

## **Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics**

### **Public Opinion Poll Executive Summary January 2006**

Americans are passionate about college sports. They believe athletes ought to be “normal” college students, facing the same standards in admissions and challenges in the classroom, according to a poll conducted last month for the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics.

Enthusiasm about college sports does not mean that Americans are naïve about the enterprise. They believe that college sports resemble professional sports much more than amateur sports. Coaches, they believe, are paid too much, advertisers exploit athletes, and commercial interests often take precedence over academic values.

The Census-balanced and representative telephone poll of 502 adults among adults 18 years of age and older was conducted in December 2005 for the commission by Widmeyer Research and Polling of Washington, D.C. The margin of error for the poll is +/- 4.4%.<sup>1</sup>

Poll findings suggest the following:

#### ***Americans believe college sports are like professional sports.***

- By a 2-to-1 margin, Americans believe that college sports are more like professional sports (60%) than amateur sports (31%).

#### ***Commercial interests often prevail over academic values and traditions.***

- 3 in 5 Americans (61%) say that college sports have become too commercialized.
- 3 in 4 Americans (74%) agree with the statement: *Commercial interests often prevail over academic values and traditions.*
- 3 in 4 Americans (74%) believe there is a conflict between the commercialization of college athletics and academic values. A similar percentage (73%) agrees with the statement: *College sports as big business conflicts with the values of higher education.*

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<sup>1</sup> Please contact the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for additional background information about the poll, which was conducted among 502 American residents 18 years of age and older. Widmeyer used an RDD (random digit dialing) method to ensure that all results are representative of the U.S. population by demographic variables such as gender, age, income, geography, ethnicity and household composition. All results can be projected to the adult U.S. population. The margin of error for the poll is +/-4.4%.

- Two-thirds of all college graduates (66%) and over half of all respondents who classify themselves as “sports fans” agree with this statement.
- 3 in 5 Americans and college sports fans (59%) agree with the statement: *College athletes are exploited by corporate advertisers.*

### ***Coaches are overpaid.***

Americans believe that college coaches’ high salaries are both a reflection and a result of the professionalization of college sports. Americans believe that salaries are much too high and are concerned that coaches are paid more than professors.

- 3 in 4 Americans (73%) and a similar percentage of sports fans (70%) disagree with the statement: *Successful college football and basketball coaches deserve to earn millions of dollars.*
- 4 in 5 Americans (83%) say they are concerned that football coaches are often the highest paid person at a school participating in big-time college sports.
- 4 in 5 Americans (82%) say they are concerned that assistant football coaches are paid much more than senior professors.

### ***Companies and TV networks have too much control over college sports.***

Americans want college administrators to control the times and dates of college football and basketball games to ensure that academics are prioritized over athletics and commercial values.

- 3 in 4 Americans (77%) say they are concerned that because TV networks schedule the times and dates for college basketball and football games, athletes are forced to miss classes and travel at inconvenient times.
- 2 in 3 Americans (65%) say that college administrators should control the times and dates of college football and basketball games.

### ***Concerns over the professionalization of college sports explain why a majority of Americans support the following initiatives:***

- 4 in 5 Americans (85%), including 74% of sports fans, believe that the money earned by the athletics department should benefit the whole school, not just the athletics department.
- 3 in 4 Americans (76%) believe that coaches’ salaries should be similar to other college and university senior officials.
- 3 in 4 Americans (75%), including 79% of sports fans, believe that colleges should spend more of their athletics budgets to support men’s and women’s sports outside of football and basketball. Support for this initiative matches up with the opinion expressed by 3 in 4 Americans (71%), who are concerned that colleges are reacting to competitive and financial pressures by dropping sports other than football and basketball.
- The majority of Americans (68%), including a majority of sports fans (63%), believe that colleges should reduce expenditures on big-time sports such as football and basketball.

- 4 in 5 Americans (82%) support requiring colleges to show that sports-related commercial contracts do not conflict with academic values. 61% of Americans strongly support this.
- 3 in 4 Americans (76%) support requiring shoe and clothing contracts be made directly with the school, not the coach. 60% of Americans strongly support this.

***Americans are concerned about athletes' welfare.***

- Nearly all Americans (93%) say they are concerned about the use of steroids and other performance enhancing substances by collegiate athletes. 73% of Americans are *very* concerned about this.
- More than 4 in 5 Americans (83%) are concerned that pressure to compete causes collegiate athletes to play when they are hurt. Nearly half of Americans (49%) are *very* concerned about this.

***Americans have a positive opinion about college sports, but are concerned about its negative aspects.***

More than 4 in 5 (83%) Americans say their overall opinion of college sports is positive. However, there is a deep divide among those surveyed about whether college sports are “out of control”: 44 percent believe they are, while 47 percent believe they are not. [Note: These numbers are improving. A Louis Harris poll conducted for the Knight Commission in 1990 found that 75 percent of people tended to agree that intercollegiate athletics were out of control; a 1993 poll for the Commission found that 52 percent of the public agreed with the statement.]

***Americans believe the myths about college sports.***

Finally, the poll results show that the majority of Americans believe many of the myths about college sports and the financial benefits they produce for colleges and universities.

- More than 3 in 4 Americans (78%) believe that athletics departments at colleges supporting big-time sports generate profits.<sup>2</sup>
- A strong majority (84%) believe that generally, successful teams generate more alumni donations to a university.<sup>3</sup>
- More than half (55%) believe that a successful athletics program generally improves the quality of applicants to a university.<sup>4</sup>
- Nearly half (42%), including a majority of sports fans (57%), believe that generally, spending more on salaries and operating expenses allows a team to win more.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> NCAA financial reports indicate that only 40% of Division I-A programs generate a surplus when institutional support is removed. NCAA President Myles Brand has indicated that the actual number is around a dozen when all costs, not currently included in the reports, are considered.

<sup>3</sup> A report by Cornell University economist Robert H. Frank for the Knight Commission found little evidence exists to support this spillover effect. Research conducted by Jonathan and Peter Orszag for the NCAA confirms this finding. Frank's report is available at [www.knightcommission.org](http://www.knightcommission.org).

<sup>4</sup> Frank's report and the Orszags' research conducted for the NCAA also indicate there is no evidence to support a relationship between success in athletics and an improvement in the quality of applicants to a university.

<sup>5</sup> NCAA research conducted by the Orszags indicates that increased spending on athletics does not affect teams' win/loss percentages.

All of the above results are from the same poll as the poll findings released on January 6, 2006 regarding Americans' views on academic reforms in college sports. Those poll results indicate that Americans are aware of—and strongly support—NCAA reforms to improve the academic performance of college athletes, and believe more needs to be done to ensure that colleges and universities emphasize academics over athletics. More information on these findings can be found at [www.knightcommission.org](http://www.knightcommission.org).

For additional information, please contact Welch Suggs at (404) 771-7753 or [wsuggs@uga.edu](mailto:wsuggs@uga.edu) or Marty McGough, Widmeyer Research and Polling at (202) 667-0901.

### DETAILED TABLES

Definitions used in the heading of the following tables are as follows:

- All – all respondents
- Men – self-identified as male
- Women – self-identified as female
- College grad - graduated from a 4-year college
- Sports fan - self-identified as a person who “closely follows college sports”

Which one of the following best describes your attitudes toward college sports?	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
I closely follow college sports	19	27	11	20	100
I occasionally follow college sports	24	30	19	28	0
I only follow my favorite college's sports teams	16	18	14	21	0
I rarely follow college sports	19	16	21	15	0
I never follow college sports	22	9	35	15	0
Don't know	0	0	0	1	0

Do you think that college sports are more like amateur sports or professional sports?	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
More like amateur sports	31	32	30	33	53
Professional sports	60	61	60	59	46
Neither	8	6	9	8	0
Don't know	1	1	1	0	1

<b>Do you think there is a conflict between the commercialization of college athletics and academic values?</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Yes	77	74	80	70	68
No	21	24	18	28	28
Don't know	2	2	2	2	4

<b>In your opinion, has higher education, which includes colleges and universities, become too commercialized?</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Yes	59	66	53	51	59
No	36	29	42	44	39
Don't know	5	5	5	5	2

<b>Commercial interests often prevail over academic values and traditions</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Strongly agree	34	39	31	38	25
Somewhat agree	40	30	48	35	31
Neither agree or disagree	3	5	2	5	0
Somewhat disagree	14	15	13	13	29
Strongly disagree	3	6	1	7	11
Don't know	6	5	5	2	4

<b>Do you think there is a conflict between the commercialization of college athletics and academic values?</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Yes	77	74	80	70	68
No	21	24	18	28	28
Don't know	2	2	2	2	4

<b>College sports as big business conflicts with the values of higher education</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Strongly agree	27	17	36	23	16
Somewhat agree	46	52	41	43	35
Neither agree or disagree	2	3	2	0	4
Somewhat disagree	13	14	12	25	22
Strongly disagree	8	11	5	9	17
Don't know	4	3	4	0	6

<b>College athletes are exploited by corporate advertisers</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Strongly agree	28	21	34	22	32
Somewhat agree	31	30	32	26	26
Neither agree or disagree	2	0	3	2	0
Somewhat disagree	25	31	20	34	22
Strongly disagree	9	11	8	14	16
Don't know	5	7	3	2	4

<b>Successful college football and basketball coaches deserve to earn millions of dollars.</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Strongly agree	9	14	2	13	7
Somewhat agree	14	15	12	15	21
Neither agree or disagree	1	1	1	0	2
Somewhat disagree	26	28	24	27	31
Strongly disagree	47	36	61	45	39
Don't know	3	6	0	0	0

<b>Football coaches are often the highest paid person at a school participating in big-time college sports. How concerned are you about this?</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Very concerned	43	35	53	53	32
Somewhat concerned	40	44	34	28	39
Not very concerned	4	3	6	5	8
Not at all concerned	11	14	6	14	15
Don't know	2	4	1	0	6

<b>Assistant football coaches at some schools are paid much more than senior professors. How concerned are you about this?</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Very concerned	54	47	64	56	41
Somewhat concerned	28	31	23	27	22
Not very concerned	4	4	4	7	5
Not at all concerned	12	15	9	9	26
Don't know	2	3	0	1	6

<b>Because television networks schedule the times and dates of college basketball and football games, athletes are forced to miss classes and have to travel at inconvenient times How concerned are you about this?</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Very concerned	43	36	53	38	32
Somewhat concerned	34	34	32	42	27
Not very concerned	12	15	8	12	9
Not at all concerned	9	12	6	8	29
Don't know	2	3	1	0	3

<b>Do you think that television networks should control the times and dates of college basketball and football games are scheduled or should the decision be left to college administrators?</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Colleges	65	64	65	64	65
Networks	19	19	19	18	28
Neither	6	5	7	11	2
Don't know	10	12	9	7	5

<b>Do you support or oppose the following initiative: The money earned by athletic departments should benefit the whole school.</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Strongly support	60	61	60	61	59
Somewhat support	25	23	27	29	19
Somewhat oppose	5	5	6	5	8
Strongly oppose	3	6	0	1	3
Don't know	7	5	7	4	11

<b>Do you support or oppose the following initiative: Coaches' salaries should be similar to other college and university senior officials.</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Strongly support	48	42	55	49	20
Somewhat support	28	24	29	24	24
Somewhat oppose	13	19	4	14	32
Strongly oppose	7	10	3	12	17
Don't know	4	5	9	1	7

<b>Do you support or oppose the following initiative: Colleges should spend more of their athletic budgets to support men's and women's sports outside of football and basketball</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Strongly support	33	35	30	36	35
Somewhat support	42	38	48	39	44
Somewhat oppose	11	14	8	14	11
Strongly oppose	4	6	3	8	6
Don't know	10	7	11	3	4

<b>Do you support or oppose the following initiative: Colleges should reduce expenditures on big time sports such as football and basketball.</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Strongly support	31	34	28	24	22
Somewhat support	37	37	37	32	41
Somewhat oppose	18	18	18	35	12
Strongly oppose	6	5	7	4	12
Don't know	8	6	10	5	13

<b>Do you support or oppose the following initiative: Colleges would be required to show that sports-related commercial contracts don't conflict with academic values</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Strongly support	61	63	59	70	64
Somewhat support	21	19	22	16	9
Somewhat oppose	8	7	10	10	19
Strongly oppose	3	7	1	1	6
Don't know	7	4	8	3	2

<b>Do you support or oppose the following initiative: Shoe and clothing contracts would be made directly with the school, not the coach.</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Strongly support	56	59	53	54	61
Somewhat support	20	18	22	18	14
Somewhat oppose	9	11	7	13	6
Strongly oppose	3	6	2	7	12
Don't know	12	6	16	8	7



<b>Use of steroids and other performance enhancing substances by athletes. How concerned are you about this?</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Very concerned	73	75	70	70	61
Somewhat concerned	20	13	26	26	20
Not very concerned	3	5	2	3	7
Not at all concerned	4	4	2	1	12
Don't know	0	3	0	0	0

<b>The pressure to compete causes athletes to play when they are hurt. How concerned are you about this?</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Very concerned	49	44	53	44	43
Somewhat concerned	34	31	37	35	24
Not very concerned	11	16	7	19	23
Not at all concerned	4	7	1	2	9
Don't know	2	2	2	0	1

<b>Is your overall opinion of college sports . . . ?</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Very positive	34	38	30	36	68
Somewhat positive	49	47	50	45	30
Somewhat negative	9	8	10	12	0
Very negative	4	3	4	4	1
Don't know	4	4	6	3	1

<b>College sports are out of control.</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
Strongly agree	14	13	14	9	4
Somewhat agree	30	30	30	31	20
Neither agree or disagree	6	7	5	6	2
Somewhat disagree	32	30	33	37	41
Strongly disagree	15	17	13	17	32
Don't know	3	3	5	0	1

<b>Most athletic departments at schools participating in big-time sports generate profits</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
True	78	77	78	76	78
False	12	12	12	12	19
Don't know	10	11	10	12	3

<b>Generally, a successful athletics team generates more alumni donations to a university</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
True	84	86	83	95	92
False	11	8	14	2	5
Don't know	5	6	3	3	3

<b>Generally, a successful athletics team helps improve the quality of applicants to a university</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
True	55	64	47	50	71
False	32	26	38	41	22
Don't know	34	28	39	48	24

<b>Generally, spending more on salaries and operating expenses allows a team to win more</b>	<b>All (%)</b>	<b>Men (%)</b>	<b>Women (%)</b>	<b>College Grad (%)</b>	<b>Sports Fan (%)</b>
True	42	48	37	47	57
False	50	40	58	41	39
Don't know	8	12	5	12	4