama’s Nick Saban, who made \$7.1 million in 2014. IU football Head Coach Kevin Wilson earns \$1.6 million annually (salary plus auxiliary revenue), significantly more than university President McRobbie, who made about \$1.1 million when salary, deferred compensation, and other benefits are calculated. Still, Wilson ranks 66th among all college coaches in total compensation, sandwiched between the coaches at Fresno State University and East Carolina University.

In college basketball, *USA Today* reports that Kentucky’s John Calipari is the nation’s top earner at \$6.4 million a year, followed closely by Duke University’s Mike Krzyzewski at about \$6 million. IU’s Tom Crean ranks ninth in the country, according to the newspaper, with a compensation package of a little more than \$3 million a year.

Like Deford, *The New York Times* columnist Joe Nocera has been a fervent advocate of pay-to-play. In early January, he wrote about the first College Football Playoff and noted that ESPN, which bought the rights to the four–team playoff for \$7.3 billion for 12 years, saw the first playoff games rank as the two most–watched programs in the history of cable television. For the national championship game, the sports network charged \$1 million for a 30–second ad.

In 2011, Nocera outlined what he considered a plausible plan for pay-to-play. He called it a “modified free market approach” resembling professional

basketball and football, in which players would be paid whatever a school thought they were worth but under a salary cap, and with a minimum salary for every scholarship athlete. For example, he suggested the cap might be \$3 million for a football team and \$650,000 for a basketball team, with a minimum salary of \$25,000. Schools would have to be judicious in deciding how to spend the remainder of the money to pay elite players and still have enough left under their salary cap to attract good athletes in supporting roles. Every scholarship player would get lifetime health insurance and players would get what IU business professor Bowers calls a seat at the table — most likely in the form of a players’ union.

IU’s Fred Glass brings up the seldom-discussed question of endorsements in a free market system. “What’s the effect of that on the (financial) playing field?” he asks. “If you’re a star athlete and you’re looking at what you can make off endorsements, would you go to Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, or maybe look to St. John’s in New York City or UCLA in Los Angeles or Boston College — all places where there is a big media market and a lot more opportunity to make money?”

NCAA creates the Power Five

When the NCAA voted in 2014 to give its biggest and most profitable conferences more autonomy in revenue generating sports, it allowed the Power Five schools to increase scholarships for student-athletes by adding a stipend to reflect the full cost of attendance, such as transportation home to visit family, lab and other fees, and even a movie or theater ticket while on the road. The amount was estimated to be \$2,000–\$5,000 above current scholarship levels, depending on the cost of living in various locales. But some schools are exceeding those amounts. CBS Sports reported in May that Tennessee, Auburn, and Mississippi State in the Southeastern Conference have already calculated stipends of more than \$5,000 per player.

And even though IU ranks low in revenue in the Big Ten, because it’s not strong in football (the biggest moneymaker), Glass is enthusiastic about the development. “If the NCAA hadn’t been able to generate the political will to create the Power Five conferences and have the autonomy connected with that, then I think the thing would have been so broken we’d have to start over,” he says.

“The decision was mind-jarring because it was a seismic change for the NCAA to say that ‘level playing field’ is no longer the coin of the realm,” Glass continues. “It used to be that the University of Texas couldn’t do anything that Butler (University) couldn’t do. And now it’s saying that schools that can afford to do more for their student-athletes can do more.

“Not only was it the right thing, it also sent the signal that the big, bad universities wring the athletic eligibility out of their kids and then dispose of them

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‘To me, the tragedy is that kids who have made significant contributions to their university’s image and success leave without being educated.’
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Fred Glass, IU athletics director



Fans on the floor of Assembly Hall after IU upset rival Kentucky in 2011. Fans storming the floor after games, a dangerous practice, has become commonplace.
 Photo by J. Scott Photography

and don’t care where they end up — that isn’t how we operate. I think giving the Power Five conferences the ability to do more for student-athletes is the best example that intercollegiate athletics and institutions can heal themselves,” Glass concluded.

The future of non-revenue sports

The creation of the Power Five sent ripples throughout the college sports world that some fear could build into a tsunami. Free market advocates such as Deford say

the revenue-generating sports (almost exclusively football and men’s basketball) should keep their money and colleges should stop subsidizing non-revenue or “Olympic” sports ranging from rowing to wrestling to water polo. “The whole idea that football and (men’s) basketball should pay for other sports — that’s not written down in scripture,” he says.

That attitude, in turn, has created fear and apprehension in non-revenue sports. “Let’s face it,” Glass says. “Men’s football and

basketball pay the bills for everyone else. If not for that subsidy, if you will, these sports would not exist on their own.”

“For the Power Five, being able to offer a cost-of-attendance stipend and other amenities is great,” says Sherry Dunbar-Kruzan, IU women’s volleyball head coach. “But for others — I’ve had head coaches at mid-major schools who want to interview for assistant jobs here. They’re not only worried about competing; they’re worried about the future of volleyball. It’s the fastest growing sport

had conversations with people who say there will be ways around that, especially since you’re already separating the revenue generators from the other sports,” says Deford. “I don’t think Title IX rules are obeyed as it is.”

Fred Glass speaks his mind

There are changes in intercollegiate sports that aren’t financial that Glass would like to see as well. One would be to address the time demands made on major college athletes, particularly in men’s basketball and football. “Lock the gym door and stop the charades of captain-led practices and give the kids time to be kids. Indiana has been an advocate for reducing that,” he says.

Glass also says the way the NCAA determines time spent on sports is highly inaccurate. “A game is considered a three-hour commitment within the 20 hours you are allowed to work each week,” he says. “In truth, that’s just how long the game takes. Say if we’re playing Minnesota or at Rutgers or Maryland, by the time you travel, do pre-game and post-game, and get home, what’s that really? It’s more like 20 hours right there. There’s a lot of funny stuff going on.”

Playing 9 p.m. basketball games at a distant school also means getting back to Bloomington in the wee hours of the morning during the school week, when students most likely have classes the next day. “But we have only ourselves to blame for that,” Glass says. “We sold the ability to set game times to ESPN, and for us to sit back and decry television rings a little hollow. It’s on us.”

Glass pushes back against criticism that athletics admits and gives scholarships to athletes who aren’t legitimately qualified for the school’s academic standards.

“It’s interesting for me to note that the (IU) Jacobs School of Music has more special admissions than the athletic department has. And, you know, that’s okay. Just like football or basketball or wrestling or softball, or whatever, if the university wants to recognize that this student just might be the best oboe player in the world but isn’t great at finite math, why not make an exception to allow that young person to get the training to become the best? The same holds true in athletics. But when I hear all the complaints about special admissions in athletics, I want to say, ‘Hey, the Jacobs School leads that parade.’”

Admission policies at other schools also leave Glass scratching his head. “We have

kids who can’t get in here because of our comparatively stringent math requirements, but they can get into Purdue. Now how can that be?” he asks. “Purdue’s supposed to be the engineering school, the math place. But we have kids who select out of Indiana and go to Michigan or Purdue because it’s actually easier to get in.”

What’s ahead

Pending litigation aside, the definition of “amateur sports” pervades practically every discussion about intercollegiate athletics. The Olympic Games, long the global model for amateurism, years ago discarded pay, commercial endorsements, and other benefits as disqualifiers. Tired of sending young college basketball players to compete against older and well-compensated athletes from around the world, the United States started sending millionaire NBA players to the Olympic Games in 1992.

In Taylor Branch’s article, “The Shame of College Sports,” he describes the origin of the term, “student-athlete,” as a means to shield colleges from labor laws and liability. The term first came into play, Branch says, when the widow of a college football player who had died from a head injury filed for workmen’s compensation death benefits.

“The term student-athlete was deliberately ambiguous. College players were not students at play (which might understate their athletic obligations), nor were they just athletes in college (which might imply they were professionals),” Branch wrote.

A last word

Despite instituting some significant reforms, such as the lifetime tuition for scholarship players who don’t graduate, and pushing for further reforms, IU Athletics Director Fred Glass gets visibly irritated when critics of intercollegiate athletics invoke the phrase, “tragedy of college sports.”

“To me, the tragedy is that kids who have made significant contributions to their university’s image and success leave without being educated. That’s the worst plantation politics there can be. We are quite serious when we say that the young men and women who play on our teams are students first and athletes second.

“Tragedy gets thrown around too much,” he says. “Nobody’s dying.” ✖