
James L. Shulman and William G. Bowen. *The Game of Life: College Sports and Educational Values*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002. 477p.

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On May 2nd of this year, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported the results of a survey which indicated that two-thirds of Americans believe colleges place too much emphasis on athletics. In *The Game of Life: College Sports and Educational Values*, most recently published in a trade paper edition, James L. Shulman and William G. Bowen crunch the numbers on college athletics, buttressing that belief with empirical substance and revealing that the misplaced emphasis threatens the core values of higher education. While their findings would be difficult to refute, all the conclusions they draw from those findings do not necessarily strike one as inevitable, nor do many of the solutions they propose seem, in any sense, likely.

The book draws its data from the extensive records of the Andrew Mellon Foundation's College and Beyond database, the same database the authors, who are both employed by the foundation, tapped for their *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions*. Shulman and Bowen analyze admissions records and periodic surveys for 30 selected institutions in four categories: Division I, Ivy League, Liberal Arts Colleges, and Women's Colleges. The Women's College category plays an important role in the authors' criticism of Title IX reforms as carried out in the institutions of the other three categories. The authors compare data for three freshman classes: 1951, during what the authors call "the good old days"; 1976, during the transitional period spurred by the democratic reforms of the preceding decade; and 1989, the last year for which sufficient data was available to determine the effects of athletic participation on athletes' post-college lives.

Opening with four thumbnail sketches of college athletic controversies, the book then moves to its real business of statistical analysis. It breaks into eight foundation-laying chapters, each covering one of four sub-topics, first, as they pertain to male athletes, then, as they pertain to female athletes. The opening chapters detail the history of college athletics, the evolution of recruiting and admissions practices, the academic and social experience and achievements of athletes while in school, and, finally, the experience of athletes after college. Three chapters follow the first eight, each focusing on a key element of the college athletics controversy, each refuting a major claim by the gatekeepers of college ath-

letics. In the first of these chapters, the authors reject the idea that participation in athletics is particularly effective in teaching leadership skills. If it is, they claim, it is no more so than any number of other activities. Second, in a chapter called "Giving Back," the authors document the failure of athletes as financial donors. The discussion of finances leads to the next chapter on the bottom line of athletics programs, a chapter showing that only a small minority, only those that are consistently successful, cover their rapidly growing expenditures. Lastly, the book moves into final summation, conclusions, and proposals. The summation chapter is particularly welcome by argument's end when a sea of numbers threatens to drown all but the most statistically savvy.

The Game of Life is a big book, both hefty and significant. Comparative tables, which swell the appendices, and footnoted references increase the book's size by a quarter. It is not a book one may attend to casually. Its structure requires a certain amount of page flipping, and the problems it discusses tear at the fabric of American higher education. The hardcover edition has already spawned an academic conference at Trinity College and countless chat room debates.

The topic is more of the perennial than the contemporary variety, however. As Frederick Rudolph observes in his definitive study first published in 1962, *The American College and University*, controversy over the professionalization of college football arose with the first organization of college football teams in the mid-nineteenth century. By the 1930s, a number of B-movies dramatized college sports gambling scandals with the usual didactic finger-pointing at the over-emphasis of sports and the unrelenting pressure to win. It is no coincidence that professional sports leagues for football and basketball took hold in the same era, as many people felt that the solution to the covert professionalization of college sports was the support of acknowledged professionals.

Clearly, though, professionalization continues in college sports, particularly, as Shulman and Bowen point out, in the high-profile sports of football, basketball, and ice hockey. The problem begins, they claim, with a recruiting process that makes athletes feel different and entitled to special treatment. The difference in average SAT scores for athletes and non-athletes admitted to Ivy League schools is often as much as 300 points. Furthermore, the authors argue that athletes *are* different from their classmates, pointing to evidence of an "athlete culture." The authors particularly lament the evidence that Title IX reforms have merely led women's athletic programs to intensify recruiting and focus on winning after the model of men's programs. The greater tragedy, though, is that women athletes, who historically outperformed women non-athletes academically, recently have

begun showing disparities in academic performance similar to their male counterparts.

When speaking generally, Shulman and Bowen provide reasonable, if not exactly novel, solutions. The effect of college sports on the overall well-being of higher education is a serious problem that needs serious attention. Athletics programs, particularly their insistence on winning at all costs, should be de-emphasized. They imply that men's athletic programs would do better to follow the lead of traditional women's programs rather than the other way around.

When moving to the specific, however, Shulman and Bowen propose solutions that are something like stopping a runaway train by blowing it up. Eliminate all athletic scholarships, starting with the lower-profile sports. Reduce coaches to part-time status. Regardless of whether college athletic programs make money for their schools, clearly, they cause a substantial amount of money to change hands. One simply does not remove such a large—and, in many college towns, vital—segment of the economy without a serious chain reaction. While their answers still need some work, Shulman and Bowen succeed in identifying the questions that those concerned with the place of sports in higher education should be asking. ✨