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**16) Opening remarks by Peter Roby, director of Northeastern University's
Center for the Study of Sport in Society**

PETER ROBY: Thank you and it's a pleasure to be here. It's an honor to be in front of the panel giving my personal background and my commitment to some of these issues, so I'm delighted to be here.

Before I get started with my comments, let me just make a comment about the last panel and the MVP program that everybody was talking about. It's a great sense of pride for me to say that that program originated at the Center for the Study of Sport in Society and continues today. It's a 13-, 14-year-old program.

We've been on over 100 college campuses and despite some of what we've talked about with regard to the SEC, I should give credit to the SEC for having the vision and the commitment to their student-athletes to be the first conference to implement the MVP program across the board in all twelve schools, men's and women's basketball, men's and women's track and field, baseball, softball and football.

The question that was asked by Hodding Carter with regard to, well, what else can we do, is I don't think we need to restrict these things to the athletic department nor to just the students. But programs like this that raise awareness and give people options about how to deal with the issues of sexual assault and violence have to be permeated throughout the culture of the community on the college campus so that faculty and staff, administrators, everybody that comes in contact with young people should be going through the program, so that the culture gets reinforced every time a student-athlete or a student in general comes in contact with an adult who's supposed to have their best interests in mind. And so that's what we would suggest in terms of one of the solutions.

We also, that program is a mixed gendered, mixed race program of trainers that go out and deliver that training on campuses and they're all former college athletes. So in terms of being able to talk specifically about issues and giving kids options, we're really proud of what we've done there.

Anyway, good morning and thank you for inviting me to participate in this important process.

Today is especially significant for me personally because of my family background and my personal feelings about today's topic. I'm the first in my family to graduate from college.

My parents never attended high school and I've spent most of my life trying to promote the importance of perspective and values in our lives. To be here today in the presence of so many distinguished individuals, speaking on a topic of such importance is an honor for me.

My comments to day highlight the need for perspective and the importance of leadership if we hope to change the culture around recruiting. Recruiting irregularities and excesses has been a part of intercollegiate athletics from its beginnings.

Initially it was thought that ego and pride were the prevailing influences affecting recruiting at that time. While they remain part of the problem with recruiting today, they have been overtaken by the influence of money on the athletic landscape. Shoe companies looking to influence scores of youngsters to buy their products, summer coaches luring prospects to play for their particular team by waving free gear, trips to distant locations to play against the best and college coaches chasing the dream of NCAA glory and the financial windfall that usually accompanies it have contributed to the crisis in recruiting.

It has gotten so bad that athletes choose which high school to attend based on which shoe company's products their teams wear, even if it means moving hundreds of miles from home and finding other guardians to live with in the district of that particular school.

All of this contributes to an erosion of values and a loss of perspective on the role of athletics in society, the sense of entitlement that athletes grow up with and influences the decision that coaches, athletic directors and college presidents make in an effort to win. College coaches now make as much as three million dollars per season.

BCS conferences generate millions of dollars from bowl games, conference championships and television deals while the athletes continue to miss more class and fall father behind their classmates in the classroom. The multi-sport athlete is disappearing from the sports landscape because youth coaches have convinced this generation of promising athletes that they can't be the best and get a college scholarship unless they play that particular sport year round, and parents have bought this line of reasoning as well.

Much of what's wrong with recruiting is being done by adults who claim to have the athlete's best interests in mind, when in fact the vast number of those individuals have their own self-interest in mind. So the question is, given the history of professionalism that has plagued collegiate athletics as far back as the Carnegie Report in 1929, can we change the culture of collegiate recruiting? With money, media and marketing influencing almost every decision made in sports today, from which nights of the week games are played, to hiring and firing coaches, to the Pop Warner Football Championships on ESPN at Disney World in Orlando, do we have the collective courage and will to change the culture? If so, how can we fix it? Do we have the courage to fix it? Leaders like Nelson Mandela, Doctor King, Billie Jean King, Mother Teresa and Birch Bayh each had a vision for a better way and the courage of their convictions and consistency of their actions to bring about change.

The type of leadership required is leaderful leadership that calls for each of us to lead from where we sit. It challenges the notion that only the gifted few can lead and instead suggests that each of us has the capacity to lead by our own actions and convictions.

Each college president must have the courage of their convictions to withstand the pressure from donors, boosters, the media, marketing interests and maintain their commitment to academic integrity and the proper role of athletics on higher education, regardless of whether their biggest rival does the same. Leading from any seat means employees at the shoe companies recognize the damage being done to thousands of young athletes' values each time they provide free gear and money to another summer basketball team.

I had to make that decision myself while at Reebok and it is not a coincidence that the company hardly mentioned in Dan's book, *Sole Influence*, is Reebok. During my time at Reebok I refused to contribute to the culture plaguing summer basketball and refused to sponsor any summer teams.

My convictions were challenged when Reebok's senior leadership team asked me to agree with their decision to hire Sonny Vaccaro to run our grassroots basketball

operation. I threatened to resign if they hired him because I didn't agree with his philosophy. They didn't hire him then but they did hire him after I left the company in 2002.

The NCAA should consider running their own recruiting and evaluation camps and restricting off campus evaluation to only these camps and actual in season games of the athletes and sanction summer leagues that are monitored by the state high school associations. This will ensure that the best interests of the athletes are in the hands of nurturing adults who actually have accountability to their athletic director, principal, superintendent and state association.

Val Ackerman and Len Elmore, like me, are products of a time when the summer league was where we spent most of our time. Beside running the city or town where we grew up playing against the best local talent in parks and in pickup games, the summer leagues was the place to see and be seen.

Today's summer leagues are irrelevant. High school coaches have gotten squeezed out of the recruiting equation because of the emphasis placed on summer travel team participation. So much of a young person's values development takes place in high school, and as such these young athletes need to be around adults that care about them for more than their athletic ability, and who will tell them when their behavior is unacceptable and needs to change.

With summer travel teams, the coaches of these teams are so worried about losing their players to others, they have no incentive to discipline their athletes when their behavior warrants it.

Like most solutions to major problems, they call for collaborative action. College presidents, state high schools associations, parents, athletes, shoe companies and the NCAA must work together to do what's in the best interests of the young athletes in their charge.

I hope that my appearance here today will help bring about the changes necessary to return integrity to the recruiting process by placing in the hands of adults most concerned with the best interests of the young people involved.

Let me just give you a couple of examples of some of the things that we've talked about today.

Given the attention that the athletes endure prior to matriculating like we've heard the three young student-athletes that spoke before us, it's not surprising that the transition issues and keeping things in perspective is so hard.

We build them up on such a pedestal, we tell them how great they are, and then they come into school and they're freshmen and they're asked to be a normal student. It's just not going to happen without some attention being paid to that.

One thing I will say about Ruth's comment about being from a small town and maybe not having gotten the recognition. Recruiting is so sophisticated and has been for a long time, that there's very few people that fall through the cracks.

And if you need any example all you have to think about is Jerry West. Jerry West came from a small town in West Virginia that nobody would have given you a spit for that town unless Jerry West came from there or the people that came from there.

And yet they found Jerry West and I think we all would agree he went on to have a pretty damn good career and people still talk about him. So is there a connection between Notre Dame firing Tyrone Willingham, even though they admit in the press conference that between Sunday and Friday he did everything that they'd ever asked him to do, but he just fell short on Saturday? Is there then a coincidence that Notre Dame ends up playing Stanford in the last game of the season and if they win that game they get a fourteen million payout for a BCS spot? That's all you need to know about why Ty Willingham was fired at Notre Dame.

And that has nothing to do with whether Charlie Weiss was worthy or not. I don't know Charlie Weiss but he's a hell of a football coach. So this isn't an indictment on Charlie Weiss, but it is an indictment about the lack of leadership that Notre Dame showed in the Tyrone Willingham situation. St. Bonaventure's recruiting irregularities that led to the death of their board of director chairman. He committed suicide because of it.

The last thing I'll talk about is one that really struck me the most. When I was at Reebok one of the things that I did decide to do was to sponsor the McDonald's All American Game because I didn't want to get into the whole influence of the AAU and the summer basketball thing.

And I thought that at least with the McDonald's game we still had the control with the high school coaches. Ronald Curry from this area in Virginia was going to play in the McDonald's game and also at the time still playing in the Capital Classic that was held here in Washington, D.C.

I came from the airport, I got picked up and on the talk radio show the people talking about Ronald Curry were saying that one of the reasons that Ronald Curry had switched his decision to go to Virginia and instead go to North Carolina was because Virginia was wearing Reebok product and North Carolina was wearing Nike.

I happened to see Ronald Curry in the lounge here for the Capital Classic and I related that story to him and I told him how much it broke my heart. Because, you know, Ronald Curry was a legitimate student-athlete with an over point average. He was a serious student, he just happened to be a wonderful athlete. And for anybody to suggest that we would throw away our future based on what shoe we were wearing was a personal affront to me.

Now I was representing a shoe company and I told him that I was offended by the comment on the radio. Now Ronald Curry looked at me like I had three heads because nobody from a shoe company was talking to him that way. That's the kind of leadership that I was trying to show then. It's the kind of leadership I'm trying to show now. It's the kind of leadership that I hope we'll all show going forward. Thanks very much.

DR. TURNER: Okay. And thank all of you presenters for your comments.