

By Salim Muwakkil

Another difficult test for collegiate athletics

A NEW NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION (NCAA) rule cutting off scholarship aid to academically unprepared student-athletes has forced a national debate on the skewed priorities of collegiate sports and brought the system's race and class dynamics into sharper focus.

The rule—Proposition 42—was passed in January by a vote of 163-154 and is scheduled to take effect in the fall of 1990. Many NCAA insiders insist, however, the proposal will be overturned at the next NCAA convention in January 1990. A poll recently conducted by the *Washington Post* found fewer than 40 percent of the NCAA members now support the measure.

Proposition 42 denies high school graduates athletic scholarships to Division I colleges if they fail to achieve a minimum score of 700 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), or at least a 15 on the American College Testing (ACT) exam and maintain a "C" grade average in a high school core curriculum. The regulation is actually an amendment of Proposition 48, a measure implemented in August 1986 that stops freshmen athletes who fail to meet those SAT and grade requirements from playing or practicing with Division I teams. Under Proposition 48, affected students lose a year of playing eligibility, but are still allowed to receive an athletic scholarship during their freshman year. Proposition 42 would eliminate the scholarship altogether.

The tough amendment was adopted without much fanfare during the NCAA convention two months ago. But Georgetown University basketball coach John Thompson brought public attention to the issue soon after when he walked off his job for a week to protest the measure. Thompson, one of the few African-American coaches of a Division I team, is well known for his commitment to educating athletes. Unlike most major colleges, a high percentage of Georgetown's players graduate.

SAT dissatisfaction: Thompson's chief complaint with the proposition is that it discriminates against black and poor students, who are the major victims of substandard schooling and who therefore are less able to meet the measure's academic requirements. These were also the very students who have little possibility of attending college without scholarship assistance, Thompson argues.

The Georgetown coach's protest carried considerable symbolic weight, but he's not alone in denouncing the new NCAA ruling. A wide range of critics think Proposition 42 is a bad idea, including, it now seems, the same NCAA members who initially supported it. Critics of the ruling seem to agree that its most objectionable aspect is the importance placed on standardized tests as admissions criteria.

Proposition 48 itself was opposed by many African-American educators and civil rights leaders who claimed the requirements were unfair because standardized tests are culturally biased against black student-athletes. While there remains some disagreement about the tests' biases—many theorists insist the major bias is one of class—most experts concur that standardized examinations have a limited function.

According to Timothy Walter, a professor

of physical education at the University of Michigan, there is considerable evidence that such tests are bad predictors of future academic achievement. In a 1987 study he conducted that followed the progress of student-athletes with low SAT scores, Walter found "the vast majority of those who would have been predicted to fail as a function of their SAT score in fact succeeded."

Even the College Board, the organization of colleges and universities that sponsors the SAT, urges that the test not be used "as the sole basis for important decisions affecting the lives of individuals" to the exclusion of other relevant information.

Student exploitation: Subsequent studies confirmed some of the fears of Proposition 48's foes. A disproportionate number of those affected by the measure have been African-American. And although there has

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been no drastic decrease in the number of black student-athletes in Division I schools, a downward trend is discernible.

But most responsible black leaders concede that Proposition 48 is a step in the right direction. It is clear to them that black collegiate athletes—particularly those playing

to the idolatry of athletics.

Proposition 48 at least provided athletes with an incentive to sharpen their focus on academics—though many insist the standards are still too low. What's more, by allowing the school to risk a financial scholarship on an undereducated student for a year, the measure encourages colleges to become more involved in the academic development of the marginal student-athlete. According to many accounts, the ruling has succeeded in boosting the overall academic performance of student-athletes in big-time college sports.

"I am fundamentally supportive of rule 48," says Harry Edwards, an African-American professor of sociology at the University of California at Berkeley and a well-known expert on sports and race. But Edwards characterizes Proposition 42 as a "racist travesty." While Proposition 48 allowed academically marginal students time to acclimate themselves to the rigors of the college classroom, the amended regulation offers no such opportunity.

With the new ruling, Edwards says, "the NCAA is telling black student-athletes this: 'If we can't exploit you, we don't want you on campus.'"

Georgetown's Thompson notes that black athletes have helped build many of the powerful athletic programs now pumping revenue into those predominately white Division I colleges. And, he says, these athletes rarely are adequately compensated for their contributions. For example, former Georgetown basketball player Patrick Ewing alone is estimated to have generated \$12 million of revenue for the school during his four-year stint.

Thompson says those same schools that benefit so bountifully from black athletic talent are, through their support of Proposition 42, turning away from the special problems of black student-athletes. These academically deprived students will "no longer have an opportunity to show that a poor test score ... is not a result of the lack of native intelligence," he says.

African-Americans are not the only ones protesting the new regulation. Former De Paul coach Ray Meyer wrote in a recent *Chicago Sun-Times* column, "No thought was given to the problems that come with using standardized national tests in admissions and the disparity in the country's educational system. Do you penalize a man because of the environment he grew up in?"

Bullied by Bulldogs: Proposition 42 was spawned by the case of Jan Kemp, a University of Georgia English instructor who was dismissed for protesting special treatment for student-athletes. Kemp sued the school, negotiated a healthy settlement and was allowed to rejoin the faculty. In the aftermath of the case, Georgia decided to stop accepting all athletes who failed to meet Proposition 48 standards.

Since that voluntary decision restricted the pool of talent available to Georgia and put the Southeast Conference (SEC) school at a competitive disadvantage with others in the conference, Georgia's athletic director

successfully lobbied other SEC schools to follow its lead. But since that would subsequently place the SEC at a competitive disadvantage with other Division I conferences, the conference made its case—successfully—that the entire NCAA should adopt the restrictive standards of Proposition 42.

Bye-bye black males: Just a week after Thompson's protest walkout, the American Council on Education (ACE) released a report noting that "participation in higher education by black males has slipped alarmingly since the mid-'70s." Enrollment of black males dropped from 4.3 percent in 1976 to 3.5 percent in 1986, according to the study, the largest decline of any racial group participating in higher education.

According to Reginald Wilson, senior scholar of the ACE's Office of Minority Concerns, this education gap has accelerated because of a series of severe social and economic problems that afflict black males from an early age. All too often, Wilson explains, these factors conspire to kill young black males' interest in college even before they reach adolescence. Their interest in sports, however, tends to be high—and many black educators and activists seek to parlay that remaining interest into something more valuable.

Pay for play: But Nebraska State Sen. Ernest Chambers, one of the country's most articulate critics of big-time college athletics, asks, "Why should someone who aspires to be a professional athlete, a trade that has nothing to do with books, have to train himself for his professional future by going to college?"

Chambers has introduced several bills that would transform football and basketball players at the University of Nebraska into state employees subject to a statutory wage scale. Chambers' views on the nature of collegiate sports raise serious questions about the treatment of amateur athletes.

"The NCAA is only interested in making money from these players, chewing them up and spitting them out," he explains. "Everybody is getting rich except the people who produce the wealth."

While Chambers is concerned about the lack of emphasis big-time college programs place on academic preparation, he focuses more intently on the flaws of a system that profits so handsomely from the confusion of education with athletics.

"Proposition 42 grew out of a concern with profit, not out of a concern for the minds of the student-athletes," he said, noting that the motive for the ruling was the SEC's worry about other conferences' competitive advantages. "First the South ensures that African-Americans receive inferior educations by denying them sufficient resources, then it punishes them down the line for not receiving what was never intended for them to receive," Chambers said. "It's another case of blaming the victim."

Sports withdrawal: But while Harry Edwards denounces Proposition 42 as racist and elitist, he holds African-Americans accountable for a disproportionate emphasis on athletic excellence as a cultural value. "The black family and the African-American community tend to reward athletic achievement much more and earlier than any other activity. As a people, we can no longer permit many among our most competitive and gifted youths to sacrifice a wealth of personal potential on the altar on athletic aspiration and put playbooks ahead of textbooks." □



Georgetown coach John Thompson

in the "revenue producing" sports of basketball and football—are systematically being exploited for their talent and receive neither education nor revenue for their troubles.

"Instead of complaining from a cocoon of mediocrity," says A.S. "Doc" Young, a sports columnist syndicated in several black newspapers, "we should do whatever is necessary to make sure now that our young athletes qualify themselves for college education before they finish high school. Only a small handful will turn professional. Without proper education the majority will wind up being underachievers in an ever more complex world."

Young's position echoes that of many who urge African-Americans to devote more energy to the problems of education and less

By John B. Judis

WASHINGTON, D.C.

SCIENTISTS AND ENGINEERS WHO UNDERSTAND the sad state of the American electronics industry are becoming radicalized. "We have to do something this year," Massachusetts Institute of Technology engineering professor David Staelin told a meeting of engineers, economists and business leaders held here February 14 by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE).

At the meeting Staelin and the IEEE proposed that the government sponsor a new Technology Corporation of America that would research, develop and produce everything from semiconductors to high-definition televisions (HDTVs). The American Electronics Association (AEA) is moving in the same direction. It is proposing a consortium of electronics firms that would develop and manufacture HDTVs.

But the engineers' sense of urgency is not shared by all business leaders and lawmakers. Many business executives are afraid that government participation in the electronics industry will set a dangerous precedent, while lawmakers and the national press are obsessed by the deficit. At the same time, foreign firms, worried about American competition, are also working hard to discredit new approaches.

At stake here is not only the viability of American industry in the 21st century, but the development of a new political economy that goes well beyond the timid welfare capitalism of the New Deal.

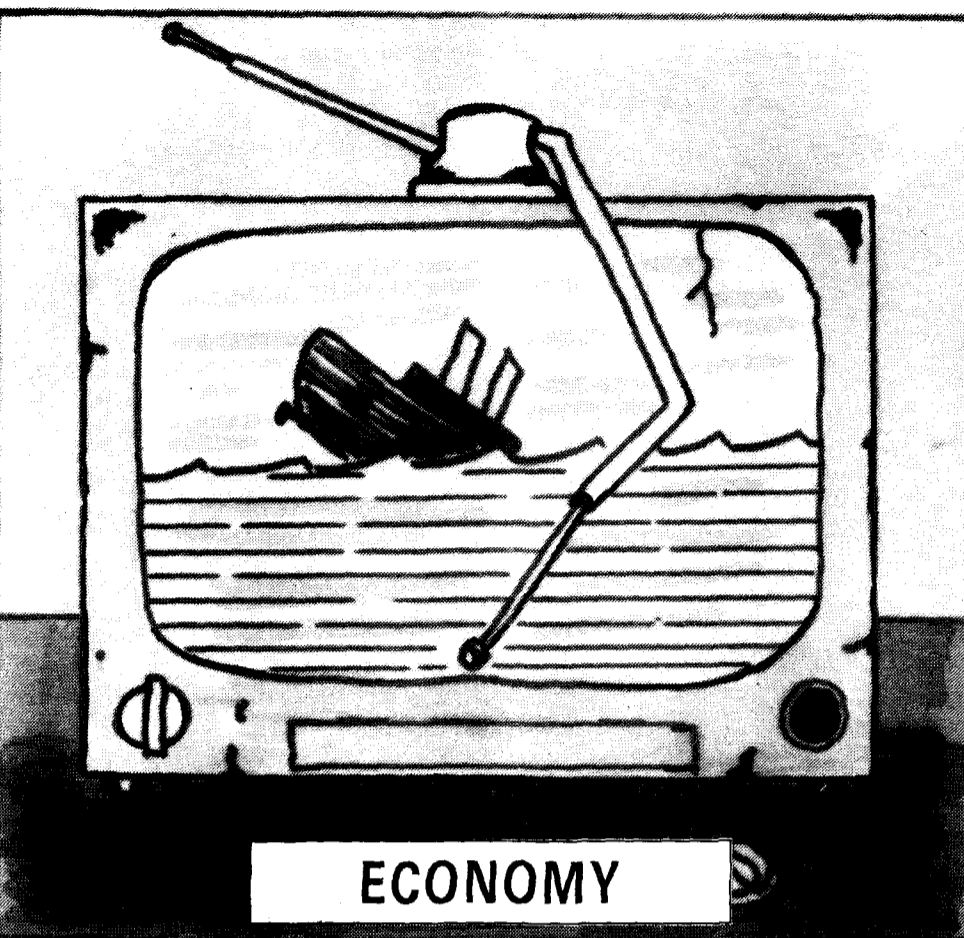
As the engineers explained at the IEEE workshop, American weakness in electronics is only apparent when one looks inside computers and televisions to see where the random access memory (RAM) chips and other devices have been made. "The problem is submerged where customers and the public don't see it but where engineers do," Staelin said. The U.S. retains its scientific edge, but lags behind Japan and Western Europe in ability to translate science into commercially viable products. "The entire infrastructure that supports low-cost manufacturing has vanished," Staelin said.

The engineers no longer believe that private firms, acting on their own, will be able to re-establish this kind of manufacturing capability. Left on their own, American firms have stopped making televisions. Only one domestic manufacturer, Zenith, remains, and it is trying to sell its television division to a foreign company. Government intervention is necessary, not only to create a new corpo-

Death Valley Days have come to American TV and electronics firms. And it looks like the invisible hand can't change channels or turn them back on without a switch in thinking.

rate entity, but to contribute development costs, which are astronomically high, and to guarantee initial demand.

According to an industry newsletter, *New Technology Week*, the engineers' proposal for a technology corporation is modeled partly on the old Radio Corporation of America (RCA), which the U.S. Navy Department helped found in 1919 in order to



U.S. electronics industry wires Uncle Sam for help

develop an American capability in wireless communication. RCA's stock was originally purchased by a consortium of American firms, and it was defined as a government-regulated utility.

The static quo: The engineers envisage a stronger government role in any new corporation than the administrations of the '20s played in the development of RCA. In contrast to other current proposals, they also insist that the new corporation not merely develop prototypes but actually make and market products. "Manufacturing has to be part of the process," Staelin said.

At the meeting, however, business leaders from IBM, Digital Equipment Corporation and Motorola balked at having extensive government involvement. In the final statement, the participants endorsed merely "industry-led consortia with government co-operation and support." Clarity gave way to fuzziness. An understanding of the industry's ills failed to produce a means to cure them.

The AEA proposal for an HDTV consortium has met with a different and more insidious kind of opposition. Last month both the AEA and the Electronic Industries Association (EIA) submitted briefs to Rep. Ed Markey's (D-MA) Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance. Markey is planning to hold hearings this month on whether the government should aid American producers to compete with Japanese and Western European firms.

The AEA is composed of American electronics firms, many of whom used to be dogmatic defenders of the free market. They have, however, dramatically changed their thinking in the past year. In the area of electronics, the AEA brief says, "The long course of free-enterprise action may serve to disadvantage the best interests of the U.S." In its brief the AEA calls for government-funded consortia that bring together private firms and universities to research, develop and

produce new TV technologies. Like the IEEE, the AEA argues that if the U.S. cedes the HDTV market to foreign firms, it will fall fatally behind in other electronics fields.

On the Sony side of the street: The EIA, dominated by Japanese electronics giants like Sony and Toshiba, initially opposed any government aid to American electronics firms. But in its brief to Markey's committee it changed course. Its differences with the AEA proposal are now more subtle, but perhaps no less telling. The EIA brief argues against a preoccupation with funding HDTV consortia. "A fundamental premise of this report is that competitiveness is primarily an economywide issue and is logically distinct from the competitive position of the

producers in a particular industry and activity." The EIA wants the government to give priority to reducing the deficit (which will also, incidentally, protect Japan's huge investment in American bonds) and to providing industrywide tax incentives.

The EIA acknowledges that some kind of consortia might be desirable, but it insists that they not be limited to American firms. "Foreign-owned U.S. producers already play a leading role in the TV industry," the EIA writes. "Any policy efforts that attempt to exclude these producers will delay the development and introduction of HDTV technology in the U.S. and discourage foreign producers from expanding their production and R&D operations here." The EIA also questions whether actual public funding is necessary. "The main roles for the government in R&D consortia," EIA argues, "are to serve as a broker for the negotiations that produce them... and to monitor them to prevent antitrust violations."

As often happens in these debates, the Japanese-funded brief is better written and more attractively produced. The IEA's arguments are also not without merit. For instance, a good case can be made for foreign participation in consortia if foreign firms participate on a quid pro quo basis. "The idea of the consortium is to improve the technological base of the U.S.," Cornell University economics professor Alan McAdams said at the IEEE workshop. "If we can do that on a reciprocal basis with foreign firms, that's fine." But many engineers and business leaders fear from past experience that the U.S. will not be able to work out adequate reciprocal arrangements with the Japanese.

The real question about the IEA's brief, however, is whether it is meant as a serious contribution to a debate or is simply meant to stall any decision while the Japanese and West Europeans plow forward with their own government-sponsored and government-funded HDTV plans. The motives behind these proposals have to be understood before their objective merits can be weighed.

Unfortunately, as the engineers argue, there isn't a lot of time to resolve these matters. "The electronics industry is in the same state as the S&Ls," David Staelin says. "The longer we wait, the harder it is going to be to rescue it." □

Will high-definition TV have remote control?

Over the past decade no group has argued more eloquently for an American industrial policy than the Berkeley Roundtable for International Economics (BRIE). BRIE's economists include Stephen Cohen and John Zysman, the authors of *Manufacturing Matters*, Laura Tyson, Jeffrey Hart and Michael Borrus. Having their imprimatur on a high-tech economic policy is akin to having a weapons system endorsed by Sen. Sam Nunn.

BRIE's economists have also been critical of Japanese trade policies, and they have worked closely with the American Electronics Association (AEA). But the Japanese-dominated Electronic Industries Association (EIA) was able to hire them to write their brief on high-definition television. In an interview with *In These Times*, BRIE's Hart criticized the AEA position as "America first." He argues that American firms are too weak to build HDTV on their own and that shutting out foreign producers will simply isolate American firms from important technological developments.

Hart could be right, but it depends on what kind of guarantees American firms can extract from the foreign firms that participate in U.S.-government funded consortiums. BRIE does not spell out any conditions in its EIA brief, and BRIE members themselves have a very different conception of such consortia from the Japanese firms in the EIA. When asked which foreign firms will participate in government-funded consortiums, Hart favors European, and not Japanese, participation. The more powerful Japanese firms, Hart warns, might "take the ideas and run." But Sony's American subsidiary, a prime mover in the EIA, has already expressed interest in joining an American-funded consortium.

BRIE believes that it is merely using the EIA as a medium for its own ideas, but EIA could be using BRIE to legitimate obstructionism disguised as debate. The real question in the debate between the AEA and IEA is not who is right, but who is really after what.

-J.B.J.