

9-23-2012

GLIAC Donahue Award Dinner Speech, delivered on September 23, 2012

Arend D. Lubbers
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

ScholarWorks Citation

Lubbers, Arend D., "GLIAC Donahue Award Dinner Speech, delivered on September 23, 2012" (2012).
Presidential Speeches. 280.
https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches/280

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Presidential Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Donahue Award Dinner
September 23, 2012
Arend D. Lubbers

To receive the Tom Donahue Award is especially rewarding for me for two reasons. First, I knew, appreciated, and respected Tom Donahue. He enhanced the conference by his work as Commissioner. Second, I remember when the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference was organized in 1972. Chuck Irwin, our Athletic Director, and I were strong advocates. He did the work and I gave the push. Today, 40 years later, the Conference is still standing, and so am I. I had the opportunity to participate in and later to observe the history of the conference in the making. That was and is a privilege and also provided me with many enjoyable experiences. The life of the GLIAC and my professional life ran on parallel courses for these forty years and to have them come together tonight in your bestowing on me the Donahue Award is particularly pleasing to me.

What I have said about the Award and my appreciation of it is sufficient I believe, but I am not yet finished. I take no responsibility for the extension of my time before you since the Commissioner asked me not to limit my remarks to acceptance of the award. In fact he mentioned a subject that he wished me to address. This has developed into an after dinner speech for athletic administrators and conference advisors. I promise, after your long day of meeting, I ask only a brief indulgence. Dell asked me to discuss the President's role in athletics.

I served on the NCAA Presidents Commission later called Presidents Council with a President of a large Division I university. His whole career had been with the university from Assistant Professor, to Professor, to Dean, Provost, and then President. At one of the council meetings he announced that he was leaving the Presidency. In a private moment I asked him why. He told me football ruled the university. The Governor, legislators, Corporate CEO's, and alumni always interceded when the coach

wanted his way. He had no influence on the football agenda. He thought that was wrong. If he wanted his job he had to surrender Presidential authority in athletics. He resigned.

Recently, we have watched the Penn State football program unravel. What happened? Essentially a good coach and a good man became so successful that he accepted the implied belief that his program was so important that nothing should tarnish it. He went through the motions of reporting a bad situation, but he did not correct it himself as he should have, and those to whom he reported on the management chart and had accepted his power of influence, did not either. The President, a fine man and a good President in almost all respects with whom I associated on the Presidents Council, fumbled the ball. Later when he approached the coach about retiring the coach refused. It wasn't the coach's call, but he made it. It was a respected, mostly clean, football program that had control in the university it should not have had.

Underlying laws of social conduct are not so different from those that rule physics. They just take longer to manifest themselves. Conditions lead to inevitable outcomes. When a college or university President allows his or her rightful responsibility for the athletic program to be undermined there will be a price the institutions will pay, publically as in Penn State's case or an unobserved cost to the academic programs, reputation of the college or university, or the lives of the student athletes.

Because of the public interest in athletics and the money involved it is common for unreal expectations and miscalculated ambition to often prevail. In an interview with a prospective coach I said, "If successful, we do not expect you to stay for a long period," but I asked that he guarantee me at least three years. He agreed. In his first year his team won the Conference Championship thanks to a transfer from a Division I team and his ability to relate well to the players. At the end of the season he was offered the head coaching job at a Division I university and he accepted it. He did not ask if he could be relieved of his promise. His career did not escalate, and he is no longer a head coach.

My happy experience was with Brian Kelly. He came to Grand Valley as a 24 year old assistant coach. After a few years the head coach left to take an assistant's job at Notre Dame. I told the Athletic Director I thought the coach could never be a successful assistant and to tell him he should stay. In two years, he was out of coaching. Brian, at a young age, became the head coach and stayed fourteen years. In those years he had time to learn to coach. We kept a gentle pressure on him. He grew as a person and a coach. After three successive Division II National Football Finals, he had to decide whether to settle in and become a Grand Valley legend or take his skill and ambition to Division I. He was ready. He left us with a strong football tradition and is successful in Division I. I think Central Michigan and Cincinnati are more stepping stones for him than we are. We were the place where he was nurtured. The process seems right to me. ●ften coaches have difficulty managing their ambitions, and understanding what role at what time is best for them. Brian is an example of how to do it right.

Misdirected ambition is not the province of a few coaches alone; it infects Presidents and Board of Trustees as well. Watching many universities move from Division II to Division I perplexes me. Why would you want to pay four or five times more dollars to probably lose more contests? Is seeing your scores at the bottom of the TV screen worth it? Whatever money gained from NCAA revenues will never match the cost in the athletic budget for more than 90% of the universities that switched. To me it is delusional upward mobility.

Division II, in my estimation, is the most sane Division in the NCAA. In Division I the money and the pressure and cheating that comes with it is out of control. In Division III most schools pretend they do not give athletic scholarships. The lack of transparency produces unintended inequalities. They claim an even playing field when in fact it does not exist. They are wrestling with the problem, I think, but it is hard to solve.

We in Division II are the most transparent. We allow athletic scholarships. Not all use them to the full, but all of us know to what extent our competition does. Our level of scholarship funding is reasonable and can be accommodated within sane and limited college and university athletic budgets. We are moderate in our spending, and it is easier, I believe, to justify our athletics budget when we compare it to our institution's total budget. Division II says to the world of college athletics, "We believe athletics are an important, even necessary, part of the higher education experience. We encourage athletes to come to our institutions just as we encourage good science students, good musicians, good humanities students, and others through our scholarship program. We recognize that spending for athletics should not be disproportional to support for other university priorities. We are dedicated to finding the right proportion within our institutions." Is that sane or not?

So here you are in Bay City searching for best ways to manage an athletic conference. You all have Presidents to whom you relate. There are three kinds of Presidents: those who don't involve themselves much in athletics, and leave them to the Athletic Director or a Vice President and Athletic Director, those who interfere in management operations to a degree the Athletic Director is hampered by him or her, and those who see athletics as important, involve themselves in policy decisions, but leave the management to the Athletic Director. I hope you all have the third kind of President I described. If not, you have some Presidential education to do. Perhaps I should offer a seminar on "How to Educate a Misguided President."

Presidents work for a Board, but the President, not his or her bosses, should ultimately make policy decisions on athletics with the advice and recommendation of staff and the Faculty Representative. If those decisions are left to anyone else there will be trouble eventually and if the President is not a good listener and accommodator there will be trouble also.

I wish you well as you deal with people of my kind. Dell asked me to give my perspective. Now you have it. It is given by a person long removed from the active scene and may lack relevance for you. But that is the risk you take when you give high honor to an old man. Thank you for this evening.