

Where Athletic Professionalism Starts

WHATEVER achievements may be credited to our system of higher education, when it comes to preparing athletes for life off the playing fields, it is dollars to goose eggs in favor of ticket sales.

The latest example of athletic professionalism in higher education is that of the Creighton University basketball player who was flunked out after he injured his ankle and lost his value to the team.

After four years of college the six-foot nine-inch black team captain discovered he couldn't read and write. He went to preparatory school and couldn't keep up with kids in third grade.

"Then I knew I had gotten a free ride for four years," the young man said. He had taken courses to keep him eligible to play; not to obtain a degree or to prepare him to earn a living after athletics.

This is not the only evidence that athletic departments of major colleges and universities are professional institutions. Many of them (perhaps most or all) operate as separate financial and administra-

tive set-ups, apart from the educational institutions' budgets.

It doesn't take an expert mathematician with a computer to figure out that thousands of people paying \$10 to \$20 each for tickets add up to a lot of money. For winners, there also may be sizable takes from television and radio rights. Boosters and fans often contribute large amounts that aren't accounted for publicly.

High salaried coaches enhance their incomes with talk shows, after-dinner speeches, testimonials and investment opportunities that may not be available to professors and researchers. We should be ashamed that the highest paid university employee in the nation is a football coach and that athletic officials are the highest paid individuals on numerous campuses.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association elicited some painful howls recently when it adopted rules that athletes must score in classrooms as well as in games. The University of Oklahoma faculty representative voted "No" because test

scores to be used beginning in 1986 were perceived as racially discriminatory. He explained "we feared losing black athletes would hurt our football program."

Scholastics aren't the only reason colleges lose athletes. One black football player at OU announced he is transferring to Arizona State University because OU coaches want him to play fullback. He said he was recruited (hired) to play halfback.

If our states are to operate training schools for professional athletics, perhaps they ought to be set up apart from education. Pay athletes salaries scaled by leagues, sell drafting rights to major team owners, put the gate receipts and TV take in the public till and forget about trying to educate players while eligibility lasts.

There could be chicanery and politics mixed up in it but it wouldn't be cloaked with pretenses of scholastic amateurism.

Then we might have to worry about professionalism in high school athletics. In fact, maybe we ought to start worrying now!