
The Columbus Dispatch

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- **ON CAMPUS:**

Complimentary cars. Every major college athletic department has special relationships with car dealers. Give a car to a coach, get a bundle of tickets to the games. At Ohio State, the football coach's wife gets a shiny new Lexus every six months. The marching band director drives a donated 1997 Buick LeSabre with 94,000 miles.

Flight manifests. Travel to the biggest games typically attracts a couple plane loads of people. One will carry the team, athletic department staff and important boosters. Another will carry the president, dignitaries, politicians and other muckety mucks.

Occasional meal forms. NCAA allows boosters to take a team to dinner as long as they get approval from the athletics department

Will-call tickets. Most athletes and coaches are allowed to invite people to games. Former Ohio State running back Maurice Claret had a bookie on one of his lists. Current football players had car dealers and drug-dealing tattoo artists.

Car registration forms. Most major universities require athletes to fill out forms detailing what kind of car they are driving, how much they paid for it, who co-signed for the loan, etc. They often are works of fiction.

Summer job forms. The NCAA requires every athlete to fill out a form telling the athletics department what they're doing for the summer. The most prestigious athletes get jobs arranged by coaches. Five months after winning the national championship, Ohio State football players got jobs for \$18 an hour for what records describe as "public relations," visiting nursing-home residents. This arrangement led to an NCAA violation.

President's box. Who has been invited to the best seats in the house and what do they do up there during the game? They eat a lot of expensive food.

Ticket database. Then learn of landmines like this: the largest single ticket holder at Ohio Stadium is the publisher of *The Dispatch*.

NCAA violations. Schools are required to report when rules both big (boosters gave quarterback money) and small (coach accidentally sent a text message to a recruit). There are tons of stories there. NCAA publishes the major infractions database on its website (ncaa.org) by school with full report of what went wrong. Be warned, all names have been removed. Most schools also keep a summary sheet of all violations – quick way to see what's going on. Very limited information, though.

NCAA financials. To get a complete picture of a school without pouring through a budget, request the financial document sent to the NCAA every January. Avoid Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act data from the U.S. Department of Education – it's often wrong. *USA Today* collects and analyzes the NCAA financial documents every year.

Compliance-department audits: Each D-I school is required by the NCAA to have an audit every four years. Some schools, such as OSU, do them annually. Most recent audit at Ohio State showed problems with athletes' car registrations – they were driving cars that didn't belong to them – and missing equipment and apparel. Federal agents recovered lots of OSU equipment during a drug raid.

Emails and phone records: who is talking to who. Coach Jim Tressel made lots of phone calls – including two to an FBI agent – when he learned of NCAA violations. He called lots of interesting people – just not the ones he should have called.

Academic Progress Rate and graduation rates. This is how the NCAA now measures the academic success of college athletics. Teams that don't make the grade risk punishment. For Division I, there are two sets of graduation rates – one compiled by the NCAA and one compiled by the U.S. Department of Education. Both have their pros and cons. The NCAA rate measures everyone, regardless of where they graduate. For example, if an athlete transferred from Ohio State to Ohio University and then graduated, Ohio State is not penalized for a drop out. The federal rate penalizes schools for drop outs even if they graduate elsewhere.

Coaches' contracts. Find gems like this: At 175 pounds, Ohio State football coach Jim Tressel already is worth more than his weight in gold. The new \$2.6 million contract trumped a 2003 agreement that had guaranteed Tressel \$1.6 million this season, roughly the value of his weight in gold. Now, he's platinum. These days, many assistants at top-tier programs also have contracts.

University police blotters. Find unruly fan behavior inside stadiums and at tailgates during sporting events.

Media guides. Examine, for example, the majors of football and basketball players to search for clusters of majors. Most guides are online.

Personnel files. They are public records in many states. It's a good way to find out if a coach has been admonished for breaking NCAA rules.

Public-record requests: FOIA the FOIAs to see who is asking for what because there may be other types of documents reporters want that you aren't familiar with.

eBay. Who is selling what?

- **OFF CAMPUS:**

Court records. College athletes get a lot of traffic tickets. Track their routes home and check records in every county along the way. Whose car were they driving? Athletes also get into other kinds of trouble – i.e. 17 Ohio University football players were arrested in recent years but faced little, if any, discipline from the team.

Health-code violations. ESPN's Paula Lavigne examined food violations at several major professional stadiums, "What's Lurking in your Stadium Food," July 2010. Makes you wanna think twice about that half-time dog.

IRS form 990. Check out how the Big 10, Pac 10 and others spend and divvy up gazillions of dollars. Check out how much the conference commissioner is paid each year. Also check out booster clubs finances. Also, at private schools, look at the highest paid employees – it's often the football coach. Even the football coach at perennial Division III football powerhouse Mount Union in Ohio is among the highest paid at that school. Check with your local campus library to see if they have an account. www.Guidestar.org.

Extra! Extra! IRE's story database always has a wealth of ideas. Look under the sports category, see what's been done and tailor it to your own school. Imitation is the best form of flattery. www.ire.org

NCAA.org. Wealth of information/data on injuries, doping, academics. Some information is broken down by school; some is aggregated. But it provides a benchmark.

- **OBSTACLE:**

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). But more and more courts are finding that not every piece of paper on campus is an education record. Student Press Law Center is a great resource – www.splc.org