

ABSTRACT

In Support of By-Law 5-1-(j)

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1. There is an implicit relationship between high school curriculum and test scores that should be made explicit.
2. Graduation should not be the sole concern. Education and personal development are also important issues and are broader than graduation alone.
3. Athletic grants-in-aid are a very poor vehicle for socio-economic mobility.
4. College athletics and NCAA legislation can provide a tremendous impetus for improvement in high school academic performance of students.
5. By-Law 5-1-(j) makes legitimate discriminations based upon academic preparation and performance.
6. College athletes can serve an important function as role models for American youth.

In Support of By-Law 5-1-(j)

The continuing controversy which surrounds the approaching implementation of By-Law 5-1-(j) of the NCAA Constitution reminds one of the old adage "emotion is the enemy of clear thinking". True enough, the proposal—Proposition 48—was passed at the 1983 NCAA Convention amidst waves of emotion, both for and against, and it is also true that the original proposal was composed and presented before even preliminary research was conducted. But having made this point we must now confront the fact that

the flimsily researched Proposition 48 is now firmly in place as By-Law in the NCAA Constitution. Accepting this, we should make every effort to divorce emotion from our discussion from this point onward.

The 1986 Convention is a last opportunity for discussion and alteration of By-Law 5-1-(j) before implementation on August 1 of that year. It seems most appropriate that consideration be given to the arguments for modification as the NCAA concludes a major research effort which considers the effects that By-Law 5-1-(j) would have on student-athletes at Division I institutions. One may question the utility of such a discussion when hard data will be available in such a short time, but, in the interest of complete honesty, it must be stated that the study, as it is being conducted, will hold few surprises.

The data will show that, based on test scores, a disproportionate number of blacks will be denied freshman eligibility if they are provided with an athletic grant-in-aid. Surprised? The data will also indicate that a respectable percentage of the individuals, both black and white, who would be ineligible under By-Law 5-1-(j) for athletic aid as freshmen can be expected to graduate. Surprised yet? Of course not. Unfortunately, the investigation will not discuss the implicit relationship between high school curriculum and test scores. The fact that there is a relationship is understood and accepted by most individuals in the business of education and represents the rationale for the curriculum requirement, for, most educators would agree that the high school curriculum should contain coursework in math, English, natural science, social science and foreign language in order to maximize the opportunity for academic success on the college level. The commonly held belief that there is a relationship between high school curriculum and test scores should be made explicit despite the difficulty in quantifying this relationship. Then, while controlling for the variable of high school curriculum, it would be interesting to view the performance of blacks and other minorities on the standardized tests and to discover the percentage of minority students who, having completed the mandated curriculum, would fail to qualify under By-Law 5-1-(j). One would predict a severe reduction in the percentage of minority students who would be disqualified.

The argument that a sizeable number of athletes who would not qualify for aid under By-Law 5-1-(j) could still be expected to graduate certainly can be accepted as a valid one and is not particularly shocking. Athletes are provided with study table, tutoring, and academic counseling, benefits which ought to improve the graduation rate of any population of students and certainly graduation itself has great value, both intrinsic and extrinsic, but there is another significant question that should be asked, namely, what are the academic majors chosen by those individuals who did graduate but who would not have qualified under By-Law 5-1-(j)? It is commonly understood

that among college academic majors there is a great variance in terms of rigor and future economic worth. Further, it can be assumed that there is a significant positive correlation between rigor and the economic worth of a particular degree, so the question that must be addressed is, are those individuals who have failed to qualify, distributed across majors in a fashion similar to those who would have qualified? Do these individuals have the number and quality of career options? Will they have an opportunity to reach comparable levels of personal development and fulfillment? In short, are we preparing all athletes for real economic and career success or are we simply handing them a degree, a degree with minimal value? One can easily speculate, but clearly, this question should be answered.

If those who desire modification are sincerely concerned about guarding the interests of minorities, in particular their access to higher education, they should first recognize that about 4,000,000 high school students graduate each year. Of this number, something less than 5,000 can expect to be awarded athletic grants at Division I institutions; that is, just over one tenth of a percent. Clearly, athletic grants are a poor vehicle for the socio-economic advancement of minorities or for the populace generally. Parenthetically, one must observe that this mythical vehicle surely has an even more abominable record in the case of Hispanics and Asian-Americans as evidenced by their underrepresentation on Division 1-A athletic squads. Further, one must accept that over 99% of high school seniors are deemed ineligible for an athletic grant for purely athletic reasons. To state this differently, coaches discriminate on the basis of athletic ability. They recruit only the very best athletes without regard for socio-economic status or race. If extreme elitism of this nature is acceptable, surely the disqualification of individuals for academic reasons must be acceptable, especially when one considers that the total number of grants awarded will not be reduced, but they will simply be awarded to more academically able individuals.

The entire argument that By-Law 5-1-(j) will reduce access for minorities is based on the assumption that a significant percentage of minority students depend on Division I athletic grant-in-aid for their access to higher education. As I have indicated, this does not appear to be the case, however it must be admitted that By-Law 5-1-(j) will very likely have a disproportionately large impact on minorities at the start of implementation. This fact, while lamentable, is not the fault of the legislation for the By-Law legislates without regard to socio-economic status or race. The objective of the By-Law is to discriminate on the basis of academic preparation in order to better ensure that student-athletes are actually representative students. One must conclude that the responsibility for the discrepancy in performance lies with the high schools.

Since it seems to follow logically that those individuals who do receive athletic grants-in-aid are indeed a privileged few, it seems reasonable that they should be expected to serve as role models for their peers. This expectation applies equally to minority student-athletes and non-minority student-athletes. Actually, it is arguable that the obligation of student-athletes to serve as exemplary role-models far outweighs their other obligations. Finally, by providing high school students with exemplary role models and by requiring enrollment in proper high school curriculum one can surmise that the result will be enhanced performance on the standardized tests and more successful academic performance in college and a concomitant reduction in the test score differential between minority students and non-minority students. With foresight and disciplined patience, college athletics can be a powerful engine for positive change.

In the April 10, 1985 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Jesse N. Stone, president of Southern University and a critic of By-Law 5-1-(j) demonstrated that he does understand the importance of standards when he said, "A youngster knows that one way to move from the ghetto, if he's good enough, is to participate in college athletics and hopefully go on to the pros." Mr. Stone was referring to athletic ability when he qualified his statement with "if he's good enough." By-Law 5-1-(j) simply says that a youngster must be "good enough" in the classroom as well as on the playing field. Surely a college president like Mr. Stone understands the importance of being explicit about expectations in order to maximize success in the ongoing effort to achieve excellence.