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## Gebhart: Prof. Sack attacks NCAA same way he hit books and tacklers

By Ed Gebhart, Times Columnist

### (First of Two Parts)

**In this corner, standing 6-foot-4 and weighing not much more than his playing weight of 210 pounds, we have Dr. Allen Sack, distinguished college professor, former athletic great and current crusader. In the other, we have the National Collegiate Athletic Association ... NCAA for short ... a multi-billion-dollar behemoth that controls collegiate athletics and much of what sports fans watch on television from September through March.**

It may be a battle Sack is bound to lose, but that doesn't stop him from trying. He's a latter-day knight in the mold of Don Quixote, and he will fight the good fight, determined to reform the way NCAA colleges treat the athletes who bring in millions in gate receipts and billions more through television revenues.

Doggedly determined, Sack has written a third book on the matter, this one titled "Counterfeit Amateurs, An Athlete's Journey Through the Sixties to the Age of Academic Capitalism." This follows on the heels of "College Athletes for Hire: The Evolution and Legacy of the NCAA's Amateur Myth," and "Dumb Jock: A life in the Battle Zone Between Sports and Higher Learning."

If I have a fault with Sack's books, it's that the titles are a little daunting, but "Counterfeit Amateurs" is an excellent work, a "real page turner" as the critics say. Despite the serious nature of his subject, Sack's latest work reads like a novel.

Few people would have the background to write such books. An amazing athlete at Chichester High School in both football and basketball, he had more than 100 college scholarship offers. He selected Notre Dame - after being recruited personally by the late former Eagles owner Leonard Tose - because the South Bend institution appealed to Sack as a place where he could play ball and get a worthwhile education at the same time.

Despite a horrible start athletically, when the gifted quarterback was converted to defensive end, he succeeded on both counts. He lettered on Notre Dame's 1966 national championship team and was drafted by the pros. He also acquired such a quest for knowledge that he turned down the pros and enrolled in a master's program at Penn State, eventually earning his Ph.D. I'm sure the NCAA would have preferred it if Sack had stuck to football.

He's been a professor at the University of New Haven, which he jokingly describes as being "two miles and three billion light years from Yale."

That's quite a jump for a boy from Boothwyn with as blue a blue-collar background as you're likely to find. His mother, Anne, was a baker at the high school cafeteria. When school wasn't in session, she worked as a waitress at the M&H restaurant in Marcus Hook. His father, Julius, had worked in the upstate coal mines, then helped drill through the "Seven Mountains" with the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression.

When World War II came along, Mr. Sack worked for the Dravo Shipyard in Wilmington, Del., as an electrician, wiring many of the craft that played such a vital role in the landings at Normandy on D-Day.

"We didn't have many books in our home, so my parents bought Nelson and me a set of encyclopedias," Sack said. "Our father had only an eighth-grade education and our mother not much more, so they really weren't in a position to help us academically. But they both knew education was among the most important things in the world, and they pushed it. In fact, if I had come home with a bad report card, my dad would have killed me.

"Ours was such a tight-knit community back then that on report card day, neighbors would stop me walking home from school to look at my marks."

The Sack brothers got the message.

Allen's resume runs a full 12 pages. His older brother, by three years, Nelson, is a prominent attorney with offices in Media. Nels, by the way, was a pretty fair basketball player himself at Pennsylvania Military College before going on to Villanova Law.

Since 1991, Allen has been director of the Institute for Sports Management in the School of Business at New Haven. He has been a featured speaker at such far-ranging venues as Alberta, Canada, Sparta, Greece, and San Marino, Italy. Even his peers at New Haven, perhaps reluctant originally to accept a "dumb jock" as one of their own, selected him Faculty Member of the Year in 2007.

He says he was able to survive the rigors of big-time football at Notre Dame because he learned "smash mouth" football under coach Tony Apichella at Chichester High. It also prepared him for some of the mental blows he's received during his lengthy and continuing crusade.

**NEXT:** Professor Sack feels his alma mater, Notre Dame, is right up there with Duke and Stanford in maintaining strict academic requirements of their athletes ... but for how much longer?

Ed Gebhart is a retired public relations executive who works part-time in the public relations department of Delaware County government. His column appears Sunday.

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