

Editorial

That score again: Fans 1, Students 0

Followers of college sports should take a look at two telling articles in the April 7 edition of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

The first, carrying the headline "Scholars Consider the 'Embarrassing State' of Big-Time College Sports," outlines the discussion of about 50 scholars who attended a recent conference on "sport and society" at Clemson University.

One of the participants, Benjamin G. Rader of the UNL Department of History, told the *Chronicle* that when intercollegiate athletics began in the 1850s, professional coaches and athletic scholarships did not exist. The level of training for student athletes was not high; those participating were real amateurs.

However, in ensuing years collegiate sports became more sophisticated. Today, millions of dollars go into events that are essentially "sporting spectacles," Rader said. Rather than being student-centered, sports have become spectator-centered, he explained.

As was pointed out at the conference, sports mania supports huge athletic programs, national television coverage and special school products, such as "Clemson National Champions Orange Soda, Official Drink of the Tigers" and "Huskers' Choice."

Rader said in the *Chronicle* article that many university officials across the country "maintain the rhetoric of amateurism" but use successful athletic programs to garner money and support for their schools. He said they have a "vested interest" in making intercollegiate sports spectator-oriented.

Just below this first article is one carrying the headline "When Budgets Are Cut, Money for Sports Should Be the First To Go, Officials Say." In a national study conducted by the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Pennsylvania State University, 3,000 college and university administrators were asked which funds should be cut first and which last in a budget crunch.

Listed first by 61.4 percent of the administrators was money for sports. Most rated money for teaching, faculty salaries, financial aid to students and libraries as funds that should be cut only as a last resort.

These two articles, set one on top of the other, make an interesting point. Although collegiate sports have developed to an almost professional level in everything but pay for players (although Sen. Ernest Chambers of Omaha has argued that scholarships and other perks college athletes receive qualify as pay), those portioning out the bucks seem prepared to cut off the flow of funds if necessary.

What exactly this means for college athletics is hard to determine. Unlike many schools in this country, UNL has an athletic department that is self-supporting. So, there is no danger that administrators will cut funds for athletics in order to save academics.

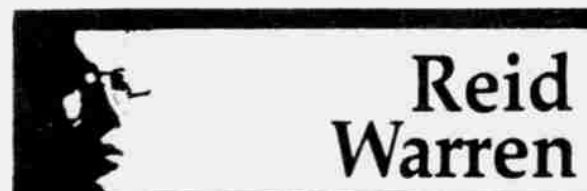
But even if Nebraska's athletic program were funded with university money, administrators here would probably be hesitant to cut those funds. UNL is the classic example of a school that has built its name with athletics, namely football.

That's not necessarily bad. But shouldn't our school be known for more? Sure, Nebraska athletes should be lauded for their achievements. After all, UNL does have a strong football team and a champion gymnastics team.

But in addition, UNL has outstanding students, faculty members and researchers. Shouldn't these people be lauded? Shouldn't their programs be supported with just as much enthusiasm? Perhaps a reputation built on academics would be a more lasting one, one that would not waver with the prospects of a team or two.

Economic policy harms education

Ronald Reagan, his voice freshly tanned, came on the radio Saturday from Barbados and reassured thousands of American students that they would receive a "veritable laundry list" of aid under his student loan proposals.



Reid
Warren

Reagan said the total volume of student loans will go up even if his revisions are enacted. He also said students have been deliberately misled that the government was "snatching away" their loans.

He was so reassuring, in fact, that he led Rep. Paul Simon, D-Ill., to say, "These are the facts. Under the proposal, more than two million college students will be denied loans and/or grants in the upcoming school year, not counting those who are losing Social Security help."

Now, I happen to agree with Reagan that his proposed student loan cuts are receiving too much attention.

But not for the same reasons. When you weigh the options, Reagan's economic policy will be far more disastrous to higher education than any of his proposed student loan cuts.

Reagan's economic policies are going to have the most disastrous effect on higher education because they are going to decline the very quality of that education.

(Granted, Reagan's student loan proposals are part of his economic policy, but the idealist in me says students always will be able to make it into college; who can deny an American dream?)

Reagan's economic policies will not only affect where students go to college, but also the level of teaching they receive.

When the popular perception is that no one can afford to send their children to the best institutions, then the unpleasant result is that the total quality of education will decline.

In the immediate future, because of the economy, choices in higher education are going to be made on the basis of what is economically convenient, rather than on what is educationally beneficial.

Economically convenient means going

to hometown schools, junior colleges and community colleges. That change in itself isn't necessarily bad, but it will contribute to a chain reaction of declining teaching quality.

It goes like this: When students can't go to the best schools, they won't receive the best education. And because students are our future teaching force, if they don't receive the best education, they won't be good teachers.

I've always thought that, discounting self-made geniuses, a student learns only what his teacher inspires (or forces, depending on how you look at it) him to learn.

Reagan's student loan cuts are critical, sure, but not as critical as the quality of our future teaching force. That force must not only be equal to present levels, it must be better; American technology is dependent on that teaching force if it is to challenge the Japanese et al, for the world's economic market.

That's why I think Reagan's student aid cuts, evil as they may be, are still the lesser of a far great evil: the decline of education through the decline of the economy.



Falklands: Marx Brothers war

You will excuse me, I know, if I tell you that images of Groucho Marx keep running through my head. I see him in the movie *Duck Soup* in which he played Rufus T. Firefly, the dictator of Freedonia, a mythical state which went to war (in black and white) to the song "To war, to war, the country's gone to war." Groucho sings it and Chico sings it and Harpo does his best — a wonderful, zany put-down of war and the mentality that produces it.

I am not sure at the moment if Argentina or Britain is Freedonia. It is clear, though, that both countries are



Richard Cohen

suffering from creeping Freedonia-ism, singing their own versions of "To war, to war" — the former in Spanish, the latter in English. The only trouble is that this movie is in color, real lives are at stake and in either language a bullet can amount to the same thing.

Already, several Argentina soldiers have died in the taking of the Falkland Islands. Already, Britain's foreign minister has resigned. Margaret Thatcher wobbles on her parliamentary throne and England has put to sea the largest armada at its command. It will take some days to reach its destination. The world has time to go for popcorn.

In the House of Lords, peers of the realm yell for war. In Argentina, fascists certified by our government with the human rights seal of approval, vow they will never give up the Falklands. The Argentine president, Lieut. Gen. Leopold F. Galtieri put it this way: "Let it be made very clear to all the international community, that if the Argentine people are attacked by military, naval, land or air means, the Argentine nation in arms, with all the means at its disposal, will present battle." Present battle? He's Margaret Dumont in drag.

On the Falklands itself, you can be sure it is raining. It either rains or snows something like 250 days a year — a climate acceptable only to the English. And England happens to be the place where most of the island's land-owners live. The rest of the Flaklanders, about 1,800

strong, raise sheep and call themselves "kelpers" after the local seaweed that grows up to 50 feet long. For this the British have dispatched the fleet.

What a lot of nonsense. The Falklands are British today because of an imperialist past. Still, the Argentines were wrong to use force to settle the dispute with England, and the English would be just as wrong to use force in response. Their strategic interests are not at stake. The Falklands are not Gibraltar and the next domino to fall, if one does, will be ... what? Antarctica. It is time to settle this dispute once and for all. Let the Argentines have the islands.

How would you like to be some British soldier contemplating death on the Falklands? How would you like to be in that armada, considering the prospect of dying for 750,000 sheep or world-class seaweed or the land itself — fit only for penguins? How would you like to compose a letter of condolence to some British mother whose son has fallen in the battle for the capital, Stanley? Stanley!

The Argentines, we are told, took the islands to divert attention from internal political troubles. The generals are in trouble. The Argentine economy is a mess. The people were pressing and so the generals, short of bread and lacking the wit to furnish a circus, gave them war. Now, Thatcher is about to respond in kind. There is pressure on her, too. Britain, which did nothing to avoid the crisis, now declares itself humiliated.

But not really. Britain is no longer an empire. It is no longer the fleet and Light Brigades and stupid little wars over inconsequential countries. It is, instead, an economically embattled democracy and it ought to use its resources to improve the lives of Britons, not to fight Argentina over some islands it does not need and probably should not have.

The pride of Britain should be its morality, its dignity, its refusal to waste lives in some international version of a macho street brawl — to sink to the level of the Argentine despots. It ought to bomb Buenos Aires with cream pies. Instead, it seems intent on becoming a comic-opera nation, out to fight a silly war over some silly island for reasons that were not worth the life of one man. It's a tragedy. It's a farce. Send in the fleet.

Freedonia rules the waves.

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Daily
Nebraskan

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USPS 144-080

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The Daily Nebraskan is published by the UNL Publications Board Monday through Friday during the fall and spring semesters, except during vacation. Address: Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, Neb., 68588 Telephone 472-2588.

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, Neb., 68588.