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# Emoryedge

IDEAS & OPINIONS FROM EMORY UNIVERSITY

## Athletics and academic values don't have to compete at a research university

BY PRESIDENT WILLIAM M. CHACE

**Emory University** is not known as an athletic powerhouse. It has no football program. It has no stadium. It is without a basketball arena to hold thousands of spectators. Students are not attracted here by athletic scholarships. Nor, on an Emory team, are they ever to achieve national fame in a bowl game or a nationally televised Final Four in basketball.

What, then, gives the president of this NCAA Division III university—"still undefeated" in football, as the story wryly circulates among alumni—the standing to comment on "big-time" university athletics? I do so because I believe we have escaped some real dangers in American higher education and, at the same time, have established a way of participating in athletic competition that fully protects the fundamental values for which universities must stand. If others cannot fully emulate our ways, Emory's story still can serve as an ideal toward which to aim.

James L. Shulman and William G. Bowen, in their book, *The Game of Life*, ask this crucial question: "Does increasing intensification of college sports support or detract from higher education's core mission?"

Not a new question. Shulman and Bowen answer it in the negative, but with the knowledge that the issue carries powerful emotional overtones. Here are a few of their key findings about the thirty selective colleges and universities—Emory included—that Shulman and Bowen studied, along with a statement of the Emory difference:

- Athletes who are recruited enjoy very substantial, and increasing, advantage in the admission process. *Yet this is not true of Emory.*
- For athletes, graduation rates are very high, but rank-in-class is low and getting lower. *Again, not true of Emory.*
- Athletes enter, and leave, the university with goals and values different from their classmates—differences that lead to different lives. *Not true of Emory.*

Their conclusion? "If a culprit emerges, it is the unquestioned spread of a changed athletic culture through the emulation of highly publicized teams by low-profile sports, of men's programs by women's, and of athletic powerhouses by small colleges." I would put it more pointedly: the culture of big-time sports on a campus is one thing; the culture of academic values is another. *Again, not true of Emory.*

If college athletics is bringing down academic standards, does this mean that we cannot have the benefits of intercollegiate sports—the positive impact it has on most participants and the morale boost it provides for a student body—without compromising our primary purpose as universities?

Not at all. What we need is to achieve the proper balance.

What does Emory's unusual and contrary experience have to offer? That rests with our history: a history of wise

decisions luckily reached long ago, decisions that now provide our good fortune.

An earlier president of Emory University—Warren Candler, in the late 1800s—established a firm policy against intercollegiate games, though he encouraged athletics on campus and raised funds for the first campus gymnasium.

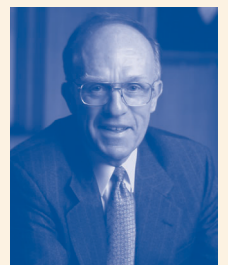
On the strength of an innovative intramural program, Emory University (and a similar program at Miami University of Ohio) once served as a model for intramural athletics at hundreds of colleges and universities throughout the land. The legacy for us today is that, in addition to running what is recognized still as one of the more innovative and successful intramural programs in the country, Emory and several other national research universities compete in a league (the University Athletic Association) of like-minded NCAA Division III members. In all, at Emory, more than 8,000 students participate in the intramural and club-sport programs and another 340 are athletes on 18 varsity teams. Zero dollars are spent on athletic scholarships.

What have been the results? Emory athletes are students first and athletes second. And they are successful at both. In fact, varsity athletes' grades are higher, on average, than the student body at large; Emory was tops in the nation last school year with more NCAA postgraduate scholarship recipients (seven) than any other school; last year Emory placed fourth nationally in the NCAA Division III coveted Sears Director's Cup Competition; and the University produced more Verizon Academic All-Americans last school year than any other NCAA school in the country.

I speak, then, from the unusual perspective of an institution that, historically, for whatever the reasons, did not go the "big-time" athletics route. It nevertheless has found a way to distinguish itself in academics and athletics.

I do not write with any confidence that other institutions will be able to do what we have been able to do. The sheer excitement that big-time sports generates is intoxicating. It makes headlines and attracts interest, if not financial support, to universities. It also generates, in far too many instances, scandal, corruption, and embarrassment. Our circumstances and our history have spared us the troubles and have left us with the virtues of genuinely competitive sports played by excellent students. We may not serve as a model for others to follow, but we do serve as a reminder of an ideal.

**WILLIAM M. CHACE** IS IN HIS EIGHTH YEAR AS PRESIDENT OF EMORY UNIVERSITY AND DESCRIBES THIS ROLE AS A VERSION OF TEACHING. FOR TWENTY YEARS HE TAUGHT IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY AND THEN JOINED THE ADMINISTRATIVE RANKS THERE AS ASSOCIATE DEAN AND THEN VICE PROVOST FOR ACADEMIC PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT. FROM 1988 TO 1994, HE WAS PRESIDENT OF WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY.



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