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## COMMENTARY

Palaima: UT may win on the field, but student-athletes lose

Thomas G. Palaima, REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR

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Nine current or former Longhorns football players have been arrested by police since the Rose Bowl in 2006. On Aug. 5, Coach Mack Brown announced a "zero-tolerance policy." It already has been violated twice. He has taken responsibility for the arrests, though what this means in real terms remains to be seen.

A reporter from USA Today called me and asked about the UT faculty reaction. I said that though UT professors are seriously concerned for the well-being of student-athletes, we had little reaction. Why? Because we have little input concerning the negative impact of big-time sports on the values and priorities of our institution.

The athletics department budget is not reviewed or controlled by the faculty budget advisory committee. The revenues of athletics, including those generated by university logos and trademarks, are controlled by athletics. The salary structure for athletics directors and coaches is outside faculty and, to be honest, even presidential control.

Safeguard or oversight committees have more say on paper than in reality.

Appointees to the Faculty Athletics Council are not independent choices of the Faculty Council. Faculty representatives are presidential, not Faculty Council, appointees. Instead of being "independent examiners," they almost always are top sports boosters. They also serve, extraordinarily among committees at UT system campuses, alongside two regental appointees. UT's operational handbook expressly stipulates that no recommendation advanced by the Faculty Athletics Council and the Faculty Council "shall have any force or effect until said recommendation has been accepted and approved by the President." Serious recommendations are approved every time hell freezes over.

What would UT look like without what former President Peter Flawn once called a "minor league franchise of the NFL"?

Let me compare the Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) in Spain, where I recently taught as a Fulbright professor.

The UAB has no big-time intercollegiate sports programs. It has not spent a quarter of a billion dollars for football stadium upgrades in the last decade. The UAB does not spend well over \$5 million per year, the still unfunded yearly cost for UT's vital curricular reform initiative, on football coaches.

The UAB's modest version of UT's soon-to-be-completed AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center does not feature prominently a multimedia sports café. We're the ones who foist commercialized sports entertainment upon our students on a daily basis.

All students at the UAB were admitted by competitive examination and take their educations seriously. The Spanish government levels the playing ground for its students by paying most of the costs of public education for UAB students.

The UAB campus is not ringed by luxury condominiums, high-end retail shops and sports bars. There are no televisions in the many cafeterias students and faculty share. The UAB campus does not sacrifice six weekends a year to football games. Its president does not spend long hours on game day weekends standing in receiving lines. Its president, professors and students concentrate instead on education.

A prominent UT alumnus who served on UT's prestigious Commission of 125 forwarded to me an e-mail on August 31 which he titled "Not too funny." It began: "It's been almost one (1) week without an arrest of a Longhorn football player! Good Job Mack! I thought you might find these jokes timely: 1. What do you call a drug ring in Austin? - A huddle. 2. Four UT Longhorns in a car, who's driving? - The police." The jokes went on and on.

It would be another joke, if it were not so sad, that the Longhorns got three players back this weekend, not from the injured list, but from the suspended-for-being-arrested list.

These jokes and Mack Brown's "zero-tolerance" policy target unfortunate young men, instead of the real guilty parties: the regents, boosters, high-salaried coaches, presidents, chancellors, alumni, alumnae, faculty, students, staff and general public who support, enjoy and profit from this clearly corrupt system.

In the Faculty Council meeting on Sept. 17, professors were told that UT, a trend-setter in big-time college sports, cannot unilaterally enact reforms, because UT would not then be competitive.

We should have a "zero-tolerance" policy for such specious ethics. UT would surely remain competitive playing the contrived weak schedules it plays. Games in Royal-Memorial Stadium might actually become truly competitive.

UT might not win as often as it does now. But it would be a moral winner by taking the first step to end the gladiatorial arms race, a race that has as its real victims many of the student-athletes it recruits.

Palaima, a regular contributor, is a classics professor at the University of Texas, where he serves on the Faculty Council Executive Committee.