

January 2009

Counterfeit Amateurs: An Athlete's Journey through the Sixties to the Age of Academic Capitalism

(Reviewed by) Mark S. Nagel
University of South Carolina

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/jiia>

Recommended Citation

Nagel, (Reviewed by) Mark S. (2009) "Counterfeit Amateurs: An Athlete's Journey through the Sixties to the Age of Academic Capitalism," *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 10. Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/jiia/vol2/iss1/10>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Hospitality, Retail and Sports Management, College of at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics

Counterfeit Amateurs: An Athlete's Journey through the Sixties to the Age of Academic Capitalism

By Allen L. Sack. Published in 2008 by The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA 16802. (200 pages).

Reviewed by

Mark S. Nagel,

Associate Professor, University of South Carolina, Department of Sport and Entertainment

In *Counterfeit Amateurs: An Athlete's Journey through the Sixties to the Age of Academic Capitalism*, Allen Sack provides insights regarding the growth of "big-time" college athletics since the 1960s. Although other articles and books have explored the dramatic changes involving intercollegiate athletics that have occurred since the 1960s, Sack incorporates previous research, interviews with key college sport coaches and administrators, and his personal experiences to provide a unique perspective. As *Counterfeit Amateurs* details, Alan Sack has "lived" intercollegiate athletics as a highly regarded high school recruit, member of the 1966 Notre Dame National Championship Football team, and participant in the 1966 Notre Dame-Michigan State "Game of the Century." Sack has also experienced intercollegiate athletics as a graduate student conducting research at Penn State University, as director of the Center for Athletes' Rights and Education (CARE), and as a sociology and sport management professor at the University of New Haven.

The book is organized in three sections. The first section is titled: College Football in the 1960s. In this section Sack details his experiences as a prominent Pennsylvania high school quarterback, being a "big-time" recruit, the struggles and joys of switching positions from quarterback to defensive end at Notre Dame, and his recollections of the legendary Notre Dame-Michigan State football game in 1966. Unlike the typical recruitment process for top-ranked football recruits today, Sack's experiences as one of the top high school players in the country centered much more on academics and future employment prospects rather than initial playing time or likelihood of later securing a professional football contract.

Section two of the book is titled: Linking Sports and Politics. This section discusses Sack's experience as a graduate student in the late 1960s, the National Collegiate Athletic

Downloaded from <http://csri-jiaa.org>

©2009 College Sport Research Institute. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution

Association's (NCAA) dramatic rule changes regarding college athletics in the 1970s, and the creation, growth and eventual decline of Sports for People and the Center for Athletes' Rights and Education. The chapters in this section detail the financial and political power of the NCAA and its efforts to limit potential reforms. Sack particularly notes how the NCAA rule that limited a student-athlete's grant-in-aid to a one-year renewable scholarship should have created a pay-for-performance employment situation. Other rules, such as granting freshman athletic eligibility and relaxing academic standards for incoming players perpetuated a system that was designed to generate as much revenue as possible rather than provide a college education to student-athletes.

Section three of the book is titled: Shouting from the Ivory Tower. In these four chapters Sack addresses a variety of "hot-button" issues currently facing big-time intercollegiate athletics. Sack utilizes his real-world experiences to frame what he feels are the major ills of the current system. He touches upon subjects such as the current state of amateurism, compensating players beyond their one-year renewable scholarship, the growth of media attention and revenues, the Unrelated Business Income Tax (UBIT), workman's compensation for athletes, and potential outlets for present and future reform. Sack discusses his role in the formation and operation of the Drake Group – a group of faculty members working to return academic integrity to colleges and universities that participate in "big-time" athletics. Of particular interest is Sack's analysis of the Notre Dame athletic department and how it has attempted to balance participation in lucrative television contracts with its core mission to educate students.

Throughout the entire book, Sack details how college athletics has changed since he was playing. He particularly notes the negative aspects of those changes, specifically for student-athletes. Sack is principally concerned about the "professionalism" that now exists in big-time athletics for everyone BUT the student-athletes. The dramatic increase in revenues and media attention has changed Division I athletics, particularly in football and basketball, so that it now resembles a professional league in nearly every manner except for player compensation.

Counterfeit Amateurs: An Athlete's Journey through the Sixties to the Age of Academic Capitalism is an important book for anyone participating, working or studying big-time intercollegiate athletics. It is rare to find a book that seamlessly combines personal experiences, interviews with prominent college sport practitioners, and academic research into a forum that is both comprehensive and understandable. Though Sack's answers to the problems currently facing intercollegiate athletics may often not be "popular," there is no doubt that he thoroughly conveys his understanding of recent NCAA history and the importance of each issue to the book's readers.