College Athletic Programs Live Above Their Financial Means

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ARLINGTON, Texas (AP)

A widely respected athletic official says swift, sweeping changes must be made if intercollegiate athletics are to survive.

The problem is money, or the lack of it. Inflation has taken a brutal toll on the athletic budgets of many colleges across the country, and the University of Texas-Arlington is among them.

"Intercollegiate athletics across the nation are in financial difficulty. The inflationary spiral of increasing costs is having a devastating effect," said UT-A President Dr. Wendell H. Nodderman.

"The result, even during the past 12 months, is significant. UT-A, like many other institutions, is facing a financial crisis in its athletic programs."

Those words do not bode well for the school's athletic programs, one of which is directed by Chena Gilstrap, a widely respected former school coach. Gilstrap has given considerable thought about the economic problems, and has some starting suggestions:

- Abolish all athletic scholarships. Reduce coaching staffs. Cut recruiting expenditures. Limit the size of traveling squads.
- "What I'm suggesting," Gilstrap said, "is that intercollegiate athletics has been living at a level it can't maintain. We may have to..."
- "Not be at the end of an era. We'd be surprised at some of the schools with reputations for success..."
- "There are fewer than 50 colleges that show a profit in athletics."
- "Giltrap's boss, Dr. Nodderman, recently rejected the recommendation of a student advisory committee that football be abolished. He choose instead to commit UT-A to a football program through 1975."
- Beyond that, he refused comment, saying, "We have the situation in constant review, we're taking the issue a year at a time."

The advisory committee wanted some $3,000,000, traditionally given to football from student activity fees, funneled into other areas.

There are some uncommon aspects about UT-A's case, although many of the problems are similar to those of other universities. The school has enjoyed some success in football, but last year lost 10 of 11 in the major college Southland Conference, causing Gilstrap to joke that "we were 6-4, lost six on the road and four at home."

The university sits in the middle of a "metroplex" which includes Texas Christian in Fort Worth and Southern Methodist at Dallas. Both are members of the more prestigous Southwest Conference and they and UT-A must compete in the Dallas Cowboys for the sports entertainment dollar. None has consistently done so with success.

Giltrap said the University of Texas is thinking about a $3,000,000 athletic deficit next year, and that without television and bowl exposure Penn State faces a similar loss.

"I figured Penn State probably had $8 million... Iowa State University of course would appreciate diminishing the near future..."

Giltrap believes if football is restricted to a small number of colleges, it will lose its over-all appeal.

"But if some major restructuring we can save the program that now exists, without really diminishing the quality, I say it's not only good for the schools, it's good for the country," he said.

"I'm not pessimistic... I believe college athletics has the capability of preserving itself by some meaning..."

Giltrap said there are others who believe, as he does, that eliminating scholarships would not prove fatal to quality football.

"I truly believe that within five years the quality of competition would be back to as good as it is now," he said. He said the truly economically disadvantaged student now has greater access to more kinds of grants than at any other time in history.

In lieu of scholarships, he suggested the method would simply be a desire to play. "In Texas," he said, "we have the Intercollegiate program and the only reason I know of is because they want to play."

Fortune, he added, "I think this would remove some of the feeling that's come into college athletics, that those who knuckle heads out not there are not part of us, but a kind of group of paid gladiators representing our school."

"Maybe I'm too provincial, but I can't see just how many of the intercollegiate athletic programs..."

The end is 60. It may be 100. But under the present format of higher football, our athletes will appreciate diminishing the near future."

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