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Declining the Big East: A Case Study of the College of the Holy Cross

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This case study examines Holy Cross' decision not to join the Big East Conference in 1979. Utilizing a contextualist approach, it highlights the long-term impact the decision has had on the institution and athletic department. Data were gathered by interviewing the two most influential decision makers, the president and athletic director, with over 50 years of experience at Holy Cross. Additionally, a review of archival data and over 300 documents including administrators' correspondence and letters, newspaper articles, magazines and websites related to Holy Cross athletics was conducted. Findings are presented chronologically to show the sequence of each category as it relates to the organizational change. Results indicated that although Big East Conference affiliation presented many opportunities due to the significant increase in national exposure of college basketball, administrators prioritized the academic focus of the institution and refused to sacrifice it in the pursuit of big-time athletics. The ripple effect of such a decision inevitably resulted in numerous organizational changes.

Introduction

Decisions regarding intercollegiate athletics have major ramifications for an institution, often resulting in substantial organizational change. This is because intercollegiate athletics has become a large part of a university identity, particularly through

the commercialization and popularity of Division I college athletics. The use of athletics to help market an institution has become a well-known reason why schools continue to pour resources into supporting a Division I program (Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2010; Bruening & Lee, 2007; Clark, Apostolopoulou,

Branvold, & Synowka, 2009). For instance, some institutions attempt to use their athletic teams to develop a brand identity for both the institution and the athletic teams; however, many institutions cannot rely on following the traditional path of building brand equity, as traditions or norms can take decades or even centuries to build (Dooley, 2013). Many schools “do not possess enough brand equity” on their own to create a strong brand and often rely on conference affiliation to help establish media attention and go from a regional to a national attraction (Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998, p.7). Thus, one of the most important decisions in athletics can be conference membership.

In today’s college athletic environment, being in a strong conference can provide an institution many tangible (financial resources, television and bowl game appearances, improved recruitment/retention) and intangible opportunities (prestige, status, image) (Groza, 2010; Hoffer & Pincin 2015; Quirk, 2004; Solomon, 2012; Weaver, 2013). To improve their chances at these opportunities, many institutions feel it is necessary to realign to a perceived “better” conference, (Kramer, 2016; Sweitzer, 2009).

Historically, conferences have been developed based on a like-minded philosophy of athletic competition, and similar expectations and constraints (i.e., academic policies, financial capabilities) (Covell & Barr, 2010; Leibowitz, 2011). Thelin (1996) states that conference members typically “agree to work together

yet compete against each other while showing mutual respect and comparable academic standards” (p. 129). Conference alliance becomes very important to an athletic department and the university because administrators believe that they are “judged by the company they keep”, with one of the most public associations being an athletic conference (Weaver, 2010, p. 144). The conference with which a college team is affiliated may also impact the perceived quality of the institution and the athletic department’s brand (Gladden et al., 1998). This chase for improved opportunities is known as the college athletics Arms Race, where schools constantly invest more money into their athletic department to provide better resources than their competitors, particularly in revenue generating sports (Fulks, 2015; Oriard, 2009; Sperber, 2000). However, the chase is very expensive and often not profitable. In 2013-14, only 24 Division I athletic departments recognized a profit; all other schools required the institution to provide allocated revenues (student fees, tuition, institutional operational dollars) to supplement losses (Fulks, 2015).

Due to the major investment required at the highest level of Division I, not all institutions believe that supporting college athletics, including moving athletic conferences is a wise decision. In 1979, the College of the Holy Cross declined an opportunity to join the newly created Big East Conference consisting of well-established basketball programs. Since that time, Holy Cross’ decision has been debated because of the strong athletic

history Holy Cross experienced prior to 1979, and the notoriety the Big East has brought to their members (Booth, 2008; Fanikos, 2013; McFarlane, 2012; Wingerter, 2011). Mike Vaccaro (2009) wrote, "It [creating the Big East] was such an outside-the-box idea that not everyone wanted in right away: Holy Cross actually declined the invite, a fact over which its alumni have been torturing themselves for 30 years" (p.54). However, to this point the decision has not been examined from the perspective of the key decision makers at Holy Cross. Thus, to achieve the purpose of the study, which was to examine Holy Cross' decision not to join the Big East Conference in 1979, three primary research questions were addressed through the lens of organizational change theory:

1. Why did the College of Holy Cross decline the invitation to join the Big East?
2. What was administrators' rationale for the decision?
3. What was the impact such an organizational change had on the athletic department and institution?

Review of Literature

There is a growing body of literature on organizational change in college athletics, specifically a change in athletic conference affiliation. The emphasis of conference affiliation has become increasingly important due to changes in NCAA governance structure that continues to shift power to the major Division I football-playing conferences, now

commonly referred to as Power 5 Conferences (Maxcy 2004; Weaver, 2015). In addition to the impact of the NCAA structural changes, conference affiliation research became more prominent from the mid-1980s to present day as Division I institutions began to align in athletic conferences in order to maximize revenues, increase prestige and enhance an institution's profile (Gladden et al., 1998; Shulman & Bowen, 2002; Siegfried & Gardner-Burba, 2004). Two major changes in Division I conference affiliation presented new cases for examining subsequent organizational change. The first change occurred in 2004-2005 when the Atlantic Coast Conference added three former Big East Conference schools (Miami, Virginia Tech, and Boston College), and the second being a major shift in Division I conferences in 2010 when the Big Ten Conference added the University of Nebraska. Each decision led to a ripple effect of conference membership changes igniting an emphasis on conference affiliation research (Tribou, 2011).

Much of the literature highlights the benefits associated with changing conference affiliation. For instance, Sweitzer (2009) provided an historical exploration of schools that have changed division and/or conferences and found that membership in a major Division I conference has significant tangible benefits; including the largest television contracts, fundraising efforts, and game attendance, which also bring increased revenue possibilities, and enhanced academic and athletic outcomes (Groza, 2010; Kramer

& Trivette, 2012; Kramer, 2016). Several studies demonstrate that changing athletic conferences, divisions, or membership associations is an effective strategy for fulfilling organizational aspirations and maximizing prestige (Cunningham & Ashley, 2001; Sweitzer, 2009; Weaver, 2010). Groza (2010) studied 21 Division I schools that changed athletic conferences and found that a change in athletic conference can increase football game attendance. Kramer and Trivette (2012) found that student applications increased following conference realignment. Most recently, Kramer (2016) conducted a multi-case design on three distinct universities that switched conferences and found that improved financial stability, increasing institutional visibility, aligning with peers, and increasing prestige were categories across all cases. Although an institution's athletic conference helps universities develop a high quality reputation (Abbey, Capaldi, & Lombardi, 2011), not all research has shown benefits directly resultant from upgrading the institution. Weiner (2009) found that although schools and conferences had an increase in financial gains, peer group prestige was sacrificed.

The exploration of the de-emphasis or "de-escalation" of athletics, while limited, has been a growing area of research in college athletics (Hutchinson & Bouchet, 2014). Hutchinson (2013) interviewed 32 "decision makers" from eight institutions that deemphasized athletics by either reclassifying to a lower level, removing football or restructuring the

athletic department. Reasoning for their decision included a lack of resources to maintain their current athletic program, the inability to maintain or enhance the student-athlete experience and a disconnect between the institutional philosophy and the current athletic department philosophy. Using the same eight institutions, Hutchinson and Bouchet (2013) examined the exit strategy of this sample and found that providing objective data to stakeholders and the timing of the decision are important factors in a successful deemphasizing strategy. Finally, Hutchinson and Bouchet (2014) studied the same cohort and concluded that the eight schools studied were able to achieve "commitment redirection" within a college athletic environment where the norm is to increase commitment (p. 158). The organizational change of de-escalation does not necessarily result in negative institutional outcomes. Jones (2014) studied three FCS schools and found that dropping football was not associated with a drop in freshman admissions applications. One institution, Siena College, even saw an increase in applications after dropping football. Finally, one case study by Bochet and Hutchinson (2012) discussed the University of Chicago's decision to deemphasize football and not follow other peer institutions to the Big Ten Conference. In fact, leadership at the time felt their peer associations in athletics were "considered undesirable and unwanted when linking the Chicago brand with stakeholder and public perception" (p.108).

Similar to the case study methodology used by Bochet and Hutchinson to study the University of Chicago, this historical case presents the story of the College of the Holy Cross, its athletic department, and what some view as a missed opportunity to have joined one of the best basketball conferences in college athletics history. Using Pettigrew's (1985a) contextualist approach, it examines the role of conference affiliation, the landscape of college athletics over a 30-year period, and provides administrative analysis on the factors that influenced the decision not to join the Big East Conference. To better understand the decision not to join the Big East, it is important to examine it broadly and in the context with which the decision was made. The case provides administrators' rationale for the decision made, including the impact such an organizational change had on the athletic department and institution.

Theoretical Framework

Using Pettigrew's contextualist approach (Figure 1), the following case study examines Holy Cross' decision not to join the Big East Conference in 1979. Specifically, the case examines the context in which the decision was made in the late 1970s and 1980s. It also highlights the impact the decision has had on the athletic department and the institution as a whole. Because the Big East was established as a basketball conference, this study emphasizes the impact the decision has had on the men's basketball program at Holy Cross and the subse-

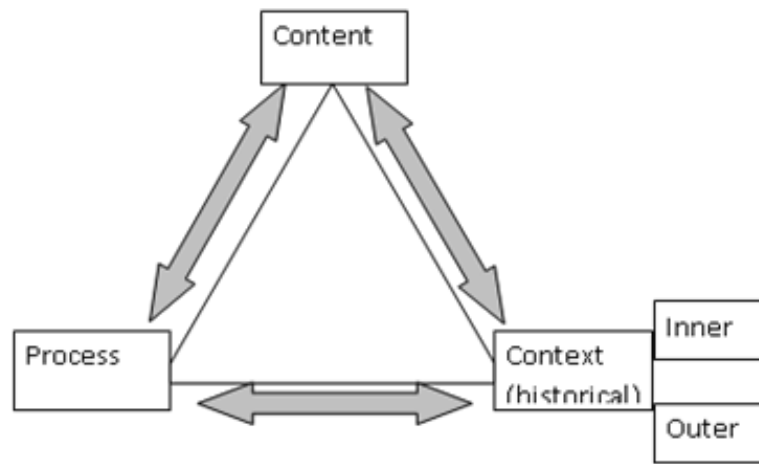
quent impact on the athletic department and the institution.

The contextualist approach provides a framework for the study by examining organizational change using three constructs: how change happened (process), what changed over time (content) and why change occurred (context). The contextualist approach frames organizational change as, "a continuous process for organizations, one whereby strategic changes can be a product of and an enabler of many consequent decisions" (Pettigrew, 1987, p. 271). In addition, this model allows for consideration of the role that decision makers play in terms of defining the linkages between content, context, and the process of strategic change. Each dimension of Pettigrew's contextualist approach is described in greater detail in the following sections.

Process

Pettigrew (1987) describes the term process as it "refers to the actions, reactions, and interactions from the varied interested parties as they seek to move the organization from its present to its future state" (pp.657-658). An analysis of the process, using the contextualist approach addresses the "how" of change. The process itself is seen as a continuous, interdependent series of events that are being used to clarify the origins, maintenance, and result of some phenomenon. According to Pettigrew (1985b, 1987), an understanding of process requires an analysis of the context, such as the social, political, and cultural elements

Figure 1: Conceptual Model for Organizational Change in an Intercollegiate Athletics



*Model Adapted from Pettigrew’s Contextualist Approach Model to Organizational Change

Process: actions, reactions, and interactions from the various interested parties. How do we change?

Content: aspects of the organization that are being changed. What could change?

Context: *Outer context* – historical, social, economic, political, and competitive environment in which the organization operates. Why did these environments influence the decision to reclassify? *Inner context* - organizational elements that influence the change process

that can shape the power relationships that structure the change, as well as the content. The impact of the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA) decision to emphasize the importance of conference affiliation and the subsequent reaction from Division I member institutions during the late 1970s, including Holy Cross greatly influenced the role of athletics in higher education.

Content

Content refers to the “aspects of the organization that are being changed. For example, an organization may be seeking to change “technology, manpower, products, geographical positioning, or corporate culture” (Pettigrew, 1985a,

pp.657-658). An analysis of the content, using the contextualist approach addresses the “what” of change. An analysis of content also requires a simultaneous examination of both process and context. Holy Cross athletics (as well as the institution) was changing, regardless of this decision. The attention to content provides a thick, rich description of the impact of moving to mid-major conferences (Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC) and the Patriot League).

Context

Context is separated into two categories, inner context and outer context. Pettigrew (1987) described inner context as those organizational elements that

influence the change process. The ideas of change will pass through the inner context. The outer context refers to the “social, economic, political, and competitive environment in which the organization operates” (Pettigrew, 1985a, p. 657). Much of the “why” of change is derived from an analysis of context, particularly the inner context. Nelson (2003) also notes that crucial to the contextualist approach is recognition of the interaction between inner and outer environments. Influence before, during, and after the change of athletics at Holy Cross may be due to the inner context, such as the institution’s management strategy and structure, on-campus traditions and cultures, the intercollegiate athletics history and culture, and political makeup of the University. Examples of external environments that may have drastically influenced the decision were (and still are) the intercollegiate athletics environment, the higher education environment, the local and regional community, as well as the national college athletics constituency.

Although the contextualist model is most often used to examine strategic change in business, some research has applied this model to sport. Caza (2000) employed Pettigrew’s model to examine organizational change within the Canadian Amateur Boxing Association (CABA). Using a participant observation methodology, Caza studied strategic innovation over a decade. Applying one element of Pettigrew’s model, context, Caza found that consistency in leadership style was viewed as an important factor

in determining the success of organizational change. Similarly, Cousens, Babiak, and Slack (2001) explored the NBA’s shift in marketing techniques over a 17 year period by examining over 80 documents and conducting semi-structured interviews of two senior level marketing executives. Findings revealed the multifaceted approach by the NBA to initiate such a complex organizational change and find success in implementing a shift from traditional marketing to relationship marketing. Additionally, the authors concluded that the contextualist approach “represents a meaningful way to understand a transformation such as the one experienced by the NBA” (p.351). Thibault and Babiak (2005) applied Pettigrew’s approach to discuss the reasons for a change to an athlete-centered Canadian sport system over a 20-year period. The contextualist approach was used in this study to “allow for a more complete picture of the variables involved in organizational change” (p.127).

The contextualist approach was also used as a framework by Girginou and Sandanski (2008) to study process of changing over a 25-year period in three Bulgarian national sport organizations (NSO), swimming, weightlifting and field hockey, as the country transformed from state socialism to democratic state. Findings from observations, discussions, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews with seven key sport officials from the three federations concluded that the NSOs organizational transformations was a discovery process compli-

cated by the changing political, economic and social environment.

Specific to college athletics, the use of Pettigrew's contextualist approach has only been utilized by few researchers, being first introduced by Weaver (2007) to study reclassification to Division I. Creating a modified model, Weaver examined two higher education institutions' reclassification to Division I. Among other prominent themes, Weaver found that key decision makers at both schools believed that the move to Division I would improve institutional profile. Similar to Caza, Weaver (2010) further examined the impact each school's history (inner context) had on the decision to reclassify to Division I. For both institutions, changing their historical narrative was an important factor for why they moved to Division I. Finally, Collins (2012) conducted a case study on a junior college transforming to a four-year NCAA Division II. The development of an athletics strategy and the important role of key figures (i.e., president, vice presidents, athletic director) on the implementation of the athletic strategy as the institution was transforming to a four-year institution were key findings from this study. Although there is a growing body of literature that examines an organizational change such as conference affiliation, there are still significant gaps. First, Slack & Parent (2006) observe that while few studies within sport management have used Pettigrew's model, the richness of data provided by the contextualist approach make it a viable method for

enhancing the understanding of sport organizations. In addition, Byers, Slack and Parent (2012) advocate the benefits of a multilevel analysis and suggest using the contextualist approach to study changes over the length of the period in which the change took place. The opportunity to collect rich data from two key decision-makers and the access to archival data and popular media over a 30-year period provides depth in examining such an impactful organizational change rarely seen in college athletic research.

The case also examines college athletics in an environment that has been frequently overlooked. Much of the literature on conference affiliation has grown in the last two decades but misses the major NCAA restructure that occurred in the 1970s and the subsequent changes from that restructure. The development and growth of such an influential peer association, the Big East Conference, has not been researched, particularly from an historical approach. The study adds to the body of research that explores the move away from upward mobility in college athletics. Although growing, Bouchet and Hutchinson (2012) called for more studies to add to the "paucity of research" that examines the organizational decision to deemphasize athletics (p.97). Specifically, using organizational change theory to examine sport this case study is unique and adds to the literature in several ways. First, the use of the contextualist approach in college athletic research provides a valuable framework to study change over time. The strength

of this approach allowed the researcher to design a case study that provided thick, rich data using questions that explored the totality of the organizational change. The study presents a unique view of the change. Much of the popular media literature suggests that the need to emphasize college athletics is of the utmost importance. For administrators to make another decision would be detrimental to the school. Yet the design of this study explored the rationale from an administrators' point of view, often overlooked. Second, the insight of the two key decision makers, the volumes of archival data, observation, and document analysis of newspapers over three decades provides trustworthiness of the data. Findings from the study are unique in that they are presented in a chronological manner. The reader can identify important categories associated with the organizational change but it is presented in a "time line approach" so the reader can see the ripple effect of change. Last, this work adds to the conversation of deemphasis in athletics, with arguably one of the most important cases in recent history. Much of the other literature uses cases that are older (University of Chicago) or identifies schools that have not had much success at the Division I level. Thus, the decision to deemphasize athletics may not have been such an impactful decision. The organizational change at Holy Cross was, and is, transformational and to this day, debatable.

Methodology

Case Study Methodology

Because of the explanatory nature of this study, a qualitative approach is most appropriate as it allows the researcher to gather open-ended responses used to answer the central question in this study: why administrators chose not to join the Big East. Creswell (1998) points out that qualitative studies allow the researcher to delve deep into the field to describe what is happening. Qualitative research is useful for discussing and analyzing sub-cultures such as college athletics within universities and examining a group in depth (Creswell, 1998).

The historical case study design takes the reader into the university setting with a vividness and detail not typically present in more analytical reporting formats (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This case study permitted the exploration of a single phenomenon, The College of the Holy Cross and its strategy of rejecting conference affiliation, as a way to identify and clarify the relationship of athletics to the mission of the institution. Schramm (1971) describes the essence of a case study by stating, "the central tendency among all types of case studies, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result" (p.12). Finally, the justification of a case study to understand higher education administrators' decision to de-emphasize athletics was highlighted by Bouchet and Hutchinson (2012) by stating, "observing de-escalation strategies in a historical set-

ting provided insight into the dynamics of a university athletic department and the stakeholders who influence behavior” (p. 102).

Data Collection

To avoid potential restrictions due to limited sources, Yin (2003) and Creswell (1998) suggest that data be collected from numerous sources. An extensive review of archival data and documents spanning over 40 years, including administrators’ correspondence and letters, university documents, newspaper articles, magazines and websites related to Holy Cross athletics were gathered from the Department of Special Collections at the College of the Holy Cross. In-depth interviews were also conducted with key administrators. Interview questions were developed in three distinct phases: questions that addressed before, during and after the decision to decline the Big East. For example, questions included, but were not limited to: Discuss the environment on campus prior to the consideration of conference affiliation? What was happening in college athletics during this time you were considering this organizational change? How did various constituencies respond to your decision? Why did you think this was (or was not) the best strategy for your school at that time? Now that you have had time to reflect on your decision, please discuss your thoughts on your strategy to not join the Big East.

The researcher also visited campus on two separate occasions to meet with the

interview participants and tour the campus. At the time, the researcher toured the campus (both formally and informally) gathered admissions brochures, and observed athletic and academic facilities. Observation notes were recorded and used to help shape some of the questions for the administrators. Documents were also reviewed on an ongoing basis to help tailor questions to each specific interviewee.

Multiple interviews were conducted with two former administrators at the College of the Holy Cross who were instrumental in the decision not to pursue Big East membership, former president, Fr. John Brooks and former athletic director, Ronald Perry. These participants combined for over 50 years of administrative experience at Holy Cross and had unique perspectives on the decision, including its long-term impact (Doyle, 2015; Hevesi, 2012). Initial interviews with subjects were conducted over the phone and then a follow up in person interview that lasted between 90-120 minutes was conducted on campus. Each participant held a different administrative role, thus the ongoing review of documentation served as a means for adding appropriate questions to highlight their individual experience.

In addition to the documents gathered at the College of Holy Cross, documents were also gathered from local, regional, and national newspapers and magazines that span the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. In total over 300+ documents were reviewed for information on topics

such as: the impact of athletics on the overall institutional profile at Holy Cross, athletic success of Holy Cross prior to the 1970s, the impact of college athletic governing bodies, including but not limited to: the NCAA, the ECAC, the Ivy League, the MAAC, the Patriot League, the internal correspondence of evaluating the pros/cons of conference affiliation, and popular media debate over the decline of Holy Cross athletics.

Data Analysis

Stake (1995) suggests that qualitative analysis is concerned with understanding the phenomena rather than stating an explanation; thus analysis of the data for this case study was to “tell the story” (p. 39). In an effort to do so, the analysis is guided by a strategy of thick, rich description. Data were collected and analyzed over several rounds of information gathering and analysis. Once all initial documentation was gathered, analysis of the data was performed on the archival records and institutional documents to categorize according to the elements of Pettigrew’s model. Additional documents from popular media were analyzed and added to support initial categorization. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) support this type of analysis by stating, “We should never collect data without substantial analysis going on simultaneously” (p.2).

Once each interview was complete, audio tapes were transcribed and all transcriptions were analyzed. Categorization based on the definitions and key words found in Pettigrew’s Model (See Figure

1) was conducted to classify central ideas that emerged from the interviews and the documents. The categories from each interview were given back to the subjects as a form of member checking. To strengthen trustworthiness within categorization, peer debriefing was employed with an additional impartial reader. Transcripts and initial categorizations were reviewed and feedback was provided back to the researcher. Data triangulation was used as information was gathered from numerous forms of data including observations, interviews, institutional documents, archival records, and popular media accounts. All steps were completed to reduce known limitations when using qualitative data analysis methods (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

Findings

Because the case is conveyed within the context of the growth of the Big East, this study emphasizes the potential impact of conference affiliation. The findings are presented in a chronological structure, while using the contextualist approach as a framework (also see Figure 1). Yin (2003) supports the chronological structure in case study research when there is a sequence of events that help tell the story. Utilizing the elements in the contextualist framework, findings provide rationale for the decision within the context of college athletics over a long period of time, the processes of the decision, and the impact not to join the Big East on the Holy Cross constituency (content). In line with Nelson (2003),

Table 1

Timeline of Categories Presented

Category	Time Frame Represented	Prominent Element of the Contextualist Approach
Institutional Background	1843-present	Inner Context
The Athletic Tradition	Prior to 1979	Inner Context/Content
The Formation of the Big East Conference	1979-present	Outer Context/Process
Growth of College Basketball	1980s-present	Outer Context/Process
Achieving National Recognition: The Impact of ESPN and beyond	1980s	Process/Outer Context
The company we no longer keep: The Jesuit Association & the Loss of Athletic Rivals	1980s-present	Content
An Athletics Identity Crisis	1980s	Inner Context/Content
Finding a Home: The Formation of the Patriot League	1984-present	Process
The Patriot League and the impact on Holy Cross Basketball	1990-present	Content
Administration's Rationale: Protecting the Academic Mission	1970s-present	Inner Context/Content

these findings highlight the ongoing relationship between the three concepts (context, process, content) which is central to understanding the complexities of the organizational change.

Institutional Background: Understanding the Inner Context

Holy Cross was the first Catholic college in the New England area, and one of the first in the United States, to open its doors. It has long maintained a commitment to undergraduate education

and a liberal arts education built on a foundation formed by the Jesuit tradition. Holy Cross has built a reputation of having great faculty-student interaction with a student population of just over 3,100 undergraduate students. As other schools, including Jesuit colleges and universities, began to expand enrollment and in some cases, add graduate programs, Holy Cross has kept class sizes small and faculty attention on providing undergraduate students with a rigorous liberal arts education (“About Holy Cross”, 2019).

Holy Cross became more academically rigorous under Fr. Raymond Swords, president of Holy Cross from 1960-70. That effort was enhanced under his successor, Fr. John Brooks, president from 1970-94. Fr. Brooks reflected on the academic mission:

I caught on with what Father Swords was doing. And I simply followed what he did. And I had one goal in mind: I saw a chance for us to become one of the finest undergraduate liberal arts colleges in the country. Holy Cross is one of 28 Jesuit institutions, but is the only one that is strictly undergraduate liberal arts so we don't have any law, medical or graduate schools. We just stick with the undergraduate, focus on that, keep it tight. (J. Brooks, personal communication, June 11, 2012)

This tight focus allowed Holy Cross to flourish academically during Fr. Brooks' tenure. Today, Holy Cross is described as, "a school with a strong academic tradition" "academically rigorous" and "more selective" ("About Holy Cross", 2019). In fact, Holy Cross is consistently ranked high in academic rankings found in Forbes (#22 in national top liberal arts colleges), US News & World Report (#35 in best liberal arts colleges) and Wall Street Journal (#4 in best Catholic colleges ("Holy Cross Points", 2019).

In addition to the student body being academically gifted, it has also become more diverse; growing from the all-male,

mostly white New England Catholic students of the 1970s to a more open campus, accepting students of diverse backgrounds. While president, Fr. Brooks was instrumental in recruiting, retaining and graduating African-American males to campus, and making Holy Cross co-educational, as women were welcomed in 1972 (Brady, 2012; Kuzniewski, 1999). Although very controversial at the time, his efforts to diversify the student body changed Holy Cross forever (Brady, 2012). Currently, Holy Cross' student population is 48% female with 25% minority and international students ("Holy Cross At A Glance, 2019").

In addition to these major changes during his administration, Fr. Brooks strongly influenced the direction of the athletic program. He always felt that presidents should lead athletics. The president, not the athletic director or the coaches, needed to be responsible for the athletic department (Kuzniewski, 1999). This message was far from the common practices of the 1970s.

I thought the NCAA had done a lousy job and I would have wished for the presidents to take a stronger stand. I used to go to these NCAA meetings, and they [the presidents] were weak. They voted for whatever was good for the coach? Of course the coaches were strong people and they argued their case, and that's fair. I don't mind that, but you have to be able to say no to them when they were not doing the right

thing. The president is in charge! (J. Brooks, personal communication, June 11, 2012).

During his time as president, Fr. Brooks faced numerous challenges with Division I athletics and the impact it had on Holy Cross' athletic program. Among the most hotly debated was the decision not to pursue membership in the Big East.

The Athletic Tradition (Prior to 1979): Inner Context/Content

Prior to the formation of the Big East Conference, Holy Cross had a strong athletic tradition, particularly in football, baseball and men's basketball. In the early 20th Century, Holy Cross had established itself as one of the best athletic programs in New England. In 1949, Holy Cross played and lost in the Orange Bowl to the University of Miami ("2012-2013 Football Recruiting Guide", 2012). The baseball team won the NCAA National Championship (College World Series) in 1952 and remains the only team from the Northeast to have won the College World Series ("2012 Holy Cross Baseball Yearbook", 2012; Gearan, 2006).

When discussing the glory days of Holy Cross athletics, the conversation usually begins and ends with men's basketball. In the late 1940s, Holy Cross was recognized as a national basketball powerhouse, culminating with an NCAA National Championship in 1947 and an NCAA Final Four appearance in 1948.

Those teams featured Basketball Hall of Famer Bob Cousy (Buttell, 2007). The teams in the 50's also dominated, as All-Americans Togo Palazzi and Tommy Heinsohn led the Crusaders to multiple NCAA and National Invitational Tournament (NIT) appearances ("2018-2019 Men's Basketball Fact Book", 2019; Gearan, 2006). However, by the 1960s, the athletic programs, including men's basketball, had become mediocre.

Although the mid to late 60s and into the mid-1970s did not bring any postseason appearances, Holy Cross began to make a comeback on the national basketball scene starting in the early 1970s, led by new athletic director, Ronald Perry, who was hired by Fr. Brooks in 1972. Perry recalls the athletic department environment when he took over:

Things [in the athletic department] were in disarray. We had not had much success in many of our sports and what I tried to do was start to build some optimism and enthusiasm. One of the first things I did was I brought George Blaney back to coach [basketball] (R. Perry, personal conversation, June 11, 2012).

Coach Blaney '61, a Holy Cross Hall of Famer and basketball standout, had a rough two years in the beginning but began winning in 1974. The 20-8 Crusaders ended the 1974-75 season with an appearance in the NIT Tournament, their first postseason appearance since 1962. The following season resulted in another

NIT bid and reestablished Holy Cross' basketball brand as a "powerhouse" (McFarlane, 2012, para 3). Success continued into the next season as the 1975-76 team won the Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) North Conference Championship, beating Providence College (then ranked eighth in the Associated Press (AP) Polls) and advancing to the NCAA Tournament, where Holy Cross lost to top ranked Michigan ("2018-2019 Men's Basketball Fact Book", 2019).

As Holy Cross entered the 1977-78 basketball season, *Sports Illustrated* ranked the Crusaders the ninth best team in the country and the AP ranked them 18th (Papanek, 1977). Holy Cross would climb to as high as 12 in the AP, but would slide out of the rankings midway through the year and end the year failing to make post-season play. The 1978-79 season rebounded with a 17-win season and an appearance in the NIT, losing to the University of Dayton in the first round ("2018-2019 Men's Basketball Fact Book", 2019). Perry reflected on that period of success:

Slowly but surely we started to come back and in about '75. We had a great recruiting class in '75 and that had Mike Vicens and Chris Potter. And then my son [Ronnie Perry] came in '76 and so in that span of '75 through '80 we were really the top team in New England. (R. Perry, personal conversation, June 11, 2012)

As Holy Cross established itself as an East Coast basketball power in the late 1970s, the landscape of college basketball was changing. National exposure, mostly due to increased television coverage, was taking Northeast recruits - that had years ago stayed and played close to home - to the South, where the Atlantic Coast Conference was flourishing and to the Midwest where the Big Ten had established itself as a location for East Coast talent (Wolff, 2011). Also in the late 1970s, the NCAA also implemented regulations on scheduling and the automatic bids to the men's basketball tournament. Because of these concerns, Dave Gavitt, the basketball coach and athletic director at Providence at the time, began discussing an idea to start a conference in the east that would be developed around established and successful basketball programs.

The Formation of the Big East Conference (Outer Context/Process)

The Big East Conference was formed in the spring of 1979 and began playing the following fall, with its first basketball conference consisting of seven teams: Boston College, Providence, Seton Hall, St. John's, Syracuse, Georgetown, and Connecticut ("Big East Conference History", 2019).

According to former Syracuse University athletic director, Jake Crouthamel, conversations about a new league began a year earlier in 1978, mainly due to aforementioned changes in NCAA

regulations in scheduling and the impact of automatic bids to the NCAA Tournament (Crouthamel, 2000). In 1978, the NCAA adopted a rule that said a team in a conference could not qualify for the NCAA tournament unless it had played every other team in the conference twice (home and away) (DeSilva, 1985). This rule had a dramatic impact on the schools in the ECAC, which was a loose collection of schools, many of whom played each other once or did not play each other at all. This forced a breakup of the more than 150 Division I schools loosely assembled in the ECAC to form smaller conferences. The Big East jumped quick to assemble major east coast basketball schools, with an opportunity for Holy Cross to join. Mr. Crouthamel writes:

These requirements forced independent institutions like the four (Syracuse, Providence, St. John's, Georgetown) of us to align and schedule schools with whom we had no interest or tradition. Self-determination was far better than being told who your partners would be, and so the four of us met for countless hours in countless sessions to determine the make-up of our new conference to be (Crouthamel, 2000, para 2).

The make-up was based on several factors, but the most prominent criteria was a strong men's basketball team. The athletic directors also wanted schools that were in cities with large media markets, spacious basketball arenas, and the

ability to take advantage of the growing sports market (Rhoden, 2012). The Big East Conference was an instant success. Of the seven teams, three (Georgetown, Syracuse, and St. John's) participated in the NCAA and two others (Connecticut and Boston College) played in the NIT. The seven original members of the Big East, were joined a year later by Villanova and began three decades of basketball dominance.

Since the inaugural year in 1979-80, the Big East had at least three teams go to the NCAA tournament during the 1980s. Twice (in 1984-85, 1987-88) six teams represented the conference in tournament play. Every team in the conference, including the University of Pittsburgh (who became a member in 1982), played at least once in the NCAA Tournament. The last team to reach the tournament was the University of Connecticut, which finally represented the Big East Conference during the 1989-90 season. Holy Cross, which decided to go in a different direction with athletics, including their men's basketball team, was not a part of the newly formed conference and the growth of the Big East basketball brand.

Growth of College Basketball (Outer Context/Process)

College basketball became a national obsession in the 1980s following the Larry Bird-Magic Johnson NCAA Championship game in 1979, which aired on NBC (Davis, 2009). However, NBC decided to get out of the college bas-

ketball business, even though they were responsible for one of the greatest network decisions in sport history, allowing viewers to move from one game to the next so exciting plays and buzzer beaters could be seen live. In 1982, CBS bid \$16 million for exclusive rights to the Final Four, while ESPN began broadcasting conference tournaments and the early rounds of the NCAA Tournament. This non-stop month-long focus on college basketball, featured the ability to view numerous games, often showing the best finishes live. More importantly, it led to the introduction of the “Cinderella” teams, which were schools who received unexpected national exposure because of their upset wins over basketball powerhouses. The tournament soon became a national phenomenon known as “March Madness” (Layden, 2012; Davis, 2009).

CBS continued to renegotiate its pact with the NCAA every few years until in November 1989, when it reached an agreement on a seven-year, \$1 billion contract (Gerard, 1989). In 2010, Turner Broadcasting partnered with CBS to offer the NCAA a 14-year, \$10.8 billion deal. That contract was re-negotiated and extended to 2032 and will now pay the NCAA an average of \$1.1 billion per season (Brady, 2016).

Achieving National Recognition: The Impact of ESPN and beyond (Process/Outer Context)

Prior to the formation of the Big East Conference, many Division I independent teams (those that did not have

a conference) were affiliated with the Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference (ECAC), which was a mini-version of the NCAA, was made up of approximately 150 east coast schools. At the time, the ECAC controlled all television rights and post-season opportunities, including their own ECAC tournaments, which was essentially a qualifier for additional postseason opportunities (NIT, NCAA). By starting the Big East and gaining an automatic qualifier bid to the NCAA basketball tournament, Big East members could control their own television package and work directly with networks. In addition to the interest from the major networks, the Big East began working with a new network at the time, ESPN, the first “all-sports” cable network. The formation of the Big East and the creation of ESPN, also headquartered in New England (Bristol, CT), created a symbiotic relationship (Marc, 2004).

As the Big East was growing quickly, so was ESPN. The timing and close proximity could not have been better. Immediately, conference rivalries began to form, and media outlets took notice. ESPN, among others, led the charge to highlight players and turned coaches into strong polarizing personalities. Jake Crouthamel, said,

I credit a lot of it [capturing the nation’s attention] to the coaches in the league. People like John Thompson [Georgetown], Lou Carnesecca [St. John’s], Rollie Massimino [Villanova], and Jim Boeheim [Syracuse] gave the

league an identity. And I believe our success fed the success of ESPN, which also was a new kid on the block at the time. (Pitoniak, 2005, p.5).

Throughout the 1980s, the Big East became a staple in ESPN programming, including the formation of Big Monday, the Monday evening showcase of college basketball, which has lasted well over three decades. Every Monday night during basketball season, ESPN featured Big East teams playing in prime time to sold out basketball arenas such as Madison Square Garden, the Carrier Dome, or the Capital Center.

This extended the popularity and the brand of the conference, which was quickly picked up by other networks. During the 1984-85 basketball season, 29 games involving Big East teams were aired on NBC or CBS, at the time a record number of games for one conference to appear on network television in one season (Kirkpatrick, Wolff, & Kelly, 1985).

In addition to television, *Sports Illustrated* had routinely covered not only the Conference and its teams, but had in-depth features on its players and coaches, giving readers insight into the personalities of the conference. Articles on the growth of Georgetown basketball (Gilbert, 1980), the Louie and Bowie show in Syracuse (DelNagro, 1980), the easy-going nature of New Yorker Chris Mullin at St. John's (Kirkpatrick, 1984), and the flash of Dwayne "Pearl" Wash-

ington (Wolff, 1986), allowed the conference to gain an identity as a physical brand of basketball built by playground legends and larger than life coaches. In 1985, *Sports Illustrated* writers debated the best conference in college basketball, with the Big East being one of the three considerations (other conferences were the well-established ACC and Big Ten) (Kirkpatrick, et al., 1985).

The company we no longer keep: The Jesuit Association & the Loss of Athletic Rivals (Content)

Perhaps most painful to the growth of the Big East was the attention of two of Holy Cross' rivals, who were getting national recognition in athletics: Georgetown and Boston College. Although different in institutional structure (Georgetown and Boston College are strong research universities, focusing on both undergraduate and graduate education and have enrollments that exceed Holy Cross), both Georgetown and Boston College share similarities to Holy Cross in that they are private institutions built on a commitment to the Jesuit mission, are academically rigorous, and had experienced athletic success.

The formation and identity of the College of the Holy Cross has been influenced by Georgetown, which was the first Catholic college in the United States, beginning in 1789 ("About Holy Cross, 2019"). In fact, Holy Cross would not have started without Georgetown. "Unable to secure an educational charter from the Massachusetts legislature, the

College of the Holy Cross conferred degrees under the authority of Georgetown University from 1843-1865' ("Holy Cross History", 2019). Perhaps more importantly, Georgetown supplied the most valuable resource – talented personnel. The founder of Holy Cross, Fr. Benedict J. Fenwick studied and worked at Georgetown before moving to Holy Cross. Also, the first president of Holy Cross, Thomas Mulledy, was also president at Georgetown. "Many of the other Jesuit administrators and teachers, who were to introduce Ignatian educational concepts into New England, gained experience at Georgetown" (Kuzniewski, 1999, p.14). This pattern has continued until today, as Holy Cross' current president, Fr. Philip L. Boroughs, was Georgetown's first-ever vice president for mission and ministry from 2003-2011 ("Holy Cross About", 2019).

The association with Georgetown was also growing in men's basketball. The teams played each other once every year from 1967-1980, and were very competitive playing to an almost even draw (Georgetown won 7 of the last 13 games played). However, in the late 1970s, Georgetown had begun to lay a foundation of basketball success with the hiring of John Thompson. Coach Thompson and the university placed an emphasis on improving and developing a more diverse basketball team (Gilbert, 1980). Since then the direction of their basketball programs has gone in two different ways. As a member of the Big East, Georgetown has appeared in 30 NCAA Tourna-

ments, appearing five times in the Final Four, the National Championship game three times, and winning one National Championship (1983-84) (Georgetown NCAA Basketball Tournament History, 2019). The two teams have not met on the basketball court since February 23, 1980 when Georgetown beat Holy Cross 105-78.

Although Georgetown University has had a tremendous influence, without question the biggest athletic rival for the Crusaders had always been another Jesuit school, Boston College. However, this rivalry started to become one sided in the early 1960s. Mike Madden, a reporter from the *Providence Journal* described the separation that existed:

In the decade from 1962 to 1972, confusion was the best word to describe the HC sports program. While one group of Jesuit administrators 40 miles down the pike at Newton willingly countenanced a drive for national sports prominence at Boston College, another group of Jesuits in Worcester decided academic quality was incompatible with athletic quality (Madden, p. C1, 1975).

The Boston College rivalry dates back to a disputed football game in November 1896 and has continued in various athletic contests since (Kuzniewski, 1999). The football series, called one of the greatest in college football history, discontinued in 1986 after Boston College, who had decided to play Division I-A football

(current day FBS designation), dominated the series in the 1970s and 80s against Holy Cross, who chose to play Division I-AA (current day FCS football) (Carew, 2002).

The two schools also met on the basketball court and developed a great rivalry, as some of New England's finest players would compete as members of the BC or Holy Cross basketball teams. Bob Cousy, who in addition to his playing days at Holy Cross also served as a basketball coach at Boston College said of the rivalry, "I don't care if its basketball, football or tiddledywinks, BC vs. HC is a very strong, intense rivalry" (Baccardi, 1980, p.15). The teams had played each other regularly since 1906, and annually from 1945-2006 with Holy Cross winning 58 of the 112 contests. However, since Boston College joined the Big East and later the Atlantic Coast Conference, Holy Cross has only managed to win two of the last 18 contests.

Those numbers, however, might not tell the entire story. Prior to the formation of the Big East, Holy Cross had more than held their own against their rivals from Boston, winning 11 of the 20 games played during the 1970s. As athletic directors began forming the idea of a basketball-centric conference in the spring of 1978, Holy Cross had won six of the last seven meetings against Boston College. One could argue that based on that recent success, Holy Cross was a better basketball program at the time than Boston College. Yet, Boston College joined the newly formed Big East and

has gone to the NCAA Tournament 11 times as a representative of the Big East Conference and another three times as a member of the ACC (Boston College's first season in the ACC was 2005-06). Although Holy Cross has been to the NCAA tournament seven times since the 1979 season, it has hardly captured the national exposure that the BC basketball program has been able to achieve.

Perhaps the greatest separation between rivals occurred on the football field in the early 1980s when Boston College captured national attention due to the meteoric rise of Heisman Trophy winner Doug Flutie. His ability to lead the team to dramatic victories and bring national attention to Boston College from 1981-84 was unmatched. The crescendo of the attention came on November 23, 1984, when Flutie connected with Gerard Phelan on a "Hail-Mary" pass on the last play of the game to beat the University of Miami, 47-45. Boston College finished that season 10-2 and ranked fifth in the final polls. The national attention and subsequent rise in attention and applications to Boston College became known as the "Flutie Effect" (Pope & Pope, 2009).

The 1980s: An Athletics Identity Crisis (Inner Context/Content)

As the Big East basketball programs began to take shape, and the nation became enthralled with college athletics, Holy Cross was searching for a new athletic identity. While other schools placed an increased emphasis on athletics, in

particular the men's basketball and football programs, Holy Cross was deemphasizing their athletic programs. In addition to their rejection of the Big East, Holy Cross declined the jump to I-A in football (Cebasuolo, 1982). When the NCAA broke Division I football into two groups (D I-A and D II-A), Holy Cross chose the level with less of a financial commitment and resources to compete, I-AA (Horgan, 1977).

The football team was settling into the Division I-AA level and had experienced success on the gridiron. However, the success they had experienced in the 1980s was being received as unimpressive, as games against common 1970s opponents (Syracuse, Rutgers, Army, and Boston College) were replaced by games against Lehigh, Lafayette, and Bucknell; hardly major college football competition. But, the Crusaders had become one of the best I-AA programs in the 1980s, highlighted by two-way player Gordie Lockbaum, who led the 1986 team to a 10-1 record. The following year, Lockbaum continued to play both running back and defensive back receiving extensive national exposure and finished third in the Heisman Trophy voting (McCloskey, 2011). One could argue that part of Lockbaum's captivating story was the small school, well-balanced student-athlete that matched perfectly with Holy Cross' philosophy (Tolland, 2012; Reilly, 1986).

As the football team found a quiet niche as a Division I-AA program, the basketball team struggled to find its

identity. The Crusaders were still very competitive as the 1980s began, allowing alumni and fans to remember the glory years of the 1950s. The late 1970s had brought national attention to the small private school and it appeared that basketball success would once again grow into a national force.

In 1979-80, Holy Cross joined Big East members Syracuse, Georgetown and St. John's in the Division I NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament. Their success however was short lived as they were beaten by Iona College in the first round and failed to make another NCAA Tournament appearance throughout the 1980s (their next appearance in the NCAA's did not come until the 1992-93 season, as a member of the Patriot League). The 1980s had introduced Holy Cross basketball to two conferences, both of which were not perfect matches: the ECAC North (members from 1979/80-1981/82) and the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC) (members from 1983/84-1989/90).

The MAAC had formed in 1981-82 and had quickly developed an identity as a decent New York City based, mid-major basketball conference; but it would never be compared with the programs that were developing in the Big East. In 1983-84, the MAAC expanded to eight teams as LaSalle University from Philadelphia and Holy Cross joined the original six schools (Iona, Fordham, Manhattan, St. Peter's, West Point, and Fairfield).

From a basketball standpoint, Holy Cross hit rock bottom, even in their new

league. In a *Philadelphia Inquirer* columnist Bruce DeSilva wrote, “In today’s world of big-time college basketball – a world of multimillion dollar television contracts and watered-down academic standards for athletes – idealistic little Holy Cross has been sucked into a black hole of failure.” (p 5D). In January 1985, five of the nine teams in the Big East were ranked in the Top 20, and Holy Cross was last in the MAAC (DeSilva, 1985). In fact, the Crusaders struggled in their seven years in the MAAC, finally breaking through with a first place regular season finish in 1989-90 (14-2 conference record, 24-6 overall) (“2018-2019 Holy Cross Men’s Basketball Fact Book”, 2019).

As their basketball team continued to struggle, administrators at Holy Cross had committed to a different approach with their athletic programs and began reshaping their Division I athletic programs based on characteristics that had nothing to do with television appearances or athletic rankings. Fr. Brooks identified schools that had the same commitment to academic rigor, providing athletes need-based financial aid, and controlling athletic department expenses.

Finding a Home: The Formation of the Patriot League (Process)

At the time, Fr. Brooks paid close attention to the landscape of college athletics and realized that to compete at Division I more resources would be needed, especially for football and basketball. Additionally, the responsibilities

of schools to abide by Title IX regulations and build a broad based athletic department that represented the needs of all students, made it difficult to commit to a men’s basketball-centric conference. It became clear that the brand for Holy Cross athletics was not going to be based on basketball wins, but rather on providing a competitive athletic environment for strong academic students. Holy Cross needed a conference that shared the same philosophy.

The Patriot League was founded in 1984 and began play as the Colonial League in 1986 as a football only conference. The creation of the Patriot League was the result of the Ivy League wanting an athletic conference as a “partner.” The Ivies were looking for schools that they could compete against in non-conference competition that valued the same athletic philosophies that they fostered. Perhaps the two most important ideals were a strong commitment to academics, which showcased student-athletes that were representative of the institution’s academic requirements, and a pledge to not provide scholarships based on athletic talent. Essentially, the Ivies were looking for schools they could compete fairly with on the athletic playing fields. At the time, two people found this very appealing: Fr. Brooks, and Dr. Peter Likens, president at Lehigh University (Feinstein, 2000).

Fr. Brooks had become disenchanted with the direction of big time athletics, and started examining other ways to run a Division I athletic department. Around

the same time the Big East athletic directors were creating their league, Fr. Brooks began speaking with Tony Maruca, vice president at Princeton and a representative of the Ivy League presidents about possible entrance into the Ivy League. After a short lived examination to see if Holy Cross could gain entrance into the Ivy League, the presidents at the Ivies decided not to expand membership. Rather the Ivy League presidents invited Holy Cross (and Colgate, Bucknell, Lafayette, Lehigh, as well as over a dozen strong academic institutions) to consider forming an associate league, where they would regularly play against the Ivies (Brooks, 1983a; Brooks, 1983b; Kuzniewski, 1999). Although disappointed, “Holy Cross would have loved to get into the Ivies”, (J. Brooks, personal conversation, June 11, 2012), Fr. Brooks still liked the idea of competing against like-minded schools and having a continued association with the Ivies.

The idea developed over conversations in 1983-84 and presidents at Holy Cross, Lehigh University, Bucknell University, Colgate University, and Lafayette College, all signed on and in 1986 began the Colonial Athletic League for football (later named the Patriot League). Like the Ivies, each school in the Patriot League calculates an academic index, a composite of GPA and other academic measures, for each recruited athlete. Both individual scores and team averages are expected to be consistent with those of the student body and member schools hold each other accountable for any ex-

ceptions (“2015-16 Patriot League Policy & Procedure Manual”, 2015).

Basketball, and all the other sports teams, at the Patriot League schools moved slower to sign up for the Ivy League philosophy. It was not until the 1990-91 season that the members of the Patriot League decided to stop athletic scholarships in other sports (particularly basketball) and become an all-sport conference sponsoring 22 sports. Seven members (Holy Cross, Lehigh, Bucknell, Army, Colgate, Lafayette, and Fordham) committed to the philosophies of no athletic aid, which was a drastic change to programs that had been full scholarship and especially hard on Holy Cross which had the strongest tradition of basketball success among any of the members (Feinstein, 2000). Navy joined a year later and allowed the conference to become eligible for NCAA Tournament play (“Patriot League History”, 2016). Having a bid to the NCAA tournament eased some of the pressures faced by Holy Cross administrators but certainly the ability to regularly compete against other Division I schools outside of the Patriot League was now almost impossible (Donaldson, 2011). The hopes of returning Holy Cross to national prominence in basketball was unlikely under the scholarship model in the Patriot League.

The Patriot League and the impact on Holy Cross Basketball (Content)

A minority of constituents, but a “very vocal minority” was against stopping athletic aid, especially for basketball

(Feinstein, 2000, p.19). Holy Cross which was allowed to phase out scholarships until 1993, had success again early on in the Patriot League but quickly became mediocre before reaching all-time lows for futility (back-to-back 7-20 seasons in 1997-98 and 1998-99). In 1996, Holy Cross announced that they would restore basketball scholarships, beginning with the class of 1998. The Patriot League, fearing that the conference would disband if Holy Cross left, agreed to establish athletic scholarship in basketball only. Beginning in the fall of 2013, all Patriot League members were permitted to offer athletic scholarships in each of the 24 League sports (“Patriot League History”, 2016).

However, restoring athletic scholarships has not brought Holy Cross back to national prominence; in fact, it has not even allowed the school to reestablish itself in the Northeast as a basketball elite. Since joining the Patriot League in 1990-91, the Crusaders have won or tied for the regular season championship six times, won the league tournament and played in the NCAA tournament five times. On several occasions, Holy Cross has come close to reestablishing itself as a strong mid-major basketball program. Holy Cross represented the Patriot League in the NCAAs three years in a row (2001-2003) and each year battled against the best basketball programs (Kentucky in 2001; Kansas in 2002; Marquette in 2003). The best year was perhaps the 2002-03 season when they finished with a 13-1 conference record

and were 26-5 overall. They beat Boston College (71-70), soundly defeated Fordham (87-54), beat every Ivy school on their schedule and took Final Four participant Marquette, led by superstar Dwyane Wade to the last minute, narrowly losing 72-68.

Minus a slight dip in success in 2003-04, Holy Cross went on another three-year run of success from 2005-07, including another tournament appearance in 2007. Although the Crusaders made the NCAA tournament in 2016 by winning the Patriot League Tournament (despite finishing in 9th place during the regular season), the Holy Cross men’s basketball team has once again struggled. Over the last decade, they have regularly found themselves in the middle of the Patriot League or lower.

Administration’s Rationale: Protecting the Academic Mission (Inner Context/Content)

Even as recent changes in college athletics presented a new wave of opportunity for some Division I athletic departments to realign and perhaps strengthen their athletic identity, Fr. Brooks remained comfortable with the decision he made over 30 years ago not to align with Big East schools and rather become a founding member of the Patriot League. College documents and interviews reveal that the administration acknowledged that there were benefits to aligning themselves with the Big East schools (favorable home schedule, television revenue, NCAA conference distri-

butions, exposure, benefits to recruiting excellent basketball players); however, any benefit gained would come with academic and financial sacrifices that the school was not willing to make. Administration had major concerns about the Big East members admitting student-athletes with academic standards and graduation rates lower than the comparable criteria used at Holy Cross (Brooks, 1979).

At the heart of their decision was Fr. Brooks' insistence that athletics remain part of the academic mission of the institution; specifically, that student-athletes would be recruited to Holy Cross based on a strong academic record with the goal to graduate in four years. Fr. Brooks could foresee the amplified commercialization, academic problems, and the increased resources needed to build the infrastructure to support athletics; all things that Holy Cross did not want to be a part of, at least in Fr. Brooks' mind. Fr. Brooks summed up the environment of college athletics in the late 1970s:

I got a glimpse of what was going on in the early days and I just didn't like it. It looked to me like they were just messing around, watering down the academic standing of the schools... And they were going to get the TV contracts and all that. And once I saw the money on the table I knew it wouldn't work out because... it was all about money. So, No, No! I would not sell Holy Cross out academically for money. I never made a decision here that I did not think

was in the best academic interest of Holy Cross. I have no regrets on it. (J. Brooks, personal communication, June 11, 2012).

In fact, Fr. Brooks stayed true to his word several times throughout the 1980s as other leagues formed and expressed interest in Holy Cross. Not only did they reject the chance to gain membership into the Big East, but also declined membership to the Eastern Eight (currently known as the Atlantic 10) Conference in the early 1980s (Connolly, 1982; Doyle, 1982).

The decision not to join the Eastern Eight raised more concern among the national media and alumni base because everyone (including Holy Cross administrators) had the chance to watch the immediate success of the Big East (Anderson, 1982). In many people's mind, joining the Eastern Eight would give Holy Cross one last chance to align with strong basketball schools. At the time, the Eastern Eight consisted of West Virginia, Rutgers, George Washington, Duquesne, St. Bonaventure, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Pittsburgh. By 1982, Pittsburgh was leaving to go the Big East and Penn State and Temple were going to be added for six sports, including basketball. Holy Cross, after great debate, declined the invitation to join the Eastern Eight (Connolly, 1982; Doyle, 1982). Yet, former athletic director Ron Perry looks back with no regret. Although early on he had his reservations about the missed opportunities to

join the Big East (and later the Eastern Eight).

I expressed some of the reservations I had. And I think it was a good dialogue, certainly when it was done I said fine let's get on with what we've got. It was the right decision so it was never where I left the room and was upset with him [Fr. Brooks]. I saw the good in what was happening with the school and that was what I liked about the whole situation and I didn't want to see that change. I give him [Fr. Brooks] an A+ for his foresight. Looking back it would have been nice and everything but there's no way we could have competed today with what's going on out there now, there's no way. (R. Perry, personal communications, June 10, 2012).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine Holy Cross' decision not to join the Big East Conference in 1979. By providing a glimpse of the changing athletic environment since the 1970s, this study highlights the impact this organizational change has had on the institution and the athletic department. Specifically, it examines the commitment to de-emphasize athletics at a time when many institutions were using the growth of college sports and its financial relationship with television to help market their university identity.

Past case study examples have supported the use of athletics to build brand equity and develop tangible results (Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2010; Bruening & Lee, 2007; Clark et al, 2009); in particular, when a school such as Holy Cross had team (success, star players), organizational (strong reputation and tradition, conference affiliation), and market related (attractive media deals, support) successes (Gladden et al, 1998). The results of this case highlight several characteristics that would suggest that Holy Cross would have been able to enhance its institutional profile using athletics, similar to what other past and current Big East schools have done in the last four decades, namely Jesuit schools Boston College and Georgetown. Holy Cross built a loyal fan base because of athletic success due to the recruitment of some of the best student-athletes in New England, a strong academic and athletic reputation, and a very competitive athletic schedule with regional rivalries. The one antecedent discussed by Gladden et al., (1998) that was missing for Holy Cross was the strong conference affiliation and the media deals that became prevalent once the Big East formed.

Holy Cross' decision not to be judged by their relationship with athletic peers goes against the current trend of the importance of conference affiliation (Gorza, 2010; Quirk, 2004 Switzer, 2009; Hoffer & Pincin, 2015). Past research suggests that administrators have a tendency to align their schools with major

Division I institutions to achieve benefits associated with such relationships (Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2010; Clark, et al 2009; Duderstadt, 2003; Gladden et al., 1998; Kramer, 2016; Weaver, 2007; 2010). Yet scholars warn against the overemphasis of athletics and the failure to adhere to an institution's core values; leading to a devaluing of the organization's profile (Feezell, 2015; French, 2004; Hutchinson & Bennett, 2012; Hutchinson, 2013; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Simon, 2008; Sperber, 2000). This case presents a prominent example of a school that made a very difficult decision to deemphasize athletics, adding to the limited scholarship devoted to this type of organizational change (Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2011; Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2012; Hutchinson & Bouchet, 2013; Hutchinson, 2013; Jones, 2014. The contribution to the literature not only builds off past deemphasis research in college athletics, but provides a thorough description and reflections from administrators that had to make the decision at a time when Holy Cross athletics was flourishing. No other case in previous literature has reviewed deemphasis at such a critical point in time at a university, making the administrative decision and its ripple effect on other institutional changes such a valuable addition to the scholarship of college athletics.

Perhaps most similar to this case is Bouchet and Hutchinson's (2012) study on the University of Chicago, which identified similar reasons provided by administrators as rationale for de-em-

phasizing big-time athletics. Presidential leadership at both the University of Chicago and Holy Cross wanted to stay away from the "win at all cost" mentality (p. 105). Although the decision came 40 years apart (University of Chicago discontinued scholarship football in 1939), both schools were aware of the long-term, consistently rising investment that was needed to either move into their new conference or maintain their current membership. In both cases, the leadership would not compromise the integrity of their institution's academic mission. A difference between the two cases is that the University of Chicago's leadership felt it was necessary to drop completely out of Division I and move to Division III. Fr. Brooks believed that Holy Cross could still compete at the Division I level, however the need to find partners that would commit to the balance of academics and athletics was paramount. Thus, the answer for Holy Cross was the Patriot League. Another subtle but important difference between the two cases is the decision on the final outcome. Bouchet and Hutchinson clearly state the president's decision at the University of Chicago was "not only courageous but correct" (p. 110). The goal of this study, however was not to determine if the decision was correct, but rather present the rationale and the historical context of the ramifications of the decision. As the college athletic environment continues to change and influence mid-major schools, the decision not to join the Big East may be viewed differently. Scholarship should

continue to question whether schools such as Holy Cross really need the benefits of big time college athletics. Clearly, the decision makers at Holy Cross would align with research that disputes the notion that conference affiliation results in increased institutional benefits (i.e. financial gains, peer association, improved admission rates) (Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2012; Jones, 2014; Weiner, 2009).

Finally, this study adds to the literature that utilizes the contextualist approach to study organizational change in sport. Exploring the context, content and process of change in sport organizations provides insight into the complexities and long lasting impact of such a decision. Similar to past research, Pettigrew's contextualist approach (1987) provides a meaningful framework to understand the magnitude of such a transformation in sport organizations (Caza, 2000; Cousins, Babink and Slack, 2001; Girginou & Sandanski, 2008; Thibault & Babiak, 2005; Weaver, 2007; 2010).

Limitations and Future Research

A limitation of this study is the late time frame. Data collection relied heavily on archival data and two administrators with extensive experience at Holy Cross. It is possible that due to the decades of time in between, important data and different perspectives have been lost. However, this study does present a strong foundation because of the significant and well-kept archives, and the opportunity to interview two of the major decision makers. Building from these findings,

research should explore other points of view not considered in this study – such as Holy Cross students, alumni, and fans' perceptions of this decision. From a broader perspective, future research could use this study as a model to examine de-emphasizing conference affiliation and the impact on the university profile.

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