

Abstract for Interview of Andy Geiger by William J. Studer

Andy Geiger, OSU Director of Athletics, May, 1994 to April, 2005, developed a strong interest in a career in athletic administration while a student at Syracuse University. His participation in crew led in time to working as a student volunteer intern in the office of the Assistant Director of Athletics at Syracuse. This was an exciting time at Syracuse since its football team won a national championship, and its star player, the great Ernie Davis, won the Heisman trophy. After graduation Geiger worked for nearly three years as a coach and physical education instructor at Dartmouth College, but at age 25 he returned to Syracuse for six years as Assistant Athletic Director. His success there led to a position as Athletic Director at Stanford University from 1979 to 1990.

At Stanford, the endowment for athletics was around \$4 million in 1979; by 1990 it had increased to \$54 million. Under Geiger's leadership Stanford won 27 national championships, and finished first, second, or third in NCAA championships in 13 different sports. He worked very hard to have excellent facilities, and strove always to provide necessary salaries and budgets for the coaches and their various programs. Not unexpectedly there was tension at times between certain faculty and the alumni, staff and others, as some persons argued that the rising costs of the athletic program somehow compromised the academic mission of the university. Nonetheless, the Stanford model, which was widely viewed as an outstanding success, served as the basis for Geiger's program later at Ohio State.

After 12 years at Stanford Geiger, largely for personal reasons, decided to return to the East Coast, and he accepted an attractive offer to be Director of Athletics at Maryland University. He stayed at Maryland for only four years, and in 1994, after some persuasive arguments from President Gordon Gee, he accepted a similar position as Director of Athletics at Ohio State, a job title that was soon expanded, to include Assistant University Vice President.

Geiger describes his management style at Ohio State as seeking to provide vision, and if possible energy, to recruit really good strong people to the various positions, whether coaching or administration or service in the Athletic Department. Give the right people the resources with which to operate, and then get out of the way. One must be a competitor, and while victory is desired, one must always listen carefully when problems arise. Administration is all about problem solving. You are dealing far more with negative things than positive things.

One of Geiger's enduring legacies at Ohio State was his remarkable expansion and improvement of athletic facilities. During his tenure the following facilities were built: the Bill Davis Baseball Stadium, the Schottenstein Center (for basketball and hockey), the Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium (track, soccer, and lacrosse), the McCorkle Aquatics pavilion, and the Steelwood Athletic Training facility (gymnastics, wrestling, fencing). Also, the Ohio Stadium enjoyed a major renovation and expansion. The first project completed was the Bill Davis Baseball Stadium whose funding was greatly enhanced by a gift of a million and a half dollars from Dorothy Davis. Planning for the Schottenstein Center was greatly facilitated by a \$15 million grant to the university arranged by Vern Riffe, the powerful Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives. Some "downtown" interests, including Mayor Greg Lashutka, had favored a multi-purpose downtown Event Center that Ohio State would have to share with other parties. Fortunately the university was able to build its own venue, the Schottenstein Center, next to the Woody Hayes Athletic Facility on the northwest corner of Lane Avenue and Olentangy River Road.

The deteriorating condition of Ohio Stadium provided a major engineering and financial challenge. It was far below code requirements. There was no handicapped seating, the bathroom situation was woeful at best (14,000 seats in C Deck had no bathrooms), aisles were too narrow for a quick evacuation should that ever be necessary, concrete was decaying, and wiring was obsolete. Exploratory planning got underway. The first option, which reduced seating capacity by 13,000 seats, was quickly abandoned. Instead it was decided to lower the field by some 14 feet, and widen the stadium by some 40 feet, to gain ability to widen aisles and add new rows of seats. Ten down rows and 19 up rows were added. Every seat was better than it had been before, and the sight line was greatly improved. The total cost was close to \$200 million, but the project is self-amortizing, and the bonds were funded without going to the state or the university. Much of the needed capital was raised from revenues generated by athletics, principally football. The Jesse Owens Memorial Stadium, designed by architect Curt Moody, was built as part of the track restoration. Moody also did the Schottenstein Center, the McCorkle Pavilion, and the Archives Book Depository Building.

There were other needs and challenges as well. The Student Athlete Services Organization (SASO), which included academic support units, lacked an adequate office, and study halls for athletes were in a dining commons on Lane Avenue. After consultation with Vice President David Williams, and Bill Hall, head of Housing and Dining, the Younkin Success Center was built on Neil Avenue. The Steelwood Center, which among other uses provided practice facilities for wrestling, gymnastics, and fencing, was opened in a former warehouse not far from campus, and was described as a "state-of-the-art, best in the country, facility." The McCorkle Pavilion will open sometime soon. Geiger's final major construction project was renovation of the old ice rink as a home for the women's ice hockey team.

After such impressive, but expensive expansion and improvements in athletic facilities, some critical dissenting voices sounded. The Board of Trustees and the Central Administration put a moratorium on construction of new athletic facilities, although they did approve a major renovation of Larkins Hall. Speaking from vast experience in such matters, Geiger lamented that cumbersome state law (the four prime system) requires millions and millions of dollars be spent unnecessarily. This is a "very, very serious problem."

The collective debt of the Athletic Department is currently around \$200 million, by far the largest in the Big Ten. Geiger stated that the current annual debt service is about \$14 million, but also that athletic revenues dedicated to debt retirement are currently running some \$15 million per year. A portion of revenues generated from each ticket sold for football is earmarked for debt retirement, as is income from the 82 suites in the stadium. Under current conditions the entire debt should be retired within 30 years.

Currently the price of a general admission football ticket at Ohio State is \$58, the highest in the Big Ten. Certain voices have derided such costs, as well as the frequent annual increases, as some "terrible thing," but the athletic department like every other department in the university faces inflationary pressures. To be financially independent ticket prices must sometimes be raised. After all, OSU has an athletic program of 36 varsity sports, 105 coaches, 150 full-time staff, 700 part-time student staff, 1,000 student athletes, and elite facilities – all supported by an overall \$80 million annual budget. Consequently some people view The Ohio State University as a football factory.

There is no question that football is something that the university is extremely famous for but there are other centers of excellence in OSU athletics beyond football. Recently the fencing team won a national

championship. And beyond athletics many other programs within the university are of course truly excellent. Indeed all parts of the university should strive for similar success, but none should be criticized for having achieved it. It is not football's fault that anything the team does, good or bad, is on page one, while an extraordinary academic achievement at OSU, such as two of its faculty members being elected to the National Academy of Sciences, is buried on page 4 of the Metro section of the Dispatch.

As Athletic Director Geiger strongly supported the non-revenue sports, such as synchronized swimming, gymnastics, fencing, soccer, or lacrosse, which he sometimes referred to as "the humanities of the athletic program." Such less-publicized sports bring outstanding, creative people to the university, and add diversity to the student body. Athletics has a real kinship with the arts and with the humanities of the University.

Some have argued, however, that non-athletic sectors, such as the arts and humanities, which Geiger obviously esteems, may be indirectly hampered by the high cost of athletics, especially the ever-escalating salaries of the football and basketball coaches. Jim Tressel's annual compensation package is \$1.5 million, Thad Matta's is about \$1.3 million, and the new Athletic Director [Gene Smith] was recently hired at \$450,000. Given market realities, and the high expectations of the general public, Geiger stated that he probably could not find a suitable basketball or football coach to come to Ohio State unless he were offered a top ten to twenty level salary. Other examples abound in the general culture of such high salaries, including movie actors, rock stars, and professional athletes. Perhaps it is evidence "of a culture that's gone awry."

Furthermore, there seems to be a lack of understanding about the athletics budget at Ohio State. It is not generally known that the Athletic Department generates all of the funds for its own budget, including facilities debt retirement; that it pays the University for tuition, fees, room and board for student-athletes on scholarship, and that it even contributes modestly to the University's general fund budget. It is also estimated that the economic impact of the athletic program on the greater Columbus metro area is ca. \$100 million annually. Yet the gross amount of money the Athletic Department spends is less than 3% of the gross amount that Ohio State spends in a year. The Department raises all the money it spends. The one subsidy that the Department gets from Ohio State is that it is allowed to build its facilities within the bonding capacity of the University. Geiger disputes the common notion that if large sums were not spent by the Athletic Department that somehow that same money would be coming over to some other activity at the University.

Another common misconception about the athletic program is the strange attitude that a coach can and should have absolute control over the behavior of all the people that he/she is connected with. Coaches are not in the marionette business; athletes are not puppets with strings attached to them. Without excusing some of the dumb things certain athletes have done, coaches would like to have the opportunity to work as teachers to help wayward athletes. Obviously this approach is complicated when the athlete's transgression is splashed all over page one of the newspaper. The Athletic Director must also from time to time confront, or dismiss, a coach who is not performing up to expectations. The ultimate question for Geiger is whether his child would be comfortable in an experience controlled by the coach. The coach-athlete relationship in college athletics is incredible, beyond powerful. Coaches have an enormous responsibility for the welfare of young, vulnerable people in their formative years.

When you find that you have hired or inherited people who cannot do it or do not get it, you have to make a change.

One challenge faced both by coaches and Athletic Directors is motivating athletes to focus seriously on academic pursuits when many have hopes of lucrative professional careers. Not all athletes come from great high schools, or from homes where there were books on the shelves, or stimulating intellectual discussions around the dinner table. To prevent bright, potentially successful student-athletes from becoming lost in a system that is not always welcoming more constructive ways must be found to inspire and integrate athletes into the academic life.

Being a good athlete and a good student are not mutually exclusive endeavors. Geiger comments briefly about the variance in league rules that permit basketball players to sign professional contracts with the NBA at a younger age than football players can do in the NFL. Such rules are not passed by the NCAA, but by the professional leagues respectively. The NFL would be free to change its rules if it so desired. According to Geiger most owners of professional franchises would favor rules closer to those of the NFL than the NBA. Many feel that young persons usually lack the maturity and strength to excel at the professional level until they are 20 or 21 years old.

Geiger was proud of the fact that student-athlete six-year graduation rates at Ohio State would currently appear to be getting closer to the norm for the general student population. Graduation rates for women student-athletes are usually well above the norm, but rates for football and basketball players continue to rank near the bottom of the Big Ten. Yet football under Jim Tressell has made major improvements. A challenge for the football team is that many players, mainly seniors, have been drafted by the NFL, and since the university operates on the quarter system students can drop out after the fall quarter and thus incur a two-quarter deficit that is harder to make up on a part-time basis within the six-year standard.

Men's basketball is the greatest challenge. The fact that relatively so few students are involved in basketball complicates interpretation of the statistics. A school might report a 100% graduation rate, and this could be a single student. Or you have 0% and it is again only one student. In football 20-25 students come in on scholarship each year, and about half of them will graduate within the six-year window. The Younkin Success Center should be helpful in this regard in the future. Recently the NCAA and the Big Ten have established new standards for academic performance of student-athletes, and Geiger is an enthusiastic supporter of these new rules.

Based on his own life experience, and his 50 years of experience with collegiate athletics, Geiger has become convinced that participation in athletics has the potential to enhance "life skills" for a young person in many meaningful ways. The well managed athletic experience in combination with a rigorous academic experience is an incredible thing; indeed, given the need for careful time management for athletes some will do better academically than they would otherwise have done. Geiger started the Athletic Department Outreach Program that provided some financial assistance for student-athletes who have used up their eligibility, but have not graduated, to return and complete their degree. Some well-known athletes have used this program, including Clark Kellogg and Eddie George. One athlete, Ricardo Volley, graduated under this program at age 48. It is a "Buckeye for Life" concept. Another Geiger innovation was to hire a psychologist as part of the Sports Medicine program to counsel coaches, teams, and individual student-athletes. Issues dealt with include eating disorders, depression, drug use and abuse, including performance enhancing as well as recreational drugs.

Geiger, with the support of President William "Brit" Kirwan, enhanced the traditional financial aid package for athletes (tuition, room, board, and books) with a "cost of attendance" stipend. This allowed athletes to receive supplemental funding for such expenses as transportation, living money, some entertainment money, further supplies, and art supplies. Today every single university in the country identifies "cost of attendance" as the basis for awarding financial aid.

Geiger recognizes that there is a public perception that student-athletes have all too frequently exhibited problem behavior, especially those within the football and basketball programs. Over a dozen football players have been arrested just since Tressel's appointment in 2001. Careful attention is given during the recruiting process, and some are weeded out, but typically the ones who transgress in college have been model students in their former communities. While public opinion cannot be ignored, Geiger's primary concern as Athletic Director was to find appropriate ways to help the "kids." Overall it should be emphasized that even though there might be on average up to ten transgressions by student-athletes per year, this is less than 1% of the 1,000 or so student-athletes at the university. It is not a higher rate than that of the general student body.

The Athletic Department's Compliance Office works to insure compliance with NCAA and Big Ten rules and regulations, both institutionally and individually. Recently the reporting line of this Office was broadened to include the Office of Legal Affairs, as well as the Director of Athletics. Currently one lawyer at the university spends 100% of his time on athletics, and his salary is paid by the Athletic Department. Furthermore, the Department has four full-time lawyers on its staff to work on compliance issues. The record keeping required is extraordinary. The Executive Compliance Committee reviews all kinds of things, not just infractions. An ongoing issue for the Department of Athletics is the role of boosters. Recently a "Booster Education Task Force" was created. In a sense anyone who ever purchased a ticket to an Ohio State athletic event could be considered a booster. Thus the potential for problems is universal. It could be considered a violation to buy a student-athlete a hamburger at McDonald's. The most serious violation involved an orthodontist giving thousands of dollars worth of free dental care to a member of the women's basketball team. Ohio State has far less problems with boosters than any of the institutions where Geiger had worked earlier. The worst worry would involve gamblers and agents.

Title IX and Gender Equity in sports have had a tremendous influence on athletics in recent years. Geiger has long been recognized as a vigorous champion of women's athletics, and Ohio State has the most women athletes on grants-in-aids among Division 1A schools. Ohio State's women's rowing team is contending for the National Championship in their sport. Women's golf has finished in the top ten for many years. There is no question that Title IX has allowed many women to earn college degrees who otherwise would not likely have done so. So far few women's basketball games have appeared on television, and the university has had to pay to get them broadcast. Although they're doing better, women's basketball is still not even close to paying its way.

The Athletic Council is a policy group of which 8 of the 15 members are faculty. The Council approves budget and schedules, but true oversight of athletics by the Council is virtually impossible given the size and diversity of the athletic program. There are several ex-officio members. The 8 faculty members tend not to be activists, and are not deeply involved in the program. Clearly the ratio of winning to losing is very important, especially in football, to how the athletic program is judged. To say that winning is not important is to be totally silly, although sometimes we are embarrassed when we realize how important it is. What is paramount, according to Geiger, is creating the opportunity to win, the opportunity for

success. He does not regard winning the National Championship in football in 2002 as the highlight of his career.

Two unfortunate, widely publicized, situations involving Maurice Claret, football player, and Jim O'Brien, basketball coach, drained much of Geiger's time and energy, and served as a catalyst for his decision to retire in 2005.

Geiger spoke to the issue of too few minority staff, especially African-Americans, in the Department of Athletics. He considers that Ohio State has done a respectable job, but could have done better. The departmental percentage of minorities hovers around the national average for peer institutions, around 11-12%. Two of Geiger's Associate Athletic Directors were African-Americans. Five of the senior administrators were female. However, the majority of the football and basketball teams are African-Americans, and the majority of the coaching is not.

During his tenure at Ohio State, Geiger worked with three different presidents. Gordon Gee was an "unforgettable character" that was interested simultaneously in almost everything. The two men met frequently. During Brit Kirwan's tenure Geiger saw less of the president, but he reports a warm relationship with both Gee and Kirwan. He had much less direct contact with President Karen Holbrook, but he worked closely with Ginny Trethewey, the general counsel to the university and Assistant to the President.

As Geiger reflected on his long-time association with athletic administration he recognized many changes had occurred in his field, especially in the last 20 years. Advances in technology, the instant information, the rise of the internet, Blackberry telephones, the invention of websites and chat rooms, the rise of talk shows, cable television and the 100 channel universe have not only changed all our lives but intercollegiate athletics as well. The changes are enormous. That will only continue. Partisans of Ohio State athletics have instant access through multiple websites. There are also 24/7 sports news channels, and ESPN alone has five channels not counting the foreign ones. Feeding this monster is going to be an ever-growing, ever changing learning experience. Trying to satiate that appetite is virtually impossible. For Geiger personally "it has reduced the joy to almost none."

A great source of joy for Geiger beyond athletics was his passion for jazz. Despite his busy schedule he started saxophone lessons at age 42, and did a weekly, two-hour "Classic Jazz Masters" radio program from 1997 to 2005. Since childhood he has been a fan of the great Jazz Masters, and has accumulated a large library of music and commentary. The music played on his radio show came mostly from his personal collection. One day he might resume his career in radio. He was personally friendly with some jazz musicians, especially Stan Getz.

Under Geiger's leadership Ohio State has greatly improved in standing in the Director's Cup, a composite score of a university's overall standing annually in some 20 sports, 10 women's and 10 men's. It is an indication of a school's ability to deliver a program that is balanced and outstanding across the board. Stanford, where Geiger created the model for the modern broadly based athletic program, has consistently been ranked first in the nation. Recently Ohio State has consistently been in the Top Ten. They were third two years ago, and fourth in 2004. One reason for the jump in the standings is clearly the outstanding physical facilities, most of which were built or upgraded under Geiger's leadership. He takes pride in the facilities and thinks these contribute to what he sees as the three main things Athletic Directors are supposed to do: the hiring and firing of staff, maintenance of the facilities, and overseeing

the financial health of the department. He is really proud of his staff, delighted with recent improvements in the physical plant, especially the gorgeous new Aquatics Center, and the redesigned, absolutely stunning, golf course, and tripled the financial reserves.

Championships won in sports other than football also raised OSU's standing in the Directors Cup competition. Men's lacrosse is now a major sport, there was a 4th place finish in the crew championship, and OSU finished first and second nationally respectively in fencing the last two years. OSU has the best men's gymnastics program in the country. The football program continues as one of the best in the nation. The women's basketball program is outstanding.

Nevertheless some disappointments remain. One has been the inability to upgrade the academic performance of student-athletes. The university's anticipated change from a quarter to a semester calendar will help, as has the change from an open enrollment system to selective admission. An especially painful episode was the need to fire Jim O'Brien, once a close personal friend. The redesign of the Scarlet golf course also sparked controversy. Initially Tom Weiskoff was principally involved, and he played an important role in defining what needed to be done. He declined, however, to compete for the design and supervision of the renovation, and so the contract was given to Jack Nicklaus. This decision "wasn't particularly political." Primary funding for renovation of the golf course came from a nearly \$10 million trust fund. The interest alone from this fund should be sufficient to maintain the quality of the golf course indefinitely.

Geiger spoke to what he considered his long-term legacy at Ohio State. He thought that what he would want people to appreciate is that although Ohio State is identified with football, "almost to the point of embarrassment," that what Ohio State is known for is an athletic program that commits to the best possible experience that any student-athlete can get, regardless of the sport they are in, and that there is a very strong commitment to a broadly-based program.

He will continue to have certain responsibilities at Ohio State until his contract ends on June 30, 2006. One task is to work on a revised curriculum that should help athletes to become better engaged in serious study at the university. He is working with President Holbrook on an NCAA task force that she's chairing. He may teach a freshman seminar or two, either athletics or jazz, or both.

As he prepares to exit university administration his first sentiment is one of relief. He is not going to miss the intensity of it, nor the media or the bureaucratic administrative headaches. He is anxious to do some other things. But what he will dearly miss is the kids and the coaches. He has no plans to continue work at some other school. He has had a great career, having met four U.S. Presidents, and worked for five prestigious universities as Director of Athletics. Stanford and Ohio State have been particularly splendid times in his life. Geiger and his wife have purchased a beautiful retirement home in Washington State. To have retired when he did was the right thing to do.

Major Topics

Geiger's 40-year career in athletic administration at five major universities

Major expansion, renovation, and financing of athletic facilities at Ohio State

Expanding comprehensive excellence in both revenue and non-revenue sports

Improving academic performance of OSU athletes

Controversies involving Maurice Clarett and Jim O'Brien

Geiger's long-term legacy at Ohio State