

Further to the Thomas-to-Brand Letter

Ed.— Readers of Clips Guest Commentaries may have already surmised that Frank Splitt's commentaries on college sports reform have a higher purpose than what meets the eye. He has been calling attention to the negative impact of our sports addictive culture on the future well-being of our nation's youth, education system, and, consequentially, to America's place as a world leader. He does it again in the following.

Here's a wide-ranging commentary describing potential Congressional intervention of college athletics in richly-worded passion.

by Frank Splitt

Preface

The following comments, "A Question of Values and Priorities" and "Continuing Tax Breaks for Corporate Sponsors?," go beyond those made in, "Kudos to Chairman Thomas." The comments have links to the referenced material at *InsideHigherEd.com* and to my previous essays and comments accessible at URL: <http://thedorakegroup.org/splittessays.html>. The reader is encouraged to read the *InsideHigherEd.com* columns and associated comments for valuable insights into the issues surrounding serious college sports reform.

It is my understanding that the NCAA has requested an extension of the due date for their response to House Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Thomas' letter of inquiry and have been granted a two-week extension to Nov. 13, 2006 – all the more time to contemplate the future course of events should the Democrats take over control of the House. According to an Oct. 15, column by *New York Post* reporter Richard Tedesco, the NCAA's tax-exempt status – and the \$503 million it gets from CBS to televise its March Madness basketball tourney – could face a full-court press from Rep. Charles Rangel next year

A Question of Values and Priorities

It was disappointing to see Paul Thacker report in "Uncertain Outlook for Science Funds" that, notwithstanding strong congressional support, the passage of funding authorization for President Bush's American Competitiveness initiative is iffy — ostensibly because of calendar and electoral politics, [*Inside Higher Ed*, Oct. 11, 2006]. Hopefully, this is not a harbinger of things to come in the congressional challenge to the NCAA's tax-exempt status reported in Elia Power's "Ball's in NCAA Court," [1].

Last week's action by the House Committee on Ways and Means — questioning the tax-exempt status of the NCAA — is considered to be a significant milestone on the path to reform in big-time college sports. This reform could lead to a reversal of the priorities seen on many of our big-time college campuses. Simply stated, these priorities are athletics-over-academics and Sports-over-STEMS, where STEMS stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Technology. See related essays; [2, 3], and, to these I would add Murray Sperber's book, *BEER AND CIRCUS: How Big-Time College Sports Is Crippling Undergraduate Education*.

Given America's obsession with sports, it is difficult to imagine how supporters of the House Ways and Means Committee's effort could ever muster the level and robustness of the bipartisan congressional support garnered by the Senate and House champions and the National Academies for the competitiveness initiative. This does not bode well for really significant college sports reform any time in the near future — no matter how right the cause and how urgent the need.

Nevertheless, the difficulties involved in making successful cases for the competitiveness and college sports reform initiatives, call attention to the need for an examination and assessment of America's values and priorities in the light of the new global realities.

A thoughtful reading of Thomas Friedman's, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* and Jared Diamond's, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, by our political leaders at all levels would provide a good start on this examination and assessment.

Web Links:

[1] <http://insidehighered.com/news/2006/10/06/ncaa;>

[2] [http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Sports_in_America.pdf;](http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Sports_in_America.pdf)

[3] [http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_STEMS.pdf.](http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_STEMS.pdf)

Frank G. Splitt, member of The Drake Group, at 4:30 am EDT on October 12, 2006

Authors Note: This commentary on Paul Thacker's column first appeared on Inside Higher Ed, URL: <http://insidehighered.com/news/2006/10/11/compete>.

Continuing Tax Breaks for Corporate Sponsors?

House Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Thomas' Oct. 2, letter to NCAA President Brand has the potential for initiating a breakthrough in college-sports reform, see Related Story, "Ball's in the NCAA's Court." Not only could this reform help restore academic and financial integrity in our institutions of higher education, but also eliminate government subsidization of "Football is Everything" type advertisements and many others that take advantage of H. R. 2014.

In his classic book, *UNPAID PROFESSIONALS: Commercialism and Conflict in Big-Time College Sports*, Andy Zimbalist advises that H. R. 2014 "exempts from taxation payments made to nonprofit organizations for advertising where comparative or qualitative description is absent." He goes on to point out the absurdity of the law as it is effectively ignored in actual practice.

So, it is to be expected that Rep. Thomas' action will be subjected to intense spin doctoring by defenders of the NCAA cartel and various corporate sponsors — the same folks who lobbied intensely to have H. R. 2014 signed into law in 1997. It has already begun with labeling such as "witchhunt," "politically motivated," and "political grandstanding." The latter labels are indeed perplexing considering the fact that Rep. Thomas is retiring at the end of the year and has no reason to grandstand.

Apparently, there are many who do not see, or, care to see, the enabling academic corruption hiding, as it were, in plain sight. Who but the federal government will be able to address the problems inherent in the fact that the tax-exempt schools are the 'owners' of the college sports entertainment businesses for which they alone provide academic oversight?

Clearly, vested financial self interests drive the need for the schools to do whatever they can to field professional teams of athletes pretending to be students. It's only wrong if you get caught — even then, the penalties are absurdly trivial. The games must go on!

Additionally, the schools always have the NCAA flying cover — touting reform measures that never seem to work — and corporate sponsors, the media, as well as wealthy boosters paving the road to perdition with huge amounts of money. Perdition? See the comments by Murray Sperber and Tom Palaima, as well as "Sports in America 2005: Facing Up to Global Realities," URL: http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Sports_in_America.pdf.

Authors Note: This commentary on Doug Lederman's Oct. 19 "Football Is ... Everything?" column on the Nike spoof advertisement – elevating the gridiron over the classroom – that struck some professors and sports officials as unfunny, first appeared on Inside Higher Ed, URL: <http://insidehighered.com/news/2006/10/19/nike>. The URL for the "Ball's in the NCAA's Court" story is: <http://insidehighered.com/news/2006/10/06/ncaa>.

This commentary by Frank G. Splitt, member of The Drake Group, was submitted to College Athletics Clips on 10-20-06.

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Further, Clips always strives to present all sides of all issues. Consequently, we welcome any commentaries that might present a different or opposing viewpoint from that expressed by Frank Splitt.