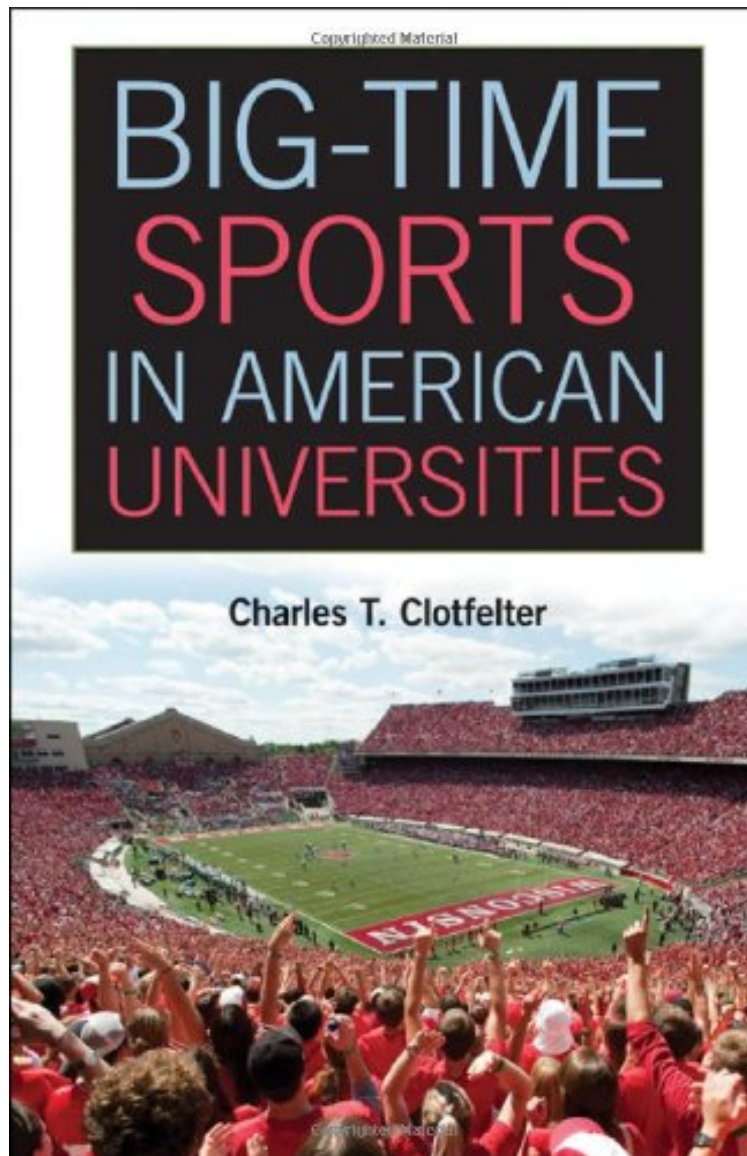


## Big-Time Sports in American Universities

*Clotfelter*

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**Clotfelter : Big-Time Sports in American Universities** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Big-Time Sports in American Universities:

15 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating and balanced accountBy Phelps GatesThere are plenty of books about what's wrong with college sports, often in the "ain't-it-awful" genre, and a long article in the latest Atlantic is an indictment of the way "student-athletes" are exploited. Clotfelter's book is a more balanced account: he's an economist and he gives an excellent description of just what the costs and benefits are of big-time college sports, both tangible and intangible. And the book explains how colleges got into the entertainment business in the first place

and why they're not likely to leave it any time soon. He doesn't neglect the exploitation issue, and suggests various ways in which it could be fixed (but probably won't be). His analysis has some surprises and I learned a lot. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An Economist Takes on the Neglected Questions about College Sports By Frank Bellizzi Charles T. Clotfelter is a Harvard-trained economist who has often explored questions about education and public policy in America. His previously-published books, for example, include titles like *Federal Tax Policy and Charitable Giving* (1985), *Buying the Best: Cost Escalation in Elite Higher Education* (1996), and *After Brown: The Rise and Retreat of School Desegregation* (2004). In *Big-Time Sports in American Universities*, his most recent book, Clotfelter once again stays within his area of expertise, while at the same time probing yet another topic. As he puts it, this is a book "chiefly about higher education, not sports" (xiii). A lack of attention to the topic he writes about here is what created his opportunity: "Despite what I saw as abundant evidence of the larger-than-life presence of big-time college sports, serious academic research about universities rarely deals with the subject at all" (xii). Clotfelter addresses two questions about universities that operate big-time sports programs. First, why do they do it? . . . And second, what are the consequences for the universities that operate these enterprises? The author limits his exploration to college football programs that are part of the NCAA's elite Football Bowl Subdivision and to basketball programs in Division I (xiii). Throughout, he seeks "to describe the phenomenon of big-time college sports as it is, trying to make sense of why so many smart institutions have decided it is a worthwhile enterprise to be a part of" (15). He concludes that while "[u]niversity leaders often justify these enterprises on instrumental grounds, for their supposed ability to boost student applications and alumni donations, for example . . . a more reliable explanation for their existence is that university stakeholders simply desire them because they want to have competitive teams" (20). Regarding schools with big-time sports programs, Clotfelter writes: "Just as surely as they perform the traditional functions of teaching, research, and service, these universities are also in the entertainment business" (22). One problem is that university leaders are loath to admit this is the case. Consequently, they are unable to intelligently or creatively deal with this basic fact. Strangely, American universities with big-time football and basketball programs are a bit like the bright, affable family that can hardly afford their two large dogs. The family never discusses the real costs and liabilities of owning Marmaduke and Mandy. But neither can they imagine their lives without them. Any suggestion that the dogs should never have been brought home, or that they should ever be given anything less than special care, would be met with disbelief and anger. The dogs are, in some real sense, a part of the family, and are spoken of in that way. One of Clotfelter's main points, one that I found fascinating, is that although the financial escalation of big-time college sports makes it "a whole new ball game" as it were, the dilemmas associated with athletic programs in colleges are actually quite old, in some instances reaching all the way back to the end of the nineteenth century. I was astonished to read, for example, that in 1893 the president of Harvard said, "With athletics considered as an end in themselves, pursued either for pecuniary profit or popular applause, a college or university has nothing to do. Neither is it an appropriate function for a college or university to provide periodic entertainment during term-time for multitudes of people who are not students" (10). The variety and quantity of raw data behind this book are a big part of what makes Clotfelter's case so very compelling. In his preface, the author acknowledges the help he received from a long list of students. The amount and level of specific detail provided in some of his 35 figures and tables indicates that those thank yous are not window dressing. Although Clotfelter makes good use of the statistics available to him, he is careful not to press a point where the numbers are ambiguous or statistically insignificant. There are times when his description and analysis have all the flair of an autopsy report. But as a student and a reader, when given the choice, I would take dry accuracy over fine-sounding fluff any day. Regarding the organization of the book, I liked the fact that every chapter included major headings, subheadings, and enumerated points. Obviously, Clotfelter writes using a detailed outline. The upshot for the reader is that you are never left to wonder what the author is doing, where he's going. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Level-headed analysis of the entertainment machine that is college football and basketball By R Henry Well-documented, scholarly report on the history and state of big college football and basketball. I learned a lot from reading this book. The analysis is presents makes sense and it is convincing. I recommend this book to anyone who wants a thoughtful look at the huge entertainment giant that college football and basketball have become. The author does a great job of present the pluses, the minuses, and the challenges ahead for the sport.

For almost a century, big-time college sport has been a wildly popular but consistently problematic part of American higher education. The challenges it poses to traditional academic values have been recognized from the start, but they have grown more ominous in recent decades, as cable television has become ubiquitous, commercial opportunities have proliferated and athletic budgets have ballooned. Drawing on new research findings, this book takes a fresh look at the role of commercial sports in American universities. It shows that, rather than being the inconsequential student activity that universities often imply that it is, big-time sport has become a core function of the universities that engage in it. For this reason, the book takes this function seriously and presents evidence necessary for a constructive perspective about its value. Although big-time sport surely creates worrying conflicts in values, it also brings with it

some surprising positive consequences.