

August 11, 2020

College Football?

Do you know the 2019 record of the MIT football team? Or the University of Chicago football team? Or for that matter, the Cambridge University football team or the Sorbonne football team? Didn't think so. Does it matter?

Your blogger (YB) is a proud alumnus of The University of Michigan, and he roots for their sports teams. His two brothers went to Ohio State – enough said. Play college football this year? You have got to be kidding!

This is a health economics blog, so let's put this in context. Just about every large Midwestern University has severely limited in-person presence for Fall 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The percentage of in-person classes started at about 20% and it is falling like an anchor. The economic externality that is COVID-19 will spread almost anywhere, and will infect students, and their instructors, and their instructors' immediate families and grandparents. And they want to play college football ... because the players and coaches want to?

Please explain this to the band members and would-be professional wind players who cannot meet because of the virus. Please explain these to the drama students who have been reduced to small plays and soliloquys. Please explain this to dance students whose programs have largely gone up in smoke.

Again, the economics. Suppose that the Michigan football team has come up with a self-financed testing program that guarantees that none of their student-athletes have COVID-19. Why are they not sharing that with the other 45,000 or so students? What do they do if they play another Big Ten school that does not have this program? And if all of the Big Ten teams have it, why are they not sharing it with students at their Universities?

President Mark Schlissel (U of M), Samuel Stanley (Michigan State), and Roy Wilson (Wayne State) are all physicians, and have experience with infectious diseases. They are the adults in the room, and it is time for them to make the adult decisions. Close down college football for 2020.

Once more, the economics. There are estimates that many large Universities will lose millions of dollars in television revenue if they do not play. The sports economics of college football are a topic for another column, and candidly, for another economist. But YB leaves you with the question ... Do you know the 2019 record of the MIT football team? Or the University of Chicago football team? Or for that matter, the Cambridge University football team or the Sorbonne football team?

Allen C. Goodman
Professor of Economics