



## The athletic scholarship debate:

# College sports will never be the same

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Athletic scholarships are no longer an issue of exclusive concern to the American college system. They have crossed the border and threaten to divide Canada along athletic lines. Philosophies have become crystallized as the ultimate goals of athletic programs and the pros and cons of the scholarship approach come into question.

As a result of recent meetings held to discuss athletic scholarships, the possibility exists that Ontario universities will risk losing their best athletes not only to the United States, but to the other Canadian provinces as well.

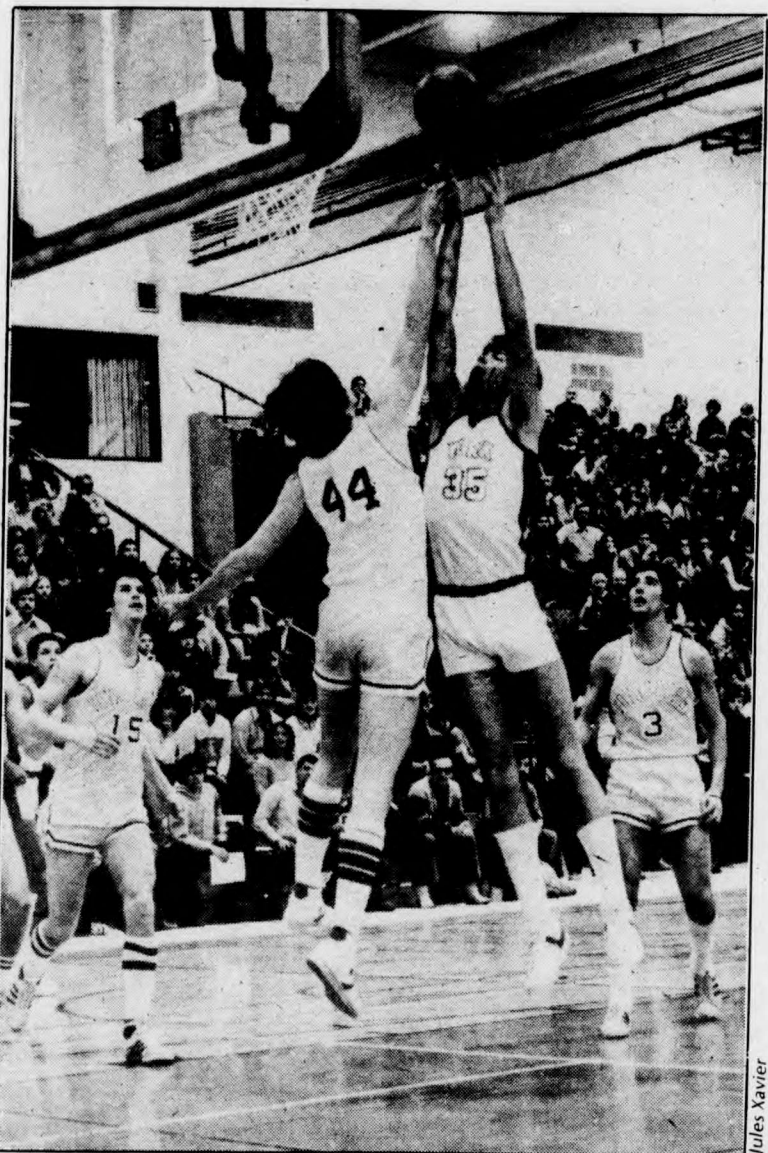
The Canadian Interuniversity Athletic Union has put forward a proposal which, if implemented, would see every varsity athlete who participates in a CIAU sport receive \$1,000 plus 15% of their living expenses directly from his or her institution.

While the schools in Eastern and Western Canada have voted in favour of the proposal, Ontario, along with Quebec, remains adamantly opposed to the idea of first party scholarships.

Eastern Canadian schools favour athletic scholarships; for them it is a question of survival. Universities in the Maritimes need scholarships to attract athletes they normally would have no hope of getting. With a smaller population to choose from and a poorer economy, these universities are virtually forced to award scholarships or face athletic extinction.

Universities in Western Canada are hoping that a scholarship program would stop Western athletes from flocking to American schools. An added incentive may be the possibility of government subsidies, which could very well be a reality considering the small number of schools in each Western province.

Ontario universities object to a scholarship program on the basis of two main factors. The first is fear that problems within the



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Should Canada go the way of the U.S. in awarding athletic scholarships?

with the U.S. scholarship system, believes that Canadians can learn from American mistakes.

"The idea that the NCAA had for athletic scholarships was a good one. It's just that the implementation has become wrong. They did not envision the system becoming the big business enterprise it now is. They are just now starting to adjust." However, he says, for Canadian schools, "the possible corruption is worth the benefits of an athletic scholarship program." Chairman of York's Physical Education Department, Dr. Frank Cosentino, puts things in perspective when he says, "People assume that what is happening in the U.S., both good and bad, will happen in Canada. This is not necessarily true. It's a red herring issue that has many questions to be answered."

The second, more important factor for Ontario's opposition is funding for scholarship programs. York's official position favours third party scholarships; the government or private corporations make money available to athletes. However, current university funding is already quite low and, in the opinion of most administrators, any additional money would be much better spent in improving existing athletic programs.

York's co-ordinator of women's athletics, Mary Lyons, feels that, "Prior to paying the athletes, our major role is to try and finance our programs. We have to try and upgrade them so that we can have good coaches, good facilities and good equipment. To me, these are the major drawing cards."

York Vice President (Employee and Student Relations), Bill Farr, states that money allotted to competing teams for travel is

"lousy. We could provide better schedules for our teams and there's always the need for equipment."

"We have good academic programs, good coaches and facilities to attract athletes without necessarily having to give scholarships."

While there's no denying that lack of funds is seriously affecting athletic programs, many feel that upgrading current programs is not enough of an incentive to keep athletes in Ontario.

Barb Whibbs, recently named York's athlete-of-the-year, and David Coulthard, All-Canadian guard with the York Yeomen, both think that improved programs may not necessarily be enough of an incentive to keep Ontario athletes here.

"If athletes are going to go to other places (because of scholarships), what's the use of improving programs?" asks Whibbs.

Coulthard says that Ontario is fighting a losing battle because it is competing against the U.S., where Ontario athletes can already get both a better athletic program and scholarships.

When athletic scholarships are brought up in discussion many of those who are opposed to them mention the inevitable pressure of winning at all costs as a point against having scholarships. Won't academics suffer for the sake of winning? Won't the pressure to win lead to the corruption already experienced in the United States?

As far as Lyons is concerned, "The trend that seems to creep in is that you become an athlete first and a student second."

Lyons believes that not only would the pressure be on athletes to perform, but it would also be on

coaches to produce winners. However, Yeoman football coach Dave Pickett is not intimidated by the possible pressures that may accompany an athletic scholarship program.

"I would expect to be held accountable for my job. I have to produce. I will welcome the pressure and I think the emphasis on winning would put a visible interest in the sport."

The goal of winning as the sole objective of athletics is very much frowned upon, and perhaps rightly so. Yet in every other facet of life, when people strive to win, often at the expense of all else, it is perceived as showing determination and drive—two highly valued characteristics in our society.

Nobby Wirkowsky, co-ordinator of men's athletics at York, points out, "When it comes to athletics, winning is a no-no, but what's wrong with people trying to be their best?"

It has been suggested by some that the corrupt and unethical dealings that have permeated the American scholarship system would never occur in Canadian universities, simply because our smaller system could be much more easily policed.

Some feel this to be an overly naive and short-sighted view. Rules are made to be broken and inevitably we would be faced with the same problems as our counterparts in the United States.

Being aware of American mistakes puts Canada in a most advantageous position. Americans are only now trying to save an already decaying scholarship program by instituting regulations and penalties for their infraction. A Canadian system could have regulations right from the start, with stiff enough penalties to avoid the problems experienced in the U.S.

Pete Axthelm of *Newsweek* magazine has suggested a framework of regulations which should keep a scholarship program from going sour. Even if the CIAU adopted two of these regulations, it might keep its system under control.

One regulation states, "Every school should be required to appoint a faculty committee to oversee academic performance by athletes. It would report to the college president...on silly course loads or lack of attendance." Such a committee would ensure that athletes on scholarships maintain the proper relationship between academics and athletics.

The second regulation deals with the penalties for breaking the rules. If certain coaches are caught breaking recruiting regulations or undermining the authority of the faculty committee by "talking professors into going easy on certain athletes", the penalties should be of such a nature that he coach would think twice before abusing the system.

Axthelm has suggested suspending the season schedule of any team whose coach (or anyone else involved with that team) is caught cheating.

Indiana University basketball coach Bobby Knight emphasizes the importance of having serious penalties for those who take advantage of the system. "Cheating in college athletics is like messing around with another guy's wife. It's not bad until you get caught. But you might think twice

if you knew that the guy who caught you was sure to have a gun in his hand."

Apart from the problems, a scholarship program brings numerous advantages which have to be considered.

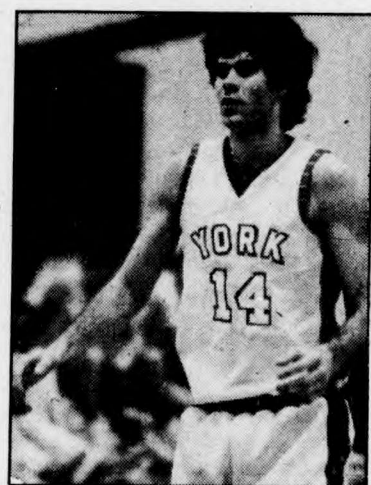
The consensus among coaches and athletes seems to be that scholarships would greatly improve the quality of college sports in Canada.

Yeoman volleyball coach Wally Dyba firmly believes that scholarships would make the Canadian sporting community that much more professional. He says, "We would do things in a classy manner, not in a rinky-dink way. We'd clean up our act." Dyba also feels that athletic scholarships would create more developmental incentive and do much for Canadian sport on an international level.

World-class runner Angella Taylor, one of the many York athletes who favour athletic scholarships, believes they provide "an incentive to stay in Canada".

It is logical to assume that scholarships would make college sports much more competitive, if only by keeping many top-notch Canadian athletes from attending American schools.

The increased quality of competition would start a chain of events which would have beneficial results, both for the individual universities, in terms of increased revenue, and for amateur sport in Canada. Better quality would bring more public



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David Coulthard: Ontario is fighting a losing battle.

attention, including more media coverage, which is now sadly lacking. Athletes could realize they needn't go south of the border to get attention and recognition.

Despite the possible advantages the skeptics remain. Mary Lyons believes that scholarships do more harm than good in the long run.

She admits the advantages of scholarships, but believes that, "there are so many cons on the other side of the line, that it is not worth getting into that whole ball game and all the problems that go along with it."

Perhaps the issue ought to be addressed on a more philosophical note. Where do athletics fit within the framework of Canadian universities? What is the goal of college athletics in Canada?

The fact is that college athletics in Canada are, for the most part, regarded as a trivial afterthought. Many believe that the development of Canadian athletes is not

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Barb Whibbs: improving programs is not enough.

American system would infiltrate the Canadian program. Many U.S. schools have been known to falsify student transcripts, give credit for courses never attended and break recruiting regulations as set down by the NCAA.

Bob McCown, a former broadcaster at Toronto's CKFH radio station, and a native American who is quite familiar