

(Address given by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the 62nd Annual Football Banquet, December 10, 1981)

In times of plentiful victories, of which we have had many, the task of the University speaker is to be a gracious winner. In times of adversity and plentiful defeats, we speak of building character and making friends. It is also a time to be philosophical and to comment broadly on the state of intercollegiate athletics. That I shall do tonight.

Anyone who is conscious of the passing scene knows that all is not well with intercollegiate athletics today -- and I speak mainly of football and basketball. It is difficult to keep up with the schools that are on disciplinary probation. Allegations of cheating, of rules violations, of improper recruitment, academic improprieties in admissions and in receiving credit without attending class, all of these are fairly widespread.

It is said that coaches are under such pressure to win that they will do anything that promotes winning. Why the pressure to win at all costs? Again, it is blamed on alumni pressure, the need to gain lucrative contracts for television and bowl games. *It is insurance coaches who cut corners.*

How does a university president cope with this? Rather directly, I think. First, a president must see and place intercollegiate athletics in perspective. He must not yell at the players, as a harried coach was said to have done, "What do you think it is, a game?" It is a game, no more, no less.

Intercollegiate athletics are important in the life of an institution, but not all important. The players are coached and

conditioned, the games are played, won or lost, as a manifestation of the school's spirit and tradition. At Notre Dame, it is a fine tradition and the spirit unmatched in the land. But how does or should the president view the players and the coaches?

The players are first and foremost students. In this, they should be regarded and treated as all students are. They should be admitted because they are academically qualified and judged to be capable of profiting from the university's academic program.

They should take a normal course of studies, not series of gut courses that keep them eligible without the difficulty of becoming educated. Most, if not all of them, should graduate in four years. They should live as the other students do, ^{should} not be segregated in some jock palace.

They should be expected to conduct themselves as other students do, the same rules, the same rewards and punishments. There should be only one inducement for them to come: the golden opportunity to get a fine education.

A decade after graduation, almost everyone will have forgotten when and where and what they played. But every time they speak, everyone will know whether or not they are educated. No one can take that from them, and nothing they have will be more valuable -- for all the rest of their lives.

Players themselves will, of course, always remember the great seasons, the great games, the moments of heroic endeavor, the thrill of victory and the empty feeling that always follows defeat. All of

this is a learning experience, too, a true education that prepares students for the life yet to be lived, a life that will have its ups and downs, its high and low moments of victory and defeat. Players will learn early that victory is the fruit of monumental effort, discipline, team work unselfishly undertaken, overcoming discouragement, gaining self-confidence and team confidence, too. Leadership is a great human asset. Sports give it ample room in which to be born and to flourish. Those who learn this lesson are greatly blessed, *for all their*

A president should believe in this healthy and wholesome and educational regime *known.* for student athletes. He cannot personally supervise it, but he does have the serious obligation to appoint athletic directors and coaches who concur with this view of inter-collegiate athletics and who promote it, in season and out, vigorously and honestly, *come what may.*

This is not a one-way street. Athletic directors and coaches who support an honest program should have equal support from the president. Their position and tenure should not be at the mercy of last week's score or the vagaries of a single season. They should have reasonable security in their jobs and the full confidence and support of the administration. Alumni should not badger them nor should vociferous fans. Of course, they will suffer a certain amount of static from those who judge anything less than total victory a dismal failure. But the pressure should not come from the administration. They have a difficult enough task to do and if they are doing it with honesty, integrity, and competence,

they should never have to be worried about being blind-sided by those who appointed them.

Generally speaking, I think a program like Notre Dame's should, on balance and over time, win more games than it loses. There will be occasional great years, National Championships even, and occasional bad years, too. But I do believe that it is quite possible to have a completely honest and generally successful program. We have a long history of doing just that, and ^{the record of} thousands of successful former student athletes who continue to compete with honor in the more important careers they have pursued after graduation. They are a great source of pride and the best evidence that intercollegiate athletics and good education are completely compatible.

I would hope that in the years ahead, Notre Dame might, by example and leadership, help to rid intercollegiate athletics of the plague that presently blights it. We should compete with schools that share this ideal and not with those who do not. We, and our competitors, should make common cause for all that is good and educational in the intercollegiate athletic program. To this, we pledge ourselves, and in this total perspective we are happy to celebrate tonight.