SPECIAL REPORT

More Headaches

Pell Grant increase for athletes poses problems for most black colleges

For most Division I black colleges, the recent increase in Pell Grant money for athletes will make it more difficult for them to recruit enough athletes to field competitive teams.

This all started in January at the NCAA Convention held in Nashville, Tenn. At the convention, delegates voted to allow athletes who qualify for the maximum Pell to receive $1,400 annually for their personal use.

The increase is for Division I only and goes into effect in August. Whether or not a school permits athletes to receive the money is optional -- not mandatory.

The Pell Grant is federal financial aid awarded to students who wouldn't be able to attend college otherwise. In the vast majority of black schools, the Pell Grant is very instrumental in helping athletic departments fund scholarships for entire athletic programs.

Under the present rule, athletes (if they qualify for the full amount of $2,100) are permitted to get $900 yearly. The $900 is used for incidental expenses such as transportation, clothing, laundry, toiletries, etc. If there's any money left from the $900, it is applied toward the scholarship.

The problem with the Pell Grant increase that most black colleges have, centers around how athletic departments at those schools utilize the grant money to run their athletic programs. Most black schools, because of scarce funds, find themselves using most of the grant money to give students the opportunity to earn a degree. It's no secret that without that money, black schools couldn't operate their athletic programs and still remain competitive.

One key point to keep in mind is the NCAA's definition of what comprises a full grant-in-aid. A full scholarship, according to the NCAA, includes tuition, books, fees, and room and board. Incidental expenses are not covered by that definition.

Here's a brief comparison of how Pell Grant money is used at the major colleges as opposed to most black colleges:

• Schools like Southern Cal, Ohio State and Florida have seven-figure athletic budgets. They can afford to pay for full grants-in-aid out of the funds their athletic departments generate. Because of that, they can use the grant money to pay Pell qualifying athletes for their incidental expenses. In a lot of cases, they are apt to receive the maximum provided they qualify for the full Pell.

• It's a different world at most black colleges. Most schools use the grant to pay for full scholarships as defined by the NCAA. Most don't have sufficient resources to fund a large number of scholarships with their own money. Therefore, there's little Pell money left for athletes' incidental expenses.

"If athletes asked for the Pell money, we couldn't do it because of our budget for scholarships," said Dave Bethany, Texas Southern track coach. Bethany attended the convention and sees the move as putting black colleges in a further bind when it comes to recruiting.

"Prospects know they can go to a major Division I school and get almost $200 a month," Bethany said. "The major colleges have an even bigger advantage now. They have the large budgets and can better fund scholarships without using very much grant money. The big schools can give full scholarships and the athletes can receive up to $1,400 yearly. A lot of black schools can't compete with that and it's legal."

At TSU, Bethany added, most athletes qualify for Pell Grant money and some do get some cash for incidental expenses. The total they receive individually, he reports, isn't anywhere near $900 or $1,400 a year.

How much an athlete gets for incidentals depends on the cost of going to school and how much Pell money that athlete qualifies for. Qualifications are based on economic need and that includes what an athlete's family can afford to contribute to his or her college expenses.

Howard University, however, won't be adversely affected by the increase, according to William P. Moultrie, athletic director. Howard's situation is quite different from other black schools. Few athletes are on Pell (12 percent in Moultrie's estimation), mainly because their parents make too much money. Of the 12 percent at HU, none qualify for the full Pell Grant award.

The reason for this is that the parents of students who attend Howard tend to be either white-collar professionals or entrepreneurs. Their family standard of living tends to be higher than families of students at most black colleges.

Howard U. parents can better afford to send their children to college without a great deal of assistance from Uncle Sam.

As a result, Pell Grant money is not a staple of the Bison athletic budget.

"My attitude is that schools shouldn't rely heavily on Pell," Moultrie said. "Schools have to make the commitment to fund scholarships by other means."

Moultrie does realize that the NCAA measure concerning Pell could put a lot of black college programs at a financial disadvantage. "Black people have been survivors," Moultrie added, "and we will find workable solutions for the situation. There have to be adjustments made -- a real effort to do what it takes (for schools) to stay Division I, Division II, or deciding whether your athletic program should go in another direction."

A number of major college sports administrators are happy about the Pell increase. They contend that the added cash will substantially reduce the number of athletes who sign with agents and accept money from them before their eligibility has run out.

Raymond Burse, Kentucky State president and NCAA Council member, doesn't buy that line of reasoning. "Fourteen hundred dollars a year is going to keep someone from signing with an agent?" he asks in amazement. "How realistic is that?"

To get some expert input on the increase, the NCAA formed the Financial Aid and Amateurism Committee. Several of its members are college financial aid officers. The committee, it was reported, was not pleased that the Pell measure passed this year. They felt that more time was needed to more fully explore all of the possible effects.

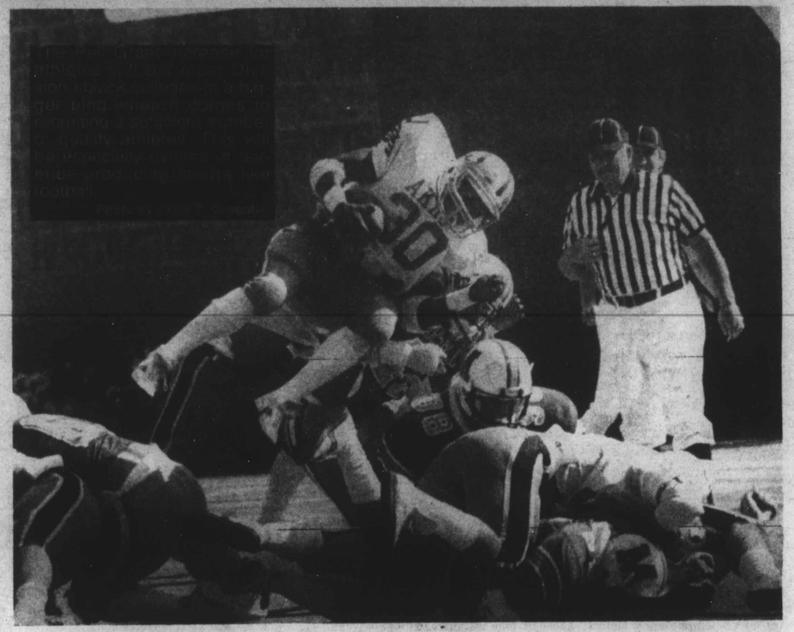
"This coming fall," Burse predicted, "the Division I schools who voted for it, may find that they can't give everybody who qualifies, $1,400. They're going to find that the benefit won't be as great as they thought. The committee warned convention delegates of the possible ramifications. But they ignored the warning and passed the resolution anyway."

The cost of attending college varies from school to school, Burse pointed out, and so does the manner in which financial aid programs are structured. Those differences, he said, won't allow all Division I colleges to give the $1,400 maximum to all eligible athletes.

Marvin Carmichael, chairman of the Financial Aid and Amateurism Committee and financial aid director at Clemson, explained that how much athletes get really depends on each school's definition of what it cost to attend.

"Each school allows so much for incidental expenses," Carmichael said. "Those expenses are based on an estimated cost of attendance for the administration of financial aid programs as defined by each school's financial aid office."

Carmichael added that varying incidental expenses among colleges have a lot to do with geographic location. For example -- let's take two athletes who are on full scholarship and they qualify for the full Pell. One attends Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., the other goes to the University of Wyoming. In this case, even though both athletes should receive $1,400 yearly, the Wyoming athlete isn't likely to get that amount. The cost of living in D.C. is much higher than that in Laramie, Wyo., so the Georgetown athlete is more likely to receive the maximum.



Before the convention, there was much concern among Division II schools that the change in Pell would make the recruiting wars for athletes even more difficult. At the Division II level, budgets are smaller and the number of scholarships are fewer.

Division II voted against the proposal, primarily because those schools can't handle it financially.

"The nature of Division II is to maximize scholarships," Burse said. "Division II schools do more financial aid packaging (often using Pell as a component) to fund someone's college education."

From a black college perspective, Burse added, the Pell increase would limit the number of scholarships offered. That point goes against the founding philosophies of black institutions, which is to provide opportunities for an education to as many students as possible.

"We have to stretch our dollars," said Doug Porter, head football coach and athletic director at Fort Valley State. "Our philosophy is to help as many youngsters as we can, without placing a financial burden on their families."

Porter doesn't see the new ruling having a big impact on his recruiting, ever though all student-athletes must meet the same academic requirements (SAT, ACT scores, 2.0 GPA in core curriculum) whether they play at Division I or II. "It could cause a kid to change his mind about going to a Division II school," Porter said. "But there are not many Division II colleges signing kids interested in Division I anyway."

At Norfolk State, more than half the athletes qualify for the Pell. And when financial aid packages are put together, the emphasis is on staying away from having student-athletes accumulate bills. "We put together things like scholarships, Pell Grant and work-study to finance a kid's education," said Williard Bailey, Norfolk's head football coach and athletic director. "We don't want to saddle students with a loan that they'll have to pay black."

Bailey adds that the increase is really a Division I issue. "We've never attempted to keep pace with Division I when it comes to spending money. Our aims and goals are different. Our claim to fame is graduating people, not how many of them play pro ball."

-- CRAIG T. GREENLEE

Can Boyd and David Clark to the major leagues and Prairie View, Charles Hudson, Florida A&M Vince Coleman and Andre Dawson.

Every year, black schools could be counted on to produce a handful of athletes for the amateur draft. That probably won't be the case when the draft rolls around in June. Southern third baseman Adell Davenport is considered the top draft eligible prospect among black schools, but he is not expected to be a first-round choice.

"Most of the teams are young," said Grambling Coach Wilber Ellis, "and the caliber of ball we're playing could be considered. Most of the blacks are in football and basketball. Baseball has been kept for the other race. If you go on recruiting trips, you don't see large numbers of blacks playing baseball."

The reason is two-fold. Black youngsters realize that basketball and football provide a faster route to the professional ranks and wealth and fame. In those sports, after four years of college, the money is there to be made. But in baseball, they might still face some tough, low-paying years in the minor leagues without any guarantee of ever making the majors.

Braddy says that in a lot of cases, that's faulty thinking.

"They get caught up in the hype that they'll be million-dollar basketball players," he said. "The same thing in football. Take a guy who runs the 40 (40-yard dash) in 4.3 (seconds) but he weighs 160 pounds and plays halfback. What happens to him after college? These guys could be outstanding baseball players because of the nature of the game. A 6-foot guard can run a college team and average 10 points a game. But how many 6-foot guards do you see in the NBA?"

Braddy says the main problem, though, is the scarcity of black e in youth programs and black coaches in youth league and high school ranks.

"You don't have many black coaches on the high school level," said Braddy. "I'm not knocking black high school coaches, but it's not many doing an adequate job. They don't adequately prepare themselves by going to clinics and talking to baseball people. When we get them (black players), instead of teaching them the mental part of the game and preparing them for battle, we're trying to change unsound fundamentals they're used to doing for 13 years. In times of pressure, they resort to unsound fundamentals.

"White coaches are able to win with white players because they are fundamentally sounder. They've gone through the Little League programs and their parents sent them to camps. They're bred into baseball."

Ellis is afraid the scarcity of black baseball players has far greater ramifications than merely jeopardizing the sport at black schools.

"It will have a trickle-down effect on the major leagues unless something happens," he said. "There is a great need for blacks to continue playing."

-- ROSCOE NANCE