



Bill Moos

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An Interview with Bill Moos, University of Oregon Athletic Director

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Introduction

William "Bill" Moos graduated from Washington State University with a BA in history in 1973. He went on to positions as an assistant coach, deputy director for the Civil Aeronautics Board, director of development and associate athletic director at Washington State, and athletic director at the University of Montana, before moving to the University of Oregon in July 1995. Since that time, he has presided over what many consider to be the most successful era of the University's storied athletic history, overseeing the development of more than \$120 million in facilities and athletic department improvements. His football teams have gone to six bowl games and finished the 2001 season ranked second in the United States.

A bold visionary who believes you must consistently commit to excellence, he has utilized marketing and sponsorship, including securing an all-sports contract with Nike, to take Oregon to new heights. Here he talks to Rick Burton, Executive Director of the Warsaw Sports Marketing Center, which is housed in the University of Oregon's Lundquist College of Business.

RB: Bill, thanks so much for taking the time to do this interview. There are so many areas we could cover in talking about college athletics but let's start off with one of the biggest and that is this: I think it's safe to say many people are

thinking about what some folks are calling the National Collegiate Athletic Association "arms race". What are your thoughts on how the NCAA is dealing with issues involving money and collegiate programs remaining competitive with one another?

WM: Well, I think it's been great. Meaning, that in the last ten or 12 years, we've been able to realize a considerable amount of parity in intercollegiate athletics, especially at the Division I level. But it also, as a result of that parity, has stimulated the so-called "arms race" of the one-time "haves" being challenged, in a sense, by the one-time "have-nots". In large part, that's been simply because of limits on scholarship offerings and these types of things. And that has driven budgets in intercollegiate athletics up in leaps and bounds – just in the last couple of years – and it's been so dramatic that it has urged the presence of university chancellors to step in and take a look at it.

RB: Let me back up and ask, what's your sense on – and this is intended to be a positive question – the health of the NCAA or the health of college sports? How do you see college sports today versus how you might have seen it when you were a player at Washington State?

WM: Certainly it's much more controlled. I think there are obviously far more ➤



opportunities for women than in my competitive days, which are now over 30 years ago. The cost of operating an intercollegiate athletic program has not just grown with inflation, but has grown dramatically because of the competitive aspect. And these are large businesses now, some of which are self-sustaining. We are beginning to see more and more concern for faculties across the country who are fighting for every paper clip and notepad they can get, watching across campus their colleagues in the intercollegiate athletic programs with their budgets growing, doubling in short periods of time and certainly that includes the salaries and benefits. So it's become a front burner issue in the NCAA and I think the real challenge is what can the NCAA do to regulate and restrict this? It's a great source of debate right now.

RB: You talked before about essentially being the CEO of a small business. Is it a feeling you get, in running the University of Oregon Athletic Department as a business, that college athletics still provides a value to the university, and is it okay for a football coach to make \$1- or \$2-million a year inside the goal of higher education?

WM: Well, we are running a business, a fast-growing business and we are becoming, here at the University of Oregon, self-sufficient. Along with probably another 30 to 35 [schools], I'm guessing there may be a couple more than that, we operate with a budget that will exceed \$30 million this coming fiscal year and have over 150 employees working full-time. So it is a business, it is a competitive business and it

does rely on the ability to be successful. And [you must] consistently be successful.

RB: The second part of the question was: is it okay to run this successful business inside the goal of higher education?

WM: I think that what we've done, by moving towards a model of self-sufficiency in intercollegiate athletics – and we are just now starting to catch ourselves at it – was deal with someone saying, 'hey, we are not going to support you any more.' I'm speaking as the generic university administration now when they said – 'you're on your own' – and in many cases university administrations turned their backs on [athletic departments] and thus grew the monster. Okay, we want to be competitive. We've got to put people in the stands, we need that ticket revenue, we need television revenue, we need sponsor revenue and we need to market our program through sponsors like shoe and apparel companies. We are going to look at every revenue that's potentially available so that we can be competitive because we're not receiving anything institutionally. As a purist, I believe intercollegiate athletics should be supported 100 per cent by the university. And I think that that was the intent way back when all of this started some 100 years ago.

But as universities have grown, intercollegiate athletic departments have grown, and the fierce competitive nature of primarily big-time college football and basketball, and some other sports, have driven the bar ever so much higher that now we're at a point that we are indeed, in many respects, competing with professional



sports. I know you have heard me say that if the University of Florida is paying Steve Spurrier \$2.5 million and the [NFL's] Washington Redskins want him for \$6 million, who is to say that Florida can't counter [that offer] and come back and say we'll pay you \$7 million. If there's no institutional funding coming to intercollegiate athletics, then how can the NCAA control that or anybody else when this is a free enterprise, capitalistic country?

RB: Well, in fact, you could have, as we saw with Coach Spurrier, a college football coach making more than an NFL coach.

WM: No question.

RB: So the money is clearly there. But I think athletic directors are also seeking to provide a comprehensive experience for their student athletes, and you know if you look at a school like Ohio State, it has, I think, about a \$70 million operating budget, with 36 intercollegiate or varsity sports teams. By contrast, a school like Oregon, as you mentioned, only spends \$30 million on 17 sports. Regardless, what is the mission of intercollegiate athletics today? How do you define the role it plays for the student athlete?

WM: Well, I think the mission is the same as it has been for years and years. Dating back to my competitive days, and long before that, it was to educate and graduate the student athlete and provide a positive experience for that student athlete that could help shape and mold his or her life into achieving a more healthy successful lifestyle, and also hopefully to provide the

leadership skills and qualities that would make those people contributors in society. And I think that in most cases we've kept that as our primary objective, but in order to fund it we've had to become innovative and have imaginations that reached far beyond any boundaries that people in higher education ever dreamt of.

RB: So true. But then, what about the fans or the donors? Perhaps donors is the wrong word, but at Oregon you've got an \$80- to \$90-million dollar stadium expansion project that's going on just behind us. Largely funded, from what I know, by people on the outside, so it's not coming from state funds, or even university funds. How do people view sports in their lives such that it causes them to give this kind of money? Because you wouldn't normally see that kind of a donation in the pro sport world, would you?

WM: Well, people tend to have an allegiance to their alma mater or their school or their adopted school, that really is far more deeply-seated than in professional sports. Because that individual may have gone to the University of Oregon, never competed, but bleeds the green and yellow, whereas in professional sports there's very few people, when you really think about it, that actually competed. And now with free agency, no one identifies with a favorite team anyway. They are here today and gone tomorrow.

But that's why I think the college fan, in their day-to-day dealings with peers and friends and co-workers, has a lot of pride in their school and their school's ability to be successful. We need only look at the rivalry between Washington and Oregon right now. The University of Washington and the ➤



University of Oregon. That's really only become a rivalry, of any parity, in the last ten years. But those people working in Portland, or working in Seattle, now beam with pride when either the Huskies or the Ducks have won a football game. And that feeling is worth enough to [certain] individuals to make sure that those schools can sustain winning by donating sums of money, sometimes large sums of money, to keep that competitive edge and that good feeling that they have after a fall Saturday afternoon.

RB: Is there anything wrong with that?

WM: I don't think there's anything wrong with it and I think in a lot of ways it's healthy. I think, and I've always felt, that intercollegiate athletics can and in many cases does, embrace their alumni and bring them back to the university. Brings them back to campus. Keeps them involved. It acts as a source of pride for the alumni base to contribute back to the university in more areas than just intercollegiate athletics. And in these days of funding concerns with state universities the private and corporate dollar are extremely important. And you know you'd certainly like to see that there would be a growth parallel to intercollegiate athletics, "the athletic arms race", in the academic sector of the university as well. And I would like to think that donations, contributions and philanthropy to the entire university grows with the success of an intercollegiate athletic program, but what we're seeing now is it's not growing at the same rate.

RB: Right. Well, you came here in 1995, so that would mean you're going into your seventh year

as athletic director. Back then, Oregon might have been thought of nationally as more of a sleepy program, a smaller school in the Pacific-10 Conference (one of the NCAA's major athletic conferences). But under your leadership, the athletic teams have achieved some amazing success. Your football team just finished the year ranked second in the nation, your basketball team has been ranked as high as 15th. So what were the challenges you faced then, and what are the challenges you face now?

WM: Well, the first challenge I think was to take something that was beginning to take form as being something good, that is to say there were some good things happening, and to realize that if we didn't establish a vision and set out on a course that would take us further into the world of success, then we could become old news real fast. And in this business you can go from first to worst over night. We were able, at that time, to develop a vision that included our administration, the community, and many more entities that could see the importance of a successful intercollegiate athletic program and what it could do in the full larger context.

And then it was about, I really feel, consistency. In this conference, and I've been a part of this conference in one way or another for a lot of years, there's been some flash in the pans and then there's the good solid programs that are in the hunt every year in a variety of sports programs. And I think where we began to realize respect within the conference was when, year in and year out, we could be successful in football. Then, of course, we also had success with women's basketball right about that same



period of time and we started to see the growth of men's basketball. Those three fed off each other to add to the national and worldwide reputation we've long enjoyed in the sport of track and field. And as we steadily have grown the program through facilities and endowments and fan support each year, just building and getting stronger, the rest of the country has taken note. And I think primarily if I could really put my finger on it, it was after our victory in football over Texas in the 2000 Holiday Bowl.

Playing off of that, you have Texas, an established national powerhouse through the history of college football, that we met in a big bowl game on national television. And fortunately we won and were able to play off that victory going into the 2001 season with a very special athlete by the name of Joey Harrington who we decided to promote the next year as a Heisman Trophy candidate. So what we really did with those two things was stimulate curiosity around the country and people started to come out to Eugene who had never been here from the East coast and see what we had and realize we have a beautiful campus. Then they saw the facilities that we've invested in and got to know a little bit more about our program and that, of course, led into the 2001 season where we were again fortunate enough to live up to the hype that had been achieved as a result of that win over Texas in the Holiday Bowl.

As I talk to my other coaches and observe it myself, it has been a very key item and that is with that football program getting that notoriety and everyone talking about it for the better part of nine or ten months. When our other coaches go into a home recruiting

whether it's for women's volleyball or golf, tennis, what have you, people know about Oregon and it's becoming more of a household word. That doesn't happen overnight and it doesn't happen as a flash in the pan. I think it happens through consistency, stability, retaining coaches, building your budget, building your ability to recruit nationally, facility enhancements etc.

RB: You are one of more than 100 top Division I athletic directors in the US. It gives you a strong perspective of the issues. That said, what are the biggest issues the NCAA faces going forward and what are other athletic directors of your stature worrying about for the future?

WM: Well, I think the so-called "arms race" has really come to the forefront. How are we going to survive? You know Oregon has increased its budget by \$11 million dollars in six years, can it increase another \$11 million in the next six and should we have to? And are we going to have to change the membership criteria for the various divisions? Do the lower quartile schools in Division I-A really belong in Division I-AA and how are the spoils going to be divided? Where's the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) thing going? How are we going to establish a true national champion in Division I-A football and do we need to? The Division I men's basketball is growing – it's billions of dollars now – but how is that going to grow and how is it going to be distributed down the road? So fiscal matters are of a real concern and where are we going in that regard and who's going to be left out? Who's going to get to go to the party and who's going to be left out, and that's all ►



going to sift out, I think, whether we like it or not, within the next five, six, seven years.

Gender equity continues to be an issue, the addition and deletion of sports and should Title IX have such a tremendously harsh effect on intercollegiate athletics when, in my opinion, it was not intended to deny opportunities for one gender in order to provide them for another. And, where are we going to find help in funding so we're not losing opportunities to create opportunities?

I continue to believe that gambling, and agents, and illegal transfers of money to the student athlete is a huge issue. And that leads to how can we find a way to provide more money to the student athlete who already has got so much of a time commitment on his or her plate to their individual sport. And, of course, at the same time, we need to be mainstreaming them through the overall student body and providing a positive experience that's going to accomplish the mission that we talked about earlier.

RB: I assume that graduation rates are in there also?

WM: Graduation rates are, but how do you define graduation rates? We are constantly talking about that. Should a school be penalized if a student athlete came in, could not compete at this level, transferred and went to another school and still graduated in four years or five years? Or how are we going to define the cohort aspects of graduation rates? I know that we're already dealing with maybe redefining what a graduation rate is and whether a student athlete should be held to satisfactory

progress and a graduation rate that is published, when [the same information for] the basic student is not. There are all kinds of issues that are being discussed at this time, but I think some of those are primarily the ones that we'll be dealing with over the next year or two.

RB: I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you about sports marketing at the collegiate level. Has it changed much?

WM: Oh boy, it sure has. And you know it used to be, you know, pass out some pom-poms and make sure the "Beat the Beavers" buttons are on everyone's seat. That's been elevated to the need to have big sponsors paying big dollars to have their names on the scoreboard or at courtside.

Of our \$30 million budget there is well over \$3 million, maybe even as high as \$4 million, realized each year in sponsorships. Or something relating to those kinds of sponsorships, so it's grown in leaps and bounds. And it has become an integral part of an intercollegiate athletic program's ability to fund itself.

RB: You mentioned how important sponsorship is to a modern collegiate athletic department. Can you talk about some of your major sponsors and what you've needed to do to keep them happy?

WM: With the rising costs involved in operating a major college intercollegiate athletic program, it's necessary to explore all options in regard to revenue enhancement. With the potential exposure due to large crowds and radio/television audiences,



intercollegiate athletics becomes a viable option for the advertising dollar. Tickets, team trips and the overall feeling of being a part of the program have been benefits that have been instrumental in attracting sponsors.

RB: Nike is a huge sponsor of college sports for many schools. Did they influence the decision to create the Joey Harrington billboard in New York City? Talk a little about that now legendary marketing campaign and how it came about and your thoughts on whether it worked.

WM: The Joey Harrington billboard in New York proved to be invaluable in regards to stimulating curiosity not only in Joey but also in Oregon football. Although we enjoy a tremendous relationship with our partners at Nike, the majority of our marketing ideas are a creation of the people on my staff and advertising agencies with whom we have worked with through the past few years.

RB: Marketing for college athletics used to be simply rolling up the ticket window and sending out a season ticket flier. What's the marketing scene for a school like Oregon look like in the new millennium?

WM: It has grown in leaps and bounds. Not only do we have our own marketing and promotions department but we have also partnered with ESPN Regional in order to enhance and grow the marketing of Oregon athletics.

RB: In your mind, is the marketing of a college team different from that of a professional team?

WM: Though there are some differences they are fast becoming more and more similar. With the rising costs of operating a successful intercollegiate athletic program comes the need to compete in the market which unfortunately has evolved to the point of including professional organizations.

RB: Bill, we appreciate so much you taking the time to talk with the *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. Obviously, we could talk a lot longer but thank you again for both your insight and candor.

WM: It's been my pleasure.



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Biographies

Bill Moos has played many positions and like a good pulling lineman, likes to lead. He was a three-year letterman as an offensive tackle at Washington State University before graduating with a BA in history in 1973. From there he went on to positions as an assistant coach, deputy director for the Civil Aeronautics Board, director of development and associate athletic director at Washington State and athletic director at the University of Montana.

He moved to the University of Oregon in ➤



July 1995 and since that time has chaired the Pacific-10 Conference's Long Range Planning Committee and currently serves on the conference's Compliance & Enforcement and Revenue Sharing committees. In addition, he is a member of the NCAA's Football Issues Committee.

Rick Burton is the executive director of the James H. Warsaw Sports Marketing Center in the University of Oregon's Lundquist College of Business and the Woodard

Family Instructor of sports marketing. He is a columnist for *Sports Business Journal*, a network radio commentator for the Sporting News Radio Network, a TV show host (Action Sports Cable Network) and consultant for sports leagues and sports organizations such as the International Olympic Committee, National Football League, National Hockey League, Japanese Soccer League, Australian National Basketball League, Disney, Nike, Visa USA, IMG and GMR Marketing.



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