

Fizel disproves common myths of sports economics

by Jason Snyder
editor-in-chief

On Thursday, November 4, Behrend opened its 1999-2000 Provost's Speaker Series with a lecture from Dr. John Fizel of the School of Business. His lecture was titled, "The Myth of Sports: The Role of Economics," in which he discussed the role of money in athletics and argued how money in sports today isn't as out of hand as people may think.

Dr. Fizel graduated from Michigan State University and has since studied the economics of sports. He is the co-editor of *Sports Economics* and *Baseball Economics*. His studies have mostly dealt with baseball, which led to his lecture being based on a nine inning game.

Fizel broke his lecture into nine innings, using each inning to argue and disprove certain myths about the economics of sports. He talked about ticket prices, the demand for sports, the value of athletes, the business of franchises, free agency, stadiums and college scholarships. To

make the sports fanatics in attendance feel more at home, he played Harry Carey's rendition of "Take me out to the ballgame..." and ended his lecture in the ninth inning, opening his presentation to the audience for a question and answer segment.

Throughout the lecture, Fizel pointed out why people are wrong when they complain about the direction sports is taking as a business. He started with ticket prices: although ticket prices have increased since the 1950s, the affordability of tickets has become more possible to the average family of four. Fizel argued that, in the 1950s, an average family with an average income could afford (with no other expenses) about 11,000 pro sports tickets a year.

Now, the same family can afford about 55,000 tickets, proving that families these days can attend more

sporting events for less money, taking into account the rise in family incomes.

When tackling the issue of professional athletes being overpaid, Fizel pointed out the story of Barry Bonds and his journey from the Pittsburgh Pirates to the San Francisco Giants. While in Pittsburgh, Bonds was being paid \$5 million/year. When he went to the Giants, his salary was increased to \$7 million/year. After a

successful season for San Francisco, where Bonds directly contributed, the Giants pulled in \$20 million to the organization—a profit of \$13 million. Of the total money that teams make, athletes only receive 14%

17% of their true value.

Despite the words of team owners, Fizel showed that sports franchises, for the most part, aren't losing money because of high player salaries. Less than six MLB and eight NBA teams are actually losing money, in comparison to the 15-20 that team owners claim are losing money. In 1998, the L.A. Dodgers gained \$300 million.

The argument that free agency upsets the competitive balance in sports leagues was also disputed by Fizel, who said that free agency helps balance the competition. He backed up this point by stating that there have been 18 different teams in the World Series in the past 20 years. Any football fan can see that also, with the rate the NFL is going this year.

Overall, Fizel brought many questions to the table about the economics of sports and certain myths that have come about through time.

The next speaker in the Provost's Speaker Series will be Dr. Michael A. Campbell on March 16. His lecture is titled "Can Undergraduates do Significant Research?"



Housing and Food Services plans for housing contracts

by Karl Benacci
staff writer

It may only be the beginning of November now, but the holiday season is just around the corner. Soon after on-campus Behrend students return from Christmas break, they will need to submit their housing contracts for the 2000-2001 academic year. Unlike previous years, submitting housing contracts will be done in a housing lottery.

Two years ago, 200 students waited in the cold outside of the Housing and Food Services office to submit their contract. There were not any major problems, but housing decided to move the "wait" to the Reed Commons so that students would not have to wait in the cold.

Last year's housing contract camp-out, however, was different from years past. The plan was for the doors of the Reed Commons to open at 9:30 p.m. The contracts would then be taken at 6:00 a.m.

When the doors were open at 9:30 p.m. there were nearly 300 students waiting in line. Some of the problems that occurred were line cutting, pushing and name-calling.

To avoid this difficulty, a commit-

tee of five students met with Housing and Food Services so that a new process could be made regarding the submission of housing contracts by returning students. The committee decided to do a housing draw. Contracts can be submitted the week of January 17-21.

The contracts will then be drawn in a lottery, which has not yet been decided how the numbers will be drawn or determined.

The committee is still planning the housing lottery, but they are nearly finished with the initial planning.

The only concern is if your number isn't pulled and there is no space left on campus, which would result in a student having to live off-campus. That shouldn't be a problem, though, because there are 874 spaces in residence halls.

The committee will be visiting all of the residence halls for a floor meeting to discuss the housing lottery. On-campus students will get a contract in their on-campus mailbox shortly after Christmas break.

The lottery will occur shortly after the week of January 17-21. More information on the housing lottery will be given by Housing and Food Services and at floor meetings.

Web-based interactive program gets a "head start" at Behrend

by Rebecca Weindorf
staff writer

A web-based interactive program that involves the practice and improvement of spatial abilities is currently in the making at Penn State Behrend.

Dr. Dawn Blasko, assistant professor of experimental psychology, and Kathryn Holliday-Darr, instructor of engineering graphics, have been working on the program in order to improve spatial abilities that are important to many careers. Also involved in the project are fourteen students who are Psychology and Engineering majors; each student contributes to the research, ideas and activities for the program.

"Ms. Holliday-Darr and I have been working on this project for awhile now," said Dr. Blasko. "The FELT

proposal we had to make [for approval of the project] was taken down to University Park, and ETS (Education Technology Services) decided to give us a one-year grant to help us out, until next summer."

The project, more formally known as "Improving Cognitive Visualization with a Web-Based Interactive Assessment and Training Program," was a way to get more people involved in using and improving their spatial abilities.

"At this point, we initially plan to release this program to college students, and then hopefully to adolescents [students still in middle schools and high schools]," said Dr. Blasko. "The program will be able to do a wide range of things, including testing and constant improvement. Its purpose is to be a learn-

ing center and to let students test themselves on their spatial abilities, and improve from there." Spatial abilities

include visualization and manipulation of objects in one's mind, and according to Dr. Blasko, spa-



Dr. Dawn Blasko and Kathryn Holliday-Darr with two Behrend students.

tial abilities can be improved. "One way we hope to do this is to develop a type of progressive program that lets the student log onto the program and pick up where they left off. Spatial abilities are difficult; we want to show that not everyone is a natural at this, or that some people simply can't do it. They (spatial abilities) are extremely important for several careers, especially in engineering and visual arts," Dr. Blasko said.

Ms. Holliday-Darr, who is chiefly involved with developing the program and its interactive abilities, shows that this program is not easy to make. The complex graphics, links, and numerous tests that need to be developed to be truly interactive takes time and imagination. Along with the team of students from numerous classes (ranging from a First-Year Seminar to MET

and PLET), the development of the program is a painstaking process. As a result, there is no set date as to when the program will be finished; Ms. Holliday-Darr, Dr. Blasko, and the team of fourteen students hope to develop the program carefully and with as many activities they can think of.

In the future, server space and other experts are going to be needed to fully build and support the program. Another innovative idea for the program is looking into virtual reality and being able to fully interact in the program. Concerns for this idea, though, are the compatibility with home computers and the complexity of virtual reality coming to several students who may use it. For more information on this ongoing project, you can visit the Web for more details at <http://cac.psu.edu/ets/catalog/fti200.html>.

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