

Ron Smith (2022)



Sept 8, 2021: The Myth of Amateur College Sports

Jan 10, 2024: The NCAA, Football Concussions and a Multimillion Dollar Lawsuit

I joined my two older brothers on a dairy farm near Delavan, Wisconsin on April 13, 1936. From an early age of three or so, I could pick out simple tunes on our upright piano. I took piano lessons beginning at age four, but I was no Mozart, quit piano, and began again when I was six. I got out of milking cows each morning by practicing for an hour every day. I continued lessons until I was 16, when sports dominated my life. I shot baskets for hours on our barn floor arena, pitched balls off the milk house wall, and kicked footballs on our grassy lawn. I got good enough to win 10 letters in those three sports before being recruited by colleges including Northwestern where I received a scholastic scholarship and participated on the basketball and baseball teams while majoring in history. After playing for a Chicago White Sox farm team, I taught high school history and coached in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin while completing a master's degree in history at the University of Wisconsin. At Wisconsin, I met Sue Fernald, a senior at Grinnell College who was taking education courses at the university, and within a year we were married. While at Wisconsin, I was invited to work on my Ph.D. in the Physical Education Department with an emphasis on sport history and was fortunate to receive a National Defense Education Fellowship. As I was completing my Ph.D. dissertation on the history of an athletic conference, Penn State had an opening in its Physical Education Department. The \$10,300 position at Penn State in 1968 was to teach the history of physical activity and sport and do research. Research continued on the history of intercollegiate athletics, which allowed me to search the archives of over 60 universities in my 28-year career at Penn State. My research took me from Harvard and Yale to Stanford and Southern California and Alabama and Tulane to Nebraska and Michigan. I have written 12 books including *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics in the 1980s* to *The Myth of the Amateur: A History of College Athletic Scholarships* in the 2020s. My most recent book is on Walter Byers, Executive Director of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, 1951-1987. A proud moment came when I initiated an amicus brief in the 2021 *Shawne Alston v. NCAA* case that was quoted liberally in the 9-0 U. S. Supreme Court decision allowing payment for the use of names, images, and likenesses, NILs, for men and women college athletes. Presently, I am involved in a major brain injury-concussion court case of a former football player and have presented a lengthy historical study of what the NCAA has not done for brain health in college athletics.

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