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At N.Y.U., Assessing Problems in College Athletics

By *MARY PILON*

Complaints about the state of college athletics are nothing new. But who is to blame for all the headlines and deep-seated issues in college sports?

That was the question bandied about at New York University Law School Wednesday evening as part of a panel, "College Athletics: Is Anyone in Charge?"

The answers were provided by the panelists: college administrators, athletic directors, journalists, television dealmakers, conference gerrymanders, boosters, the N.C.A.A., agents, coaches, among others.

"Money," David Jones, a columnist for The Harrisburg Patriot-News, said, when asked about the circumstances surrounding the sexual abuse scandal at Penn State. Jones was among the first journalists to report on the allegations against [Jerry Sandusky](#), the former assistant football coach at Penn State who was recently found guilty of sexually abusing 10 boys.

"I'm a survivor of child molestation," Dana Jacobson, a former sports anchorwoman for ESPN, said. "And part of the smokescreen of maybe not everyone, but some of these molesters, is they're not who you'd expect."

Also on the panel was LaVar Arrington, a retired professional football player who played at Penn State, where Sandusky was his coach. He said he had "no knowledge" of abuse there.

"I thought that Jerry Sandusky was a great man," Arrington said. "I would even go as far, I would not even shortchange what I thought of the man when I was there. I absolutely based my decision to go to Penn State because of the reputation that man had that preceded him before I even made my commitment. And I was the player of the year in high school. It wasn't that I went to Penn State because it was the only opportunity I had. I had scholarship offers from every college in America. I chose to go to Penn State because of the things I heard about Jerry Sandusky."

But the conversation went beyond the Penn State scandal and questions about what administrators knew. Joe Nocera, an Op-Ed columnist for The New York Times, reiterated his argument that [college athletes should be paid](#). John Sexton, New York University's president, said university leaders could drift away from big-time college athletic cultures and focus on academics, if that is what they wanted.

"It's an old-boys' club," Constance Zotos, an associate professor at N.Y.U. who has been a college coach and athletic director, said. "Things are secretive. There's not much budgetary

transparency. That leads to no transparency in many, many things. And then you add to it the reputation and then you've got a structure that doesn't lend itself to having the conversation or having the oversight that's needed to fix this."

Also addressed was the role of television and the fans who watch college sports, either packing stadiums or tuning in to an expanding array of programming.

"Media is influencing the postseason," Tim Perneti, the athletic director at Rutgers, said. "It's influencing expansion. It's influencing these massive TV contracts, which I was part of years ago, and it's influencing the minds of 18-year-old kids and the decision they're going to make that's going to affect the rest of their lives."

The panel was moderated by Arthur R. Miller, an N.Y.U. law professor and chairman of the N.Y.U. Sports and Society Program, and also included David Brekke, a law student and former college athlete; Len DeLuca, a media strategist; Bob LaMonte, an agent; and Leonard Wilf, the vice chairman of the Minnesota Vikings. Fred Wilpon, the real estate executive and majority owner of the Mets, was scheduled to appear, but was unable to make it and sent his regards.