

Universities should be more than their athletics programs

BY RUSSELL PHILBRICK

The NCAA decision to not penalize UNC for its fake classes is a terrible outcome for our society, and for the future of athletes.

This penalty should have been very severe to encourage every university to properly view its responsibility to educate the younger generation, both in the knowledge of the human experience and the importance of truthful dealings. How could such a thing have gone on for 18 years without everyone

knowing? How many hundreds of young men and women were cheated out of an education? It is an abomination for a university system to accept the idea of fake classes as part of its program, and these actions will be regarded as a disgrace to UNC's program until after it is demonstrated and proven to all that the situation has been corrected and totally eliminated.

Universities were originally formed to provide a formal process to pass on the knowledge of mankind to the next generation. Why should they also be "farm club teams" of

professional sports? Would all university students – those who are top athletes and those who aren't – be better enabled for their careers by changing the university system? The professional sports athletes in football and basketball would be better prepared for their vocations in a "farm club team" arrangement like that used by the baseball profession, and universities would be better off without serving as the "farm teams" for these professional sports.

The argument that has been used to justify the current system is that the

revenue sports – basketball and football – support the rest of the sports programs. Another argument is that the alumni give because of their sports teams' standings relative to other universities. However, there is something a bit absurd about the idea that the sports team is the reason that most alumni donate to their university, when it is in fact the knowledge gained and the skills learned while at the university that gave the alumni the resources that enabled them to make donations in later years. What are the national rankings of the football

and basketball teams of the Ivy League schools?

I have enjoyed playing and watching sports in past years. When I was a professor at Penn State University, I had season tickets for all football and basketball games year after year, and enjoyed watching those and several other sports for many years. On coming back to my alma mater, NCSU, a few years ago, I enjoyed going to a couple of seasons of NCSU games. But over the past decade or two, I have developed this nagging feeling that these pre-professional sports activities are more of a distraction from the true educational goals of a university. That anxiety has been largely amplified by the scandal of fake classes at our sister institution in Chapel Hill. It is time for some serious reflection by the universi-

ties of their role in the process of serving as the "farm teams" for football and basketball.

There are many athletes who actually dread the burden of having to enroll and struggle to succeed at a college or university. Likewise, those responsible for fielding a team next week struggle to ensure that the best athletes are making the minimum grades to stay eligible. The real shame is when the courses become fake or weak attempts at learning experiences.

Russell Philbrick is a professor in the Physics and Marine, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences Departments at N.C. State University and an emeritus professor at Penn State University.