

Being Sun Devils in a Dynamic Environment:
The State of Arizona State University Athletics in the Twenty-
First Century

A Report to the Faculty of Arizona State University

By Gary M. Grossman, PhD

Faculty Athletic Representative

and

Jean Boyd, MEd

Associate Athletic Director, Office of Student-Athlete Development

Arizona State University

April 2014

Abstract

This report is intended as information to the faculty of Arizona State University. Its aim is to summarize the state of athletics at ASU and to contextualize the issues as they impact both athletics and academics at the university. It draws upon and addresses commonly held attitudes among members of the faculty and offers a framework for viewing both athletics at ASU and for understanding its place in American society.

The Current Environment in University Athletics in America

University athletics today is facing unparalleled challenges. Never before in the more than century and a half of organized competition in higher education have more serious threats loomed on the horizon as they are today. Even a cursory glance at headlines makes this clear. Just in the last several years, we have seen the following:

- Scandals plaguing some of America's most respected institutions, both academically and athletically, as allegations of wrongdoing, ranging from "pay for play" to academic fraud to very serious and very grievous criminal activity, have been made;
- Governing agencies, whose rulings were once regarded as absolute, have experienced the erosion of authority, making it sometimes difficult to enforce rules, even in cases of clear violations;
- Market pressures and hope for financial gain have transformed the arrangement of schools and their conferences, undermining tradition and order, in a difficult to comprehend rearrangement that sometimes varies by sport; and,
- Student-athletes are now asserting a new voice in matters involving their physical health, their status with respect to their universities, and how their "image" is marketed and who may benefit from such images.

Causes of these challenges are many and varied. Indeed, the speed and variety of media in the environment can take issues that would have once been overlooked or quickly forgotten now go viral, well beyond even the community of interested sports communities. Allegations of wrongdoing in university athletics are now known worldwide within minutes, whether or not they are true, ranging from an unfortunate remark to serious crime. Damage is done to the athletic program and university in any case. Perceived weaknesses in program administrations and governance become a frenzy of controversy. Sums of money involved in university athletics are discussed without relation to the realities of the costs of maintaining those programs, leading to wide-spread misunderstandings of athletic program finance. These misunderstandings lead to erroneous judgments from constituencies in university athletics, including how student-athletes are treated or, in the view of some, mistreated.

Despite these very real challenges, there are very real opportunities for university engagement in athletics. Many of the same factors that create or sustain threats to the university also make it possible for it to benefit greatly. In examining the history of higher education in America, success or note in athletics often preceded the emergence of a university's academic reputation. This is especially true for American public universities, whose emergence in the mid to late-nineteenth century was roughly

coincidental to the rise of organized college sports, which quickly resulted in the governance of institutions participating in athletics in the early twentieth century with the beginnings of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) in 1905, transforming into the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in 1910. Spurred by the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 and, in turn, with subsequent actions within states, public higher education exploded in the early years of the twentieth century, ultimately with every American state deeply engaged in the business of higher education. Indeed, one way available for these new public institutions to distinguish themselves was in athletics, with the response that followed to provide the public support, and often revenue, to grow academically. While the history of the NCAA and collegiate athletics is well beyond the parameters of this report, suffice it to say that academics in American universities, particularly public universities, and university athletics did not emerge in separate spheres. They grew together, each benefitting and sometimes costing one another, and this process continues today.

The Context of Athletics at ASU: A Brief History

Arizona State University and its athletic programs have grown together symbiotically in much the same pattern as is seen in other public institutions in the United States. Beginning in 1885 as the Tempe Normal School, ASU began its athletic program very early, culminating in a victory in the first Territorial Cup match with the University of Arizona in 1899. Since then, the university has grown with athletics, and to be sure, the early successes of Arizona State athletics, in large measure, contributed to the explosive growth of the university in the twentieth century. As ASU athletics, particularly football, basketball, baseball, and wrestling began to succeed on the national stage, the university has been able to leverage that success in becoming the ASU of today. In its movement from Tempe Normal School to Tempe State Teachers College in 1925 to Arizona State Teachers College in 1929 to Arizona State College at Tempe in 1945, its athletic programs became not only a focal point for the Phoenix metropolitan community but also nationally, with its representation in the Border Conference between 1931-1961. The athletic leadership of those years included names that have become legends at Arizona State. Frank Kush, Bill Kajikawa, Ned Wulk, Bobby Winkles, and many others came to be extremely well-known in the state and the nation, as did the President of the university during those years, Dr. Grady Gammage. These leaders were of such stature that, by 1958, Arizona State College at Tempe had grown to be a university in fact, if not by name, a situation that the leadership of the state was disinclined to change. By skillfully marketing the growing academic reputation of the university in harmony with the growing popularity of athletics, supporters of a name-change by public initiative won a resounding victory at the polls in November of that year, overriding the Arizona Board of Regents and the Arizona legislature of the day, such that Arizona now had two public research universities. That mutually-reinforced relationship of academics and athletics have characterized Arizona State University in the more than five decades since, as athletics has grown into one of the elite programs in the United States as a member of the Pac-12 Conference, and the academic side of the university has become the largest and one of the very best universities in America. While it is obvious that there would be no athletic program at ASU absent the university that houses it, it is also fair to say that the Arizona State University that now exists would have been extremely unlikely without the athletic program that has sustained it. They were joined at birth and continue as one entity today.

ASU Athletics and the Challenges Ahead

Given the threats facing all of university athletics today, and with the unparalleled opportunity ahead, how well is Arizona State University positioned for the future? Michael Crow, ASU's 16th president, has issued the following challenges for ASU athletics: help our student-athletes maximize their academic achievement and ensure they graduate on time; win; and win within the rules. While success in athletics contests are matters that must be left to coaches and student-athletes, the other priorities are very much within the purview of ASU faculty and administration and, as we have seen in other places, the faculty and administration has a great stake in success and failure in these areas.

With regard to "helping our student-athletes maximize their academic achievement and graduate on time", the data with regard to this question are reasonably straight-forward. The Graduation Success Rate (GSR), a statistic developed by the NCAA in 2005, was designed to show the proportion of student-athletes on any given team who earn a college degree. With regard to ASU's performance on the GSR, the data show a dramatic improvement. At the introduction of the GSR, ASU scored a 69%, indicating that this proportion of student-athletes who receive college degrees in the cohort measured. By 2013, ASU reported a GSR of 82% overall, placing it fourth in the Pac-12 Conference, its all-time high. Among ASU male student-athletes, the GSR was 71% in 2013, achieving a score of better than 70% for the first time, up from 56% in 2005. Among ASU female student-athletes, the GSR score is 93%, second to Stanford University in the Pac-12. Five ASU teams lead the Pac-12 Conference with a four-year GSR of 100-percent: men's and women's golf, women's swimming and diving, women's tennis and women's volleyball (all data from the NCAA). By comparison, the federally -recognized 6 year graduation rate for ASU undergraduates as a whole, roughly comparable to the GSR, was 58.7% in 2011. (Arizona Board of Regents).

In terms of other criteria, ASU student-athletes perform as well or better on GPA measures. Overall, student-athletes scored 2.99 in 2012-13, compared to 3.06 for ASU students as a whole. Male student athletes scored a GPA of 2.78, compared to 3.00 for ASU males in the general student body. Female student-athletes had a GPA of 3.27, compared to their counterparts' 3.12 in the general population. (OSAD and ASU Institutional Analysis).

Regarding the undergraduate majors ASU student-athletes pursue, the proportions in various disciplines are somewhat similar to ASU students in general. Of the 455 full-time undergraduate student-athletes in the university, their major breakdown is as follows (comparable general population data in parentheses):

Number	Major Area	S-A Percent	General Population
79	Business	17.4%	(17.0%)
20	Engineering	4.4%	(11.9%)
8	Herberger Inst.	1.8%	(7.4%)
136	Lib Arts/Sci	29.9%	(32.6%)
67	Letters/Sci	14.7%	(3.9%)
67	Nurs/Health	14.7%	(7.9%)
20	Public Prog.	4.4%	(5.6%)
19	Teachers' Col.	4.2%	(5.7%)
1	Technology	0.2%	(4.8%)
38	Univ. Col.	8.4%	(3.1%)
455		100%*	(100%)*

*Rounded to equal 100%

While there are some differences, in terms of major selection between student-athletes and the general population, they are not dramatically so. Indeed, it would be difficult to cast these differences in terms of "harder" or "easier" major areas. While student-athletes and general ASU students emerge from different demographic cohorts in general, student-athletes tend to be younger, thus somewhat more likely to engage in exploratory programs earlier in their study. As well, the challenges of locating a program compatible with a student-athletes schedule may make certain academic programs somewhat more in demand. However, the data also show that perform academically as well or better across university programs. Thus, given all factors, one can only conclude that student-athletes at Arizona State University are students, generally successful ones at that. As such, the evidence seems to indicate that President Crow's goal of "help our student-athletes maximize their academic achievement and ensure they graduate on time" is being realized.

The university priority of winning "within the rules", the university is responsible to the Pac-12 and NCAA regulations, as well as those of the Arizona Board of Regents, and state and Federal law. With regard to the NCAA, Arizona State athletics is in challenging times. ASU has been found responsible for a total of nine NCAA violations in its history, most of which stem from long ago, the first occurring in 1954. However, a recent (and highly disputed) case involving the baseball program in 2009, the university was placed on probation for three years in 2010 (through December 2013) and warned that any major violations before November 2016 would result in serious penalties (Yahoo Sports; Arizona Republic). In response, the university has upgraded its compliance efforts, locating the reporting lines of the Compliance Director in the Office of the General Counsel and hiring an attorney for the post with significant experience with the NCAA. Since 2010, the university has enhanced its internal review of ASU athletics, with both the Office of the General Counsel and the Office of the Faculty Athletic Representative closely monitoring its activities. Moreover, the university supports a very active, independent Student-Athlete Code of Conduct Committee under the leadership of the Dean of Students of the Tempe campus. While challenges remain, particularly with the NCAA threat on the horizon, no major violations have occurred since and ASU appears well-positioned to "win within the rules."

Finally, a portion of the attention of this report needs to address the finance of ASU athletics. To be sure, there is a deep lack of understanding, especially among faculty and students, about how much it costs to run a program at a major university, like Arizona State, and where the money goes. Such a lack of awareness leads to misconceptions, expressing itself either in terms of the degree of support ASU athletics draws from the university or that athletics makes a tremendous amount of money that never

benefits the academic side of the university. To explore this question, data from the past two fiscal years were examined from reports submitted to the NCAA:

Revenues (in millions)

	FY 2012	FY 2013
Ticket Sales	\$9.059	\$9.590
Guarantees*	0.983	0.300
Contributions	11.266	12.738
3rd Party Support	0.389	0.400
Direct Inst. Support	8.896	8.618
Indirect Admin. Sup.	1.448	1.502
NCAA/Pac12 Dist.	12.899	20.242
Concessions/Park.	2.005	1.778
Royalties/Licensing	11.167	9.029
Sports Camps	0.109	0.150
Endowment/Invest.	1.047	0.412
Other	0.587	0.915
	<u>\$59.856</u>	<u>\$65.674</u>

Expenditures (in millions)

	FY 2012	FY 2013
Ath. Student Aid	\$11.168	\$12.136
Guarantees*	2.542	1.519
Coach/Supp. Staff	20.195	22.309
Severance	3.631	-0-
Recruiting	0.898	1.172
Team Travel	3.656	4.441
Equipment, Supplies	3.412	3.290
Game Expenses	3.590	3.322
Fund Raising. Promo.	3.405	4.972
Camp Expenses	0.109	0.150
Facilities	7.900	7.027
Medical Exp.	1.121	1.470
Memberships/Dues	.033	.033
Other	3.927	3.759
	<u>\$65.588</u>	<u>\$65.610</u>

* "Guarantees" are financial payments made to visiting institutions when they come to play at ASU or we go to another institution. The reason for the large decreases in revenues and expenses is that as part of the new Pac-12 arrangement, we no longer exchange guarantees with fellow Pac-12 institutions.

The data, in general, are neither surprising nor dramatic. In essence, ASU athletics is financially stable, trending toward a "break-even" status. While it does depend on a certain level of institutional support, its magnitude is moderate (less than 15%). Moreover, with student fees for Sun Devil Athletics poised to begin next year, the level of institutional support could be reduced or eliminated, if this is desired.

Conclusions

Athletics at Arizona State University is a highly desirable aspect of campus life. Its activities, both on the field and off, contribute to the richness of university life as well as serve as a very visible vehicle for students, faculty, and community members to engage the university at a number of levels. Historically, it has served to put the university “on the map”. In its present expression, it keeps us in the public eye and is a significant part of the platform that Arizona State University offers to the Phoenix community, the nation, and the world. Indeed, Sun Devil Athletics can be fairly credited with its share of the health and vibrancy of ASU today.

That said, ASU is a part of events taking place in the current environment of university athletics. We, also, are subject to the same challenges and opportunities all across the nation. The same media that puts college sports under a microscope also applies to us. However, we actively guard against these threats through a variety of institutional safeguards and firewalls within and beyond the athletic department. We are actively engaged in the governance structure of the future through participation in conference and NCAA discussions in which those decisions are now being made. Finally, being concerned about the well-being of student-athletes is hardly a “new” area for us. However, it is one of increased emphasis, most especially in the work of the Office of Student-Athlete Development (OSAD). Through its unique program, “Sun Devils for Life”, OSAD does all that it can to ensure that student-athletes leaving Arizona State University are equipped for life outside of the university environment. While the future cannot be known with certainty, one can certainly feel a sense of confidence that Sun Devil student-athletes, Sun Devil Athletics, and Arizona State University are well-positioned for those challenges.