Big-Time Sports in American Universities

Charles T. Clotfelter
Duke University, North Carolina

About the Book

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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Praise for the Book

“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.” – 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

“… [This] remarkably welltimed 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

“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

“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