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If I was an FBS athletic direc...

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At the beginning of every new year, I get too many calls from my favorite media folks asking for “predictions” for the coming year. While I don’t have “predictions”, I do have a list of things that NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision athletic directors should be worrying about. So I’m sharing the list I keep by my telephone…

WORRY#1. Financial sustainability. Less than 24 schools a year make more money than they spend and these operating budget data do not include crippling capital debt service - long term debt that cannot be reduced. More and more big time schools will suffer the media microscope like Cal Berkeley ($22 million) and Rutgers ($36 million) having to justify these cosmic level school subsidies. For more info. Another?

WORRY #2 No stopping the football and men’s basketball arms races. Escalation of coaches’ salaries and expenditures on lavish facilities continue out of control – excesses made possible because athlete scholarship costs (cost of athlete labor) are capped. And we haven’t seen the worst of it yet. Training tables for athletes only are back from the 70’s and they are now open all day. God forbid our

athletes should access institutional student meal service with unlimited meal tickets and feel like they are actually part of normal campus life! Antitrust suits like the cost-of-attendance O'Bannon decision become mandated rather than optional costs that will bust the financial systems of most still institutionally subsidized FBS schools...and more antitrust lawsuits are lined up on the runway showing no signs of abating, fueled by lawyers enticed by treble damages.

WORRY #3. The cost of concussion lawsuits is an approaching freight train. These cases are just now being litigated and the potential liability is more than scary. The NFL settlement cost $1 billion for 3,500 NFL pro athletes. There are 28,000 plus college student playing D-I football **each year**. No wonder the NCAA has shifted concussion and all medical malpractice liability to their member schools, denying they are responsible. What gives? The NCAA could easily mandate that all member institutions not conduct contact practices out-of-season or limit contact practices in season to two days a week, like they do in the NFL. The NCAA annually publishes its Sports Medicine Handbook and could mandate that all of its members follow those physician recommendations – but it doesn't! They want the institutions left holding the liability ball when the clock runs out.

WORRY # 4. Athletic directors are dreaming if they think the current media revenue model will continue over the long term. Perpetually escalating revenues is a figment of someone's wish list rather than a reality check. The entire cable television industry is experiencing massive audience fragmentation, a move toward consumer control of viewing options, and a rejection of mandated channel packaging. Mobile livestreaming is more likely to be the delivery system of choice for the millennials.

WORRY #5. All D-I coaches in football and basketball know they have to cheat to win. Not only do coaches know they need to cheat in the recruiting wars, but they also know that the NCAA enforcement system is unlikely to catch them. Further, the fraud involved in admission of academically underprepared athletes via waiver of institutions' normal admissions standards is not limited to UNC – everyone is doing it. Our most highly selective institutions of higher education in particular, will face increased scrutiny regarding academic fraud. The media dominoes will fall, revealing more exposes on the selection of athletics-friendly professors, registering athletes in the least demanding courses and majors, and more tutors writing more papers. And why aren't institutions questioning the efficacy of the athletic department running academic support programs? Whew – talk about 'conflict of interest'! The UNC, SMU, Southern Mississippi, Notre Dame and Missouri scandals are simply tips of the icebergs. As the graduation rates of the predominantly minority athletes receiving special admissions receives increased scrutiny, the NCAA's "Graduation Success Rate" will be exposed as a fraudulent metric...just a smokescreen to prevent the public from using the Federal Graduation Rate to compare athlete versus non-athlete graduation performance. This is a powder keg that can blow at any time - sinking institutional as well as athletic brands.

WORRY #6. The impact of Don Yee's (Brady's super agent) recently announced establishment of a developmental football league (minor league football) will be considerable. The new league will offer $50,000 per year player salaries, plus benefits like health insurance, a 401K and even community college tuition- a direct threat to college recruiters. This new deal might look a lot better to some of those academically underprepared players who now go to class and try to compete on the intellectual and athletic playing fields in the same season. For kids who don't want the pressure of D-I football and someone else running their lives 24/7, the prospect of quick cash and a close look by the pros may be very enticing. More...

WORRY #7. The FBS Big Five in particular is being boxed into a competitive corner by the power ratings. The super powers have to play each other to get a berth in the College Football Playoff. Only a handful of teams can win under such a model. The rich will get richer portending another round of separation between the Big Five “haves” and “have nots”.

WORRY #8. FBS athletic programs are now so heavily dependent on fundraising they are competing with general institutional fundraising. Athletic departments aren't running out of private suites and 50-year line seats to offer donors in return for their dollars...perks not held by the larger academic entity. Conflict will occur more commonly, much to the chagrin of their mostly public university motherships, who are suffering from declining state subsidies and underpaid faculties. Student fee and general fund subsidies are maxed out. Widespread talk about “loss leader” athletic programs will be embarrassing with the unraveling occurring from the bottom up.

WORRY #9. Board of Regents/Trustees meddling in athletics matters will continue unabated with powerless college presidents and athletic directors in the middle catering to the whims of these political bosses and the head coaches ruling the proverbial roosts. For those who don’t know it, it's a political nightmare to operate an athletic program at the FBS level. And, as we move farther away from professionally trained educators and sports managers and closer to hiring business trained ADs, we will experience the heightened risks associated with winning and commercial success taking precedent over athlete education and protection of athlete health and well-being. We aren’t on the right end of the see saw now and the commercially bloated elephant sitting at that end is not even thinking about a diet.

WORRY #10. Athlete and coach behavior will continue to undermine respected brands. Rich, spoiled, and arrogant coaches and athletes will continue getting their under the table special treatment from campus and local police when misconduct occurs. Most institutions aren’t choosing to use their moral compasses. Instead, they continue to be "enablers" of athlete violence and coach misconduct. Disasters such as Baylor will increase. If the NCAA doesn’t have the courage to adopt strong rules lowering the risk of concussion or mandating institutional adherence to sports medicine model practices, it certainly isn’t going to legislate strong rules that address athlete/coach misconduct. More... Another...

At the risk of plagiarizing a recent quote from our new President, continued “carnage” rather than educational reform is a reasonable and depressing prediction for another year in the FBS.

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