

THE KNIGHT COMMISSION ON INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS PRESENTS
A SUMMIT ON THE COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC EXPERIENCE

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Dorothy Betts Marvin Theater
The Marvin Center
The George Washington University
800 21st Street NW
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Introduction

ALBERTO IBARGUEN: Good morning, I'm Alberto Ibarguen, and I'm president of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which has supported the important work of the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics since its inception fifteen years ago.

The Knight Commission was formed at a time of collegiate athletic scandals. Over time it has positively influenced the national discourse about the role and structure of intercollegiate athletics, and helped reaffirm the primacy of education as the mission and of presidential authority in guiding the course of intercollegiate athletics in our colleges and universities.

The Knight Commission has never pretended to be the sole voice of right or reason on these subjects and has worked collaboratively with others to bring about positive change.

It has also tried to state the things as they are—not as one might like them to be—and an example of that is a poll of American attitudes toward intercollegiate athletics, the results of which are being released this morning.

The Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics is an ongoing discussion, an ongoing dialogue about ethics and values in the context of athletics in our diverse society. This would be barely interesting if the discussion didn't affect and engage the student-athlete. So today is one of the times dedicated to hearing their voice.

We are privileged to have several panels composed of extraordinary people who are in the main, current or recent athletes and thoughtful and hopefully thought provoking individuals.

Our leader on the Commission, Tom Hearn, the former president of Wake Forest University, is unable to be with us this morning and so it's my privilege to welcome you on his behalf and acknowledge the leadership of two vice-chairs of the Knight Commission who will co-chair today's events. They are Gerald Turner, president of Southern Methodist University, and Clifton Wharton, the former president of TIAA-CREF and of Michigan State University.

On behalf of Amy Perko, the Executive Director of the Knight Commission, I'd like to acknowledge the cooperation of George Washington University in organizing this event. The administration has been outstanding in helping us and we appreciate that very much.

To welcome you this morning I'm especially pleased to introduce an old and very, very dear friend, the president of George Washington University, Stephen L. Trachtenberg. Steve?

STEPHEN TRACHTENBERG: Thank you. I've been looking forward to your arrival and I'm delighted you're here.

Some of you may have noticed that the compensation of university presidents has received a lot of attention in the recent past and it occurred to me that there was a simple and straight forward way to deal with this matter that actually fell

under the jurisdiction of this group today as well. And that is to index the pay of university presidents to that of their football coaches. I think the presidents would go along without much of a protest. As for the football coaches, I'll leave that to you.

At George Washington University we have as you know, not lost a football game in over forty years and we've done this without a coach and so my own personal situation would be uniquely challenged. But I like to think we could overcome this if we put our minds to it.

The second and very consequential point that I want to bring up with you has to do with the NCAA Rule Book which I once lifted and then spent a week in the hospital with a strained back. The only comparable document that I know of in the western world is the Internal Revenue Code and it seems to me that just as we periodically take a look at the Internal Revenue Code, it wouldn't hurt us to more regularly look at the NCAA Rule Book with the thought of putting it on a diet.

It's not that I don't think we need rules. God knows we do in this world but I always feel that any document that's much longer than the United States Constitution is probably not serving us as well as it might. I think also it's useful to point out the extraordinary importance of what's going on here today.

I woke up this morning, I picked up the Washington Post, I looked for a department in philosophy. I couldn't find one but I had no problem at all finding an entire section on sports. It's clear that sports is very much on the minds of many Americans and that what we do in our sports departments to some extent speaks for our universities even more dramatically. Whether that's good or bad I'll leave for others to debate.

Even more dramatically than what we do in the other aspects of the university in which we teach in the classrooms and in the laboratories and in the libraries.

Now it's true, the Modern Language Association periodically gets together to tell us how we ought to teach English and languages and they seem to have about as much fun as the NCAA does at its annual meetings, but the NCAA isn't ridiculed quite as much as the MLA. Nevertheless, all aspects of human endeavor call for the negotiation of rules and serious reviews of how we are proceeding. And so again I'm delighted to welcome you to George Washington University for these very consequential proceedings.

I can tell you that when I travel around the country, or for that matter even in the District of Columbia, hardly anybody raises questions with me about how things are going with my chemistry department.

Nevertheless we soldier on in chemistry and biology but, but every time I sit down in a barber chair, every time I get into a taxi cab, every time a bellhop in a hotel as far away as California notices my name or the tag on my luggage which says, George Washington University, they inevitably raise questions about my athletic program and these days more regularly and often, the men's and women's basketball teams which have been having as you probably know better than I, a very, a very good season.

I don't rely on this on a daily basis but it is an observation that I see perhaps more acutely than the president of Duke, for whom I presume it happens on a daily, on a daily basis and sometimes even more regularly than that.

In any case, I want to encourage you in your work. I want to tell you as somebody who went to a college that I will leave unnamed, but started there in 1955 and so we have at least a half a century, I look back on my own undergraduate experience and recall that the only team we could root for was the fencing team and that was not in my judgment sufficient. Even during my college days and on to this day as an alumnus, I think intercollegiate sports are very important. They're important to the nation, they're important to the individual schools, the students get great pleasure and excitement and enthusiasm out of them, they help to brand the

institution and so what you are focusing on is something that goes to the very heart of the university experience in America, and something which perhaps goes to the very heart of civilized men and women.

As I look back over history in the west and in the east, in Asia, all over the planet where there have been human beings there have been sports. And so it is probably in the nature of our species to engage in such activities and I congratulate you on your commitment to seeing to it that we do it right.

Thank you all very much.