

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH BIG 12 COMMISSIONER BOB BOWLSBY

SUBJECT: COLLEGE ATHLETICS: IS CHANGE POSSIBLE?

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JOHN HUGHES: (Sounds gavel.) Welcome to the National Press Club. My name is John Hughes. I'm an editor for Bloomberg First Word, that's Bloomberg News's breaking news desk here in Washington. And I am also the President of the National Press Club. Our guest today is Bob Bowlsby. He's the fourth full time commissioner of the Big 12 Conference, and he's going to talk with us today about college athletics.

First, I want to introduce our distinguished head table. This table includes guests of the speaker, as well as National Press Club members. From the audience's right, Kevin Wensing, retired Navy captain and a member of the Press Club Speakers Committee; Michael Phelps, former publisher of the *Washington Examiner*; Loren Lewis, former Fox News channel producer; Colleen Nelson, White House correspondent for *the Wall Street Journal*; Carl Leubsdorf, Washington columnist for the *Dallas Morning News*; Kevin Blackstone, *Washington Post* columnist and ESPN panelist; Jerry Zremski, Washington bureau chief of *The Buffalo News*. He's also a past president of the National Press Club, and he is the chairman of the club's Speakers Committee.

Skipping over our speaker for a moment, Pat Host, reporter for *Defense Daily* and *Rotor & Wing International*, and he is the Speakers Committee member who organized today's event. Thank you, Pat. Kenny Hulshof, he's a former Missouri Congressman who is now with Kit Bond Strategies; Bill Miller, retired Washington editor for *Industry Week* magazine; Anna Miller, health and wellness reporter for *U.S. News & World Report*; and Jack Williams, retired *USA Today* weather editor and a freelance writer. (Applause)

I also want to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. And I want to remind you that if you are following the action on Twitter, please use the hashtag NPCLive. That's hashtag NPCLive on Twitter.

Well, if you love college athletics, you know something about the Big 12 conference, or at least the schools that are part of it. There's Baylor, Iowa State, Kansas, Kansas State, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, TCU, Texas, Texas Tech, and West Virginia. Note to all college math majors: there are ten teams in the Big 12. And, by the way, there are 14 teams in the Big 10. There will be a test after class.

The Big 12 faces more than a math issue, of course, in today's era of league realignment and playoffs in what has become big time college football. Last year, the Big 12's two best teams missed the playoffs, largely because they both finished with one loss and thus tied for their league title. Our guest today, Mr. Bowsby, is working hard to make sure that doesn't happen again. He's established a new football tiebreaker for the league after last year's playoff miss. And despite the math issue I mentioned earlier, he's ruled out conference expansion in the near future.

Meanwhile, he has become a leader in off field issues. He's advocated for regulations that prohibit schools from accepting transfer athletes with past disciplinary issues including sexual violence. He has spoken out against co-opting the use of player's names in daily fantasy sports, calling it gambling. He's denounced Cable Network's use of what he calls betting friendly coverage.

As a native of Waterloo, Iowa, Mr. Bowsby has been leading the Big 12 for a little more than three years. Conference teams achieved seven national championships in his first three years, and the Big 12 set a record for revenue in 2014-2015 reaching \$253 million. Given that Bowsby has been outspoken on so many college sports matters, we invited him to the National Press Club to share his thoughts. So please join me in giving a warm National Press Club welcome to Big 12 Commissioner, Bob Bowsby. (Applause)

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Yes, I'm outspoken, sometimes to my own detriment. My presidents and chancellors have told me that I should give them a little bit of warning when I'm going to say anything that's provocative. I didn't call any of them today, so my notes are not overly provocative. Your questions may get me into a situation where I get in trouble with my bosses. And so, please spare me.

I come with apologies for missing last year. I was just about ready to come to Washington, D. C. and my friend and Washington, D. C. mentor, Kenny Hulshof, had been getting me in to see senators and representatives in anticipation of what might happen with the National Labor Relations Board or some of the 13 class action lawsuits that we're a part of. And we were planning yet another round of visits in Washington, D. C. when on the Thursday before the OU-Texas football game, which you may know in Dallas is a pretty big deal, the Red River rivalry was just about to happen when I learned that I had a torn retina in my left eye. And I said, "Well, maybe we can get it fixed over Thanksgiving." And they said, "We're going to do surgery this afternoon or tomorrow

morning.” And so I started canceling things, and unfortunately my visit to the Press Club, which I was very much looking forward to, was among those. So, my apologies for delaying this by a year.

It’s the fourth week of the football season. It’s also the fourth year of my tenure at the Big 12. I came up as a wrestler in college, and I had aspirations to being a coach and a teacher. I still consider myself an educator, and I really think that's why I've stayed at this for about 35 years. But, as I've been away from campus and it’s just been the last four years, I was director of athletics at Northern Iowa, at the University of Iowa, and at Stanford University, and in those roles I got to be around a lot of great kids. Lot of great coaches, lot of wonderful people. You get all the high highs and the low lows that go along with working in a kind of a volatile environment, but yet it’s a very supportive and team oriented environment as well.

And so this last four years. The first time that I've been away from that. I really miss the energy that comes with a campus at the education of August and beginning of September, this time of year. You can't replicate the energy that's there. And I honestly even miss some of the knucklehead stuff that 18, 19, 20 year olds do. And Lord knows there's plenty of those kinds of things.

But being away from the good stuff that goes along on campus has really reminded me, and kind of led me, to look at the enterprise of athletics just a little differently. And as John mentioned, I have been critical of some of the things that we've been doing and not doing in intercollegiate athletics. The preponderance of opportunities and experiences, the vast majority of the people, are unbelievably positive. It's a great thing.

One of the things that kind goes without being noticed too much is one out of every five division one college athletes is a first generation college student. One out of five. That's pretty remarkable. It’s the athletic scholarship program at America's universities, is the second largest scholarship program in the history of the United States, second only to the G. I. Bill. It is a remarkable success story. And yet, when you begin the process of looking at how the sausage is made, there's plenty of stuff in there that I'm not proud of and I don't think others should be proud of, either.

Now, you know, you can stay at it. I'm 63 years old. I told the people at the Big 12 I wanted to work another 10 years when I took the job. And I guess I'll probably do that, but I don't really expect to move anyplace else. And it would probably be fairly easy just to say, “Ah, this is what it is, and I'll live with it and collect my check on the 20th of the month and we'll go on our merry way.”

Anybody that knows me very well will tell you I'm not wired that way. And part of the reason why I took the job is because I felt like I could have more of an opportunity to affect change at the national level as a conference commissioner than I could as the director of athletics at Stanford University.

And so I've begun the process of digging into how the sausage is made and whether you want to go down the path and chew on your Braunschweiger or your salami or your summer sausage and not really look into how it's made, or the other alternative is to dig deep and look at the things with eyes wide open that ought to change, things that we don't like, things that might not be right for young people, things that might not be right within the context of higher education, I prefer to do the latter. I have spent time trying to get involved in the things that will make a difference.

And, you know, we've got 350 division one athletic programs, division one universities. And these universities range in budget from \$3 million on one end to almost \$200 million on the other end. And yet, we all try and play in the men's basketball tournament, women's basketball tournament. We try and make rules that paint all those organizations with a single brush.

What's a great decision at the University of Oklahoma may be an awful decision at Northern Iowa where I spent some time, and maybe even a worse decision at Siena, if you think about what their needs might be.

And so increasingly, I wonder about whether or not we can continue to manage this enterprise with 1,200 schools in the NCAA, 350 in division one and trying to make rules that essentially create a level playing field. And we've said that for decades. We want a level playing field, we want us all to be equal. And what that means is we dumb down a lot of our processes in deference to the people who can't afford a faster set of priorities.

And so I think there's a real question as we reorganize the NCAA yet again as to whether or not we can meet the very needs of that wide and diverse population. This is an infinitely more complex environment than the NFL or the NBA or major league baseball. When you think about having 32 entities managed by a group of people who actually own the businesses, and the decision processes that go into it, it's not even close. Mark Emmert has an extraordinarily difficult job because the president, although he's called the president of the NCAA, really has no power except that which is given to him by his board of directors.

And so it's very difficult to affect meaningful change. We have a new governance structure, we're being helped right now by the courts. I have gotten some favorable outcomes, we've gotten some unfavorable outcomes. But we are in a period of significant evolution. There are things going on right now in college athletics that we really never thought would happen. Think about Friday night used to be completely sacrosanct. We would never put college games on Friday night. Well, now we play Friday night, Thursday night, Wednesday night, Tuesday night, in search of the Holy Grail which is TV money.

We are routinely selling alcohol at college games despite the fact that three-fourths of the college undergraduates are under age. Now, you know, they don't constitute the majority of most crowds, but it's still highly symbolic in some obvious

ways. And the other thing is we're starting to see a proliferation around gambling that is really quite remarkable. And at a time when we're trying to delineate the differences between the collegiate experience and the professional experience, you know, if it looks like a duck and walks like a duck and talks like a duck, pretty soon it's hard to determine that it's not a duck.

And that's really where we are. We have cover alerts on our television coverage now, point spreads are routinely promoted. Some of the fantasy games that are weekly and daily games. You're never going to convince me it's not gambling. Is there skill involved? Yeah, there's skill involved. Well, there's skill involved in blackjack, too, but this is gambling. You're wagering money and taking your chance on winning. And oh by the way, just like they didn't build all the big buildings in Las Vegas on the backs of winners, they're not giving away million dollar checks on the backs of winners, either. There are a lot of people losing significant amounts of money in these games. And FanDuel and DraftKings three weekends in a row were the largest purchasers of advertising on ESPN and Fox without any real comparison.

At the same time, we see all these troubling trends, there are a lot of interesting, fundamental questions that I think we can ask ourselves. You know, is there an appetite or even a need to create policies and procedures that differentiate college sports from the professional sports? Is it even feasible to think about it? If educational leaders don't do it, if class action lawsuits don't change the way you operate, then what is it that's going to accomplish any sort of meaningful change?

You know, we think about most of the lawsuits that we're involved in, are a result of the difference between room, board, books, tuition and fees and what it really costs to go to school, which is called the full cost of attendance. And it's that delta between basic educational expenses and the full cost that is really the substance of these lawsuits. You know, it's easy to get lost in here's this million dollar coach and here's this poor student athlete that only makes room, board, books, tuition, fees and the cost of attendance.

But the fact of the matter is, the median income in most states is between 40 and 60 thousand dollars a year. The average value of a college athletic scholarship on a full ride basis is, with all the bells and whistles and academic support and sports medicine and all the things that go along with it, is easily between 80 and 125 thousand dollars a year. So there's certainly the argument, if you're going to be compensated, aren't you perhaps fairly compensated already? And by the way, there are some fairly significant lifetime implications to getting a college education. I really believe in the model and I really believe that it's important for that 20 percent of our student population who's never had a relative go to college that that happens. Those are important societal things for us.

So, you know, we have to do what's right for young people. And the fact is we finally, with the help of the courts, have gotten to the point where we could legitimately provide something more than room, board, books, tuition and fees. And I was on the NCAA financial aid and amateurism committee in 1987 when we came up with a revolutionary new idea. We were going to provide room, board, books, tuition, fees and

\$2,000 a year. Well, it got shot down by people couldn't afford it then. It's gotten shot down about four or five times since then. And I would submit to you we could have avoided all of these lawsuits had we been able to get that passed. And finally, we have been able to do it with the help of the 9th Circuit in California.

Other questions. Can there be a legitimate and viable developmental opportunity for young people who are unprepared to go to college and really uninterested in a college education? And right now, the only pathway for football and basketball players is to go to college. There is no other alternative. The major league baseball model is really the one that I can take some pride in. Draft me out of high school, or leave me alone until after my junior year. And if I want to go and play minor league baseball, develop my skills, follow my dream of playing in the big leagues, I can do that. There's no comparable opportunity in football or men's basketball other than going to college.

Should college athletics and higher education be expected to set examples for society? Well, we're really high visibility, but is it unrealistic to expect that our campuses and our college athletic programs would be a reflection of society instead of somebody that's setting examples? Well, I think the gambling example is a really good one. We all remember the day when we didn't have any state lotteries or they were really limited. People played numbers games, organized crime made a lot of money at it. The public really wanted lotteries. And now I think every state has its own lottery. We have a national lottery. It's something the public wanted. We legitimized it and a lot of the illegal opportunities went away.

But right now gambling, I believe I'm correct when I say it, it's illegal in 49 states and yet ESPN and Fox insist upon carrying betting lines on college football games, and pro football games for that matter.

Our student athletes are spending an enormous amount of time in pursuit of excellence and some of it they do on their own, some of it they are pushed into by coaches. But every institution keeps track of what's called countable athletic related activities. And this rule hasn't been reevaluated for probably since 1991 when it was put in place prior to text messages, prior to digitized video, prior to a lot of the things that we now have in place. So I think it's a fair question to ask how we reinvent ourselves because what happens when the NCAA tries to reinvent something? Is we start out to design a thoroughbred race horse to perform a very particular function. And by the time it gets done going through the process, it mostly looks like a three-legged camel that doesn't run very fast and doesn't really meet anybody's needs.

And so how do ADs and presidents effect genuine change where change is necessary, retaining all the good things that are right about intercollegiate athletics, and do it in an environment where by virtual universal acknowledgement their coaches sometimes exercise influence over regents and trustees and athletic directors and presidents find themselves in very compromising positions when they advocate for real change.

How do we seek to manage transfers from one university to another? We have coaches that jump all over every place, leave their contracts before their completion. We have institutions that fire their coaches years short of the commitment that they said they would give them. And yet, we find that in men's basketball almost 50 percent of division one men's basketball players transfer at least once in their career. Almost 50 percent. I mean, that's an embarrassment to higher education. It makes a mockery of it.

As I said, we've had a few positive outcomes, the National Labor Relations Board deciding not to deal with the Northwestern unionization issue. I do think that there'll be a time, and I'm glad the unionization process has cooled for right now. But the fact is, and it will probably be in the sport of men's basketball, there will be a day in the future when the popcorn is popped, the TV cameras are there, the fans are in the stands and the team decides they're not going to play. Mark my words, we will see that in the years ahead. And we saw some of it for other reasons in the '70s. But I really believe that we aren't finished with the compensation issue or with the employee versus student issue.

I would be out of this as my career in a hurry if I didn't believe that this was a co-curricular activity, that it was worth the time and effort to go through having kids-- our goal is to help 18 year old adolescents become 22 year old adults and in the process get a good education and have a great college experience, collegiate athletics experience. Now, if they go on to have a professional career, if they can go on and compete in the Olympics, those are highly desirable byproducts of a quality collegiate athletics experience. But they are not why we're there. And I recognize that there are some real contradictions in the system.

But we have to get our arms around the fact that this is about a college experience, this is about students who are there to get an education, those that ultimately end up going to the Olympics or going into the professional ranks, it's an infinitesimal number, about 1 ½ percent of the FBS division one football players are drafted. Less than half that actually make a roster. It's a very small number, and the percentages are even smaller in men's basketball.

So there are unrealistic expectations in the system. As we think about other changes, perhaps it's a time to have one semester sports so that we can have students that are legitimate students during part of the year and have a bigger commitment to their athletics in the rest of the part of the year. Maybe it's time to federate our rules by sport so that we don't have to worry any longer about trying to make rules that equally impact football and golf and field hockey and track and field.

Maybe the days of having conferences are coming to an end. Perhaps we end up with confederations of one sort or another that are horizontally arranged by sport rather than having multi-sport organizations that operate as we do today. It's easy to pose all these questions, and I think there are lots of legitimate answers and lots of differences of opinion. With my hat on as a member of the U.S. Olympic committee the last eight years, I really worry about what happens when a lot of money goes into football and men's basketball and people on campus are wondering how to fund it. And all of a sudden

wrestling and swimming and golf and tennis and lacrosse and a lot of these other sports begin to go away. I think it changes the culture of the campus and I think it eliminates an enormous number of opportunities for young people.

So, even with all that I've described, I'm very committed to it because I believe in it. And I think for the vast majority of kids, they're doing it the right way. They're there for the right reasons. But we've got some things that I think we have to deal with. And I'm committed to the task. I believe in the mission. I think it's a terrific leadership laboratory. But, if we're not forthright in at least advocating for the things that would be appropriate changes, I just think that we are going to be constantly facing what we've been facing the last three years. And that is what we say we're going to do, what we articulate as our philosophy and our principles, is inconsistent with our actions.

I don't think you can play football games on Tuesday night and say that you care about the education of the campus and the kids. I just think there are lots of examples, some of them very glaring, where we don't walk the talk. And until we start reconciling some of those, I just think we're going to be in for a long slog. And it's with that backdrop that I look at it and say if we want to extricate ourselves from the courts and from some of the challenges, then we need to define ourselves differently than sometimes others define us.

And so, I'm excited about the challenge. I'm a little bit tired from the challenge. I really did-- all of the lawsuits came after I signed the contract to come to the Big 12 and I've now learned more about Article 1 of Sherman Antitrust than I ever thought I needed to know. But having said that, it's been a very interesting intellectual journey and because I believe in the enterprise and because I remember how transformational an experience in intercollegiate athletics can be, I'm very committed to fighting the fight these next few years and hopefully helping to either incrementally or perhaps even more radically change the enterprise. So, thank you very much and I'll be happy to address your questions. (Applause)

MR. HUGHES: Thank you so much, Bob. College sports has become such a big money enterprise in every respect. Some of the reforms that you talk about, whether it's transfers, alcohol in stadiums, betting, is it really the big money nature that is preventing these reforms, or is that oversimplifying it, that it's about the money?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: I don't think there's any question about it. All of the things that I talked about, the gambling and the alcohol and the playing all over the calendar, they're all driven by money. And they're driven by a need to try and chase that Holy Grail. And I think that one of the things we did with regard to autonomy is we sought to not draw any bright lines. The five conferences, the Big 12, the SEC, the Pac 12, the Big 10, and the ACC, believe that the student athletes in our programs were highly recruited. They had some challenges with agents and they had experiential things that were different than the vast majority of the other student athletes. And that's the reason we went down the path of trying to have some control over our own fate.

But when we did that, we didn't want to draw any bright lines and say, "You can participate with us and you can't participate with us." Anybody that wants to play by the same rules that we want to play by can do so. We just don't want to be told by a minority of 300 that we can't operate our own programs.

I think many thought that it would be a runaway train when the five of us had the opportunity to set some of our own rules. And, in fact, most of our rules changes have been around restrictions rather than around expansion. And so, but you're right, it is all about money. And it's about people without money trying to keep up with those that have money and that makes for strange bedfellows, obviously.

MR. HUGHES: If we pay college athletes salaries, in other words more than just an allowance, will we get athletes whose lives are ruined by too much too soon? Would there be a downside to paying athletes salaries?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Well, that's a great question. The one thing I will say is college athletes aren't any better at handling their resources than any other college student. Having educated four of them myself, I've had them squander amounts of money that I thought were really quite astonishing. (Laughter) But I do think that over a very long period of time, we have invited students to campus fully with the acknowledgement that some of them have no opportunity for resource support from home. And we've said, "We're going to give you room, board, books, tuition, fees, and you should be happy with it," even though we know they don't have pocket money, they don't have any discretionary money, they don't have money to go home.

And so, could we provide them with more than they can handle? I think most institutions, they have the prerogative to provide a check for the entire year if they wanted to. But most of them are putting it out on a two week basis or a four week basis for the exact reason that they don't want people to have large amounts of money that is discretionary all in a short period of time.

And so I think resource management really is important. And I think it's important that we be thoughtful about it because it's easy to squander the money. And I think there is a good and appropriate reason to pay every nickel of what it costs to go to college. There is not a compelling case, in my estimation, to pay above that. And I think once we get above that, we're on a very slippery slope and then it just becomes a matter of how much.

So had we put full cost of attendance in place 15 years ago, I think we would have avoided the lawsuits that we now find ourselves in. Can we give them too much too soon? Sure, we can. But I think one thing that has kind of come and it's starting to go, and that is that the difference, the delta at Texas may be \$3,000 and the delta at Oklahoma may be \$4,000. And coaches say, "Well, how can we compete against one another when they can give four thousand and we can only give three thousand?"

Well, I think the answer is at the end of your college days at both schools, you graduate with no debt. And there aren't very many college students that can say that these days.

MR. HUGHES: This questioner notes that most of the discussion about compensating athletes in some way is rooted in football and basketball because team members in those sports are responsible for bringing in the revenue. If football and basketball players eventually get compensated in some way, how do you feel about members of tennis or gymnastics, swimming, non-revenue sports teams? Should they also get some kind of compensation?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Well, as a former college wrestler, I would suggest that none of the football and basketball players worked any harder than I did. And I think that if you apply any form of the labor theory of value, I think you would say that they all work hard and they all deserve some incidental expense money, which they are, in fact, now getting. The rule surrounding cost of attendance doesn't just apply to football and basketball. But yes, they are the ones that are generating it.

Now having said that, when you think about the football and basketball environment, it's easy to say well look at the full stadium and look at the coach's salary. Why shouldn't the players get some of it? Well, first of all, almost all of the money that's raised through those processes goes to support other things within the athletics department.

The other thing is the football and basketball players don't work any harder, they don't work any longer. They just happen to have the blessing of an adoring public that is willing to pay to get into their events. And I just am not convinced that it's through their own hard work that they're entitled to more than other student athletes. And I know there's a case to be made on the other side of it. We did a forum here in April where Jay Bilas and I sat next to each other and debated that very topic. But, this is a very unique model. It is socialistic in its heritage, and I just am not compelled by the argument that it should be just football and basketball.

And by the way, I don't think our federal laws allow us to do that. If we're going to have 85 football scholarship kids getting full cost of attendance and 13 men's basketball, we're both legally and duty bound to do similarly for women student athletes in the same numbers.

MR. HUGHES: This questioner says that Baylor versus TCU Big 12 football championship game was an obvious, unfortunate tragedy because one of those teams should have been in the college football playoffs. Is there any interest in creating a Big 12 conference tournament for football? And if not, why not?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Well, our athletic directors, I was actually proud of them after-- we were all in New York together and we were bitterly disappointed not to have either team in. There were those among the fan bases that

thought we ought to be-- that I ought to intervene and say-- we have a rule that says we have co-champions in virtually every sport. And so obviously, you can't change that rule in the middle of the year. But there were a few Baylor fans who thought I should be able to do that, and that I should just go ahead and anoint them as our champion and thereby put them in better position to get into the playoff.

But we have proposed, along with the ACC, a rule that would deregulate the rules around the championship game. Right now, you have to have at least 12 members. You have to play two six team divisions, and you have to play a round robin in your own division. We've asked to have those rules deregulated. And if that happens, we'll be able to have a champion game with ten members. And I can't honestly tell you if we'll do it or not. I actually think that our path to the playoff in many years may be preferable to those that put their two best teams against each other in a game late in the season because your best team doesn't always in. In fact, our history with the Big 12 championship game is our better team got beat about 50 percent of the time. So our pathway might end up being favorable to the conference playoff.

MR. HUGHES: This questioner says most division one athletic departments run a deficit. Why is that?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: They spend too much. (Laughter)

MR. HUGHES: And we'd like to think they could get their budgets in line with all that money coming in, so what's wrong?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: You would like to think that, yeah. I told our presidents not long ago that it didn't matter how much money we created through-- and that's one of the things that the conference offices expected to do, is be a rainmaker for our members. It's been an interesting transition for me because our budget, while as John said, we distribute \$250 million to our members, our annual operating budget's only about \$15 million. So, we have 30 full time equivalencies, it's a relatively small operation. My budget at Stanford was \$100 million a year, and we had 425 full time equivalencies. So it's a very different management environment than I was accustomed to before.

But institutions have taken on very large amounts of debt, mostly for facilities. They have paid coaches more than they can really afford to pay, especially in the case of not wanting to lose a coach. As a general statement, they are not particularly well run enterprises, a lot of times. There are about 25 schools out of the top 125 athletic departments that play FBS football, football to highest level. About 25 of those actually break even or make money, and the rest lose money.

Many of those 125 are highly subsidized by their institutions. In fact, some of them are putting up something approaching \$25 million a year into their athletics program. And not surprisingly, there are robust debates on campus where those kinds of subsidies are taking place because the faculty salaries are frozen and state support is

diminishing or at best staying the same. And all of a sudden, you're putting \$25 million towards an intercollegiate athletics program that many on campus don't think is doing much for the institution.

And so I think there are bad decisions being made in terms of not only how much is being spent, but what it's being spent on. And then some of it is structural, too. We require that if you're going to play in division one, you have at least 16 sports programs. Well, if that rule would ever change, you can bet that there would be a bunch of non-revenue sports that would go away. And as I mentioned before, I think that really changes the character of your athletic program, and indeed your university as well because it's a place where opportunities ought to be diverse and robust. And the narrower it gets, the less that's going to be true.

MR. HUGHES: This questioner here in the room wants to follow up on something that you said earlier in your remarks. Are things really so bad that college basketball players will someday boycott a game? And how close are we to that point?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Well, I don't think close. It's a great question, but I just think that the tensions in the system aren't going to go away any time soon. And, you know, it depends on who you ask. I was speaking to a class last week and there was a basketball player in the class. And he's a nice, young guy. Had a number of different good questions, thoughtful. And I said, "Do you think of yourself as an employee?" And he said, "Yes, I do." And I said, "Well, tell me why." And he says, "Well, because my time is not my own. I'm told where to go and when I can come and when I can't come. And I travel, I don't play very much so this is a good way for me to get my school paid for. But I feel very much like an employee because I don't have any control over where I go, what I do, how I work out, how long I work out, what I eat, where I eat." He said, "That sounds like an employee to me."

And I said, "Well, you know, you have a choice as to whether you participate." He says, "Well, I don't feel like I have a choice because I don't-- my family can't afford to send me to college and this is the way I get there." And I said, "Well, would you feel different about it if you were playing a lot?" And he said, "Well, right now, I lack the passion because I'm not really one of the people that's impactful on the team. And I'm grateful for what I'm getting, but you asked me if I feel like an employee, and I do."

And, you know what? I have thought about it a lot since then, and am going to ask that question of others as I go around. One of the things I do during the course of the year is I try and meet with what are called student athlete advisory committees. Each campus has a student athlete advisory committee that's an elected body with representatives from each sport. And it's one of the things I'm going to probe with them a little bit. Because I guess in the end, it doesn't really matter what the courts say about employee status or not. If the student athletes feel like they're involved in a situation where they lack control over what it is they could do or can't do, and Lord knows we've got lots of rules that govern them from a grade point standpoint and from a name, image and likeness standpoint.

You know, I probably would have felt differently if I was still on campus. But in listening to student athletes, in some ways we're putting them in untenable situations.

MR. HUGHES: Two ongoing health issues certainly have been a concern in professional sports, in particular, but of course it's also an issue at the collegiate level, particularly in football. One being concussions. There was another major study out this weekend on the effects of concussions and ongoing brain injuries in later years. And also performance enhancing drugs. On the college level, are we on top of those to the degree that we need to be or is there more that needs to be done?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Well, let me answer the second one first. My opinion is we need to do more with regard to performance enhancing drugs. The testing has been almost completely left to institutional prerogative. And there is wide variance as to how the policies work and how often they're tested and what they're tested for and the like. There is also a fair amount of variance in how the NCAA testing program goes. And I just think it's an area that we probably need to spend some more time on. I don't think we do as much as the national governing bodies in our Olympic programs and I think we can probably do better. I don't know if it's a conference initiated program. We have a random drug testing program in the Big 12 and I think most conferences do. But we're really testing a very, very small number of the total athletes on each campus. I think we end up testing between 40 and 60 on each campus. So it really is not all that impactful. And I think we probably have more that we can do.

In the case of the concussions, we have really tried to lead on that. The Big 12 has just put in place a rule that cut our full contact practices by 50 percent. Going into this year, we went from three days a week to two days a week. We are still higher than what the NFL allows. The NFL only allows 11 days of full contact after the first game. And so we're, in my estimation, in a little bit of a compromising position. But we're better than the national rule.

The issue of concussions is obviously acute in college football, and we've changed the rules to make helmet to helmet contact and targeting illegal including ejections. And it really has changed the way people play the game. We still call it once in a while, but it isn't like it was two or three years ago. The interesting thing about that is one of two things happens if you target somebody in practice, you do it to one of your teammates. And by targeting, I'm talking about helmet to helmet contact where you're launching against another person's head.

One of two things happen. Either the coach takes you out and sits you down and gives you a real understanding of his displeasure. Or, the teammates take care of it. And so why would we allow in a game teams to target other players, especially defenseless players, and high five each other when they come to the sidelines on the same thing that we would punish them for if they did it in practice? And so we've come a long ways with the targeting, and I think we'll continue to come a long ways.

There is virtually no longitudinal study in place right now. They're in the early stages of it. The NCAA and the Department of Defense are collaborating on a \$30 million research project on concussions and sub concussive events. There is some evidence that repetitive use issues might come into play as well and there's not much in the way of evidence there.

But I would also mention that it's not just in football where we see this. Women's soccer has a high incidence of head to head contact. Wrestling is actually the highest one among all the sports. And I didn't know that until later, and it probably explains some of my disabilities to this day. But it's a hot topic. There's pending litigation. We are working our way through it and I'm happy to say we're making progress. I think kids in football are safer today than they were a few years ago.

MR. HUGHES: This is a question following up on your comments about the Northwestern case. Since the NLRB ruled against college athletes unionizing, a coach was fired for making injured players play. A coach was disciplined for fining players, a school was revealed to buy an easy curriculum for athletes to maintain their eligibility. Against that backdrop, why shouldn't athletes have representation like other workers?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Well, I don't consider them to be workers, I consider them to be students. But the point of representation is a really good one. And I think it's really the Achilles heel for a lot of our campuses. It is a very fine line between motivating someone to go where they might not be able to take themselves and being abusive. It's a very fine line. We want to push young people, and it's true in high school, it's true in college, it's true in the professional ranks. That's what coaches do. They push people to places they can't go themselves, or couldn't readily get there themselves.

But it isn't very far past that line that it becomes abusive. And so, I think it's all together legitimate and we rely on people of good will to manage the programs and make sure that coaches are not doing the things that you noted. And there are, like any other profession, there are failures. We're not infallible, that's for sure. The conference doesn't get too much involved in that. But having spent 32 years on campus, I've done a lot of-- I've had to do a lot of interventions when coaches have behaved badly and would student athletes have been served well by having an advocate? Typically, it was their parents that did that, but not all our kids come from the kind of family environment where they can count on parental assistance.

I don't know how you allow advocates and then also not have those advocates get involved in such things as playing time and who gets featured and how the program gets run. It's a little bit of a slippery slope, but I recognize that 18 year olds need advice.

MR. HUGHES: We are almost out of time, but before I ask the last question, I have some housekeeping. The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists, and we fight for a free press worldwide. To learn more about the National Press Club, go to our website, that's press.org. And to donate to our nonprofit Journalism Institute, visit press.org/institute. I'd also like to remind you about

some upcoming speakers. National Endowment for the Arts Chair Jane Chu will address a National Press Club breakfast next Monday, September 28th. On September 30th, Education Secretary Arne Duncan, will speak at a Press Club luncheon. And on October 1st, the National Press Club welcomes Latvia President, Raimonds Vējonis for a luncheon address.

I would now like to present our guest with really a good reason why it was worth coming here after postponing for a year, because this is the greatest of all trophies, really. It would be right at home in a Big 12 trophy case. So, I want to present you with the National Press Club mug.

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: Thank you very much.

MR. HUGHES: Congratulations. (Applause) So our final question, I've mentioned that the Big 12 doesn't have 12 teams in it. So I want to combine a couple questions. Are you recruiting Central Florida and South Florida to join the Big 12? And when can we expect to see the Big 12 return to its true name and get 12 teams? Is that coming at any point in the future, or should we just forget about it, it's not going to happen?

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: And you think I'm going to answer that?

MR. HUGHES: Well, if you don't, I'll have to find a different last question. (Laughter) So I'll work on that while you ponder.

COMMISSIONER BOWLSBY: We have no active plans to add members, although when I was in the Big 10, we had 11 members and we always said that if we thought about adding an additional member, we would, even though we had 10, we'd change our name to the Big 11 just to kind of keep people off balance. And so, I can't comment on specific institutions, but we have a composition committee that is comprised of three of our presidents and we constantly monitor the environment and look at the landscape.

There are some good reasons to get bigger. There are some really good reasons to stay small. But I can tell you, it's a lot easier to grow than it is to get smaller if you once think you're too big. And some of the larger conferences are having some real challenges with scheduling. One of the real victims in all of this is traditional rivals. There are lots of schools that have had border arrangements with rivals for generations that now no longer play each other on a regular basis.

And so those things, I think, have a lot to do with whether or not you stay home and watch TV, or whether you actually go to the stadium. And I think about the OU-Texas week. Families for decades have done something specific on Tuesday, and they've done another thing on Wednesday and they've done another thing on Thursday. And if that game doesn't get played some years, all of those traditions fall by the wayside.

And so I think the jury is still out as to whether or not these larger alignments really deliver anything other than television viewers and money. I think in the end, we've created a television product that is very difficult to compete against. But if the quality of the TV product results in people staying home because they're less interested, we will have lost significantly even though the money has flowed in.

MR. HUGHES: Ladies and gentlemen, could you please give a nice round of applause to our guest today? (Applause) I'd also like to thank the National Press Club staff including its Journalism Institute and Broadcast Center for organizing and supporting today's event. If you would like a copy of today's program or to learn more about the National Press Club, remember you can go to that website, that's press.org. Thank you very much, we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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