

- Mark your confusion.
- Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)
- Write a 250+ word response to the article.

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## The Crisis in College Sports

By *The Week* staff, November 14, 2020

*With revenues plummeting in the pandemic, colleges are eliminating Olympic sports like diving and volleyball. Here's everything you need to know:*

### What is happening at colleges?

They are experiencing a massive budget crisis as they cope with dwindling enrollment, fees, and donations, as well as unexpected costs associated with COVID-19. By the American Council on Education's estimate, the pandemic has resulted in \$120 billion in lost revenue and unforeseen costs to American institutions of higher learning. To reduce expenses, colleges have canceled the seasons of more than 250 teams, while others are playing shortened schedules with little or no attendance. Stanford cut 11 sports; George Washington, seven; Brown, eight. Olympic sports like diving, swimming, golf, gymnastics, rowing, tennis, track and field, and volleyball have been disproportionately affected, an NBC News analysis found, while colleges in the NCAA's Division I have yet to cut a single team in revenue-generating sports like football and basketball. "We are all holding our breath in the Olympic sports community," said Kathy DeBoer, executive director of the American Volleyball Coaches Association. "It's like there are six bullets in the gun and 10 of us are standing there."

### Why only Olympic sports?

Administrators say football and basketball have escaped the ax because they generate the lion's share of most schools' athletic department revenue and support other sports programs that lose money. At Oregon State University, for example, the football program generates 80 percent of athletic revenue for the entire department. At the public universities in the elite "Power 5" sports conferences — the ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12, and SEC — half of total sports revenue came from football during the 2017–18 sports season, a study by ESPN showed. That money goes to funding everything from maintaining swimming pools and tennis courts to paying for other sports' travel. The existing "model of intercollegiate athletics has been broken," said Mike Moyer, the executive director of the National Wrestling Coaches Association, "and COVID-19 is exposing it."

### Are college sports profitable?

Total revenue collected by college athletic departments exploded from \$3 billion to \$14 billion from 2004 to 2018, with the help of sponsorship and licensing deals as well as lucrative TV and radio rights. But athletic departments are nonprofit entities that operate on the principle of "spend the money that you generate," said Bubba Cunningham, the athletic director at the University of North Carolina. This dynamic of swelling revenues that had to be spent led to an arms race on coaches' salaries and facility construction that became untenable once the pandemic struck. "Schools have spent money recklessly for years," Tim Nevius, an attorney and former NCAA investigator, told *The Washington Post's* Sally Jenkins. "There has just been an extraordinary amount of spending on things that have very little resemblance to a university's mission to educate and develop people." Some colleges have now laid off coaches and staff in some sports. In a letter to alumni and students, Stanford University officials said they faced a \$70 million budget shortfall over the next three years and had to cut 11 sports programs. The athletic department made \$139 million in 2018–19, with \$44 million of that total coming from football.

### What about smaller schools?

Schools in the NCAA's Divisions II and III, which do not spend as much on athletics and often do not give athletic scholarships, have not eliminated as many varsity programs as Division I schools. In all, 84 Division I teams have been cut, compared with 58 Division II teams and 62 Division III teams. At the Division III University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, athletic officials are struggling with the loss of revenue generated from clinics and summer camps. "That was huge," said athletic director Ryan Callahan, noting

that the camps "subsidize up to 60 percent of our operating budget" for sports teams. At its sister campus UW–Parkside, athletic director Andrew Gavin launched a \$5 million fundraiser on March 5 — at the start of the pandemic in the U.S. — to renovate the gym, among other things. "The timing was interesting," he said, adding that some typical donors decided to either skip the fundraiser or donate less than they normally would have.

### **Did losing the NCAA Tournament hurt?**

Massively. Every year, the NCAA men's basketball tournament not only crowns a national champion but generates nearly \$1 billion in revenue from combined ticket sales and TV rights. That money is then distributed throughout college athletics, funding programs large and small. In late March, after the men's basketball tournament was canceled because of the pandemic, the NCAA announced that it would distribute \$225 million to member schools for 2020 — a 62.5 percent reduction from the \$600 million that had been expected before the pandemic. And while that loss might be absorbed by a football powerhouse like the University of Texas, smaller universities are not so fortunate. The University of Wyoming was forced to make deep cuts in its sports budget after facing a \$42 million budget deficit. Wyoming athletic director Tom Burman could have been speaking for all college athletic directors when he called the pandemic "the greatest adversity we have ever faced."

### **An ill omen for the Olympics**

Student athletes and Olympic officials are warning that college administrators' decision to cut non-revenue Olympic sports to save money during the pandemic jeopardizes the feeder system for U.S. Olympic teams. "To be on the national team," said Erik Shoji, a U.S. Olympic bronze medalist in volleyball during the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, "you've got to play in college." The former All-American at Stanford was one of hundreds of American collegiate athletes to compete during the Rio games. The NCAA reports that eight out of 10 athletes who represented the U.S. there played in college. In total, Stanford cut 10 Olympic sports programs — including the men's volleyball program that nourished Shoji — only four years after the university set a school record by winning 26 medals in Rio, 14 of them gold. "It's absolutely devastating to the Olympic pipeline," said Alexander Massialas, a Stanford alumnus and two-time Olympic medalist in men's fencing. Stanford has cut men's fencing this year.

### **Response option(s):**

- After reading the article, what is one main idea that you find most remarkable (meaning, "most worthy of a remark" -- so it can be interesting, concerning, confusing, alarming, offensive, etc)? What is it that you find so remarkable? Explain.
- After reading the article, what additional questions do you have? Research these on your own and write about what you find.
- Summarize any point made in the article and respond.