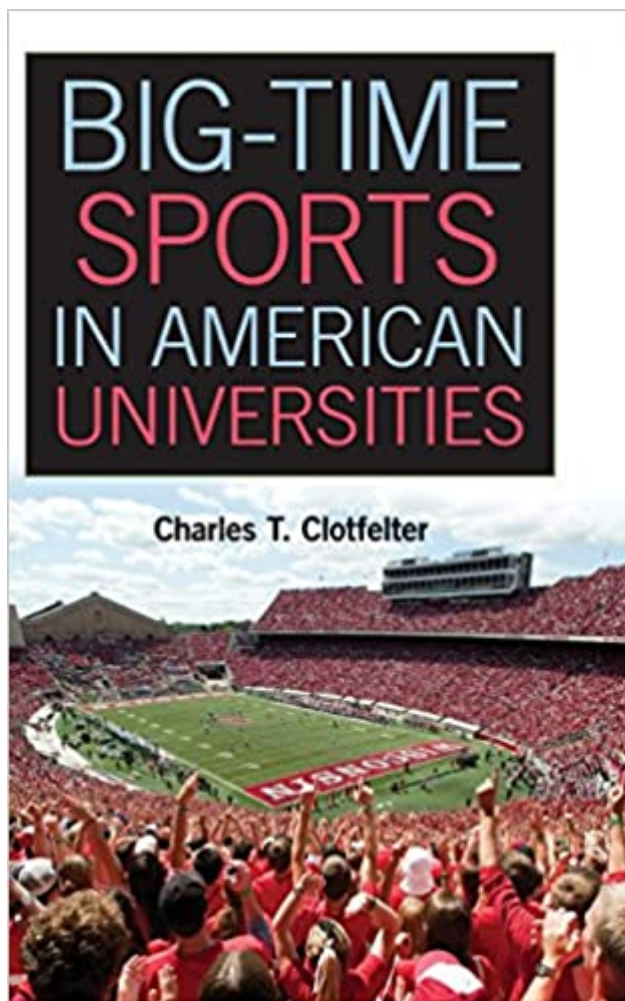




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Big-Time Sports In American Universities



Synopsis

For almost a century, big-time college sports has been a wildly popular but consistently problematic part of American higher education. The challenges it poses to traditional academic values have been recognized from the start, but they have grown more ominous in recent decades, as cable television has become ubiquitous, commercial opportunities have proliferated, and athletic budgets have ballooned. Drawing on new research findings, this book takes a fresh look at the role of commercial sports in American universities. It shows that, rather than being the inconsequential student activity that universities often imply that it is, big-time sports has become a core function of the universities that engage in it. For this reason, the book takes this function seriously and presents evidence necessary for a constructive perspective about its value. Although big-time sports surely creates worrying conflicts in values, it also brings with it some surprising positive consequences.

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Customer Reviews

"This is a remarkable book. Charles Clotfelter uses the tools of policy economics (tools that he wields with the best of them) to shed light on one of the most vexing issues in higher education: Why do so many excellent universities devote so much money and attention to big-time intercollegiate sports? He presents surprising facts and original analyses, makes persuasive proposals for change, and delivers the package with an unusual and welcome combination of wit and rigor. This is must reading for university administrators, and flat out fun reading for all who are interested in universities or intercollegiate athletics." - Paul N. Courant, University of

Michigan"Charles Clotfelter has provided a valuable and remarkably well-researched assessment of the role of 'big-time' college athletics in American higher education. Bringing to bear his considerable experience in economic and social policy, he has provided an unusually well-balanced analysis of the pros and cons of including this form of commercial entertainment as a university mission, thereby resulting in a book that is an important and fascinating addition to this highly controversial subject." - James J. Duderstadt, President Emeritus, University of Michigan"A fascinating, insightful discussion of the arms race that is big-time intercollegiate athletics. Clotfelter clarifies how this parallel universe in large universities exists essentially independent of faculty or administrative control, being instead the creature of powerful self-perpetuating groups of 'boosters.' The convincing, novel demonstration of the role of tax subsidies in supporting these operations should raise every reader's blood pressure." - Daniel S. Hamermesh, University of Texas at Austin"This book offers an excellent discussion of the role of big-time athletics on university campuses today. Instead of either lambasting varsity athletics across the board or celebrating them uncritically, Clotfelter's persuasive data, thoughtful analysis, and balanced treatment make a strong case for acknowledging athletics as an integral part of life on many campuses and dealing straightforwardly with both the problems and the benefits this entails." - Nannerl O. Keohane, Princeton University, Former President, Duke University"With his book Big-Time Sports in American Universities, Charles Clotfelter has done those of us who care about balancing the mission of higher education institutions with the impact of high-level college athletics an enormous favor. Providing great insights and careful analysis, Dr. Clotfelter reveals both the rationale behind 'big-time' sports programs at American universities and the consequences - good and ill - that follow. Hopefully, this fresh look at a decades-old (and uniquely American) issue will encourage and guide the on-going reform efforts aimed at finding the right balance in the costs and benefits of big-time college sports." - William Kirwan, Chancellor, University System of Maryland"Charles Clotfelter offers an original, informative perspective on a question that has confounded scholars of sports: Why are American universities uniquely devoted to providing big-time sports entertainment? This book is crammed with new facts and analysis about intercollegiate sports, and it offers fresh insights into why college sports programs sometimes are out of control even in elite universities." - Roger Noll, Stanford University"Finally an honest, balanced, sober, well-informed, and highly intelligent analysis of the nature, role, and impact of big-time athletics on American higher education has arrived. Clotfelter's new book, which judiciously deploys an impressive variety of data sources together with expert and original analysis, should be required reading by anyone with a genuine interest in the future of American higher education and the role and impact of big-time sports in the academy." - Harold S.

Shapiro, President Emeritus, Princeton University" If I ever wanted to educate a person who knew nothing at all about big-time sports in American universities (and there are plenty of them out there, namely 6.86 billion non-Americans on the globe, and maybe a stray Martian or two), I would start them off with Charles Clotfelter's book, *Big-Time Sports in American Universities*.... And, best of all, in addition to Clotfelter's sage comments, the book is replete with charts and tables of proprietary new research findings wherein he methodically demonstrates correlations, relationships and causations that sagely plot big-time sports, universities, conferences, bowls, administrators, alumni, boosters and media into a series of comprehensible concepts and conclusions that even a stray Martian would understand." - CollegeAthleticsClips.com "The book offers plenty of... eye-opening statistics but is perhaps most surprising in its even-handed approach to the subject of major college athletics." - The Wall Street Journal "Charles Clotfelter, a Duke University professor, proves to be a delightful guide on a quest to answer two questions: Why do so many universities embrace big-time sports? And what are the consequences?.... True to his academic roots - remember, economist - Clotfelter engages in a cost-benefit analysis that goes off in all kinds of surprising directions, particularly when he comes up with his own, often ingenious, ways of testing assumptions." - The Seattle Times "Charles Clotfelter's book, *Big-Time Sports in American Universities*, is a masterpiece. It is the seminal work on this topic and a splendid piece of work." - Robert Atwell, President Emeritus of the American Council on Education "... [This] remarkably well-timed book... is essential reading for anyone serious about understanding why college sports persist and what practical steps could be taken to improve them." - Thad Williamson, Indyweek.com

Why do so many American universities engage in commercial sports competition? Although it has been a feature of American universities for a century or more, big-time sports has little connection with the traditional aims of universities - research, teaching, and service. This book shows that big-time sports has become an important part of what many American universities do and value, explains its continued emphasis in the face of mounting problems, and argues for an honest accounting of its costs and benefits.

There are plenty of books about what's wrong with college sports, often in the "ain't-it-awful" genre, and a long article in the latest *Atlantic* is an indictment of the way "student-athletes" are exploited. Clotfelter's book is a more balanced account: he's an economist and he gives an excellent description of just what the costs and benefits are of big-time college sports, both tangible and intangible. And the book explains how colleges got into the entertainment business in the first place

and why they're not likely to leave it any time soon. He doesn't neglect the exploitation issue, and suggests various ways in which it could be fixed (but probably won't be). His analysis has some surprises and I learned a lot.

Charles T. Clotfelter is a Harvard-trained economist who has often explored questions about education and public policy in America. His previously-published books, for example, include titles like *Federal Tax Policy and Charitable Giving* (1985), *Buying the Best: Cost Escalation in Elite Higher Education* (1996), and *After Brown: The Rise and Retreat of School Desegregation* (2004). In *Big-Time Sports in American Universities*, his most recent book, Clotfelter once again stays within his area of expertise, while at the same time probing yet another topic. As he puts it, this is a book “chiefly about higher education, not sports” (xiii). A lack of attention to the topic he writes about here is what created his opportunity: “Despite what I saw as abundant evidence of the larger-than-life presence of big-time college sports, serious academic research about universities rarely deals with the subject at all” (xii). Clotfelter addresses “two questions about universities that operate big-time sports programs. First, why do they do it? . . . And second, what are the consequences for the universities that operate these enterprises?” (xiii). The author limits his exploration to college football programs that are part of the NCAA’s elite Football Bowl Subdivision and to basketball programs in Division I (xiii). Throughout, he seeks “to describe the phenomenon of big-time college sports as it is, trying to make sense of why so many smart institutions have decided it is a worthwhile enterprise to be a part of” (15). He concludes that while “[u]niversity leaders often justify these enterprises on instrumental grounds, for their supposed ability to boost student applications and alumni donations, for example . . . a more reliable explanation for their existence is that university stakeholders simply desire them because they want to have competitive teams” (20). Regarding schools with big-time sports programs, Clotfelter writes: “Just as surely as they perform the traditional functions of teaching, research, and service, these universities are also in the entertainment business” (22). One problem is that university leaders are loath to admit this is the case. Consequently, they are unable to intelligently or creatively deal with this basic fact. Strangely, American universities with big-time football and basketball programs are a bit like the bright, affable family that can hardly afford their two large dogs. The family never discusses the real costs and liabilities of owning Marmaduke and Mandy. But neither can they imagine their lives without them. Any suggestion that the dogs should never have been brought home, or that they

should ever be given anything less than special care, would be met with disbelief and anger. The dogs are, in some real sense, a part of the family, and are spoken of in that way. One of Clotfelter's main points, one that I found fascinating, is that although the financial escalation of big-time college sports makes it "a whole new ball game" as it were, the dilemmas associated with athletic programs in colleges are actually quite old, in some instances reaching all the way back to the end of the nineteenth century. I was astonished to read, for example, that in 1893 the president of Harvard said, "With athletics considered as an end in themselves, pursued either for pecuniary profit or popular applause, a college or university has nothing to do. Neither is it an appropriate function for a college or university to provide periodic entertainment during term-time for multitudes of people who are not students" (10). The variety and quantity of raw data behind this book are a big part of what makes Clotfelter's case so very compelling. In his preface, the author acknowledges the help he received from a long list of students. The amount and level of specific detail provided in some of his 35 figures and tables indicates that those thank yous are not window dressing. Although Clotfelter makes good use of the statistics available to him, he is careful not to press a point where the numbers are ambiguous or statistically insignificant. There are times when his description and analysis have all the flair of an autopsy report. But as a student and a reader, when given the choice, I would take dry accuracy over fine-sounding fluff any day. Regarding the organization of the book, I liked the fact that every chapter included major headings, subheadings, and enumerated points. Obviously, Clotfelter writes using a detailed outline. The upshot for the reader is that you are never left to wonder what the author is doing, where he's going.

Well-documented, scholarly report on the history and state of big college football and basketball. I learned a lot from reading this book. The analysis it presents makes sense and it is convincing. I recommend this book to anyone who wants a thoughtful look at the huge entertainment giant that college football and basketball have become. The author does a great job of presenting the pluses, the minuses, and the challenges ahead for the sport.

This is *the* definitive account by an esteemed Duke economist of why American universities front for professional sports despite more than a century of controversy and criticism. Although the book is long on data and short on solutions (his main conclusion is that at the very least universities need to admit to their addiction), the data are hard to dispute. The book is extremely well-written and

engrossing. For a big sports fan like me, the story is both depressing but fascinating. Why put themselves through all the scandals and hypocrisy? Why indeed.

Writing my dissertation on a similar subject and used book as reference. Professional view of college athletics, good and bad, written by a former UMichigan president. This book is quoted in research articles about college athletics as well. Not a hard read at all and very honest.

I bought this for research into athletics at postsecondary institutions. It was helpful information for my research. I would buy it again.

should be required reading for all college administrators

I enjoyed this book very much. The author was partial, then impartial from both sides of the college sports argument. Whether you think the current system works or is in disarray, this is a thought-provoking book.

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