

Note: the following is a question and answer interview between the University of South Alabama student newspaper, the *Vanguard*, and USA President Gordon Moulton, on the subject of NCAA-sanctioned football at the University. The interview was conducted on November 16, 2007, and was printed in the newspaper's November 20 issue.

***Vanguard:* How might the addition of an NCAA Football program affect academics at a university?**

Moulton: There are many ways an NCAA football/marching band program can positively affect academics at a university. First, and most importantly, we know from experience that there are many academically talented students whom we recruit each year who choose other universities because we don't have these programs. Secondly, such a program offers great opportunities for positive public exposure and awareness, which can enhance our student and faculty/staff recruitment efforts. It also has been observed that highly visible sports programs stimulate alumni interest and support, as well as philanthropic giving, not only to the athletic programs, but also to academic programs. For instance, I'm personally aware of many cases where philanthropists remained close to a university through athletics, but made substantial gifts to academics. Finally, athletics can create closer bonds between a university and its community, which can bear positive fruit for the academic programs if the community increases its advocacy for the university.

The one caution here is that we must continue to operate our athletic programs with complete academic integrity. If you look at USA's track record, we have done this. We must remain ever vigilant and make it an abiding priority for all of our sports to add to the academic strength of the University, and not diminish it. Fortunately, the NCAA in recent years has played a transformational role in enhancing and maintaining academic integrity in college sports to the extent that intercollegiate athletics are among the most regulated aspects of any university. The bottom line is that we must make a *complete* and *institution-wide* commitment to academic integrity.

***Vanguard:* As far as adding an NCAA Football program goes, how do we expect to affect academics and student life?**

Moulton: I have just addressed the academics issue, so I'll address the student life issue. The first and most important concept here is that students themselves should determine the fundamental elements of what contributes to a positive student life environment on any campus. USA has offered a wide range of extracurricular activities for many years – from intramural athletics to NCAA-sanctioned athletics to art, music, cultural and entertainment opportunities. All of these contribute to a rich and diverse student life experience. Since I became president nine years ago, football has been a near constant request from our students and alumni, who believe that it can dramatically enhance student life and campus unity. I think a university should listen closely to its

students and, where possible, be responsive. It is no secret that for many universities across the nation, NCAA-sanctioned football and a marching band program serve as the centerpiece of student life and campus tradition. They serve as a catalyst for a wide range of student life activities, from tailgating to homecoming to any number of related experiences. Our students desire these things, and I think we should do our best to provide them.

***Vanguard:* What background assumptions have changed since the 2000 and 2001 reports that would lead you to believe that NCAA Football at USA will break even (as opposed to lose money)?**

Moulton: If you recall, this decade began with some of the most difficult economic times in recent history. The University of South Alabama had many unmet needs and its finances were, frankly, in terrible shape. We knew that we had many financial and infrastructure issues to deal with in our academic programs and in our health system. We needed a major library expansion, which we've now completed. We needed a student services center, which we have completed. We've addressed other major infrastructure needs, including a new home for Nursing and Allied Health Professions, a new recreation center soon to be under construction, and additional student housing, which is now done. Even more importantly, we needed to enhance our faculty and staff salaries and add to the size of our faculty, which we have done. We also needed to address the issue of declining enrollment, which we have done, and, in fact, our student body is almost a quarter larger than it was in 1999. We have also made significant changes in our health system, and we have it on a sound financial footing. Simply put, all of our institutional vital signs are now good.

You may also recall that external economic conditions in the Mobile area were much different back in 2000. From a previous position of economic weakness, our area has experienced an economic renaissance that is the envy of many metropolitan areas around the nation, with a major influx of new and sustainable jobs. The University has never been closer to its community, as evidenced by rapidly growing enrollment and numerous cooperative ventures with the city and county related to educational enhancement, health care improvement, and economic development. Our city and county leaders have expressed their support of football at USA and have offered their assistance, anticipating football's potential to further enrich area entertainment opportunities and provide an economic stimulus.

Another important element is that our state funding, which was stagnant as this decade began, has been at record levels for three years now. This has helped to further address some of the problems we faced back then.

Frankly, there is no way that I could have recommended a football program in 2001. It would have been administrative malpractice.

As to what has changed to make football more economically viable:

- Our students have expressed their desire to have a football program and their willingness to pay the lion's share of the cost. This is the single most important difference.
- The city and county are in much better shape financially and have pledged their support.
- Since 1999, USA has created a highly effective development program and is in the midst of its first comprehensive fundraising campaign. We are now staffed to raise the private support needed for football.
- Our alumni base is even larger, as we will award our 60,000th degree in December. We have awarded more than 15,000 degrees since we last looked at the football issue. Of course, alumni support will be vital, and our alumni are solidly behind this effort.

***Vanguard:* What is our best estimate for cost of adding an NCAA Football program?**

Moulton: Our best estimate is that when the program is fully implemented in four years, the annual budget will be approximately \$5 million, about two-thirds of which will be paid for by the student fee. Most of the remainder will come from city and county support, ticket and game revenue, private giving, and other sources.

***Vanguard:* Does this include capital improvements? Title IX requirements?**

Moulton: The football budget does include some capital improvement funds, as we will need to address issues such as football/band practice fields and locker/storage areas. Of course, our plan is to play in Ladd-Peebles Stadium, which we will essentially be able to do for free, thanks to the city of Mobile. The largest capital cost in most football programs, by far, is the stadium, which we won't have to worry about. Our Title IX situation is okay, since we recently added women's softball. If other women's sports are identified as priorities by our students, we will certainly look into those.

***Vanguard:* Some faculty and students are concerned that building a football program represents "opportunity cost" that may hurt plans for expansions of academics. Even if no money is taken from the academic budget, there are still other resources, such as time and energy, that might be diverted from academics to building a football program. How would you address these concerns?**

Moulton: These are certainly reasonable questions, and I would be concerned if we weren't asking them. I think the only way you can predict the future is to look at the past. I believe the record will show that this administration has its priorities in order and has worked consistently to address any financial or other deficits in USA's academic programs and has focused intently on this, even to the extent of forgoing the students' request for football for several years. Further, most of the funding that is going to football is being generated strictly for that purpose, so there won't be any large-scale redirection of resources to football ... most of it is "new money." Certainly there will be an investment of time in making the football/band program a reality, but this has to be balanced with the value that is added to the experiences of our students, alumni, faculty, staff, community, and other constituencies. A real plus to keep in mind, too, is the great bonus of being able to add a marching band program, which I think will be as valuable to the University as the football program.

Vanguard: **It seems that the anti-football people point to the one or two case examples where a football program has horribly failed causing a negative impact on academics and the university as a whole. But from what I understand, these cases are much rarer than the very positive cases of football programs bringing in millions in profits. (Of course, it seems the most common cases are where football programs hover around even, maybe losing a reasonable amount of money in line with other athletic programs) Would this understanding be accurate?**

Moulton: The key to keeping football, or any other academic or athletic program, from being a financial drain on the University is to make a solid financial plan, be conservative with your revenue estimates and liberal with your cost estimates, and budget carefully. In our case, I will tell you unequivocally that if our students had not agreed to fund the majority of the cost, we would have NOT gone forward and the idea would again have died. Furthermore, be assured that football will NOT be counted on to bring in great amounts of so-called "profits." If we break even financially, and our students, alumni, faculty, staff and other constituencies are brought closer to their university, then football will have been a success.

For more on the football proposal at USA, visit:
www.southalabama.edu/footballproposal/