

BIG MESS on campus

Recruiting scandals,
steroids and academic failures
have pushed college football deep
into its own territory

Article by Ed Sherman

The ideal concept of what college football should be does exist. It thrives light years away from . . .
... the Sunbelt Fiesta Bowl, the USF & G Sugar Bowl and the John Hancock Bowl, formerly known to generations as the Sun Bowl. It thrives without big-time recruiting, steroids, slimy agents and \$10-million indoor facilities so the players won't get cold and wet, and without overzealous boosters, who usually drag their schools into embarrassing scandals. It is, believe it or not, college football with players who compete without scholarships, Proposition 48 and Basketweaving 101 . . .

A long time ago, college football was conceived as an extracurricular activity. The idea was to make college students sound of body as well as of mind. It was thought that competition was good for the spirit, and thus universities formed teams and decided to compete against each other. But at most prestigious institutions of higher education, unfortunately, the concept went haywire.

One level of collegiate competition, however, has avoided the traps. Division III schools, small universities in the main, have successfully parlayed the marriage of athletics and academics. Players don't receive scholarships, and they are required to meet the school's academic requirements, just like other students. They attend the colleges of their choice for reasons more significant than admiration for the defensive-line coach. Make no mistake—Division III players work and train hard and take their sports seriously. Yet winning isn't the only thing; competition is.

The concept has worked well at such places as Augustana College in Rock Island, Millikin University in Decatur and Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, which has had 35 consecutive winning seasons, the longest current streak in college football. And it has worked at the University of Chicago, whose Maroons also compete in the lower-key Division III class. They've long since found a home there, a level where athletics nicely complement academics.

That wasn't always the case at the U. of C. The Maroons were once a big-time team, competing in the Big 10. It was where Amos Alonzo Stagg carved his legend as a coach and where halfback Jay Berwanger, in 1935, won the first Heisman Trophy.

University president Robert Maynard Hutchins, however, didn't believe his institution should be in the entertainment

business. He thought the concept had gotten out of hand, and he did something about it. In 1939 the University of Chicago decided to drop major college football.

"The greatest obstacle to the development of a university in this country is the popular misconception of what a university is," Hutchins said. "The two most popular of these are that it is a kindergarten and that it is a country club. Football has done as much as any single thing to originate, disseminate and confirm these misconceptions. By getting rid of football, by presenting the spectacle of a university that can be great without football, the University of Chicago may perform a signal service to higher education throughout the land."

Fifty years later, with college sports suffering through some of its worst-ever scandals, Hutchins comes off sounding like a prophet.

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In 1988, 35.5 million spectators watched football games at 680 four-year colleges. According to a study by the College Football Association, \$17.3 million was spent in one community solely from fans attending football games during the season.

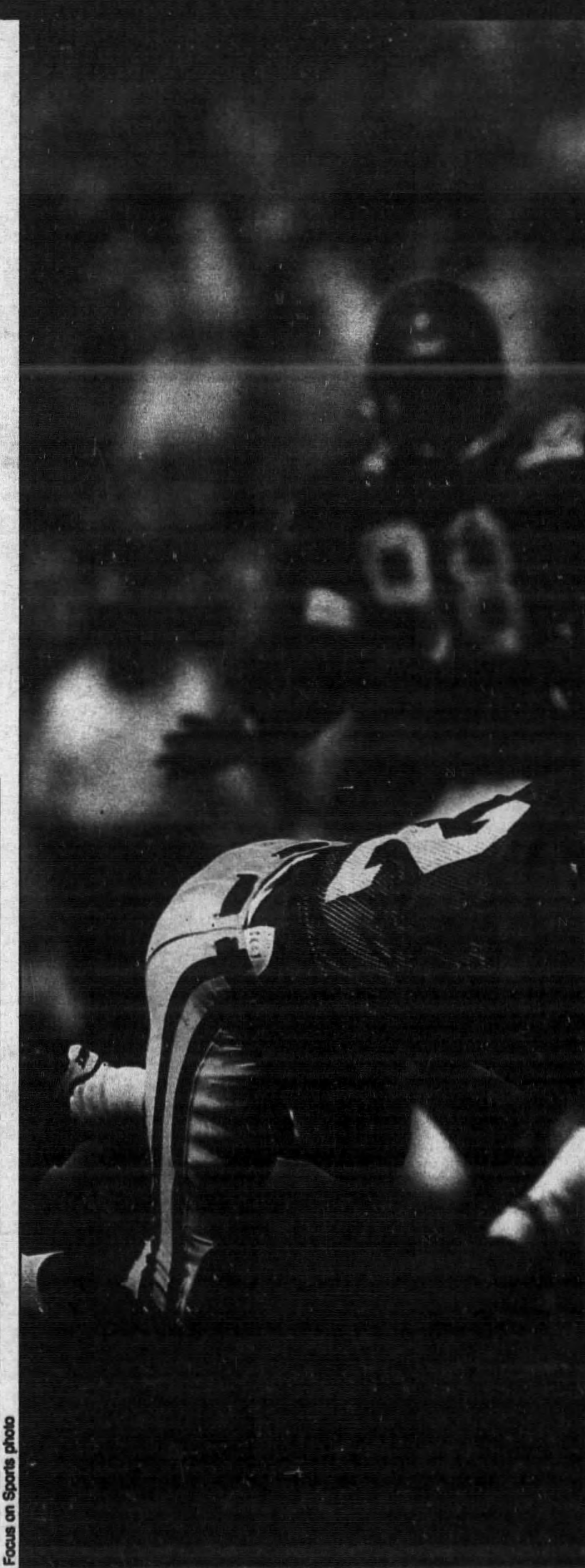
You say you can't make it to the stadium? Television can accommodate you. On any given Saturday the dial, from CBS to ABC to ESPN, is dominated by round-the-clock football. Last Jan. 2 the three big networks carried seven bowl games, as if the public might feel shortchanged by getting only six.

College football is part of the American fabric, a fall tradition for more than a century. It is tailgate parties, Knute Rockne, marching bands and 11 men on the field trying to uphold the honor of State U. But will major college football will be around for the 21st Century? Or will there be a "silent fall," as it were, the equivalent of an autumn without leaves? Will there be Saturday afternoons cast adrift in a Twilight Zone of empty stadiums and pennants gathering dust on dorm-room walls? A silent season of unsung fight songs, quiet Monday mornings at the office, no pep rallies and, above all—without the big game—no homecoming, either? Given the recent problems, there are many who believe this could happen and should.

College football—and the same goes for basketball—seems to be a sport bent on destruction. The house is burning, sending administrators in search of a hose. The college football lowlights during the past year include:

● Tommy Chaikin, a former player at South Carolina, going public about rampant steroid use involving himself and many of his teammates.

● Sports agents **Norby** Walters and Lloyd **Bloom** being



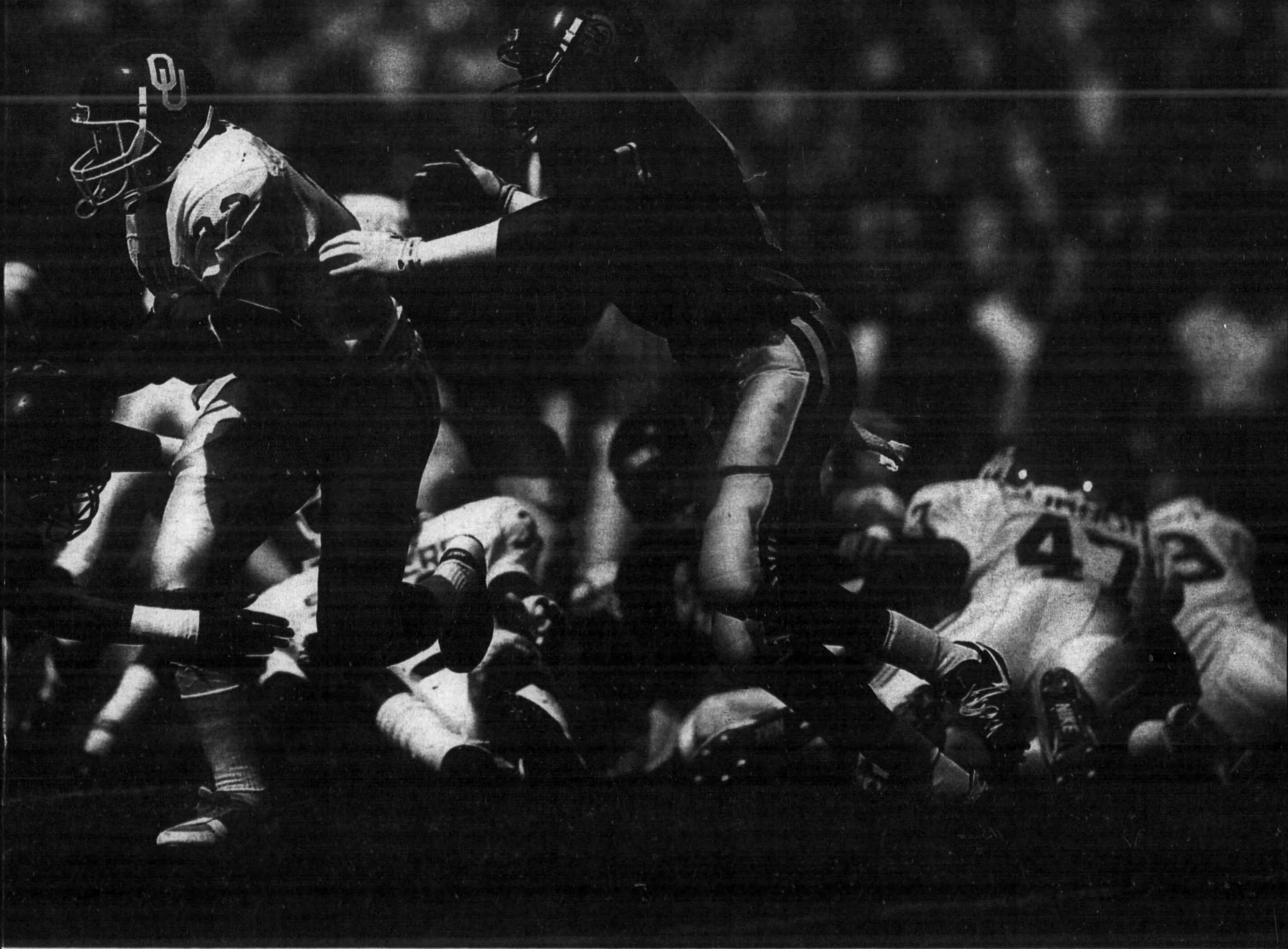
Focus on Sports photo

convicted of defrauding universities by signing athletes before the end of their college eligibility. On the other hand, during the trial, universities such as **Iowa** take a beating when it is revealed that two of its players were kept eligible even though they were making no progress toward a degree.

● Washington Redskins defensive end Dexter Manley admitting that he can't read. Despite that deficiency, he was kept eligible for four years at Oklahoma State.

● The NCAA nailing Oklahoma for various recruiting violations. The Sooners' problems then intensified when a player shot one of his teammates and when three others were indicted on a rape charge. Then starting quarterback

Ed Sherman is a Tribune sportswriter.



Southern Cal battles Oklahoma, a school cited for recruiting violations and some of whose players have been charged with serious crimes.

Charles Thompson landed on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* after his arrest for selling cocaine.

While those scandals still simmer, Southern Methodist University is resuming its football program this fall after the NCAA sent the school to the sidelines for two years on charges of excessive cheating. The charges involved several boosters who, overcome with generosity, couldn't resist making payments to so-called "amateur athletes." Such practices have plagued many institutions, but at SMU the sordid affair cost the university president his job, and the tentacles even reached the Texas governor's office.

Despite those embarrassments, there still are those who

believe the situation isn't as bad as it seems.

"In the 1980s college athletics tried to put our house in order," says Chuck Neinas, executive director of the College Football Association. "We accomplished that, although maybe it's not all that visible. I like to say, 'Our image hasn't caught up with our progress.'"

"The sport is healthy," says Indiana football coach Bill Mallory. "You hear a lot about the negatives. The public dwells so hard on the negatives. They don't look for positives. Sure, we've got our problems, but I do feel college football has come a long way."

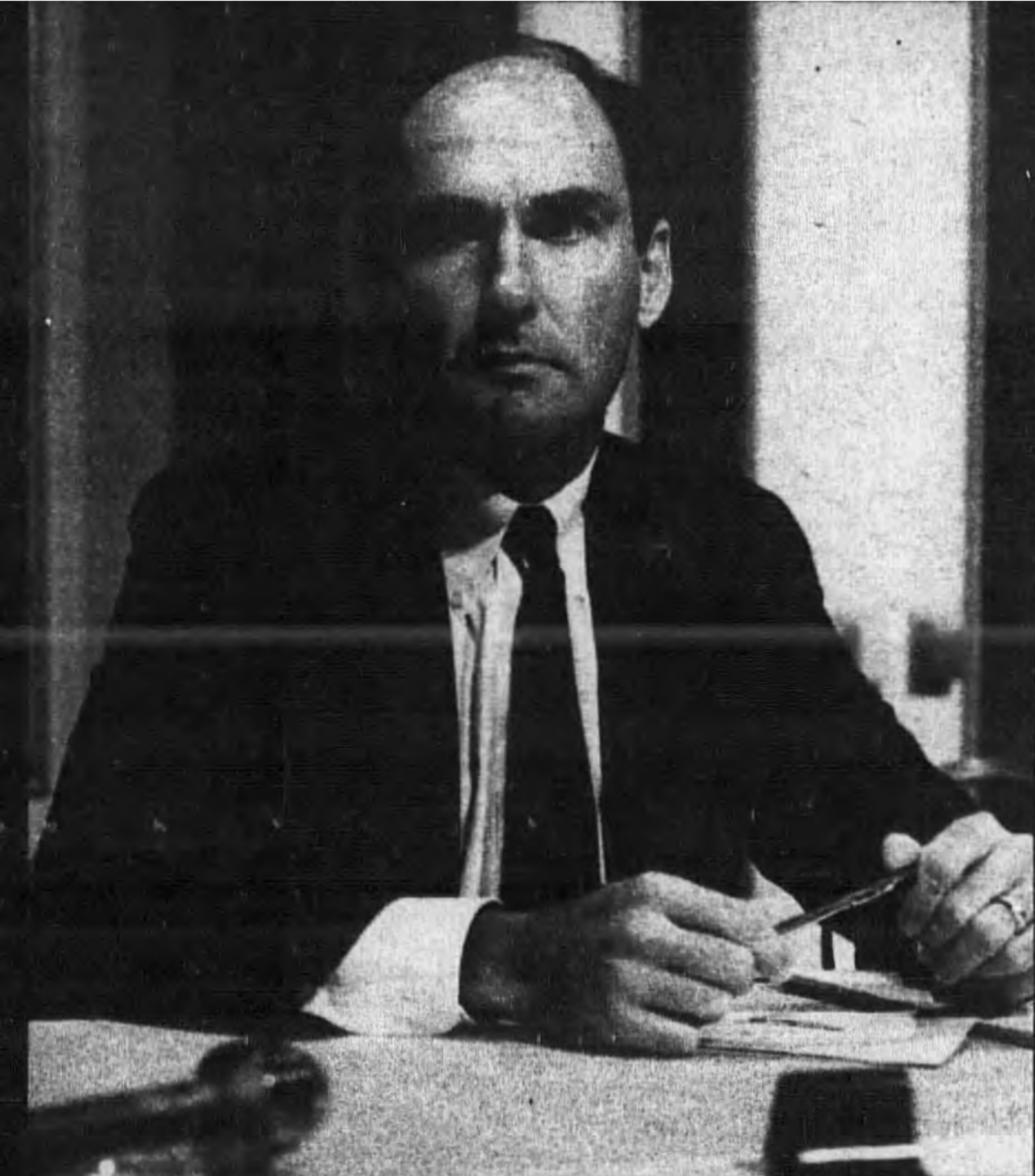
"The situation isn't as bad as people think," says Richard

Schultz, executive director of the NCAA. "We're talking about a few schools out of 800 that have had problems this year. We're talking about a small percentage of our population. It's a tough sell to convince people of that."

Schultz is right. Few are convinced.

"It's analogous to playing 11 games and going 10-1," says new Big 10 commissioner Jim Delany. "You had a great season, but you lost that one game that kept you from winning the championship. That's the game people are going to remember."

Delany is painfully aware that major college sports have
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Tribune photo by Amy Dupuy

The Big 10's Jim Delany: "Change is in the air."

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lost more than games in recent years. The Big 10 hired him to help the conference lead a reform agenda nationwide to bring college sports back into focus. The No. 1 priority is achieving the balance between athletics and academics, a concept that rarely is seen on the large campuses.

"The model we're working with was created post-World War II," Delany says. "College sports for the most part were regional. The system that was in place in 1950 is largely in place today. However, there have been some amazing changes in the environment. The current model has been stretched to the point where it's become obsolete."

The new model, Delany says, has to deal better with the unique and sometimes overbearing demands on a student-athlete. It has to devise a way to make sure athletes who come from impoverished backgrounds can survive financially at a major university. It also has to do a better job of screening out athletes who also want to be students, instead of just being football players. And it has to make universities accountable for graduating these athletes, he says.

The new model is needed to help change the public's perception of college athletics. Otherwise, Delany believes college sports will be in for more of the same. And it could mean the death of the sport.

"Change is in the air," Delany says. "Some of the disasters have focused attention on college sports. State legislators are becoming interested. The federal government has become interested. If we don't recognize that we have to address these problems, I don't know where we'll be."

"Intercollegiate sports can't stand the kind of scrutiny and revelations that we've seen recently. If it continues for the next 10 years, there are series of people who are willing to pull the plug."

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Bo Schembechler sits in an office filled with the rewards of a legendary coaching career. There are a couple of Rose Bowl trophies, citations and honors, pictures of him with former players, with presidents of the United States and even with another famous Bo—last name, Derek.

College football has been very good to the Michigan coach/athletic director, and he has been very good for it. He can't conceive of university life without his favorite sport.

"If they closed this place [Michigan's athletic offices] down, what would it mean to Michigan?" Schembechler asks. "The answer is something would be missing from the college experience. All of these things people talk about—

generating alumni support, fundraising, bringing the campus together—that's all well and good, but there's something more important. The bottom line is the experience for the guys who play. It's a great experience for them. That's all you need to justify college sports."

Schembechler calls himself "a Neanderthal," and Penn State's Joe Paterno probably qualifies as one, too. They are two of the most successful coaches of their era, both on and off the field, and their status has made them spokesmen for the college football. They run clean programs in which the players go to class and graduate at a rate equal to or better than the rest of the student body. If college sports had more Schembechlers and Paternos, it wouldn't be facing the problems it has today. To put it mildly, they are concerned.

"My biggest concern is whether we can eliminate the type of competition we seem to be getting at our level," Paterno says. "The players don't seem to be playing just to play the game. Everybody wants to turn pro. There's the steroids and drugs. Kids not getting a legitimate education. It's a matter of losing perspective. I just don't understand how those things can be allowed to happen."

It doesn't happen everywhere. Paterno says it never occurred at his school because the faculty wouldn't allow it.

"I've always believed in firm faculty control," he says. "The kids we bring in here have to be bona fide students. We're not given the leniency to do some of the things other schools do. I never had a choice. Besides, I couldn't do it any other way."

The same holds true at places such as Michigan, Northwestern, Stanford, Vanderbilt, Rice and Duke. The common thread at those schools has been an unrelenting code of rules set by the faculty. The No. 1 edict is that there will be no compromises.

Notre Dame has long been viewed as the champion of victories both on and off the football field. With rare exceptions, all of the school's players graduate. Unlike their counterparts at other universities, they receive no special privileges. They live with and are treated no differently from the rest of the members of the student body.

"Notre Dame is an example of a university that has its priorities in order," Schultz says. "There are certain things they won't compromise on. Their No. 1 mission is to educate the student-athletes."

Notre Dame's storied tradition gives its recruiters an edge on their competition. Every year high school players flock to the school as much as it goes to them, making it easier for the school to take the cream of each year's crop of student-athletes.

Notre Dame, though, deserves credit for having such a tradition, largely because of two men: its former president, Rev. Theodore S. Hesburgh, and its former executive vice-president, Rev. Edmund P. Joyce, both of whom retired in 1987. Joyce, who oversaw the athletic program for 35 years, says the formula for the Irish's success is basic.

"We inherited a program where integrity was very important," Joyce says. "I like to say that Notre Dame's success

can be attributed to the president of the university having direct control over the athletic department. Here it's in the hands of the No. 2 man, who works directly with the president. Having responsibility that high up prevents abuses. At other schools, the athletic departments become fiefdoms unto themselves. The athletic directors don't report to anyone. That's where you see the abuses. It shows the lack of attention by the higher officials."

If there has been anything positive coming out of the scandals, it's that the university presidents now realize that they are hardly immune from the mess. Kentucky president David Roselle learned that lesson when he helped his basketball team through its recent problems with the NCAA. Roselle estimated that although the athletic department represents a small part of the overall university budget, he spent 50 percent of his time on the basketball team during the height of the scandal, which almost saw the Wildcats' program suspended for two years.

"There's something wrong when the university president has to spend 50 percent of his time on athletics," Roselle says.

Says the CFA's Neinas: "One president, whose team was on probation, told me he felt his efforts as president were minimized because of it. He told me that before he could do anything, he had to stand up and explain why his team was in trouble."

The NCAA's Schultz hopes that in the 1990s the presidents will closely monitor their athletic programs. Call it fire prevention—snuffing out the spark before it becomes a blaze.

"The presidents realize that while the athletic programs are only a small part of what they do, it's a highly visible program," Schultz says. "You can have a lack of integrity in the English department, and most people won't notice. But if you have problems in the athletic department, you have a major debacle."

Paterno hopes the presidents' involvement will help eliminate some of the problems. Yet he's skeptical and uncertain about the future.

"I've been in this business for 40 years," Paterno says. "If I have to stay in a business where kids have to take steroids and where schools are bringing in kids who have no business being there, then I've got a problem. We might as well be a minor league for the National Football League."

"For me to legitimize this, I've got to be dealing with people who are getting something out of the sport. My biggest concern in the next 10 years is whether we can find those kinds of people who have that commitment."

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Rick Telander of Sports Illustrated thinks Paterno should get out now. He doesn't see much hope for college athletics.

"College sports turned the corner a few years back," Telander says. "Now it's headed for the cliff, and it's going 100 miles an hour."

Telander is a former defensive back for Northwestern and an academic All-Big 10 selection in 1969 and 1970. He has covered college football on and off for 15 years, and he has been the main beat man for Sports Illustrated for three years.

Telander, though, won't be covering college football this season—he's disgusted with the sport. He has a book coming out this fall titled "The 100-yard Lie" in which he directs his wrath at the game's principal players.

"The basic premise is that college football has nothing to do with higher education," Telander says. "The game has been corrupt from the beginning. Rutgers was using illegal players as far back as 1864. It's an institutionalized hypocrisy that is evil. Winning is everything. If a coach has a bunch of Rhodes Scholars, and his record is 5-6, he's gone. But he can go 11-0 with things all crazy and still keep his job. It's all out of whack."

Even as an athlete at Northwestern, Telander was skeptical about college sports. He never felt like an amateur because he viewed his scholarship as a form of payment, so he approached playing football as a job. He still remembers the endless hours of preparing for a game.

"The games were fun, but they were like a hiccup," Telander says. "Putting in a thousand hours on football was

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Writer/ex-player Rick Telander



Michigan's Bo Schembechler

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nothing for a season. It was 40 hours and more a week. Then you had to put up with all the aches and pains. The only way a typical student could be injured the same way is to be in a car accident. Your muscles are twitching, and you can't sit down because your back is sore. And the big game is this weekend. Tell me, with all that, how are you going to study for midterms?"

Telander doesn't have much faith in university presidents, because he thinks if they were smart, they'd follow the lead of the University of Chicago's Hutchins and eliminate big-time sports. One such faculty campaign does exist at Southern Illinois University.

Jerome Handler, an anthropology professor there, is not a favorite of the SIU football team because if he has his way, there won't be one. Handler argues that during the last seven years, the football team has lost an average of \$500,000 a season, and he doesn't think the university should sustain that kind of loss.

"The argument I'm raising is, 'What do we get in return for this loss?'" Handler says. "I argue, 'Nothing.' This is not a football area. We don't fill the stadium. It provides entertainment only five times a year. Is football worth that kind

of loss? The money we save theoretically could be used for the library."

Handler says he'd feel the same way even if the football team were profitable. "I want to eliminate all scholarships," he says. "Eliminate the pressure on the teams. Why should a university perform a farm service for the pros?"

When Handler first emerged with his proposal last winter, the campus didn't take it seriously. The professor persisted, though, and many people, including the SIU athletic department, now take him very seriously. The faculty senate has put his proposal on the table for the fall, and the intercollegiate advisory board also is looking into it. The SIU School of Medicine also has endorsed his proposal.

"I've already achieved one of my primary goals," Handler says. "This thing is not a sacred cow. Now it's a respectable topic. It's been brought out in the open."

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How to tame the college football monster? *Can it be tamed?*

Larry Hawkins believes many of the troubles plaguing college athletics are simply a reflection of the problems facing education as a whole. Hawkins, working out of the University of Chicago, operates the Institute for Athletics and Education, a program designed to provide educational support for athletes, parents and coaches. Hawkins argues that sports can be used as an incentive to get a student more interested in school.

He thinks some of the problems in college sports could be eliminated if junior highs and high schools did a better job of educating. He calls for the major athletic universities to aid that process by getting more involved in creating programs to help prepare high school athletes for what awaits them in college, both in and out of the classroom.

"I love sports, and I'd like to see it do well," Hawkins says. "I just think that since there's such a crisis in education, sports, like everything else, should adjust. The trouble now is that kids are being sent to college who can't swim. The colleges are left trying to pull them out of the water. That's where you get the scandals."

Notre Dame's Joyce has a pet theory. He believes that each athletic department should have an independent monitoring system for athletics. Among the monitors' duties would be to analyze athletic admissions and determine whether students are making progress toward a degree. Because they would be so close to the program, the monitors also could investigate possible recruiting violations. These watchdogs would report to the NCAA executive director and a board of advisers, comprising five university presidents.

"The system would operate as preventive medicine," Joyce says. "Nip the problems in the bud before they begin to fester."

The Big 10's Delany is in favor of eliminating freshman eligibility, but he'd still give the student-athlete an opportunity.

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nity for four years of competition, since most athletes take five years to graduate. However, the athlete would get that fourth season only if he's making progress toward a degree after his senior year.

"Send the message that academics comes before athletics," Delany says. "It's time to send the message, 'Get yourself in shape on campus, and then you play.' Use the fourth year

as a carrot."

Then again, Telander asks why should colleges offer any carrots? Isn't the opportunity to attend a university enough incentive?

"If a kid is 20, and he wants to risk everything to play in a rock band, people don't ask what college he's going to," Telander says. "But if you're going to be a football player, you've got to have an education. It doesn't add up."

Telander suggests that all of college football go entirely to a Division III format. For those who want a higher level of competition, Telander suggests "Age-Group Football."

"It would be for players between 18 and 22," Telander explains. "You'd get paid. It could be subsidized by the

NFL. There's no eligibility requirement. It doesn't matter if the guy's illiterate. Simply find out how good you are. The teams could even be located near college campuses so you'd have something to fill the void on Saturday afternoons."

Whatever happens, this much is sure: There will be some major changes in college athletics during the next few years. Among the topics on the table is a requirement that universities publish the graduation rates of their student-athletes. Making freshmen ineligible should come into effect within the next couple years. Admissions standards also will get tougher.

The NCAA already is cracking down on cheaters. The penalties are stiffer than ever before, and yet it's just a start.

The game the way it should be

By Bo Schembechler and Mitch Albom

College football coaches today are being asked to do just five simple things:

1. Fill the stadium
2. Don't break any NCAA rules
3. Graduate every player they recruit

4. Be morally better than anyone else on campus

5. Win all their games

Hey. No problem. And then I'll flap my wings and fly to the Moon.

Until administrations stop making ridiculous demands, college football will keep swelling out of control, coaches will continue to cheat, players will continue to rebel and we will all continue to miss the point.

This is what college football should be: the most rewarding experience in a young man's life. A time he looks back on, years later, and says: "You know, for all the things I've done and seen, that was still the best time I ever had. It was tough, it was hard and the old coach could be an s.o.b. But everything was fair. Everything was honest. He never asked us to use steroids, never asked us to cheat, never brought kids in and paid them. And when it was all said and done, we played some great games. I made some lifelong friends, and it was a hell of an experience."

If the player can't say that, then, folks, we cannot justify the game as it is today.

Do you know the most significant lesson I ever learned in football? It did not come in a showdown with Ohio State. It came in my own house, from my son Chip, who, at the time, was on his high school football team. He was a backup, one of the last guys on the squad. But he loved to play, and he was happy to be out there.

One day the phone rang. Chip went in the other room to answer it. He didn't come back.

I walked into the kitchen and saw him there, crying.

"Hey," I said. "What's wrong? Who called?"

"Aw, nothing."

"Hey, I want to know."

"Aw, that was this kid, Joe. He said he talked to the coach, and he's going to return punts in tomorrow night's game. His game pants don't fit him, so the coach said he could have mine."

"HE SAID WHAT?"

"Dad," Chip said, wiping away the tears, "I don't mind so much, except that I'm already the only guy on the team who doesn't have a warmup jacket. So when we go to warm up, I'm the only one who stands out. And now, this guy gets to wear my game pants."

I could have killed that coach. I tried to explain to Chip that not all sports are handled that way. Eventually, he got it straightened out. But I'll never forget his face, seeing the tears, knowing how it felt to be the last guy on the team.

If you watch my teams at Michigan, you will notice they all dress alike: full uniform, name across the back. All 125 of them. I've got guys out there I wouldn't put in a *high school* game, guys who can't even catch the ball. You watch them in warmup drills and you say, "Look at that guy, he's awful."

Yes, but he's a part of the team. And he's warming up alongside the Anthony Carters and Mark Messners. Do you know why? Because somewhere, up in the stands, there's a mother and father watching. And that is this kid's reward for busting his butt all week.

Everybody equal. That's what the college football program should be about. You can't do that if you bribed some kid with a car. You can't do that if one player becomes the reason your fans buy tickets.

Call me old-fashioned, I don't give a crap. I believe in the concept of a *team*. None of this big-names-first, little-names-second stuff. Sure, you spend more time with the regulars, but those other guys—hey, don't just kick them in the face.

We used to have these two running backs we called "Super Sid" and "Super Cede."

Super Sid was a walk-on named Ron Szydlowski. And "Super Cede" was a walk-on named John Cederberg, the slowest son of a gun that ever lived. Nice kid, tougher than hell, but couldn't run a lick. Toward the end of his freshman year he was drinking, got in a big fight at the dorm and rammed his hand through glass.

"Damn you," I said. "How could you do

something like that? You're out of football for a year, and if you don't get your act together, you will never play here!"

Well, he stayed out a year. He could have become a full-time screwoff. But he wanted back on the team, so he straightened up. We took him back, and he rode the bench for three years. By his senior season, he and Szydlowski had become sort of cult celebrities. Whenever we were beating a team by 25 points or more, the cry would go up. "Hey, Super Sid! Hey, Super Cede! Time for you to go in!"

I'd throw those two in there, and they were like two peas in a pod. If they got back to the *line of scrimmage* it was a miracle. But we gave them the ball, and the rest of the team loved it because they knew walk-ons work just as hard as the regulars. And at the end of four years, they get the M letter jacket and the M ring just like every other scholarship player. . . .

I loved my time playing college football. And since the day I became coach, I've been trying to re-create it for my players. I wanted them to learn the way I learned under Woody [Hayes] and Ara [Parseghian]. I wanted them to work that hard, to sweat that much, to feel that bad and to feel that good, and to make the kind of friends you can still call, even in your 60s, and say, "Remember that game when we played in a snowstorm. . . ."

Maybe that's not possible these days. When I played at Miami of Ohio, we had a medium-sized crowd and no television. At Michigan, it's 105,000 fans and network TV. At Miami, almost none of us expected a shot at the NFL. At Michigan, four or five a year may get there. Professional football has strongly influenced college in areas like money, steroids and lack of interest in academics. It consumes these kids, making the pros. And that's sad.

I've never had a guy in the NFL who didn't swear he had more fun in college. Jim Mandich has a handful of Super Bowl rings, and he always tells me, "Coach, it just didn't compare." Dan Dierdorf was about as good as you can get in the NFL, but when I see him, he still talks about that locker room after the **Iowa** game in 1969. "Coach, I've still never felt anything like that, before or since."

Why do you think I've never coached in the NFL? Because I'd have coached them like a college team, and it wouldn't have worked. You can't ask players to win for pride and teamwork when you're pink-slipping and trading them.

The NFL is a business. But college football, *real* college football, shouldn't be. And

there's the problem. For all the emphasis on academics, the bottom line with many administrations is still filling the stadium, producing revenue, keeping that program in the black.

And the pressure grows. Everyone wants to win—but not everyone can. Schools must recognize a mission impossible when they see one. You don't hire a coach at Northwestern, then say, "Go get Ohio State and Michigan." You don't hire a coach at Vanderbilt and say, "You must win the Southeast Conference." You don't go to the coach at Kansas State and say, "When are we going to beat *Oklahoma and Nebraska*?"

Not unless you want him to cheat, bend and look the other way.

You know what you get if you put that pressure on a coach? You get a coach who knows he won't be there long. He plays the "face man" game, tries to look while he's collecting his paycheck and sees how much he can get away with, waiting for the inevitable ax to fall.

I have one question.

What about the kids? . . .

The temptation today is to grow cynical. Many people have. "The whole college sports system is a joke," they say. "The schools are just using the players to make money, and the players are just training to go to the NFL."

Well. That's one person's opinion. I'm here to tell you otherwise. The system can work. Take a look at Stefan Humphries. Now there was a kid who got everything out of every minute of college *and* football. He studied biomedical engineering, got mostly A's, some A-pluses—they even printed his transcript in *Sports Illustrated*. Yet Humphries was one of the toughest guards you'd ever want to meet. Made All-American in 1983. Played with the Chicago Bears and now the Denver Broncos. He used to kid me whenever he had a lab that conflicted with practice. "Bo, you're not going to like what I have to tell you, but there's nothing we can do about it. . . ."

Now, my point is you didn't have to tell Stefan Humphries that being a student-athlete could be a great thing. And there are plenty of guys out there like him.

How about Kenny Higgins? He was as brilliant as they come. After four years at Michigan he was accepted at Stanford, Harvard, Yale and Michigan law schools. My problem was, he was my leading receiver, and he had a fifth year of eligibility.

"Sorry, Bo," he told me, "but I'm

College sports has a long way to go before it eliminates all of the abuses it has endured in recent years. Landmark legislation is needed.

Schembechler says gruffly: "Sometimes it's worthwhile to get your tail kicked. It makes you understand that you can't continue to operate like that."

Father Joyce adds, a little more philosophically: "There are generally a lot of good people in college athletics, but we still need some people to clean up their acts to have a blemish-free game. I hope I live long enough to see intercollegiate football and basketball cleaned up."

finished here academically, so I'm going on to law school."

"Where are you gonna go?" I asked.

"Harvard. It's the best."

"But, Higgins, you're my top guy. Why not go to Michigan and play another year?"

"Bo, Harvard is the No. 1 law school. It's rated a little better than Michigan's. I had a great four years playing for you, but it's time to move on."

He grinned at me. How could you not be proud of this kid?

"You're right." I said, "get your butt out of here."

"Thanks, Bo."

"Higgins?"

"Yeah?"

"Harvard Law School is *not* better than Michigan's."

Back in April, we had a big weekend celebrating my 20 years with the Wolverines. The highlight was a Saturday night banquet for players and coaches—everyone who had ever played since 1969 was invited.

Do you know that out of 640 players who wore the uniforms, nearly 400 showed up? Some traveled from Seattle, Florida, San Diego. There were guys from that 1981 Rose Bowl team that finally beat the jinx and from the 1973 team that was denied a trip to Pasadena, from Jim Harbaugh's year, when he "guaranteed" a win over Ohio State, and Tom Slade's year, when our quarterback was really a pulling guard, and from that 1984 team that went 6-6 (they got the most teasing), and, of course, from the 1969 group, which year after year keeps coming back, even though I was harder on them than any other team.

That banquet started around 6 p.m. and did not end until the wee hours of the morning. It was laughter and insults and bad jokes and cigars. And it was more. It was doctors and lawyers and businessmen and fathers with sons in college. It was good men with decent values—not all, but most—who were reliving some great years, not because those years were the only highlights of their lives, but because those years prepared them for the years that followed, taught them how to work hard, to endure adversity, to keep plugging away even if an old man with a whistle or an old man called "the boss" was making life miserable. None of these guys ever won a national championship or a Heisman Trophy. But you should have heard them talk, and laugh, and cry, and throw their arms around each other as if they were all related, blood to blood. I think that's what some of these other coaches are missing when they focus on themselves, their money, their fame.

"Time of my life," the guys said over and over that night. "Time of my life."

That's what college football should be.

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