

The Student Body

SPORTS • HEALTH • FITNESS

Playing hardball

Presidents force reforms on college athletics

By JOEL HORN

State Press, Arizona State U.

For decades, critics of college athletics have complained that the phrase "student-athlete" is a lie.

Athletes, they have said, are little more than disposable commodities to the institutions they serve — pack mules who devote every waking moment to their sport and are left, four years later, with little but memories to show for it.

Coaches and athletic directors have disagreed, saying their students are given the time and opportunity to

acquire an education which might otherwise be unattainable.

But occasionally, concerns of the critics are personified in the types of embarrassing stories that universities would rather forget.

In 1989, Dexter Manley of the Phoenix Cardinals tearfully testified before Congress that he played football for Oklahoma State from 1977 to 1980 despite being functionally illiterate.

Former Creighton basketball player Kevin Ross sat in class for four years before leaving

school in 1982 to enroll at a Chicago elementary school because, like Manley, he could not read.

And at California State U., Los Angeles, seven members of the basketball team filed suit against the university for alleged academic fraud. The school eventually paid the players \$100,000 in damages and educational benefits and issued a formal apology.

After years of tolerating such scandals, it appears college presidents are trying to clean up their programs and give sensible boundaries to those that are out

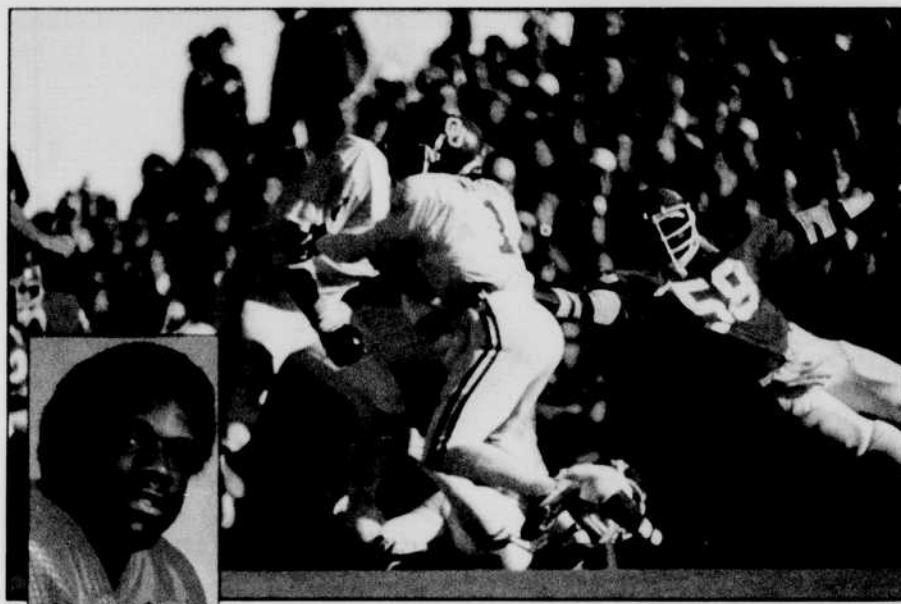
of control.

The presidents stormed the January NCAA Convention in Nashville, Tenn., outmuscled their own athletic directors, and pushed through a series of reform legislation that could alter the very nature of college athletics.

When the dust had settled in Nashville, nearly all of the 182 proposals, resolutions and amendments that the presidents introduced had passed, and it was clear that the presidents had asserted control over the

"I realize that I am just road kill on the highway to reform."

— Robert Bowsby
NIU Athletic Director



PHOTOS COURTESY OF OKLAHOMA STATE U. SPORTS INFORMATION

Nightmares in the Ivory tower: Dexter Manley, functionally illiterate when he played football for Oklahoma State U., exemplifies an era college presidents would rather forget.

NCAA.

Many coaches and athletic directors felt crushed.

"I realize that I am just road kill on the highway to reform," Northern Iowa Athletic Director Robert Bowsby said at the convention.

That reform includes five proposals that will have a significant impact on college athletics in the years to come: a reduction in mandatory practice time for student athletes; 10 percent cuts in scholarships; the imposition of stricter academic standards; a reduction in the size of coaching staffs; and

the phasing-out of athletic dormitories.

Perhaps the most controversial change is the reduction of mandatory in-season practice and competition time to a maximum of 20 hours per week and four hours per day, with athletes guaranteed one day off a week during their season. The 20-hour week includes team meetings (but not physical therapy) and allows three additional hours for games. In the off-season, athletes can spend only eight hours per week at their sport and are guaranteed three days off.

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Practice (but not too much) makes perfect

By MICHAEL BLUHM

Indiana Daily Student, Indiana U.

While university presidents, athletic directors and coaches were duking it out during this year's NCAA convention, some unexpected visitors stopped by to add their voices to the fray.

For the first time in the convention's 84-year history, NCAA athletes came to Nashville to address the elders. And they did not come to pay tribute.

The athletes came to declare their opposition to the soon-to-be-

notorious Proposition 38, requiring a "student-athlete's participation ... be limited to a maximum of four hours per day and 20 hours per week" during the season.

Despite their protests, the proposition passed overwhelmingly.

The new law — part of the NCAA Presidents Commission package to reform athletics, cut costs and curb the exploitation of athletes — seeks to make athletes' lives less demanding.

But it might do just the opposite. The athletes' speeches at the convention only clarified the irony; they publicly opposed the legislation designed to help them. If anything, they said, it creates a host of new problems.

The first, and most well-known, casualty of the legislation is former Stanford U. swimmer Janet Evans. Winner of three gold medals in the 1988 Summer Olympics at the age of 17, Evans left the university team in April because she said the practice restrictions would hamper her ability to train for next year's Olympics.

"This is a hard decision because I love Stanford and I love my teammates," Evans said upon leaving. "It will be hard not swimming for Stanford."

When the plan was originally proposed, Evans, who trains about 35 hours a week, threatened to sue the NCAA if it was enacted. But the form of the legislation passed by the NCAA allows unlimited voluntary workouts, and allows the universities to enforce compliance. Coaches in some sports, including swimming, are allowed to be present during those voluntary workouts.

These loopholes were intended to give swimmers like Evans the chance to train as much as they want. But Evans decided otherwise.

"I don't want to spend the rest of my life worrying if I'm spending

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ROD SEARCEY, STANFORD U.

Former Stanford U. swimmer Janet Evans, floating free of red tape.

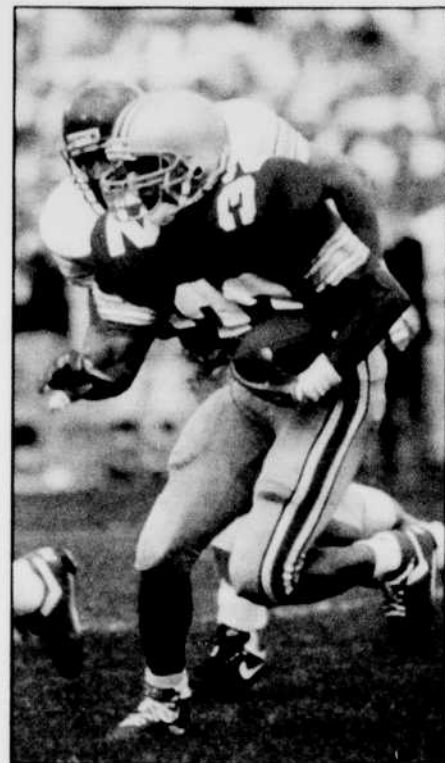


PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE U.

Robert Smith: A new breed of college athlete who refuses to put his sport above academics, or just tired of playing football for Ohio State?