

# This is what a student should look like

How popular media portrays the ideal of the student athlete

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“Her Husband, among various physical accomplishments, had been one of the most powerful ends that ever played football at New Haven – a national figure in a way, one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterwards savors of anti-climax.”

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, pp. 12.  
(London, Penguin Popular Classics, 1994)

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## Introduction

To say that sport is popular in the United States would be an understatement, as almost all Americans are taken in by sports in one way or another. When they are not actively playing a sport, Americans might be watching it, discussing it or even be betting on it. Athletic events in the United States have become one of the country's most important forms of mass entertainment with baseball and American football currently being the most popular sports. The finals of the professional American football season, commonly known as the Super Bowl, usually attracts the years highest television audience, with about half of all Americans watching the event.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of sports seems to have been taken to a new level in the United States, compared to the rest of the world and from a young age onwards kids are being motivated to participate in the distinct American sports of baseball, basketball and American football. In *The Meaning of Sports*, Michael Mandelbaum mentions the author Fran Lebowitz, who said: "What is truly chilling is that there are a lot of smart people interested in sports. That just gives you no hope at all for the human race."<sup>2</sup>

This is a very interesting statement because, in the United States, sports and education are intertwined, because almost all American high schools and universities have athletic programs for their students. These athletic programs vary greatly in size, but most of them garner a lot of publicity, which can vary from very local to, in the case of Division I college football teams, international. This means that the smart people, mentioned by Lebowitz, actually play a large role in the way sports are played and perceived by the American public.

This relationship between sports and educational institutions is interesting to study, because it is unique in the world. No other country has an educational system where sports are as important as is the case in the United States. In Europe, for example, sport is important as a means to remain fit and is usually taught in classes called gymnastics. These same classes are

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports: Why Americans Watch Baseball, Football and Basketball and What They See When They Do* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, xiv.

being taught in American schools, but Americans consider school sports to be events where schools compete against each other in statewide competitions.<sup>3</sup> What is even more remarkable about these interscholastic competitions, especially for people outside of the United States, is that the teams often get more recognition than the professional teams do. This is certainly the case in areas where there are not a lot of professional athletic teams, such as in Southern and Midwestern states. Recording artist Kenny Chesney, who grew up in Powell, Tennessee, a town with 15,000 inhabitants, sings about high school athletics in his 2010 song ‘The Boys of Fall’ where he addresses why these sports are so popular in the following way: “In little towns like mine, that’s all they got.”<sup>4</sup>

So, athletic teams in American schools are popular among the American public, and this means that often a lot of money is invested in the school’s athletic departments. In the case of universities, who compete at the highest level, millions of dollars are annually invested in the teams and have become big business.<sup>5</sup> And while high schools might not spend millions of dollars on their athletic departments, still a lot of money is involved in these programs. This by itself may not seem of big importance, but it is interesting that all academic athletic teams are considered to be amateur, meaning that the athletes do not receive any monetary compensation for their service to the teams.

American educational institutions have always tried to protect the ideal of the amateur ethos as an important part of academic sports, leading to believe that professionalism take away the idea that sports can be beneficial for the education of students. This has led to a situation, where schools earn money from their student athletes, while only providing them with an education. And the higher the level of play, the higher the profits for the academic institutions are which has led to a paradoxical situation between academics and athletics because schools see that

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<sup>3</sup> Craig James, *Game Day: A Rollicking Journey to the Heart of College Football*, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 39.

<sup>4</sup> Kenny Chesney, “The Boys of Fall.” *Hemingway’s Whiskey*. BNA Records, 2010. Music.

<sup>5</sup> Stewart Mandel, *Bonks, Polls & Tattered Souls: Tackling the Controversy That Reign over College Football* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 54.

winning athletic competitions can benefit the school greatly. Some scholars argue that in many schools the emphasis on winning has created a situation where athletics seem to have become more important than education, while sports in schools originally were meant as a means of recreation for students.<sup>6</sup>

The ideal of the unpaid student athlete, who competes for school pride, has become a tradition in the United States and this is protected by several institutions. The main ones are the schools themselves, but the organizations that regulate interscholastic sports, like the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and the National Collegiate Athletic Organization (NCAA), also have many rules to maintain amateurism among the athletes.<sup>7</sup>

Much research has been done about how this amateur ethos has developed over time, but hardly any research has been done into how this ideal has been sold to the American public. This thesis deals with the idea that popular media, like literature, film and the press has played a large role in the development and maintaining of the amateurism ideal in society. The belief that amateur sports and competition instills desirable traits of character, like teamwork and leadership, into students is very strong in the United States and many people believe that professional sports cannot provide in these life lessons.<sup>8</sup>

Because so many different sports are being played in American schools, the focus of this paper had to be narrowed down to just one sport, because otherwise the source material would have become too complicated and it would have been near impossible to develop a coherent story in the limited space and time available. The logical choice of sports came down to the two games that are most distinctly American, namely baseball and American football. And while both sports make a claim to be 'America's game,' the popularity of the game at the professional level is about equal. In schools, however, the popularity of American football has, since the early

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<sup>6</sup> Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 143.

<sup>7</sup> John Nauright, 'Writing and reading American Football; Culture, Identities and Sports Studies,' *Sporting Traditions* 13, no. 1 (1996), 111.

<sup>8</sup> Mandelbaum, 148.

twentieth century, become far more popular than all other sports.<sup>9</sup> This is why American football, from here on referred to simply as football, was chosen as the main subject to research amateur athletics in American schools.

There has already been a lively academic discussion about American sports, and most authors, like Michael Mandelbaum in *The Meaning of Sports*, deal with multiple American sports on a more general level. When authors choose to focus on football, they often limit their work to professional football. Authors who wrote on amateur football usually write about the collegiate level and, like John Sayle Watterson's *College Football* or Willy Lee Umphlett's *Creating the Big Game*, limit themselves to describing the formative years of the game. And while the history of the game is very important in establishing the amateur ideal, the game has changed so much over time that it is now worth looking in to how this view of the amateur athlete, which has long been promoted by institutions like the NFHS and the NCAA, now is being portrayed by popular media.

Academic works that deal specifically with amateur American football, like *Bowls, Polls & Tattered Souls: Tackling the Controversy That Reign over College Football* by Stewart Mandel usually describe how problems in the game have been created over time but they can never explain why the American public is still accepting these controversies that exist within amateur football. This is where the mass media can help the scholar, as studying it can provide a valuable insight in both why and how American society looks at amateurism in academic institutions.

The paper will revolve around the statement that: popular media plays a major role in how the ideal of amateur athletics in American educational institutions is currently being perceived by the American public. And to test whether this statement is true, the paper will make a case study out of several forms of popular media which will be examined in the different chapters. These forms are literature, film and news media and have been selected because almost all Americans come into frequent contact with these. Within these different forms of media another selection had to

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<sup>9</sup> James, *Game Day: A Rollicking Journey to the Heart of College Football*, 47.

be made, because in all of them there are many different works that deal with amateur athletics in American schools.

The first chapter will show the development of the ideal of the student athlete that has developed since the end of the nineteenth century, from the humble beginnings of intercollegiate contests between the Eastern 'Ivy League' schools up until the current student athletes who get recruited to play football, rather than for their academic talents by large public universities throughout the United States. This chapter will lean on various authors and articles that have all contributed to writing a history of football and will provide the reader with a valuable overview of the development of the amateur ethos.

In the second chapter a study is made of two nonfiction literary works, one of which has become quite popular in the United States after it was turned into a movie and later into a television series which ran for multiple seasons. Harold G. Bissinnger's *Friday Night Lights: A Town a Team and a Dream* and Richard Rubin's *Confederacy of Silence: A True Tale of the New Old South* both deal with amateur football at the high school level. These books provide a valuable insight in how teams in small towns affect their respective communities, and are also both examples of media portrayal of amateur athletics.

The third chapter, which will focus on amateurism at the collegiate level, will make a case study out of a 1993 motion picture, *The Program*. This movie portrays several student athletes who compete on the football field for a high ranked college football program and deals with several controversies attached to college football like illegal recruiting, the payment of students and the pressure put on players to perform at a very high level.

The fourth and final chapter addresses the gap between collegiate and professional football by looking at how news media has chosen to report on several scandals surrounding student athletes. The first of these scandals is a confession by professional agent Josh Luchs, who, in 2010 revealed that he had paid several high-profile student athletes in defiance of NCAA regulations. The second controversy discussed is the one surrounding a running back from the

University of Southern Carolina, Reggie Bush, who is an example of a college player who was accused of accepting many benefits during his amateur career. Both case studies will give a good example of what sort of abuses are going on in high profile American football programs in American universities.

Looking at this small selection of different outlets of popular media should give the reader an insight in how influential media has been in the shaping and maintaining of the amateur ethos of student athletes among the American public and why it is unlikely that, even though there is a lot of criticism, the current system will change. These books, film and news reports will show that there is no single one sided answer to the controversies surrounding America's academic athletics and that there is a large, interesting, grey area between the schools strive for academic accomplishments and the goal of athletic excellence.

## The invented amateur

“Spite of the disagreements which were developed early in the season, both in respect to the numbers which ought to belong to each team and in respect to the dates of the games, the contests of Harvard, Yale and Princeton for the championship were characterized by an unusual amount of good nature, and the final result has been accepted pleasantly by every one.”<sup>10</sup>

This was how the *New York World* described intercollegiate football in the article ‘The Close of the Football Season,’ published on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December, 1878. It is an early reference to the portrayal of the amateur athletics that had become very important for the American universities. It was in this period that the amateur ethos was established and newspapers played an important role in the development of the ideas surrounding amateurism, some of which were maintained to this very day. Newspaper and other forms of media have therefore played an important role in the shaping of the ideal of the amateur athlete which will be discussed in the next chapters. But to understand the recent portrayals of amateur athletes in popular media, it is important to look at how the ideas surrounding amateur athletics have developed over time.

Sport has to be looked at as modern phenomenon, which could only be established because of modern developments which have influenced society, longer childhoods, the development of schools, urbanization and increased mobility due to improved modes of transportation all led to people having more time on their hands. One of the ways to fill this time was entertainment and watching sporting events became a staple of America’s mass culture during the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> But where sports were at first just entertainment for the public, the events soon became breeding grounds for lewd behavior, and became associated with improper actions like gambling, drinking and violence.<sup>12</sup> It was generally believed that this

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<sup>10</sup> The Lost Century of American Football, ‘Thanksgiving Football in 1878, Articles from the New York World: Close of the Football Season,’ <http://www.football1800.wordpress.com>, accessed on May 14, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Christensen, *Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 251.

improper behavior was a side effect of the professionalization of sports that took place during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

The negative aspects attached to professionalism in sports were counteracted by an increased focus on the benefits of just playing a sport, not for commercial gain, but for a pure love of a game. This is how the ideal of the amateur athlete was born, he had to be someone who participated in a sport for the advancement of his own personal skills, like leadership, teamwork and the building of physique. It was even believed, by the likes of President Theodore Roosevelt, that amateur sports could promote masculinity and shape the national identity of the United States.<sup>14</sup>

Some authors have argued that amateurism in sports was a way for the established classes to keep the less wealthy from playing, because time and money were necessities to be able to play. This was almost certainly the case in Great Britain, where playing certain sports was considered to be the mark of a gentleman, while other sports, like association football, soon became professional and were almost exclusively played by the working class.<sup>15</sup> The same is true for the United States where many working-class Irish-American immigrants, for example, saw nothing wrong with receiving benefits for participating in a sport.<sup>16</sup>

American sports are surrounded by many legends of sporting heroes, but the biggest myth seems to be the idea of the amateur athlete, which has become one of the most enduring myths in American society.<sup>17</sup> Amateurism is an invented tradition which has led most Americans to believe that professional sports are the most recent manifestation of athletics which has replaced the age-old amateur ethos. But, according to S.W. Pope, there has never in history been such a thing as competing on an amateur basis like the tradition that had been created during the nineteenth century. Athletics had always been associated with a certain level of professionalism

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<sup>13</sup> S.W. Pope, *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876-1926*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18.

<sup>14</sup> Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Christensen, *Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds*, 252.

<sup>16</sup> Nauright, 'Writing and reading American Football; Culture, Identities and Sports Studies,' 113.

<sup>17</sup> Gerald R.Gems and Gertrud Pfister, *Understanding American Sports: In Culture and Society*, (London, 2009), 8.

like payments for the winner and gambling for the spectators.<sup>18</sup> And even amateurism in the United States, especially in collegiate athletics, was very commercial until the last few decades of the nineteenth century, with students competing not just for school pride, but for financial gain.<sup>19</sup>

America was a late bloomer in amateurism, as in Great Britain an amateur ideal had already been established in private schools, where it was believed that sports would build the characters of the future leaders of the country. These ideas also manifested themselves in the United States, where sports started to become a core element of educational institutions.<sup>20</sup> Whereas in Great Britain gentleman sports like cricket became popular among students, American students preferred the adaptation of a more violent British game, rugby. But while the British athletes were considered gentleman, playing this violent game, the American students turned rugby in a far more dangerous and violent sport, and called it American Football, which soon became the most popular of the intercollegiate sports.<sup>21</sup> To regulate the sport, Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Columbia, in 1876, cooperated to establish the Intercollegiate Football Association.<sup>22</sup> And the popular game among students soon developed into a game that was widely watched by spectators in the Eastern schools of the United States. This meant that amateur American football became a mass spectator sport with huge commercial interest, while school administrators tried to maintain the ideal of amateurism in an attempt to rebuff any accusation of the sport becoming tainted by professionalism.<sup>23</sup>

What is remarkable about this is that this ideal of amateurism has subsisted to this day while it is clear that collegiate football has become highly professional. Division I of collegiate sports, for example, consists of 218 schools which field athletic teams, they, in 2010, combined to spend a total of \$6.2 billion on their athletic departments.<sup>24</sup> So, where intercollegiate athletic events during the latter half of the nineteenth century had first been about school pride or the

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<sup>18</sup> Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 19.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, 144.

<sup>22</sup> Nauright, 'Writing and reading American Football; Culture, Identities and Sports Studies,' 111.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Christensen, *Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds*, 5.

development of character, it soon came to bear many of the traits of professional sports. The first manifestation of this professionalism can be found in the traditional Thanksgiving Day football games, which were attended by thousands of spectators. Universities had to rent large sporting venues, in New York for example, to accommodate all the fans who wanted to attend the games. In 1888 the game between Yale and Princeton drew in a total of 40,000 spectators and the university leaders quickly realized that intercollegiate athletics could be an advantage for their schools.<sup>25</sup>

William Rainey Harper realized that intercollegiate sports had a large appeal in America. And to utilize this when he founded the University of Chicago in 1892, and became its first president, he immediately established a football team for the school.<sup>26</sup> Harper reasoned that a successful football team would be crucial for the reputation of the new institution, and he hoped that, through ticket sales and fund raising, the football team would give the school a financial stimulant, while winning games would, at the same time, build the school's reputation which would lead to increased admissions.<sup>27</sup>

Other academic institutions reasoned in the same way, and collegiate football spread from the elite Eastern institutions to other parts of the country. The prestige that schools garnered when their team was winning football games soon led to a mentality where winning was considered the most important. According to John Sayle Watterson, in *College Football*, this led to major changes in the game. Whereas teams at first were strictly made up of students from the institution, the schools soon sought to gain an advantage by hiring semiprofessional athletes, who played for the team in exchange for room, board and expenses and usually had no other affiliation to the school. This meant that the universities would often compete for the best athletes by offering them high sums of money, usually provided by wealthy alumni, and it was

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<sup>25</sup> Christensen, *Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds*, 255.

<sup>26</sup> Nauright, 'Writing and reading American Football; Culture, Identities and Sports Studies,' 117.

<sup>27</sup> Christensen, *Sport and Democracy in the Ancient and Modern Worlds*, 56.

therefore not unusual for one such player to switch teams multiple times during a single season.<sup>28</sup> These players became a serious threat to intercollegiate football, not only because they tainted the ideal of amateurism, but also because they offered a physical threat to the student athletes due to their experience in football and mature bodies. This meant that the need for schools to field a winning football team led to increasingly violent games.<sup>29</sup>

It was this violence, rather than the commercial character of the game, which led to much controversy in the United States during the first decades of the twentieth century. Even President Theodore Roosevelt interfered in football, by demanding that the rules should be changed to create a safer sport.<sup>30</sup> These changes eventually came through the athletic director of Yale University, Walter Camp, who would become known as ‘the father of American football.’ And together with changes in the rules of the actual game, Camp also imposed restriction on the use of semi-professional players. He touches on this subject early on in *Book of College Sports* by saying: “A gentleman does not make his living from his athletic prowess. He does not earn anything from his victories except glory and satisfaction.”<sup>31</sup> And: “A gentleman never competes for money, directly or indirectly.”<sup>32</sup>

Camp’s new rules were implemented across all American colleges and made sure that only members of the actual student body were eligible to represent their school in intercollegiate competitions, and the rules became even stricter when, in the early twentieth century, it became mandatory for the student athletes to be amateurs. They were no longer allowed to receive any form of compensation for their athletic services and were not even allowed to compete against people who were professionals. Advocates of amateurism wanted athletic competitions to turn into events where athletes competed for honor and glory rather than prizes. This idea was not just prevalent in the United States, as can be seen in the creation of the modern Olympic

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<sup>28</sup> John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 46.

<sup>29</sup> Watterson, *College Football*, 46.

<sup>30</sup> Nauright, ‘Writing and reading American Football; Culture, Identities and Sports Studies,’ 120

<sup>31</sup> Walter Camp, *Walter Camp's Book of College Sports* (New York: The Century Company, 1893), 2.

<sup>32</sup> Camp, *Walter Camp's Book of College Sports*, 3.

movement and the establishment of the International Olympic Committee, which held the first Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 and only allowed amateur athletes to compete.<sup>33</sup>

This amateur ideal, however, clashed with the professional attitude of many college's athletic departments, which needed to earn money. Walter Camp, for example, advocated amateurism, but at the same time funded the athletic department of Yale University through a complicated financial Union. Camp also hired professional coaches, and he himself earned an annual salary of \$5000, while the average professor at Yale would only earn \$3500.<sup>34</sup> And because the schools considered athletic teams a benefit, they invested large sums of money in their athletic venues, by building stadiums for example. These large investments meant that their student athlete teams became even more professional, which led to a weakening of the values claimed by the advocates of amateur athletics.

The reforms which were started by, among others, Walter Camp and continued under the leadership of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) could not stop the universities from walking a fine line between amateurism and professionalism. Schools would often bend the rules when they saw fit, in order to win games. Examples of this are the payment of students' tuition fees by alumni, handing players money 'under-the-table' and the gambling on intercollegiate matches grew in conjunction with the overall growth of the sport in America.<sup>35</sup> During the twentieth century, the NCAA tried to cleanse football from all negative elements by implementing "Principles for the Conduct of Intercollegiate Athletics."<sup>36</sup> This act became known as the Sanity Code, and was meant to create a fairer system of intercollegiate football with an emphasis on academics and amateurism.<sup>37</sup> The most important of the new rules stated that the NCAA could now expel any institution that did not conform to the rules regarding amateurism. Watterson, however, states that the Sanity Code also shows the NCAA's change regarding

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<sup>33</sup> David C. Young, *A Brief History of the Olympic Games*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 12.

<sup>34</sup> Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Watterson, *College Football*, 211.

<sup>36</sup> Sherry K. Watt and James L. Moore III, 'Who Are Student Athletes?' *New Directions for Student Services*, no. 93, Spring (2001), 9.

<sup>37</sup> Watterson, *College Football*, 209.

amateurs, as the new rules did allow for schools to give athletic scholarships to their students: “The code was a critical step towards officially subsidized athletics.”<sup>38</sup> So while maintaining a guise of amateur ideals, the NCAA did somewhat acknowledge that the collegiate sports had become professional indeed, but the athletes were not paid with money, but with an education.

As early as the 1870s, the press played a large role in the portrayal of amateur athletics. The most important shop window for amateur sports were shown was in Thanksgiving Day football games, where colleges hired big stadiums to compete against their biggest rivals.<sup>39</sup> These games were the most publicized in the whole country and elevated football to become a mass spectator sport, rather than a sport only seen by students on campuses. Newspapers like Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*, portrayed football games as spectacular events and created a whole new audience of college football leading to a situation where people did not have to attend a school to be a fan of their football team.<sup>40</sup> Collegiate football became a popular sort throughout the United States.<sup>41</sup> According to Mandelbaum, in *The Meaning of Sports*, the identification with these teams became a matter of pride, it created a community. But at the same time it also created the opposite, as people who associated themselves with one team would often see other team’s fans as rivals.<sup>42</sup>

While many people attended the Thanksgiving Day games, most people learned about the sports through the newspapers and the athletic departments of schools realized that there was a huge opportunity in the media to promote their school team. Often reporters were paid by coaches to serve as promoters and there are even instances known where the reporters were allowed to get very close to the games, as referees.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Watterson, *College Football*, 211.

<sup>39</sup> Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 117.

<sup>40</sup> Nauright, ‘Writing and reading American Football; Culture, Identities and Sports Studies,’ 119.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem* 117.

<sup>42</sup> Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 32.

<sup>43</sup> Nauright, ‘Writing and reading American Football; Culture, Identities and Sports Studies,’ 119.

## Pride of the community

In the United States it often seems like sports is the most important thing in society, and this is especially true for football, which plays an enormously important role in many cities, states and other communities across the United States. What is very striking about football being played is the importance it has garnered at the amateur level, as is shown in the previous chapter, but most studies focus on the collegiate level and seem to ignore amateurism in high schools. This chapter will therefore deal with amateur football at high schools by looking at two non-fiction books.

The first book is the 1990 book *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, a Dream*, by journalist H.G. Bissinger, which chronicles the 1988 football season of the Permian High School football team, called the Panthers. The school is located in a Texas town with a population of almost 100,000 people called Odessa. One of the inhabitants of the town, Bob Rutherford, said, to illustrate the importance of high school football: “Life really wouldn’t be worth livin’ if you didn’t have a high school football team to support.”<sup>44</sup> And to further illustrate, when a pastor thanks God for the joy football brings to life, during a service, and especially so in a very religious State like Texas, it must mean that the people consider football to important.<sup>45</sup> The second book used to illustrate amateurism in high school football was also written by a journalist, Richard Rubin, and depicts his own experiences as the sports editor for a local newspaper in a small Mississippi town called Greenwood, where being a sports editor means writing on the local high school football team, the Bulldogs.

Bissinger had the intent of depicting the role which football plays in America’s rural societies and decided to portray the Permian Panthers because Odessa can be typified as a ‘football crazy’ town, he and his family lived in town for a full year which meant that he could report on one full season. The title, *Friday Night Lights*, has become synonymous in American vocabulary with high school football games, and *Sport Illustrated* named it the fourth greatest book

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<sup>44</sup> H. G. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights: A Town, A Team, and a Dream*, (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1990), 20.

<sup>45</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 47.

about sports in 2002. *Friday Night Lights* was very well received in the United States, with the exception of Odessa, where people criticized Bissinger for stereotyping the inhabitants as thinking that the Permian Panthers are the only important thing in life.

Rubin did not travel to Mississippi with the intent of writing a book about a football community, but went there to gain experience as a journalist. The special circumstances he encounters while living in Greenwood eventually lead him to write *Confederacy of Silence*, especially after Rubin learns that the football phenomenon which he met in town, someone who seemed to have a promising football career ahead of him, has been accused of murder. Both books are non-fiction works, but where Bissinger from the get-go set out to write a book about the special status which football receives in American towns, Rubin only encountered this ‘football crazy’ behavior on accident.

Bissinger makes a fair point when he states that football goes to the core of life in Odessa. It seems that everyone in town, not just the players, coaches and parents, invests a lot of time in following Mojo football, Mojo being the Panthers’ rallying cry.<sup>46</sup> This might best be illustrated by the school district’s building of the 5.6 million dollar Ratliff stadium in 1982.<sup>47</sup> This venue is where the Panthers play their home games, in front of 20,000 fans, which is about one-fifth of the entire Odessa population.<sup>48</sup> These would be staggering numbers for any team, but especially so when considering that this is a team maintained by a high school and played by 17 year old amateur athletes.

The fact that more than 1 million male students play football in high school makes it strange that not more attention has been paid in academics to high school football.<sup>49</sup> This might best be attributed to the fact that high schools attract fewer scandals compared to collegiate football, since high school sports are usually only regarded locally or, incidentally, statewide. But much of the criticism that has been geared toward college amateur ideals, can also be seen in the

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<sup>46</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, xii.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, 42.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, xi.

<sup>49</sup> Gems and Pfister, *Understanding American Sports*, 184.

high school level with the latter being the stepping stone to the college level. That is why this chapter will deal with the amateur ideal in high school football by asking how H.G. Bissinger and Richard Rubin contributed to the portrayal of this ideal with their books *Friday Night Lights: a Town, a Team, and a Dream* and *Confederacy of Silence: A True Tale of the New World South*.

There are several reasons why students choose to participate in football and these can be shown through the example of the Permian Panthers. In towns, like Odessa, where football is deemed very important, there is a lot of social pressure on athletically superior kids to play for the football team. Many boys, according to Bissinger, also wanted to play football because their fathers had also played football for the Panthers and wanted to follow in their footsteps. Another reason, mentioned by Brian Chavez, who himself played simply because he liked football, was fame. Chavez said that many of the other players on the team “played because it was Permian football. It was their ticket to popularity.”<sup>50</sup> Bissinger also accuses some parents, and especially fathers, of pressuring their sons to play football so that they could relive their own glory days through their children, which put a lot of pressure on these kids to perform to the high expectations their fathers had of them.<sup>51</sup> As if playing in front of 20,000 fans, in a town obsessed with football, is not enough pressure already.

Some of the players even moved to Odessa to be able to play football for this famous team, which had won a number of state championships in recent years. This was the case for Don Billingsly, who moved from Oklahoma to come and live with his father and attend Permian High School. Billingsly, who had been a football star in his previous school, made this decision because of the stories he had heard about the Permian Panthers, who, he believed, always competed for the Texas state championship.<sup>52</sup> It seems to be quite remarkable that a student would leave his home town just to play high school football, and the only logical reasons to do this seem to be the increased attention, which might improve someone’s chances of receiving an

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<sup>50</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 13.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, xiv.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, 91.

athletic scholarship to a college. According to Rubin, the boys in Greenwood seem to have played football simply because it provided a form of entertainment, as he does not really elaborate on this subject any further.<sup>53</sup>

In most Southern States, as well as other states America, playing high school football is seen as an important rite of passage for teenagers, even though many kids do not get to play as they are not considered to be athletic enough to play the game.<sup>54</sup> Students who do get to play on the team, not only represent their team and their school, but they often represent their whole town.<sup>55</sup> And the people in town recognize this fact treat their student athletes with a celebrity status which most of them will never again experience after their graduation from high school. Their football ‘careers’ during high school sometimes becomes the high water mark of their lives, and they struggle to find a fit for life after they are done playing the game.<sup>56</sup> Or as Janet Gaines, the wife of Permian’s head coach, said: “you [the football players] live in a fairy tale for that one year of your life, you’re worshipped, and that year is over and you’re like anyone else.”<sup>57</sup>

The value that had been attached to high school football in Odessa was deeply rooted in the minds of its inhabitants and this importance attached to sports led to an important idea in town: the idea that athletics are more important than academics. Odessa, like many other small towns in the United States would rather see football games under the Friday night lights than have a school that is known for its academic excellence.<sup>58</sup> So at Permian High School, football was a priority, although it rarely ever led to a future career for its players as most of them did not receive athletic scholarships and only a handful of people actually graduated from Permian and went on to play football professionally.<sup>59</sup>

Because football is so important for the thousands of fans in the Texas town there is a lot of pressure on the team, as the supporters had come to expect good results from the team. The

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<sup>53</sup> Richard Rubin, *Confederacy of Silence: A True Tale of the New Old South* (Simon and Schuster, 2003), 59.

<sup>54</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 61.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, 123.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, 81.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, 284.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, 147.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, 149.

Permian Panthers in the 1980s had often made their way deep into the playoffs, so each and every year, the fans expected to win the coveted state-championship and were sorely disappointed if their team is unable to reach the 'big game'.<sup>60</sup> The fans really treated the high school team the same way that many others would treat a professional team, and the same is true for many high school football programs throughout the southern and Midwestern states in America. The expectations were high, and so was the pressure on the kids who played the game on Friday nights, when everyone seemed to forget that the game was supposed to be an amateur event, a recreational game. The fans of the Greenwood Bulldogs, for example, traveled to road-games with hundreds of fans in tow, these trips often meant traveling to towns more than three hours away.<sup>61</sup> And during home games, the stands were often so full that people had to stand around the seats just to be able to see the game.<sup>62</sup>

Whereas high school football is important in many communities, it is especially important in small and rural communities, like Odessa, that do not have any ties to the collegiate or professional teams. In towns like this high school football clearly is the major form of entertainment for the inhabitants.<sup>63</sup> So while the players are amateurs, in the sense that they do not gain financially from playing high school football, the rest of the athletic programs of the schools are very professional. In fact, the only amateurish part of the football teams are the unpaid players, as all serious high school football programs throughout the United States pay their head coach a very generous salary. And besides the head coach, many other people's incomes depend on these amateur football teams, such as position coaches, offensive and defensive coordinators, medical staff and those who that maintain the practice facilities and the stadiums.<sup>64</sup> So while the kids may play for their own entertainment, the coaches have a huge responsibility as they might be lose their job if the results of the team are not up to par with the

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<sup>60</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 36.

<sup>61</sup> Rubin, *Confederacy of Silence*, 60.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, 113.

<sup>63</sup> Gems and Pfister, *Understanding American Sports*, 187.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, 185.

expectations of the fans and sponsors of the football program.<sup>65</sup> This is shown in *Friday Night Lights* when fans put 'FOR SALE' signs in front of head coach Gary Gaines' home, to show their displeasure with the recent losses of the Panthers.<sup>66</sup> Another reason for teams to perform well is financial gain, because winning games means more paying fans in the stands, which can provide considerable income for the schools.<sup>67</sup>

The annual salaries of the head coaches are often higher than that of any other employee of the school districts, and *Friday Night Lights* shows this by comparing coach Gaines' salary with that of a teacher. The coach, in 1988, earned \$48,000 while a teacher earned about \$32,000 annually.<sup>68</sup> In 2010 the coaches of the 4 teams in Odessa and Midland earned, on average, a salary of \$95,000 which was further increased by gifts from boosters.<sup>69</sup> And these can be huge sums of money, a head coach in Washington, for example, received a gift of \$55,000 after a particularly successful year.<sup>70</sup>

The high schools also provide the facilities for their athletic teams and many schools districts have their own football stadium, often of considerable size, like Ratliff Stadium or Midland's Grande Communications Stadium, which seats 15,000 people and was financed through bonds of a sales-tax increase.<sup>71</sup> During the season these stadiums are usually filled to capacity when home games are being played and in Texas alone about 4 million people attend high school football games each weekend, which is a testament to the importance put in high school football.<sup>72</sup> Some of the richest school districts' teams even own a plane to travel to road games.<sup>73</sup>

Football really brings communities together, and fans therefore invest a lot of time and money in their high school football team. There is one example where fans of a Texas team, in

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<sup>65</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 125.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Watterson, *College Football*, 401.

<sup>68</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 238.

<sup>69</sup> Len Hayward, 'Football defines West Texas Towns,' *ESPN*, October 12, 2008, 3.

<sup>70</sup> Gems and Pfister, *Understanding American Sports*, 189.

<sup>71</sup> Hayward, 'Football defines West Texas Towns,' 3.

<sup>72</sup> Gems and Pfister, *Understanding American Sports*, 185.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, 184.

1985, chartered nine large airplanes to transport all the fans to a state championship game.<sup>74</sup> And even though this may be an extreme example, it shows that football is important for many communities all across the United States. High school sports, according to Gems and Pfister in *Understanding American Sports*, serve important economic, social and even psychological functions. It is one of the few forms of entertainment found in these cities and the success of the school team can relieve some of the stress in daily life. Gems and Pfister go on to say that sport provides an area of common interest which can unite a town and bring a community together.<sup>75</sup> The high school in this way becomes the centerpiece of a town or a community and the football games often become a gathering place of nearly everyone who lives there.<sup>76</sup>

Because the football teams of these towns are so important, the young athletes are often treated like celebrities, especially when the team was successful and the players were playing well. Take for example Greenwood quarterback Handy Campbell who after home games was usually mobbed by fans who wanted to have his autograph, or just be in his presence.<sup>77</sup> This celebrity status means that being a high school football star has many advantages, as can be seen in *Friday Night Lights*, when Bissinger quotes a player of the Dallas Carter Cowboys, Gary Edwards, who said: “You walk around [school], you break all the rules. The teachers and administrators, they see you, they just don’t say anything to you. It was just like we owned it. Everybody looked up to us, it was just a great life.”<sup>78</sup> These star players receive a very preferential treatment in classes, if they attend classes at all, and often receive passing grades for mediocre work in order to maintain a grade average high enough to be allowed to play football. This is important since statewide rules prohibit a student from participating in interscholastic sporting events if they are unable to earn a passing grade in the classroom. In Texas this rule became known as the ‘No Pass No Play’ rule, which meant that if a student failed a single one of his classes, he or she would not be allowed to

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<sup>74</sup> Gems and Pfister, *Understanding American Sports*, 185.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem, 186.

<sup>76</sup> Hayward, ‘Football defines West Texas Towns,’ 3.

<sup>77</sup> Rubin, *Confederacy of Silence*, 98.

<sup>78</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 291.

participate in sports during the next semester. To ensure that the football players of the Permian Panthers would always be allowed to play, they were often allowed to take easy courses during the season or teachers would even turn a blind eye when the players did not do the mandatory assignments in class.<sup>79</sup> These athletes are afforded a very privileged treatment for their abilities on the gridiron, while other gifted students in for example the arts or sciences never receive any privileges at all, for no other reason than a tradition of the importance of athletics which has firmly been entrenched in American society.<sup>80</sup> In Odessa this means that even the teachers are involved in the football programs, who on Fridays support their team by dressing up in the black of Mojo.<sup>81</sup>

For many of the high school football players, the dream is to receive an athletic scholarship to play for a collegiate football team. These scholarships, however, are only given to the country's best athletes and Mike Winchell, the Panthers' quarterback, was not lucky enough to be considered for a one of them, even though coach Gaines considered and often advocated him as perfect student athlete material to college scouts. Winchell was someone who considered an athletic scholarship as a means to get a proper education, rather than just a stepping stone to a possible professional career in football as so many other high school athletes did.<sup>82</sup> Colleges, however, did not seem to be interested in a *student* athlete, and wanted someone who was a pure athlete, someone who played quarterback and had better physical skills and talent, which strongly suggests that the ideal of sports as a form of education is in decline and is giving way to a professional orientated view on sports in academic institutions. A player who did have the physical set of skills to play for a Division I team was Derric Evans, who played on the defensive side of the ball for the Carter Cowboys, and he was heavily recruited by universities throughout the United States. This meant that he received a very privileged treatment by the colleges and was even given gifts by the schools that were trying to lure him onto their teams. Evans eventually

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<sup>79</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 299.

<sup>80</sup> Nauright, 'Writing and reading American Football; Culture, Identities and Sports Studies,' 117.

<sup>81</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 8.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*, 314.

made his decision based on the perks he received, he said: “everybody [the colleges] was promisin’ something. It was just who was promisin’ the most.”<sup>83</sup>

While life can be glorious for those student athletes who are at the center of attention, life can be miserable when they are forced out of the spotlights. In *Friday Night Lights* this is seen by the example of James Earl ‘Boobie’ Miles Jr., who, at the beginning of the season, was considered one of the top high school runningbacks in the state of Texas and had received numerous college recruiting letters from the first day he had stepped out on the turf of Ratliff Stadium. Pushed by his uncle, who himself had never been allowed to play football, Miles firmly believed that he would one day play as a professional in the National Football League. But when he injured his knee during a preseason game he saw all of his college offers vanish.<sup>84</sup> Miles no longer was the center of attention in Odessa, and became just another high school student. Or as Bissinger put it in *Friday Night Lights*: “...before thousands of fans who had once anointed him the chosen son but now mostly thought of him as just another nigger.”<sup>85</sup> The coaches, who had once counted on Miles to sacrifice himself on the football field, now thought of him as being obsolete, as a replaceable running back whose starting position on the roster had already been taken over by another player. It also meant that Miles, who had struggled academically, lost all of the privileges he had enjoyed while being a football star and his academic grades would never be enough to get him into college.<sup>86</sup> James Miles figured that his only opportunity to go to college was to play football, so he made the decision to return to the team, without taking the time to properly rehabilitate his knee, risking further injuries. The coaching staff did not protect Miles from this decision and welcomed him back on the field even though they knew that no college would ever recruit the running back after such a serious knee injury.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 339.

<sup>84</sup> Ibidem, 61.

<sup>85</sup> Ibidem, 1.

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem, 263.

<sup>87</sup> Ibidem, 200.

James Miles' example shows that high school football players sometimes try and play while they are hurt, and even choose to play through serious injuries, but that they get no real rewards for this other than the perceived notion that playing sports is a good lesson in itself. The worst part, however, is that when the players are super stars and get too much of an advantage in their academic work, they are often punished in the long run by playing football, as they will never really learn to provide for themselves. There is an interesting quote from Melvin Rodgers, who said of African American student athletes: "A white kid tries to become President of the United States and all the skills and knowledge he picks up on the way can be used in a thousand different jobs. A black kid tries to become Willie Mays, and all the tools he picks up on the way are useless to him if he doesn't become Willie Mays."<sup>88</sup> This is now true for many athletes in the American high schools who often get pampered in classrooms because of their achievements on the playing field. The fact that they get rewarded for doing little work in the classrooms means that they might miss out on important life lessons which might have helped when it turns out that a professional career becomes impossible to achieve.

In Odessa, as in most of the Southern states, African Americans had been excluded from the main communities, as they often attended special schools for minorities. In Odessa it wasn't until 1982 that the school districts were officially integrated, and then only because of a verdict by the federal court.<sup>89</sup> Many people in Odessa saw this imposed integration as a threat to Mojo, but some of the influential boosters recognized this as a golden opportunity to recruit the best football prospects to the Panthers. To accommodate the football teams of both 'white' schools, the decision was made to close Ector High School, whose students were predominantly of African American and Mexican descent. All of these students would have to be enrolled into one of the schools and the district line became a complicated zig zag, not to accommodate minority

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<sup>88</sup> Jack Olsen, 'The Black Athlete – A Shameful Story,' *Sports Illustrated* (July 1, 1968), 3.

<sup>89</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 92.

quotas, to facilitate desegregation or to serve any academic purpose, but to make sure that the Permian Panthers football team would have the best players go to their school.<sup>90</sup>

While this integration helped the football team, football also became important for the African Americans, because success on the field meant that they and their families were finally accepted into the predominantly Caucasian communities, as can be seen in James Miles' example. The downside of this emphasis on football was that African Americans were only really accepted when they were good athletes, or as coach Nate Hearne said: "we fit as athletes, but we really don't fit as part of society."<sup>91</sup> Many African Americans had had the feeling that they were exploited during, and discarded after, their high school career was over. Laurance Hurd put it in the following terms: "Today, instead of the cotton field, it's the sports arena."<sup>92</sup>

Since the initial integration, African Americans have become increasingly accepted into the harsh Texan society, and high school football teams have played a considerable role in shaping better relationships between African Americans and whites. Even if it was only between the black and white teammates, steps were made in the right directions and African Americans became people rather than things to be exploited for athletic success. Today most of the Permian Panther football team consists of non-whites as African Americans and other ethnicities started playing an increasingly large role in Odessa's community.<sup>93</sup> The same has been true for Greenwood, where the team had been slowly integrated, just as the community itself had. Rubin states that: "all of Greenwood has always rallied around the Bulldogs."<sup>94</sup>

The redrawing of the district lines also shows the influence of football on politics, or rather the influence of the team's booster club on political decisions. Members of the community participate in the town's football program through booster clubs which attempts to create a favorable atmosphere for the football team. This also means ensuring that the best players in

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<sup>90</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 105.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*, 109.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, 109.

<sup>93</sup> Hayward, 'Football defines West Texas Towns,' 2.

<sup>94</sup> Rubin, *Confederacy of Silence*, 50.

town will play for their school's team.<sup>95</sup> But because schools are officially zoned by districts, this means the booster clubs even try to convince players to move to their district. They do this by offering incentives to these players and to their families. In the case of the Permian Panthers, players and parents were offered cars and low prices on housing just to play for the team, meaning that while they did not receive an official salary for actually playing football, these 17 year old kids come dangerously close to being professional players.<sup>96</sup> Looking at these facts shows that the ideal of amateur sports with its educational values is often subordinate to the ideal of winning at all costs, even in high schools.

The pressures that come with this emphasis of winning, as well as playing football games in front of thousands of fans and representing an entire community often lead to problems with the amateur ideal, and high school football often takes on certain characteristics usually attributed to professional sports. Examples of this are the aforementioned recruiting issues, inappropriate conduct by fans and players and even the use of performance enhancing drugs. It is hard to defend the notion that high schools only play for the pride of their schools as a lot more is at stake for everyone around the school's athletic departments.<sup>97</sup>

Bissinger, in *Friday Night Lights*, shows that high school amateur athletes, and in particular football players, are often revered in their communities. Towns, schools and fans devote a lot of their time and money to these amateur sports and in return they get to see games on Friday nights. What *Friday Night Lights* mostly portrays is the hardships that come with being a high school football player. It is often very stressful, especially in 'football crazy' communities and players often physically get hurt playing the sport while usually getting very little in return other than camaraderie with their teammates. Bissinger also showed that the amateur ideal is tainted because of the many controversies that surround high school football, football played by 17 year olds who are recruited into other school districts or are being paid money for success on the

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<sup>95</sup> Gems and Pfister, *Understanding American Sports*, 188.

<sup>96</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 163.

<sup>97</sup> Gems and Pfister, *Understanding American Sports*, 188.

gridiron. The booster clubs, who invest their money in the local team, in combination with multi-million dollar stadiums and professional coaching staffs give high school football a very professional allure in a game that should only be played for community pride.

## Education versus entertainment

“Now for the starting lineup, for the ESU Timberwolves, at tailback, number 20, Darnell Jefferson!” And as this name was yelled through the speakers by the announcer in Wolf Den Stadium, 95,000 people roared in excitement because the Timberwolves, led by quarterback Joe Kane were about to start their first game of the season against the Mississippi State Bulldogs.<sup>98</sup>

Although this scene is fictional, as it is taken from the 1993 feature film *The Program*, it is a familiar scene at universities all over the United States. The film depicts the exploits of an American football program at a university called ESU, an abbreviation which is not further defined by the writers David S. Ward and Aaron Latham. The title of the film is a reference to the importance given to the football program by the ESU administration. And it is clear that ESU is meant to represent one of its real-life counterparts; an academic institution which partakes in intercollegiate football at the highest level, Division I, often referred to as ‘big-time’ college sports, which, according to Charles T. Clothfelter in *Big Time Sports in American Universities*, is synonymous to “commercial college sports.”<sup>99</sup> *The Program* deals with a number of ideas, controversies and prejudices that are attached to the intercollegiate competitions and the movie is therefore a valuable source when examining how amateurism in collegiate football is depicted to the public.

The moment Darnell Jefferson runs out onto the field, to the cheers of thousands of fans, it becomes clear to the viewer that intercollegiate football games are important and that a lot of time and money is invested in these teams, not only by fans, but also by the academic institutions.<sup>100</sup> Intercollegiate sports at American universities, and especially so football and basketball, draw a lot of fans to the stadiums, owned by the schools. These fans are not just

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<sup>98</sup> David S. Ward and Aaron Latham, *The Program*, Directed by David S. Ward, (Beverly Hills, California, Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, 1993), DVD.

<sup>99</sup> Charles, T. Clothfelter, *Big Time Sports in American Universities*, (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 16.

<sup>100</sup> Steward Mandel, *Bombs, Polls & Tattered Souls: Tackling the Controversy That Reigns over College Football* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 1.

students or alumni of the universities, but are often people, drawn in by the schools' athletic teams, who come from the city or state in which the university is located. Usually this attachment is quite local, but some universities have a huge nationwide fan base, like the University of Notre Dame and Brigham Young University, who appeal to specific religious groups in American society. Gems and Pfister, in *Understanding American Sports*, argue that the athletic teams of American universities provide important ties and construct a collective identity for communities.<sup>101</sup>

But how exactly does intercollegiate football benefit the universities? The first answer, and possibly the most obvious, is money. And even though according to 'The Shame of College Sports' by Taylor Branch, the athletic departments of most universities are not profitable, they do provide other ways of earning money for the universities.<sup>102</sup> This is depicted in *The Program*, in an interaction between the football team's head coach Winters and the chancellor of ESU. In this discussion the chancellor says that the results of the Timberwolves should improve, as they affect the monetary donations from rich ESU alumni. Chancellor Wilson is even afraid that the influential alumni will affect the state's funding as they are the ones who lobby the state legislators. So, even though the athletic department in itself is not profitable, the universities rely on public and private donations to maintain both their academic, as well as athletic programs and do so by generating donations from alumni. This is supported by Clothfelter in *Big Time Sports in American Universities*, when he says that alumni make donations to the schools in order to receive a special treatment And alumni are aided in their decision to donate money to the athletic departments because it is a tax-deductible gift.<sup>103</sup>

Another reason for the schools to engage in college football is the prestige it generates for the institution. The names of the educational institutions are well known throughout the United

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<sup>101</sup> Gems and Pfister, *Understanding American Sports*, 162.

<sup>102</sup> Taylor Branch, 'The Shame of College Sports,' *The Atlantic*, (7 September, 2011), 2.

<sup>103</sup> Clothfelter, *Big Time Sports in American Universities*, xiv.

States, not usually for their academic success, but rather because of their football teams.<sup>104</sup> So athletic teams have often become the most recognizable part of these institutions which has, in turn, improved the overall image of the schools, leading to an increased enrollment of new students.<sup>105</sup> This means that there is some truth to the contention that academics benefit from athletics in the United States, as many of the best universities of the United States, and even the world, also feature a Division I football team.<sup>106</sup>

This creates a situation where the worlds of academics and athletics in universities are often conflicting, especially in universities where football seems to be the number one priority on campus. There are many critics of intercollegiate football, and the most heard argument against it is that the enterprise has become too commercial. It has become too detached from the ideal of the student athlete who performs to build his own character and for the pride of his own school or community. College football has become a multibillion dollar industry, with corporate sponsorships, television deals, huge coaches' salaries and student athletes who neglect their academics in order to be able to practice.<sup>107</sup> The schools have in fact become entertainment for the American public and a huge industry has been build around intercollegiate football teams which nowadays more closely represent a professional sporting franchise rather than an amateur team consisting of students.<sup>108</sup>

This means that, even more so than high school football programs, the teams in universities are very professional. This is referred to by coach Winters in *The Program* when he says: "Football is just a game to these kids. This is our program, our livelihood."<sup>109</sup> Other than glory, the amateur athletes have nothing really to gain by winning games, but for coaches it is very important because winning games and championships are the only way to guarantee a good career. On average the coaches in the highest division earned an annual salary of \$900.000 during

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<sup>104</sup> Clothfelter, *Big Time Sports in American Universities*, 5.

<sup>105</sup> Watt and Moore III, 'Who Are Student Athletes?' 8.

<sup>106</sup> Clothfelter, *Big Time Sports in American Universities*, 17.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibidem*, 14.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibidem*, 21.

<sup>109</sup> Ward and Latham, *The Program*, DVD.

2006, with certain coaches earning multiple millions dollars, so they usually out earn the universities president and sometimes they even make more money than their counterparts in the professional league. This makes football coaches, at public universities, the highest paid state employees.<sup>110</sup> And this is only their base salary, many of the best coaches can supplement their salaries by having their own endorsement deals, television appearances or other profitable ventures normally associated with celebrities or professional athletes.<sup>111</sup>

The professionalism of the football programs can also be seen in the athletic venues of the universities, which often include huge stadiums. Several universities, like Penn State, Michigan, Ohio State and Texas play their home games in excess of 100,000 fans and attract a television audience from all over the country. Europe, in comparison, has only one athletic venue which comes close to the 100,000 mark in Barcelona's Camp Nou, which seats almost 99,000 people.<sup>112</sup> In the United States there are currently 10 universities that own a stadium which seats over 90,000 people, and many more which come very close to this number.<sup>113</sup>

Even the federal government has discussed the status of intercollegiate football in congress, especially regarding the status of the tax-deductibility of gifts towards collegiate athletic departments. These are considered to be gifts for educational purposes, and therefore profit from the favorable tax position of the public universities. This in fact means that the gifts made to the football teams are completely tax-deductible, leading to a situation where alumni would rather sponsor athletics directly instead of contributing to the academic departments of schools.<sup>114</sup>

The commercial side of intercollegiate football has become so important for the colleges that a lot of emphasis is placed on the winning games. This, according to Clothfelter, means that a lot of money is being spent on the athletic programs and that a real ceiling for investing money

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<sup>110</sup> Gems and Pfister, *Understanding American Sports*, 158.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem*, 158.

<sup>112</sup> FC Barcelona, 'Camp Nou Experience,' <http://www.fcbarcelona.com/camp-nou/camp-nou-experience/detail/card/frequently-asked-questions> (accessed May 21, 2013).

<sup>113</sup> ESPN, 'Largest College Football Stadiums,'

[http://espn.go.com/espn/thelife/photos/gallery/\\_/id/5793795/largest-college-football-stadiums](http://espn.go.com/espn/thelife/photos/gallery/_/id/5793795/largest-college-football-stadiums) (accessed May 21, 2013).

<sup>114</sup> Clothfelter, *Big Time Sports in American Universities*, 13.

has become non-existent. The athletic departments keep pushing the limits of their budgets, and they also keep testing the rules regarding the recruitment of new student athletes.<sup>115</sup>

To try and stay on top of their competition, the universities' athletic programs invest a lot of time and money in the recruitment of new players. Early on in *The Program*, coach Winters flies out to Philadelphia to meet with a high school prospect who he tries to lure to sign a letter of intent to commit to playing football at ESU. In return for playing for the Timberwolves, he will receive an athletic scholarship which will provide him with the costs of tuition, room and board. These athletic scholarships are often referred to as 'free rides' and mean that the best athletes can receive a completely free college education.<sup>116</sup> So in essence, student athletes do receive official benefits for participating in intercollegiate sports, but the monetary worth of an athletic scholarship, according to NCAA rules, may never exceed the amount of money a regular student would have spent on his education. This rule was put into place to ensure that the amateur ideal, which is firmly entrenched in the United States, would be maintained as exceeding this amount could be considered a payment, which in turn would be a violation of the amateur status of the student athlete.<sup>117</sup>

Another NCAA rule, to ensure a fair and open competition, is that the number of athletic scholarships a school can grant is limited. A Division I school is allowed to grant up to 25 athletic scholarships to football players each year, but the total number of scholarships in the program may never exceed 85.<sup>118</sup> This means that each year there often exists a fierce battle between schools throughout the country to recruit the 'blue chip' prospects to ensure the success of the team in the future of the program.<sup>119</sup> This means that teams will do whatever it takes to ensure the best recruiting class each year even though it is very hard to predict which high school players will be able to have a successful collegiate career, as there is no guarantee that a player will be able

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<sup>115</sup> Clothfelter, *Big Time Sports in American Universities*, 21.

<sup>116</sup> Gems and Pfister, *Understanding American Sports*, 156.

<sup>117</sup> James, *Game Day*, 66.

<sup>118</sup> Mandel, *Bowls, Polls & Tattered Souls*, 149.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibidem*, 138.

to make the transition between the two levels of amateur football.<sup>120</sup> Especially considering the fact that most players will not even start a match until their third year or later, which means that about half of each recruiting class will never see any actual game-time during their time at the universities.<sup>121</sup>

Sometimes universities even go to great lengths to steal a recruit away from other schools, as can be seen in Rubin's *Confederacy of Silence*, where quarterback Handy Campbell is lured away from Mississippi State University and is signed on by the University of Mississippi. But the coaches of the 'Ole Miss' Rebels had no intention of letting Campbell actually play for the team, they just did not want him to play against them.<sup>122</sup> And according to coach Bradberry, this is something that happens quite often in universities with Division I football programs. The justification that the schools use is the argument that these players will still receive a free education, and will therefore still be better off.<sup>123</sup>

A high school running back's decision to attend ESU is shown in *The Program* to be a televised event and in reality some of these decisions on 'National Signing Day', are broadcasted nationally, often even with fans attending the ceremony in person. All just to see a high school player decide on which school he will attend, and which team he will represent. Stewart Mandel gives the example of a player who, in front of hundreds of fans, picked hats of different teams from a bag and threw them away until he put one on his head, bearing the logo of the university he had chosen to attend.<sup>124</sup> And whereas a few years ago Signing Day did not garner any interest from national media, the internet has turned the recruitment process in a large media event, which means that fans can even celebrate when their school recruits a great new class of players.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Mandel, *Bowls, Polls & Tattered Souls*, 142.

<sup>121</sup> Ibidem, 138.

<sup>122</sup> Rubin, *Confederacy of Silence*, 267.

<sup>123</sup> Ibidem, 269.

<sup>124</sup> Mandel, *Bowls, Polls & Tattered Souls*, 136.

<sup>125</sup> Ibidem, 145.

Life for these collegiate football players seems to be easy, but according to Sherry K. Watt and James L Moore III in 'Who Are Student Athletes,' playing intercollegiate sport on a high level adds a lot of complexity to their student life. Most regular students experience a lot of difficulty in adapting to their new lives as college students, being without their parents for the first time, but Division I football players will have to cope with this new life, as well as handle the pressure and duties that come with being an athlete. Watt and Moore call it a balancing act between being a student and being an athlete.<sup>126</sup> The difficulties that come with intercollegiate football means that many of the players do not receive their degrees while they are playing football and often have to extend their time at the institution in order to earn a diploma.<sup>127</sup>

Student athletes in Division I have to maintain both a certain academic standard, as well as play sports at a near professional level and these two demands often conflict.<sup>128</sup> Student athletes who fail a course during a semester are not eligible to compete for their team in the following term. This is somewhat of a struggle for many large schools, because the student athletes admitted on an athletic scholarship have to prioritize athletics over academics due to the busy schedule of the football season.<sup>129</sup> To accommodate their athletes the universities provides them with assistance in their academic work. In *The Program* Darnell Jefferson is given a personal tutor when it became clear that he was at risk of losing his eligibility to play football. Many of the 'full-ride' student athletes already received preferential treatment during high school and often prioritize their athletic career over their education, they see playing in a collegiate sport as a stepping stone to the professional level, and hope to be one of the lucky few, out of thousands of eligible college players, to be picked by the professional teams.<sup>130</sup>

Just like high schools, the colleges are willing to bend the rules for their student athletes. In *The Program*, linebacker Alvin Mack says to Darnell Jefferson: "As long as you're in the

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<sup>126</sup> Watt and Moore III, 'Who Are Student Athletes?' 7.

<sup>127</sup> Ibidem, 10.

<sup>128</sup> Ibidem, 12.

<sup>129</sup> Gems and Pfister, *Understanding American Sports*, 163.

<sup>130</sup> Ibidem, 164.

Program, they'll get you through. Maybe not with a degree, but they'll keep you eligible.” He even admits to receiving copies of tests in advance just so that he will get grades that are good enough to keep him playing for the Timberwolves.<sup>131</sup> Now the last example might be exceptional, but it is true that most student athletes receive preferential treatment in their classes.<sup>132</sup> The emphasis on winning has become so important that schools are willing to bend whatever rules there are regarding their student athletes and football programs. Often players are encouraged to take easy classes, especially during the actual season, and there are even instances where their grades will be changed or where the players enroll in classes that are not actually on the curriculum of the university.<sup>133</sup> According to Stewart Mandel, these “academic farces” take place all across the United States and that there is currently nothing that can be done about that. Because, even though the NCAA has certain rules in place about academics, the agency has no control over what sort of criteria the schools set for their students and their teachers.<sup>134</sup>

Sometimes the limits of what universities allow for their students will be stretched to extremes, as was the case for Dexter Manley who attended Oklahoma State University for four years and later confessed that he had been illiterate during this time.<sup>135</sup> In an interview in the *Los Angeles Times*, Manley said that he had never had any trouble passing his courses in high school, and even though he only scored a 6 on his ACT college placement test, where the average score is 18.2, he had no trouble getting into a college, because of his abilities as an athlete. He himself suspects that he was “just passed through” his classes. Manley made it through four years of college, and eventually fell short 50 credits of actually graduating with a degree in marketing. But he was still unable to read. A lot was demanded of Manley, as an athlete, but nobody ever pushed him to pursue his education.<sup>136</sup> This was also the case for quarterback Handy Campbell, who had always just relied on his athletic abilities and said: “Ain’t nobody tell you to go to college for

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<sup>131</sup> Ward and Latham, *The Program*, DVD.

<sup>132</sup> Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 150.

<sup>133</sup> Stewart Mandel, *Bowls, Polls & Tattered Souls*, 243.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibidem*, 243.

<sup>135</sup> Branch, ‘The Shame of College Sports,’ 16

<sup>136</sup> Roger Simon, ‘A Football Player Tackles Illiteracy,’ *Los Angeles Times*, (May 28, 1989).

academics. They just said to go for ball.”<sup>137</sup> This leads to a situation where many of the student athletes, who do not turn professional, even if they graduate college, do not have degrees to get good jobs. Take, for instance, Todd Jordan, a former quarterback for the Mississippi State Bulldogs, who got a degree in ‘fitness management’, because that was a degree where he could easily maintain the grades to stay eligible to play football. When his collegiate athletic career ended, he was not picked up by a professional football team, and the former star quarterback had to become a maintenance worker in his home town.<sup>138</sup> Sometimes coaches even tell players to dismiss their academics in favor of athletics. At Texas Christian University, for example, a player who suffered an injury during the season was told by his coaches to leave school until he had rehabilitated because there was no use in him going to class if he was unable to play football.<sup>139</sup>

What this essentially means, is that the Division I colleges do not really care about their student athlete’s grades and only care about the advancement of the physical talents of their football players. The student athletes are at times viewed as replicable commodities, who get their scholarships revoked as soon as they are unable to perform for the team. In *The Program*, linebacker Alvin Mack, who had no chance of graduating ESU with a degree, had all his hopes set on a future professional career. But when he breaks his leg during the season, his future professional career is ruined. Manley, like Mack, had no backup plan besides football, but he was confronted with his mistake when he was 30 years old, when he saw his colleague break his leg. At that point Manley realized that he needed to learn to read and write to ensure his life after football, because successfully completing a collegiate course in ‘underwater basket weaving,’ although giving him course credits would probably not help him in the rest of his life.<sup>140</sup> The university did not actually offer Manley a course in basket weaving, but is a humorous idiom used by Rick Atkinson in *The Grey Line* to describe the useless collegiate courses, that has become

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<sup>137</sup> Rubin, *Confederacy of Silence*, 291.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibidem*, 277.

<sup>139</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 49.

<sup>140</sup> Diana Nyan, ‘Views of Sport: How Illiteracy Makes Athletes Run,’ *New York Times*, May 28, 1989.

wildly used.<sup>141</sup> Student athletes at Florida State University have, for example, actually received college credits for taking courses on the rules of golf.<sup>142</sup>

While Manley was lucky enough to make it to the National Football League, many collegiate players are not so lucky and jeopardize their future by playing football in exchange for a, sometimes questionable, college degree. According to Mandelbaum, in *The Meaning of Sports*: “The ethos and the commercial orientation of major sports are at odds with the purpose of the university.”<sup>143</sup>

This commercial orientation of the football programs, in addition to the importance of winning, puts considerable pressure on the student athletes.<sup>144</sup> In *The Program* some players go to great lengths to ensure that they are able to perform on the highest level. Steve Lattimer is shown to be using performance enhancing drugs to boost his athletic abilities and even though the coaches suspect him of using these drugs, they turn a blind eye to it. The coaches would rather see him play well than stop him from using steroids. The NCAA, after all, has testing regulations in place to catch drug abusers: “let them worry about it” says coach Winters. The coaches do, however, inform Lattimer in advance when the NCAA is about to test, so that he can prepare by hiding clean urine behind the toilets in the locker room in order to pass the drug test.<sup>145</sup>

Other than showing the lengths to which student athletes go in order to perform at the highest level, and cope with the pressures of Division I football, Lattimer’s example also shows the ineffectiveness of the NCAA to administer its rules on the universities’ football programs. While it is true that the NCAA sets the rules regarding the national intercollegiate competitions it is largely the task of the schools themselves to actually enforce these rules. This means, according to *Bowls, Polls & Tattered Souls*, that nobody is actually in charge of college football. The schools have divided themselves into different conferences and decide many things for themselves, like

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<sup>141</sup> Rick Atkinson, *The Long Grey Line: The American Journey of West Point’s Class 1966*, (Holt Paperbacks, New York, 1989), 157.

<sup>142</sup> Nyan, ‘Views of Sport: How Illiteracy Makes Athletes Run,’ *New York Times*, May 28, 1989.

<sup>143</sup> Mandelbaum, *The meaning of Sports*, xvii.

<sup>144</sup> Watt and Moore III, ‘Who Are Student Athletes?’, 12.

<sup>145</sup> Ward and Latham, *The Program*, DVD.

for which opponents they will play each year.<sup>146</sup> These conferences were created by the schools on a regional basis, ensuring that the teams would not have to travel too far during their season to play games, but over time have changed in powerful institutions that rule over college football.<sup>147</sup> But, as all universities with athletic programs are members of the NCAA and usually of a conference, they do pay a fee to the agency. And although these conferences are non-profit organizations, they earn millions of dollars each year from television contracts regarding the broadcasts of the intercollegiate football competition.<sup>148</sup>

Some schools have decided to remain independent from conferences, and while these schools often have more difficulty in making a competitive schedule, they are able to retain all of their television earnings. The schools that choose to remain independent often do so because they have a large national audience and rely on this fan base to ensure their popularity. The most notable of the independent schools are the United States Military Academy, the United States Naval Academy and Notre Dame University, the last being the only team in the country with the privilege to have all of its games broadcasted live on national television. Another reason to remain independent from the conferences is the fact that reaching a national audience helps them in recruiting better football prospects, but also in attracting students to their institutions.<sup>149</sup>

So while there is a lot of debate over the issue of academics versus athletics and over the role of the NCAA, currently the most controversy is regarding the Football Subdivision System (FBS) which organizes the most important games of the year, the bowl games. These have traditionally been the finals for the college football season and the goal of the season for ESU, just like for its real-life counterparts, is qualifying for a bowl game. There are currently 32 annual bowl games, and four of these are meant to represent the top eight teams of Division I. One of the bowl games is chosen to be the National Championship Game, in which the winner is crowned as the best collegiate team of the season. The controversy arises because there are no

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<sup>146</sup> Mandel, *Bowls, Polls & Tattered Souls*, 3.

<sup>147</sup> Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 158.

<sup>148</sup> Gems and Pfister, *Understanding American Sports*, 156.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibidem*, 157.

playoffs to determine who qualifies for the national championship game, but rather a team is chosen through a system in which voting by journalists determines the top college teams. This, nowadays, is seen as a very arbitrary way of determining which team is the best in the country as all other American sports, as well as many international sports, have a clear playoff or elimination system in place to determine the eventual winner.<sup>150</sup> So instead of transparent system, the voting in NCAA's Division I is done by a panel of sportswriters and computers, meaning that the ones who cover the sports, journalists, have actual influence in the overall outcome of the season.<sup>151</sup>

This system of voting for the Bowl Championship Series (BCS), which was created in 2002, means that each year there is a lot of confusion over which team will get to play for the national title. The six richest conferences in Division I dictate what happens in the college football competition, and the 'lesser' conferences simply have to agree, because of the share of money they receive due to the shared revenue from the richest conferences.<sup>152</sup> Many of the most important football teams, for example, get to decide for themselves which crew of referees officiates their home games. This means they are often looked at with suspicion, because many of their rivals feel that playing a normal home game would be enough of an advantage for these teams.<sup>153</sup> There is, as stated by Stewart Mandel, always some sort of power struggle going on between the different teams, conferences and agencies that together dictate what happens in college football.<sup>154</sup>

Davis S. Ward and Aaron Latham could, for the obvious reason that this controversy did not exist at the time, not include the BCS controversy in their film, but all of the other myths, problems and controversies surrounding amateurism in 'big time' college sports have been shown in *The Program*. Improper benefits for amateur athletes, illegal recruiting practices by coaches,

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<sup>150</sup> Mandel, *Bowls, Polls & Tattered Souls*, 4.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibidem*, 6.

<sup>152</sup> Clothfelter, *Big Time Sports in American Universities*, xiv.

<sup>153</sup> Mandel, *Bowls, Polls & Tattered Souls*, 5.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibidem*, 6.

discussions between athletics and academics and the clash between education and commercialism all contribute to the paradoxical status of student athletes in America's universities.

So besides the more recent BCS controversies, David S. Ward and Aaron Latham, have used *The Program*, to show what problems arise with universities engaging in 'big-time' college sports. From problems with the amateur status of the student athletes, the improper benefits for the athletes, recruiting of high school players, scholarships and clashes with academics standards are all shown in *The Program*. Amateur athletics at universities exhibit a paradox, as the ideal of education clashes with the commercialism and winning ethos of the athletic programs. But schools who have adopted 'big time' sports almost never choose to cut the athletic program because it has become too valuable to the schools due to the potential gifts, the public attention and the building of a community have become indispensable for many American academic institutions.<sup>155</sup>

*The Program* is also a good indication of the ambivalent status of the student athletes, who have to cope with very professional institutions, while receiving no benefits besides their scholarship. So while universities earn a lot of money through these players, by jersey sales for instance, the students do not receive any money for their services because of the appeal of amateur athletics in the eyes of the American public, which was created at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the start of intercollegiate sporting competitions. The entertainment factor of universities has become more important than the actual academics. In the world of amateur football the athlete has driven out the student, the body has become overemphasized with regards to the intellect as the sport became increasingly important in the United States. The growth of 'big time' college football has created a situation where the amateur ideal has suffered in favor of commercialism, as one of America's most popular sporting competitions.

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<sup>155</sup> Clothfelter, *Big Time Sports in American Universities*, 12.

## Show me the money

Problems with the amateur ideal do not just arise from the athletic departments of the schools, or because of the importance placed in athletics. The student athletes themselves realize that they are valued commodities and professional sports agencies try to benefit from the fact that the collegiate players do not earn any money.

In a 2010 interview in *Sports Illustrated*, former agent Josh Luchs revealed that he had given money to many student athletes during their collegiate careers, in an attempt to lure them in as clients when they became professionals. Luchs says that paying money was a way to build long term relationship with the college athletes, and admits that a useful way for an agent to get started in the business is to get a foot in the door with a single 'big time' football school. In Luchs' case this school was UCLA, and because he was very young when he started out as an agent, Luchs was constantly hanging out with the players, trying to build a relationship with them by, for example, buying them lunches and concert tickets.<sup>156</sup>

Buying gifts for collegiate players, let alone handing them money, are all NCAA violations of the athlete's amateur status, because the rules clearly state that any gift is prohibited. Giving a student athlete a car is just as serious a violation of the rules as buying him lunch.<sup>157</sup> Luchs justified his actions, to himself, by remembering that he had never agreed to the rules, as professional agents were not NCAA members and therefore had never agreed to the NCAA's rules. Another justification for him was the fact that collegiate players do not receive any salary, while the schools and NCAA gain millions of dollars from the athletic contributions of the student athletes. If he did not hand out gifts and money, some other agent would, as according to 'Confessions of an Agent': "It goes on everywhere."<sup>158</sup> Luchs said that agents have been giving money to college athletes since at least the 1960s, but that it used to be more open before state

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<sup>156</sup> George Dohrman, 'Confessions of an Agent,' *Sports Illustrated* (October 18, 2010), 4.

<sup>157</sup> Mandel, *Bowls, Polls & Tattered Souls*, 235.

<sup>158</sup> Dohrman, 'Confessions of an Agent,' 4.

governments prohibited agents contacting collegiate players. Agents, however, still do it, but it has become more secretive and middle-men are used so neither the athlete nor the agent will be caught red handed.<sup>159</sup>

And even though agents are usually blamed for preying on student athletes and violating the rules, according to the *Sports Illustrated* article, the players themselves, as well as their families, often approach agencies for representation and benefits.<sup>160</sup> Student athletes are helped, because the rules state that players who receive illegal benefits do not have to return them if they get caught. Where before agents were protected from losing money when a player decided to sign on with another agent, now players and their families often contact multiple representatives and receive money without having to be afraid of the consequences.<sup>161</sup> And this is exactly the reason why Josh Luchs chose to reveal his secrets to the press: “People should know how the agent business really works, how widespread the inducements to players are and how players have their hands out. It isn't just the big, bad agents making them take money. People think the NFLPA is monitoring agents, but it is mostly powerless. People should also be aware of all that an agent does for his clients.”<sup>162</sup>

Luchs’ admission, however, did not lead to any direct NCAA investigations into his clients, because the agent most recent revelation stemmed from 2005, while the statute of limitations on violations is four years. The story though, did lead to increased NCAA’s investigations into recent violations of the college athletes’ amateur status.

The University of Southern California, based in Los Angeles, was one of the football programs hit the hardest by recent NCAA sanctions. The NCAA’s Committee on Infractions ruled that because one of its players, Reggie Bush, had received gifts from agents he was considered to be ineligible to have played during the 2005 season. USC would therefore have to vacate its 13 wins that season, including the Orange Bowl trophy earned at the end of the year.

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<sup>159</sup> Dohrman, ‘Confessions of an Agent,’ 4.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibidem*, 5.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibidem*, 7.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibidem*, 11.

And as further punishment, they would not be allowed to play in bowl games for two years and were docked 30 scholarships. According to Stewart Mandel the penalty was this high because the NCAA wanted to use this opportunity to send a message to other football programs across the nation.<sup>163</sup> The main reason for the severity of the sanctions had been USC's unwillingness to cooperate in the Reggie Bush investigation, someone who no longer attended the school as he had turned professional. So, in effect the school was punished because of wrongdoings by a former player and the NCAA believed that the school could have done more to prevent Bush's interactions with sporting agents. Mandel, however, faults the NCAA for making an example out of USC rather than delivering a fair judgment about actions that could only have been prevented when Bush was still in school.<sup>164</sup>

Bush, from the moment the investigation was announced in 2009, had maintained that he was not aware of any wrongdoings by his family or himself.<sup>165</sup> But the NCAA judged otherwise and after the verdict had been handed down to USC by the NCAA's infraction committee, Bush called USC's athletic director Pat Haden to discuss the matter. In an article by *USA Today's* Leon Moore it was stated that Bush apologized for his actions to Haden and that he wished to make amends with his alma matter.<sup>166</sup> Gary Klein, in the *Los Angeles Times*, however, contradicted this information. The call from Bush to Haden is confirmed, but the athletic director wanted to make it perfectly clear that Bush never apologized to him or the university. Haden, after learning about the penalties to the program, decided that Bush's jersey would have to be removed from USC's trophy hall, and that the school would return Bush's Heisman Trophy to the Heisman Trust.<sup>167</sup> According to another article in the *Los Angeles Times*, 'USC to send back its Reggie Bush Heisman,' university president Max Nikias confirms that Haden instructed the school's athletic department to remove all remembrances of Bush before any new students would come into

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<sup>163</sup> Stewart Mandel, 'Inside College Football,' *Sports Illustrated.com Columns*, June 10, 2010.

<sup>164</sup> Mandel, 'Inside College Football.'

<sup>165</sup> Lance Pugmire, 'NCAA combines investigations into USC athletics,' *Los Angeles Times*, April 09, 2009.

<sup>166</sup> David Leon Moore, 'USC AD Pat Haden gets apology from Reggie Bush,' *USA Today*, August 12, 2010.

<sup>167</sup> Gary Klein, 'Haden gets call, but no apology, from Bush,' *Los Angeles Times*, 08-14-2010.

school for the new semester because the: “Trojan family honors and respects the USC sporting careers of those persons whose actions did not compromise their athletic program or the opportunities of future USC student-athletes.”<sup>168</sup> It is clear that the local newspaper, the *Los Angeles Times*, is more intent on trying to accuse Reggie Bush of his wrongdoings than is the case for *USA Today* who are further detached from the Los Angeles fan base, and would benefit less of accusing the player.

So media plays a role in steering its audience in a certain direction, regarding the amateur ideal, but sometimes even play an active role in the recruitment of athletes for agents, as, according to Josh Luchs, agents often use reporters from well known newspapers or television shows to demonstrate a good relation between the agent and press. This is important because good media relations would be beneficial for professional players during their careers.

Luchs even confessed that certain coaches at universities steer their players in the direction of sporting agents they have good relationships with, and at times have even been paid for these services by the sporting agents.<sup>169</sup> So while the media often condemns the actions by agents who violate the amateur ideal, they are sometimes part of this violation.

Luchs’ and USC’s examples show agents making illegal contact with student athletes in universities, but athletic directors and coaches of college football programs have often done the same thing while trying to recruit high school prospects. It is just another example of football programs trying to stretch the boundaries of legal contact with players. The most recent of the NCAA investigations regarding illegal recruiting practices, involves the University of Oregon, where at least one major recruiting violation has taken place between 2008 and 2011, according to *The Oregonian’s* Adam June.<sup>170</sup> To avoid an NCAA punishment, the University of Oregon has admitted to have broken the rules and have suggested a self-imposed punishment which would reduce the number of scholarships that the football team could hand out. But the NCAA said

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<sup>168</sup> Mike Hiserman, ‘USC to send back its Reggie Bush Heisman,’ *Los Angeles Times*, 07-20-2010.

<sup>169</sup> Dohrman, ‘Confessions of an Agent,’ 8.

<sup>170</sup> Adam June, ‘Oregon, NCAA agreed Ducks committed ‘major violations,’ documents show,’ *The Oregonian*, April 15, 2013. [www.oregonlive.com/ducks/2013/04/oregon\\_ncaa\\_agreed\\_ducks\\_commi.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/ducks/2013/04/oregon_ncaa_agreed_ducks_commi.html) (Accessed May 28, 2013).

that they would rather impose their own penalty on the school. Oregon's case is especially worth looking at because the program was already on probation for recruiting a junior-college player in 2003 but have now admitted to have violated the probation by continuing to recruit players that are not in accordance with NCAA rules.

While violations of amateurism in academic football are widespread, the press usually only gets involved after the NCAA has started an investigation or when they are able to get an exclusive story, as was the case with in *Sports Illustrated* with the Josh Luchs interview. So while it seems that the press tries to persecute the violators of the amateur ideals, they themselves are involved and sometimes even benefit from creating a controversy by accusing a major athletic program such as the University of Alabama in 2002, Florida State in 2008 or the University of Southern California in 2010 as this will generate a lot of publicity for media outlets. A lot of the reporting in national press releases like *Sports Illustrated* or *ESPN* might be described as discursive, the television stations, and online news sources in particular are often very biased and bring very tendentious reports. Especially when these sources have the ability to criticize rival football programs, as is shown by Stewart Mandel, a reporter for *Sports Illustrated* in his book *Bowls, Polls and Tattered Souls*.<sup>171</sup> According to Mandel: "Cheating in college football is a tradition nearly as old as tailgating and letter sweaters." Mandel claims that schools bend the rules because they want to remain competitive in a system where it is hard to get caught and therefore all of the competition is also cheating.<sup>172</sup>

In their reporting, media often tries to protect the ideal of the amateur athletes in intercollegiate sports by reporting negatively on either schools or former collegiate players who have violated the NCAA's rules. There are, however, other reporters who want to show that the whole amateurism ideal should be dismissed in favor of professional collegiate football. One of them is Taylor Branch, who in 'The Shame of College Sport,' states that: "the real scandal is the very structure of college sports, wherein student-athletes generate billions of dollars for

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<sup>171</sup> Mandel, *Bowls, Polls & Tattered Souls*, 232.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibidem*, 235.

universities and private companies while earning nothing for themselves.”<sup>173</sup> According to Branch, all of the recent scandals in college football stem from the fact that America refuses to accept that the student athletes should benefit from their representing the football team and he makes the case that professionalism would not take away the integrity or appeal of college football. He argues that college football already is fully commercialized but that the press and audience refuse to admit this fact and that especially television has corrupted any ideal that was left after 1950.<sup>174</sup> Branch even compares collegiate football with slavery, where the universities earn money from their student athletes who receive nothing in return.

This link between slavery and collegiate football is also used by the satirical animated television series *South Park*, in the episode called ‘Crack Baby Athletic Association.’ The show, which often comments on problems in American society, has a large national and international audience, and used this particular episode to criticize the fact that the NCAA and academic institutions profit from their unpaid athletes. This particular episode was later nominated for an Emmy award for its humorous commentary on American society.<sup>175</sup>

Overall, however, the press plays a major role in how the amateur ideal is protected by the American universities, by reporting on its violations. It is remarkable that newspapers, as described in the first chapter, have helped popularize the sport. Then, in the 1950s television and football proved to be a very successful combination and all this time criticism in the media about the amateur athletes has been very limited, and never really accusing of athletes themselves violating rules but rather focusing on athletic departments of schools or agents recruiting players. Only when players turn pro will they become targets for media, and the student athletes seem to enjoy a status where they can’t be criticized for anything other than failing achievements on the playing field.

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<sup>173</sup> Branch, ‘The Shame of College Sports,’ 1.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibidem*, 5.

<sup>175</sup> Robert Seidman, ‘Comedy Central Honored With Twelve Primetime Emmy Nominations,’ *Entertainment Weekly*, July 14, 2011.

## Conclusion

By looking at these different case studies, *Friday Night Lights*, *Confederacy of Silence*, *The Program* and the two stories in the news media, it becomes clear that the American public can come into contact with popular media stories about athletics in schools on a daily basis. This means that many Americans, especially those who consider themselves to be fans of high school or collegiate football teams, will have had to deal with either reinforcements or controversies through mass media of the amateur ethos that has been established in the educational system of the United States.

So it is true that popular media plays a large role in how the ideal of amateur athletics in American educational institutions is currently being perceived by the American public because all of the discussed works show that there are two sides to student athletes. At the one side there is the ideal, the student who plays for a genuine love of the game and knows that playing football will instill certain desirable traits in him that he can use in his career. One of the best examples of one such player is Mike Winchell who, according to Bissinger, truly believed that playing football would teach him lessons he could use to be successful later in life, in a life beyond football.<sup>176</sup> Bissinger, however, also shows another side of academic athletics, for those student athletes who see amateur athletics as a necessary stepping stone to a professional career as is shown by the example of James 'Boobie' Miles. Bissinger seems to confirm that the mere idea of professionalism can corrupt students. So even though *Friday Night Lights* at first glance seems to be fairly critical about the supposed amateur ethos in Odessa, the book in itself seems to reinforce the idea that amateurism is desirable for high school football. And the simple fact that Bissinger's book has spawned both a film and a television series, both also called *Friday Night Lights*, shows how popular and influential his work has been.

What is clear about all of the sources is that there is a lot of controversy surrounding amateurism at all of the football programs in high schools and colleges. And *The Program*

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<sup>176</sup> Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*, 314.

especially seems to touch upon all of the problems regarding the amateur status of players in a sport that has become big business in the United States. None of the sources deny that all of the programs in the national college football competition have become professional on every level, except for paying the actual players. *The Program* shows that collegiate football teams bend the rules, set by the NCAA, to extremes in order to win football games and the film seems to reinforce the idea that the public, who know schools are cheating, simply choose to ignore this, as long as they will be entertained on Saturday nights. Movies, books and news reports, however, have made sure that Americans are aware of the controversies surrounding amateurism and popular media has therefore played a large role in how the amateur ethos in schools is being looked at.

The biggest limitation of this paper is the fact that it is near impossible to actually read, analyze and study all of the sources that are available about amateur football and each one of these sources could probably be the basis for additional study just by themselves. Just considering how many books, both fiction or non-fiction, are available to the public with references to high school and collegiate football shows that a lot more research can be done into this subject. And that is just regarding football in academic institutions. As mentioned in the introduction, a lot more sports are popular on campuses around the United States and further research into amateurism should not focus on just American football but could look at a multitude of sports like baseball, basketball, ice hockey or even sports that have only recently started to become popular like association football.<sup>177</sup>

What this study has done, at the very least, is show how important sports are in the United States. Furthermore it shows how amateur football has developed over time and how these academic institutions and their football team are considered to be of huge importance in American society and that high school and college football are considered to be unique American

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<sup>177</sup> Andrei S. Markovits and Steven L. Hellerman, *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism*, (Princeton University Press, 2001), 11.

features. The most important lesson in this paper, however, is that the popular media has played a large role in shaping the amateur ethos in football to the public. The combination of two things that are very dear to Americans, popular media and athletics have, over time, proven to be a very lucrative combination and looking at the sources in this paper, *Friday Night Lights*, *Confederacy of Silence*, *The Program* and news reports, shows that both sports and media complement each other to create a phenomenon that can only be found in the United States.

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