The “Cinderella Story” as a University Resource: The Use of Intercollegiate Athletic Success for Institutional Growth

Author: Jerry Logan

Boston College
Lynch School of Education

Department of
Educational Leadership and Higher Education

Program in Higher Education

THE "CINDERELLA STORY" AS A UNIVERSITY RESOURCE: THE USE OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETIC SUCCESS FOR INSTITUTIONAL GROWTH

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JERRY M. LOGAN

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Abstract

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Jerry M. Logan

Dr. Ana M. Martínez Alemán, Dissertation Chair

Through a qualitative case study of Butler University, this study seeks to understand how high-profile athletic success—in this instance, a Cinderella run in the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament—can be leveraged to develop other institutional functions and elevate the profile of the university as a whole. The story of Butler's investment in men's basketball, culminating in two successive trips to the Final Four in 2010 and 2011, spans nearly three decades and offers an extreme yet instructive case of the potential synergy between a serious academic institution and a big-time college sports program.

Through interviews with faculty and administrators, document analysis, and field observations on Butler's campus, a picture emerges of the Cinderella story as a university resource that can be developed and managed through the decision-making of administrators in a variety of offices, including admissions, advancement, athletics, and marketing and communications. At Butler, the narrative begins in 1989 with the intentional decision to build men's basketball into a flagship program for the institution, peaks with the twin Final Four appearances, and then consists of efforts to leverage this success as part of the university's pursuit of a national profile after a long history as a regional institution.

Acknowledgements

After working in higher education for more than a decade, I've heard the horror stories. The word "dissertation" seems to summon from most faculty members at least one tale—often theirs, occasionally that of some other poor sap they once knew—of woe. Had I been recording the conversations and diligently coding the transcripts, I'm sure a handful of themes would emerge: there is of course the chair, inscrutable, or unreachable, or both; there is the committee, expanding or contracting on a dime, and always seeming to have that one reader gone rogue; sometimes it's a hearing or defense where the candidate crashes and burns, in public if particularly unlucky; and, perhaps the most frequent response, the completion date that seems sometimes to drift and sometimes to be shoved out of reach year after year. Each different theme elicits the same gut response for me: guilt, followed by a flood of gratitude.

My story feels like an outlier in the sample. Dr. Michael Malec and Dr. Patrick Keating have been responsive, consistent, thoughtful, and encouraging every step of the way. They have been enthusiastic about my research from the jump, insightful in their feedback on every idea or draft I have shared, and lightning-fast on email. Dr. Ana M. Martínez Alemán agreed to serve as my chair even though my topic was well outside her own research program, and then stuck with me amid a change in her job description that, I can only imagine, made life markedly more hectic. Not once did I feel her support waver or her availability lessen. She was open to all of my ideas and accepted my voice as a writer, yet ensured that I stayed on course as a social scientist when my druthers otherwise would have led me astray. Her communication was always clear, her perspective always helpful, and her interest—not just in my project but in me—always refreshing. I do not need to triangulate data or member check sources to conclude with full confidence that I lucked into the dream dissertation committee.

Likewise, I'm not sure I could have asked for better classmates and professors. I was nervous to enter the program as a part-time, commuting student, but my cohort made coming to campus a joy and pushed me, nearly always without knowing, to see this program through to completion; our time together in the capstone course with Dr. Karen Arnold was hands down the most satisfying educational experience I've had as a student. The faculty in the Lynch School are really smart and really human, which seems a difficult combination to find, but there must be something in the water at Campion Hall.

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I've said a lot about the community at Butler University in the pages ahead, but I owe the individuals who aided in my study an enormous debt of gratitude. After so many of the interviews I conducted or the interactions I had, I'd say to myself, or to my wife, or to no one in particular, "I think that was the nicest person I've ever met." Over many decades and with many hands, the Butler community has built a men's basketball program, an athletic department, and a university worth rooting for, which I will continue to do in the years ahead. I had no idea what I

was getting into when I selected Butler for the case study, but in retrospect, it was a half-court heave that went clean through the net at the other end of the court.

Despite filling these pages with plenty of words, I still don't know the right ones to offer my friends and family. To Mark, who wisely told me to go get my doctorate while I was still young and whom I will spend the rest of my career trying to emulate; to Josh, who has been my fellow dreamer and frequent sounding board for a decade and a half; to Jordan, who offered to help me more times than I can count and probably never realized that those simple offers spoke volumes; to my mom and dad, whose support at every step of my education I will never be able to repay; and to Charlie and Brady, who will not remember this time period in our family history once they've grown and so will not fully appreciate how often the laughter or play time we shared boosted my spirits ahead of another long night of reading or writing—I am grateful to you all, and hope we have many more years together in which I can return your many favors.

Finally, to Lisa: one of my favorite daydreams when walking to class at BC was to imagine this moment, when I could pause at the end of my studies and express my full gratitude to you. But, I've typed and deleted and re-typed this part of the acknowledgements so many times that it's clear: even given four years' time and so many jaunts from the free parking on Commonwealth all the way to Campion on the other side of campus, my imagination still failed me. And since we both have no desire for me to spend another Tuesday or Wednesday night away from home and down in Chestnut Hill walking to class and pondering this moment, let me simply say I love you, I'm grateful, and you can borrow my cool robes whenever you want. I never could have earned them without you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Each year, television coverage of March Madness—the annual postseason tournament for NCAA Division I men's basketball—concludes in the same fashion. Following the trophy presentation, the song "One Shining Moment" plays over a montage of clips from that year's games. In three minutes, the clips rehash all of the storylines from the previous three weeks—buzzer-beating shots, upset victories by obscure schools, star players seizing the moment, coaches dancing, fans yelling, teams euphoric in victory and devastated in defeat. As the music fades, the final image is always that of the recently crowned champions, hoisting their trophy skyward as confetti rains behind them. The montage, like the tournament itself, follows a proven formula: though the teams and players change in ways that are notoriously difficult to forecast each year, the storylines—and all of the attendant emotion that fuels them—are one of television's most reliable commodities. And despite the title of the tournament's anthem, the montage drives home a singular point: come March, there are plenty of shining moments to go around.

One of the tournament's defining tropes is the "Cinderella story," a lower-seeded outfit that strings together a couple shocking victories over powerhouse programs and captures the nation's attention in the process. Perhaps the glass slipper has fit no team more snugly than George Mason University during the 2006 NCAA tournament. In the tournament's opening two rounds, the eleventh-seeded Patriots defeated two of college basketball's bluebloods, Michigan State and North Carolina, to advance to the Sweet Sixteen. The following weekend they beat Wichita State and Connecticut to earn a coveted spot in the Final Four, where they would lose to the eventual champion Florida. To celebrate the ten-year anniversary of this surprise run, *The Washington Post* ran an oral history of the event that led with this preface: "In March 2006, an

unheralded team from an overlooked university known even to locals as a commuter school took the nation on a magic carpet ride" (Kilgore & Steinberg, 2016, para. 1).

The oral history, combined with other retrospectives and contemporary media coverage, reveals the frenzy that enveloped the team and the university during these weeks. Back on campus in between games, players received standing ovations in class and were swarmed by students who felt the team had changed the course of the university's history in a single weekend (Kilgore & Steinberg, 2016; Steinberg, 2006). The athletic department received over 100 media requests in a single day, including one from CBS—the host network for all of March Madness—to follow the team for as long as it remained in the tournament (Kilgore & Steinberg, 2016; Schmuck, 2006; Steinberg, 2006). The day after the team defeated North Carolina, the university bookstore received 180 online orders for merchandise before noon, well more than the five or six orders its staff was accustomed to receiving each day (Steinberg, 2006). By the end of March, the bookstore had sold more than $800,000 in merchandise that month alone, $175,000 more than the entire previous academic year (Baker, 2008). As Alan Merten, George Mason's then-president said later of the Cinderella story, "It completely took over the whole university" (Kilgore & Steinberg, 2016, para. 117).

Though Merten's comment paints the university as a passive recipient of the hysteria, later in the oral history he later reveals a coordinated attempt on behalf of his administration to seize control of the moment:

> We had a group that got together every morning in March. It was called the Leverage Group. We were asking ourselves the question, how can we get attention from this for our academic programs and for the university? We had everybody working on it, every step of the way. (Kilgore & Steinberg, 2016, para. 148)

In the aftermath Robert Baker, Director of the Center for Sport Management at George Mason, assessed the results of this leveraging effort. In the two years following the basketball team's Cinderella story, Baker (2008) found dramatic increases in web traffic, booster club funding, licensing revenue, admissions inquiries and applications, GPAs and SAT scores of the incoming class, alumni activity, and school spirit. He estimated the value of the university's total media exposure to be a staggering $677,474,659. Baker downplays the idea that this litany of benefits sprang solely from the Final Four appearance, arguing instead that the basketball team's success "shed light" (Baker, 2008, para. 16) on a transformation that was already underway at the university, accelerating the process "like a surge of adrenaline" (Cohn, 2009, para. 22). This acceleration has had lasting effects. Three years after the Final Four run, President Merten continued to refer to it as "the gift that keeps on giving" (Cohn, 2009, para. 6); ten years later, he dubbed it "one of the highlights of my life" (Kilgore & Steinberg, 2016, para. 142). The moment is now firmly embedded in George Mason's institutional narrative: it is one of 17 "defining events" in the university's history that are highlighted on its public website, and it receives extensive coverage in an online account of Mason's history developed by the University Libraries (George Mason, n.d.; George Mason, 2016).

Whether told by nostalgic sportswriters or university officials, George Mason's Cinderella story has the feel of catching lightning in a bottle. And perhaps that is not too far from the truth. From a sporting perspective, George Mason was one of the last teams to be selected for the tournament field. By the luck of the draw, they played their third and fourth round games in Washington D.C., just 15 miles from the university's main campus in Fairfax, Virginia, giving them de facto home games. And, of course, they had to win four straight basketball games, the last of which was a two-point overtime victory over the second-ranked team in the country. From

a managerial perspective, the timing was equally fortuitous. President Merten suggests that, had the Final Four run happened either earlier or later in the university's history, it would not have had the same wholesale effect on the institution's transformation (George Mason, 2016). Along these lines, Baker attributes the successful leveraging of the moment to the ability of the university's leadership team at the time; the presence of a charismatic coach in Jim Larrañaga, who ran a respectable program and was a strong institutional citizen; and, the team's senior class, all of whom graduated and reflected well upon the student body (Baker, 2008; Cohn, 2009). After his analysis of the economic and cultural aspects of the Final Four run, Baker (2008) concludes that, "if properly managed, this type of athletic success can translate into much more for an institution" (para. 17). Yet, given all of the moving parts in Mason's equation for success, two questions follow: how widespread is "this type" of success in big-time intercollegiate athletics and what does it mean to "properly manage" this moment?

Boundary Lines

"Big-time" intercollegiate athletics refers to heavily commercialized and widely popular sports at the NCAA Division I level. For the most part, this term applies to football and men's basketball. Competition in these two sports at this particular level draws the bulk of the country's interest in college athletics, and as large-scale spectator sports, they have the capacity to generate revenue from ticket sales and television deals, and to dominate the national and local media coverage given to universities (Clotfelter, 2011; Toma, 2003). They are, in short, big business, and as such they are open to a variety of critiques.

Four months before running the oral history of George Mason's Cinderella story, *The Washington Post* also ran an investigative feature entitled "Playing in the Red." The report, based on findings from the financial records of athletics departments at 48 public universities

that compete in the "Power Five" athletic conferences, details the arms race in intercollegiate athletics from 2004 to 2014. Among the highlighted findings are that, over this ten-year period, total revenue among all 48 athletics programs rose from $2.67 billion to $4.49 billion, with the median program's revenue surging from $52.9 million to $93.1 million; yet, despite this apparent infusion of funds, more than half of the programs in the study ran a deficit in 2014. Though the reporters present a nuanced analysis of the issue, their conclusion nevertheless points dramatically toward reform:

> But many departments also are losing more money than ever, as athletic directors choose to outspend rising income to compete in an arms race that is costing many of the nation's largest publicly funded universities and students millions of dollars. Rich departments such as Auburn have built lavish facilities, invented dozens of new administrative positions and bought new jets, while poorer departments such as Rutgers have taken millions in mandatory fees from students and siphoned money away from academic budgets to try to keep up. (Hobson & Rich, 2015, para. 5)

Such journalistic condemnations are an annual occurrence. A week prior to *The Washington Post* report, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published "The $10 Billion Sports Tab: How College Students Are Funding the Athletics Arms Race" (Wolverton, Hallman, Shifflett, & Kambhampati, 2015). The project, which similarly used public records reports on athletic department finances from 234 public universities, features an interactive table of athletics subsidies, a long-form article focusing on Georgia State University's decision to launch a Division I football program, and multiple images of the near-empty stadium in which the Panthers play. Each component of the report points to the same question: why do universities continue to invest in these deficit-riddled programs, and at whose expense?

Intercollegiate athletics have provided equal fodder for scholars and special interest groups as well. In the scholarly realm, studies range from reform-minded pieces that ultimately hold out hope for stronger bonds between academics and athletics (Atwell, 1985; Duderstadt, 2000; Schulman & Bowen, 2001; Thelin & Wisemann, 1989), to scathing denunciations that college sports are crippling the entire academic enterprise (Sperber, 2001). Alongside these studies lies the work of interest groups formed in recent years to combat the ills of commercialization within intercollegiate athletics, such as the Drake Group and the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics. The latter has produced several thoughtful reports over the past 25 years charting an agenda for the restoration of academic integrity to intercollegiate athletics and, most recently, zeroing in on financial reform (Knight Commission, 1991; Knight Commission, 2001; Knight Commission, 2010).

Undoubtedly, these calls for reform are a vital piece of the collective attention paid to big-time intercollegiate athletics. The ills associated with this facet of the American university—from academic scandals, to lavish spending, to an over-reliance upon student fees, to the exploitation of athletes whose value to the institution can exceed the cost even of a full scholarship—demand continued thought, critique, and ultimately reform. Nevertheless, for some perhaps more pragmatic scholars the window for major change has closed. In his sweeping call for reform of American higher education, Zemsky (2009) charts a practical agenda for dealing with the challenges of the coming decades. Critical to this agenda is an identification of certain issues that are, for a variety of reasons, simply not worth addressing. The first item on Zemsky's "don't-do list" is intercollegiate athletics, which he refers to as "the one that got away—permanently" (Zemsky, 2009, p. 183). For Zemsky, reform is necessary but not feasible; as such

he puts an essentially blind hope in universities one day deciding to relinquish ownership of their football and basketball programs.

In recent years scholars have begun to chart a path between these cries for reform and Zemsky's (2009) treatment of athletics as something of a third rail. Several assumptions set the boundaries for this middle ground. To begin with, a critical analysis of big-time intercollegiate athletics must avoid a moralistic starting point (Clotfelter, 2011; Thelin & Wisemann, 1989). Vilification and exultation alike tend to ignore the complexity of the enterprise itself and of the realities with which universities must grapple in the current age (Buer, 2009; Toma, 2010). Accordingly, as Thelin and Wisemann (1989) suggest, in order to begin to understand intercollegiate athletics one must view it as "a central part of the character and operation of American colleges and universities" (p. 24); it must be understood and examined as a constituent element of the university, rather than a separate entity altogether (Clotfelter, 2011; Toma, 2010). The resulting analysis must also acknowledge the benefits of intercollegiate athletics alongside its drawbacks (Beyer & Hannah, 2000), being careful to move beyond some of the traditional justifications for athletics, such as their capacity to build character or generate revenue, which often "ring hollow" in the contemporary environment (Toma, 1999, p. 89). Instead of seeking to describe *what* is happening with regards to the relationship between universities and their athletics programs, researchers must pursue questions of *how* and *why* (Toma, 1999; Toma, 2010). Ultimately, their goal should echo that of Buer (2009), who seeks to employ "a more nuanced and inclusive both-and perspective" of big-time athletics as a commercial entity that offers both tangible and intangible benefits to the modern university (p. 110).

The present study lives in this middle ground. Though an acknowledgement of the fundamental risks that accompany big-time athletics is necessary, the greater interest lies with

the reasons that commercial athletics not only persists but continues to grow in the American university, and how it might function as a multidimensional resource to institutions in this day and age. Perhaps, in 2006, George Mason did catch lightning in a bottle with the postseason success of their men's basketball team. But look backward, and you will see that they are far from the only ones to have done so; look forward, in the years since their surprise Final Four run, and you will find a string of similar stories across the country, from Indianapolis, IN, to Richmond, VA, to Fort Myers, FL. Look all around and you will see universities with bottles still held aloft, waiting for the March sky to light up once more.

One Shining Moment

Only 150 miles separate George Mason from the College of William and Mary, but the defining features of each institution put them much further apart. George Mason is a toddler university, established in 1957 as a commuter school in the suburbs of Washington D.C. In a short time, it has grown into a research-heavy university with an enrollment of nearly 34,000 students. Much of William and Mary's identity, on the other hand, is bound in its history: founded in 1693, the college is old enough to have given George Washington his first job, birthed the Phi Beta Kappa honor society, and earned the tagline "alma mater of a nation" for the number of statesmen who studied at the university during the founding period of the country's history. Despite such venerable origins, the college's turbulent fortunes have given it a different shape than its colonial college peers, and today it maintains a relatively intimate university community of less than 9,000 students. Setting these differences aside, the two institutions do share the school colors of green and gold, and for some time their athletic teams competed together in the Colonial Athletic Association (CAA) until George Mason jumped to the more prestigious Atlantic 10 Conference in 2013.

Notwithstanding its place in a lower-tier conference, William and Mary can make a plausible claim to having done intercollegiate athletics the right way. The college recently boasted the highest graduation rate for scholarship athletes among all public universities nationwide and, on the strength of its cross country and women's tennis programs, has won more CAA championships than any of its peers since the conference's inception in 1985 (CCE, 2015). Beyond the athletic program, William and Mary has much more to be proud of: known as a public ivy, the college annually appears near the very top of the national rankings for public institutions and for best value. Currently, the *U.S. News and World Report* (*USNWR*) ranks William and Mary sixth on its list of top public schools and fourth on its list of best undergraduate teaching among all universities. With its sterling history, distinctive identity, and excellent academic reputation, it would seem that William and Mary has little to envy in the newbie to its north.

Yet, George Mason is one of several universities cited in aspirational fashion in a recent report on the state of William and Mary Athletics, prepared in 2015 by the "Committee on Competitive Excellence" at the request of the College's president. The report features all of the familiar justifications in the case for increased investment in intercollegiate athletics: national exposure, brand enhancement, merchandising, entertainment, convening power, cultural expression, community building among students and boosters, and, ultimately, a belief that athletics "can elevate an entire university community" (CCE, 2015, p. 1). So, what is missing? What prevents William and Mary from playing the same game as George Mason? The following passage captures the answer precisely:

> Our moment is coming. When Tribe Athletics' success provides a galvanizing event, we need to be ready to fully capitalize on it. Otherwise, that moment—and the opportunities

> to tell William and Mary's remarkable story, strengthen its brand, and enthuse our community—will be lost. (CCE, 2015, p. 21)

The conviction is clear: William and Mary has an identity worth telling and selling, a need to continue nurturing and expanding its community, and a proven tool for doing so. All that remains is a spark bright enough to steal the nation's gaze.

Reading between the lines, that spark is not to be found in the grass and open air of a stadium, but amid the hardwood and echoes of a gymnasium, where each of the other universities cited in the report generated their own light. For institutions like William and Mary with a lighter resource base in athletics, basketball represents a more prudent investment: it is much less expensive than football—some three to four times cheaper by some measures—yet it can provide similar dividends (Brewer, Gates, & Goldman, 2002; Rader, 1990; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Further, while the sport certainly has its aristocrats, on the whole it offers a far more level playing field than football; the rankings are more fluid, individual games more winnable, a national championship more accessible (Rader, 1990). This egalitarian quality is evident in college basketball's postseason tournament, which features 68 teams compared to four in the college football playoff, and reserves slots for each conference champion regardless of the conference's strength. Indeed, it is March Madness that sets the sport apart from both a commercial perspective and a publicity perspective. The tournament is a commodity with unparalleled staying power and reach (Clotfelter, 2011; Southall, Nagel, Amis, & Southall, 2008). CBS Sports and Turner are in the middle of a 22-year deal to broadcast March Madness, the rights fee for which is $19.6 billion over the course of the agreement. Turner's president David Levy justified a recent extension to this deal by claiming that "there is no other event that

captivates an entire nation for over three weeks and across all platforms—television, digital and social" (Deitsch, 2016, para. 6).

Beyond these advantages, there is one additional quality about March Madness that appeals to administrators at universities outside of the most prestigious athletic conferences: a championship is not necessary in order to unlock the institution-building capacities of athletic success. None of the men's basketball programs cited in William and Mary's report—Davidson, Lehigh, Butler, George Mason, Harvard, and Virginia Commonwealth—were the team lifting the trophy when the tournament's closing montage faded from television screens. The same is true of other lesser-known programs who have grabbed shining moments of their own over the past two decades: Gonzaga, Northern Iowa, Florida Gulf Coast University, Wichita State, and on down the line.

For each of these teams, the common thread is the development and, for however brief a moment, possession of the Cinderella story. The narrative differs from team to team and season to season, perhaps turning one year on the performance of a transcendent player, as it did in 2008 with Stephen Curry at Davidson; another year on a memorable shot, as it did two years later with Ali Farokhmanesh's three-pointer in the final minute of Northern Iowa's win over Kansas; another year on a magnetic style of play like Florida Gulf Coast's combination of alley-oops and grins that quickly earned the moniker "dunk city." Yet, there are two features that nearly all Cinderellas share. First, they tend to hail from "mid-major" athletic conferences outside of the most powerful five to six affiliations, which is often a more important determinant than their actual tournament seed. Second, they must emerge from the tournament's first weekend to at least earn a spot in the Sweet Sixteen, thereby extending the media cycle and capitalizing on what scholars have dubbed the "good story phenomenon," in which "people 'buy into' a

particular team because its season has the movie script quality of being unexpected" (Toma & Cross, 1998, pp. 651-652). This is the galvanizing event for which administrators at William and Mary are hoping, when the investment in commercial athletics mixes with a little bit of good fortune to provide the institution with a singular leverage point to broadcast its story across the country.

This study seeks to investigate big-time intercollegiate athletics as a tool for institution building through the lens of the Cinderella story. It posits that the Cinderella story constitutes a resource that universities can pursue, acquire, and develop. As such, the study addresses two primary research questions. First, how does an institution position itself for a Cinderella run in the NCAA tournament? Second, how does the institution seek to leverage this resource in both the short- and long-term to build other facets of the university? Or, in other words, what does it really feel like to catch lightning in a bottle?

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Historical Forces

The presence of big-time athletic programs within the university is a historical quirk of American higher education (Chu, 1989; Clotfelter, 2011; Thelin, 1996; Toma 2010). As Clotfelter (2011) notes, this uneasy alliance constitutes "an authentic case of American exceptionalism": in no other setting across the globe are commercial sports so deeply intertwined with institutions of higher learning (p. 6). Yet, a thorough understanding of the historical conditions and social forces that gave rise to this arrangement can help to strip away some of its apparent oddness while also explaining many of the tensions that persist today.

At the root of big-time intercollegiate athletics lies the booster college phenomenon. As American settlers pushed westward throughout the nineteenth century, colleges sprouted in tiny frontier towns with astonishing frequency. On par with newspapers, hotels, and basic utilities, higher education institutions were seen as essential in attracting additional settlers and ensuring the survival of these fledgling cities (Boorstin, 1965). As Brubacher and Rudy (1997) make almost comically clear, nothing—not "fear of Indian attacks, lack of proper secondary-school facilities, severity of climate, sparseness of population, nor poverty of local resources"—could check the college founding movement, and as railway track began to stretch across the territory in the middle of the century, the phenomenon only accelerated (pp. 59-60).

The missionary spirit of various religious denominations drove much of this growth, but Boorstin (1965) pinpoints an additional factor of nearly equal weight—the "booster spirit" (p. 155). This spirit was fueled by an "optimistic confusion of present and future," a romantic ambition that, despite the modest beginning and paltry resources of any given outpost, the town was destined for metropolitan greatness (p. 152). Accompanying this optimism was a pragmatic

reliance upon community whereby survival hinged upon the creation of social institutions that could serve existing residents and draw new ones to the area. Out of this milieu the "booster college" emerged in town after town, particularly in the Midwest and the South (Thelin, 2011) and nearly always following the same pattern: "denominations gave the initial push and provided a plan, but the whole community, regardless of sect, then built and maintained the college" (Boorstin, 1965, p. 155). In these booster colleges were bound the towns' resources, hopes, and prospects for the future, and in return, residents expected the institutions to "express, serve, and be governed by, their community" (Boorstin, 1965, p. 159).

The booster college phenomenon was enabled in large part by the lack of coordination and consensus around higher education in America. Chu (1985) describes this environment as an "open charter": in the absence of a central authority or even a common social understanding of the purposes of higher learning and the appropriate means to pursue those purposes, colleges were afforded carte blanche in terms of their operations. Yet, at the same time this open charter also meant that institutions rarely enjoyed dependable and sufficient funding. Thus, a capacity for adaptability was written into the DNA of the American college, intertwined with the near-constant pressure to generate adequate resources. The resulting tension left institutions "open to redefinition to suit the particular needs and desires" of their constituents (Chu, 1985, p. 36); it also meant that, like many of the nascent communities supporting them, survival was the most pressing question for the booster college during the nineteenth century. The presence and interplay of these three historical forces—the booster spirit, the open charter, and the instability of resources—thus created a fertile environment for the growth of commercial athletics within the university setting.

The story of big-time intercollegiate athletics begins with and continues to revolve around the sport of football. Initially, football appeared on college campuses organically, as a part of the extracurriculum. Like other features of the extracurriculum, it was something of a tolerated rebellion, an attempt on behalf of students to carve out their own niche on college campuses in response to a regimented curriculum and the pervasive authority of the faculty. Football was, in short, an assertion of freedom (Smith, 1988). Further, the resulting sub-communities offered students an escape from the often impersonal world of academia (Rader, 1977). In short order, teams were formed and students began to look beyond their campus boundaries for competition. The first organized game occurred in 1869 between Princeton and Rutgers; over the next decade the sport ballooned in popularity so that by the 1880s university teams were traveling across the country to play one another (Rudolph, 1962). In the span of just a few decades, the defining features of modern, big-time intercollegiate athletics would coalesce around football. By the 1890s, the sport had grown too complex, too large, and—most significantly—too valuable a commodity to continue as a student-driven initiative; with faculty largely disinterested, alumni assumed control of the burgeoning operation and were soon joined by administration (Rudolph, 1962). By the 1920s, all of the familiar features were in place at campuses across the country: enormous stadiums filled with paying spectators each Saturday in the fall; frenzied media attention in local and national outlets; the professionalization, followed quickly thereafter by the lionization, of head coaches; the establishment and growing presence of a regulatory body; and distinctive expressions of institutional culture in the form of school colors, mascots, fight songs, and game-day rituals (Clotfelter, 2011; Smith, 1988; Thelin, 2011).

This surge in popularity both emanated from and capitalized upon the dominant sociocultural forces of the day. Perhaps the most obvious of these influences was a perceived

crisis in masculinity. For many, the closing of the western frontier in concert with the emergence of the country on a national stage demanded a visible, substantive recovery of manly virtues (Davis, 1993; Smith, 1988). Looking back on this time period, many scholars therefore view sport as "partially replacing the frontier as a masculine preserve" within American society (Davis, 1993, p. 19). The image of the nation's young men being raised on football, a sport so violent that President Theodore Roosevelt had to intervene and demand rule changes to protect the players, did much to soothe these national concerns. The game embodied related movements of the time, such as muscular Christianity, social Darwinism, and Roosevelt's notion of "the strenuous life," and institutionalized the martial spirit of the day (Lester, 1995; Rudolph, 1962; Toma, 2003). Further, it offered Americans a locus for expressions of imperialist nostalgia. The fulfillment of the country's manifest destiny to subdue the frontier was a point of deep and lasting pride that, for a certain segment of the population, warranted commemoration. Sports teams, in need of identifying symbols in their early years, were shaped by a nostalgic longing for this period in the nation's history. The mythology of the West is reflected in many of the mascots and rituals that were adopted during this time and persist today (Davis, 1993; Slowikowski, 1993). If Americans wanted reminders of their country's past conquests and future virility, they need look no further than the college football field.

Beyond its masculine and imperialist influences, football was also subject to some of the economic drivers of the day. As Smith (1988) notes, the sport "grew up with the emerging industrial America" and as such, it echoed many of the characteristic features of capitalism (p. 4). The game was quickly standardized and professionalized (Toma, 2003). Those who developed, played, and consumed it all held to the belief that success was predicated upon merit and that competition was vital for the game (Beyer & Hannah, 2000). Of course, in such an

environment winning became central. Rudolph's (1962) matter-of-fact assessment captures the almost fatalistic consequence of the interaction between so many social undercurrents: "For, once the *sport* had been accepted, the *games* had to be won. Americans lacked a psychology for failure." (p. 381). The pursuit of victory at great cost, at *all* costs, was woven into the logic and operations of big-time college football from the very outset. The game bore a distinctly American imprint that would leak into other intercollegiate sports as they developed in the ensuing years. Therefore, as Beyer and Hannah (2000) rightly conclude, "university athletics survived and prospered in the U.S. because it expressed and reinforced ideas and values embodied in U.S. culture and thus in its colleges and universities" (p. 6).

In many ways then, the explosion of college football was the natural result of the collision between the booster spirit and the open charter. The booster college was deeply embedded in its contexts. It was explicitly designed to respond to community needs and impulses, and football—as a form of popular entertainment, a vehicle for local pride, and a reflection of the national mood—emerged as perhaps the college's most significant tool in meeting the expectations of the community around it. Furthermore, the open charter made the integration of commercial sport into the institution's regular functions a relatively easy prospect. The emergence of physical education as an academic field provided a comfortable landing spot for athletics programs within the curriculum, while the language of amateurism, lifted from Oxford and Cambridge, offered a historical and revered precedent for college students spending increasing amounts of their time and energy on the football field in addition to the classroom (Chu, 1985; Smith, 1988). Yet perhaps the greatest justification and most enticing allure of a big-time college football program, again a product of the booster spirit and open charter, was its capacity to generate resources for the institution, both in terms of funding and, perhaps even

more significantly, publicity. “At last,” Rudolph (1962) observes in his seminal history of American higher education, “the American college and university had discovered something that all sorts of people cared about passionately” (p. 386).

For university presidents, football loomed as a savior. It frequented the local and national news cycles, generated revenue, and bridged the public relations gap between the intellectual pursuits of the academy and the anti-intellectual sentiments of many communities around it (Rudolph, 1962). What’s more, the cool kids were doing it. More than any other institutions, Harvard and Yale gave big-time intercollegiate athletics its earliest form: Harvard constructed the first permanent stadium for its football team, and Yale, under the direction of legendary coach Walter Camp, became known as the “cradle of coaches” as former players scattered across the country to build their own professionalized football programs based upon the Yale model (Smith, 1988; Thelin, 1996; Toma, 2003). When booster colleges sought to establish their athletic programs, they saw the elite institutions of the Northeast as both inspiration and competition.

Indeed, what better way to validate booster optimism than to beat these schools at their own game, particularly when that game was almost certain to draw the eyes of the entire country? In 1929, for the first time in its history Yale’s football team journeyed to the South in order to play the University of Georgia for the opening of Sanford Stadium. For the entire decade prior, Georgia’s team had traveled north to play the sport’s dominant programs, losing every time. Much was made of the ties between the two institutions, from their common bulldog mascot to Georgia’s founding by a Yale graduate. Much more, however, was made of Georgia’s surprising victory over their Northern competition. The win was a “watershed event” in the history of the university (Thelin, 1996, p. 77), putting the small and under-resourced institution

on the map and spurring regional pride across the entire South, as evidenced by the Civil War verbiage that characterized local media coverage of the victory (Oriard, 2001).

By this time, the booster spirit had transferred in many places to large state institutions like the University of Georgia (Thelin, 1996). The growth and success of these universities mingled with the aspirations of their home states, particularly in "underserved regions of the country" like the South and the Midwest, where football enjoyed popular, quasi-religious support unlike any other social institution (Thelin, 1996, p. 71). Given the absence of professional sports teams in these regions, intercollegiate athletics became the principal expression of community pride and, likewise, the chief means of evaluating the region's standing in relation to its peers in the Northeast. Further, for the universities themselves, all of whom in characteristic American fashion aspired to national recognition, big-time athletic teams offered "the most visible signs of the contests for prestige taking place in all areas of university life" (Smith, 1988, p. 218). Thus, by the 1940s the booster college phenomenon had matured into a collection of universities attempting to serve their local communities while at the same time competing with each other on a national level. For the most part, they were still chasing institutions like Harvard and Yale, with perhaps one major difference: while the Ivy League schools had managed to scale back their commitment to big-time intercollegiate athletics, most other American universities had doubled down on the enterprise.

The investment has continued into the present day, fusing higher learning and commercialized athletics at many institutions in what often seems to be, on the surface, a perplexing arrangement. In the preface to his work on big-time intercollegiate athletics, Clotfelter (2011), an economist, describes the features of this arrangement that captured his attention and ultimately provoked the study. Having grown up in the states, Clotfelter found little

that was curious about college sports until he began his academic career, first at the University of Maryland and then at Duke University. In both places, he was surprised to find administrative offices abandoned on the first day of the conference basketball tournament, to watch as faculty and staff at all levels tiptoed around the athletic calendar in scheduling their own events, and to feel the entire institution grind to a halt before any major sporting event. For reasons such as these Clotfelter entitles his first chapter "strange bedfellows," his own turn of phrase in a long line of them from fellow scholars attempting to relate just how weird the relationship is (Chu, 1985; Thelin, 1996; Toma, 2003). Yet, as Smith (1988) rightly asserts, an understanding of the historical context reveals that big-time college athletics are not abnormal at all; in light of the open charter, the booster spirit, and the perpetual absence of resources during American higher education's infancy, it is in fact a perfectly natural development, coming down through the ages alongside many of the other, more accepted and valued features of the American university that nevertheless benefitted from the same freedom afforded to these institutions. Accordingly, Clotfelter's (2011) practical conclusion from this historical background rings true today:

> Regardless of the precise genesis of this connection between universities and spectator sports, every university with an established reputation for fielding competitive teams implicitly faced the following prospect on an annual basis: 'Among your historical legacies is a tradition of intercollegiate athletic competition. For better or worse, you are in part defined by this tradition. Use it or lose it.' Needless to say, most universities that had inherited such legacies chose to stay in the game. (p. 57)

Athletics as Institution Builder

For college and university administrators, the greatest use of big-time intercollegiate athletics is as a tool to develop other segments of the institution. As Toma (2003) contends,

institution building is "the name of the game at American higher education institutions" (p. 7), and athletic success can offer ambitious universities an inside route to what is perhaps higher education's most valuable commodity: prestige (Brewer, Gates, & Goldman, 2002; Clotfelter, 2011; Thelin & Wisemann, 1989; Toma, 2003; Toma, 2012). By analyzing higher education as an industry, Brewer, Gates, and Goldman (2002) provide the strongest theoretical framework for this connection between athletic success and academic prestige. The three economists devised this framework over a two-year study based on site visits to 26 higher education institutions in the United States and interviews with more than 200 administrators, faculty, and students at those institutions. Through an inductive approach to the data, the concept of prestige emerged as central to their framework; as a foundational concept, however, prestige can feel quite fuzzy. It derives from the general public's difficulty in assessing higher education's chief products, namely teaching, research, and learning. In the absence of widely understood metrics for these goods, consumers—and to a certain degree even those within higher education—develop a basic sense of the best institutions and extrapolate from those institutions a set of characteristics by which to judge the quality of other institutions. Thus, universities can "develop a strong reputation by 'looking right,' rather than directly meeting the primary demands of customers" (p. 28-29).

From here, Brewer, Gates, and Goldman (2002) pinpoint several key features of prestige. First, it is an asset that can enhance an institution's ability to compete in each of higher education's four primary revenue markets—enrollment, research funding, government dollars, and private donations. Second, at any given time an institution possesses a stock of the prestige asset. To build and maintain this stock requires strategic investment over time, and without such

investment the stock will erode. Third and finally, the pursuit of prestige can be rewarding, but it is almost always a risky venture.

With this understanding of prestige in mind, the economists classify institutions as either prestigious, prestige-seeking, or reputation-based depending upon their stock of prestige (low, moderate, or high) and their investment in pursuing it (again, low, moderate, or high). Those that fall in the middle category of prestige-seekers, possessing at best a moderate stock of prestige while investing at least a moderate amount of funds in its pursuit, are of highest interest. These institutions, referred to elsewhere as "striving institutions" (O'Meara, 2007, p. 125) and those "obsessed with 'moving to the next level'" (Toma, 2012, p. 118), are widely recognized across the higher education literature (Toma, 2012). As the three economists explain, prestige-seekers assume enormous risk in their efforts to scale the prestige hierarchy, as they

> must allocate large amounts of discretionary resources to costly investments in prestige, which have uncertain payoffs. If the payoffs do not materialize, or are long delayed, pressure will grow for the institution to abandon its prestige seeking. If the institution abandons its prestige seeking, it must stop maintaining or even dismantle its investments in prestige. The institution will then end up the poorer for the failed investments. (p. 98)

Prestige-seekers are, as Zemsky (2003) memorably phrased it in a review of Brewer, Gates, and Goldman's work, "the industry's biggest gamblers" (p. 475); and one of the areas in which they continue to wager their precious chips is intercollegiate athletics.

Through their study, Brewer, Gates, and Goldman (2002) identify three "prestige generators" that institutions use to build prestige: student quality, research, and sports (p. 29). Because prestige is an abstract concept, it leaves space for markers of success in any of these three areas to spill over into perceptions of the university's other operations. This phenomenon is

central to the connection between big-time intercollegiate athletics and prestige. As the economists make clear, "the core of our notion that sports success is a prestige driver is the sense that success in sports has a halo effect, spreading success to other institutional functions" (p. 136). In this way, athletic prosperity can have an institutional impact similar to indicators of success in the other two more traditional prestige generators, on par with surges in the number of national merit scholars in the student body; prominent awards—such as Nobel Prizes, MacArthur Fellows, and Fulbright Scholars—earned by faculty; and, the quality of a specific academic department through faculty recruitment (Brewer, Gates, and Goldman, 2002; Goidel & Hamilton, 2006; O'Meara, 2007).

The halo effect is, in short, the great hope of investment in athletics at prestige-seeking universities (Toma, 2003). In more sport-specific terms, the basic blueprint for the production of this halo is fairly straightforward: investment in football or men's basketball can yield high-profile wins that garner national attention; with the right touch, institutions can parlay this widespread interest into name recognition, image enhancement, and increased resources, whether tangible ones like funding or intangible ones like institutional pride and identification. These fruits, in turn, can feed growth across the entire institution, setting off a cycle of prestige and resource generation that might lift the university into ever-more prestigious company (O'Meara, 2007; Toma, 2012). In this way, a successful, big-time athletic program can become "an instrument of total institutional enhancement" (Thelin, 1996, p. 9).

This perception is a powerful factor in the administrative choices made in many universities. Though scholars debate the soundness of such logic, primarily because of the size of the investment that is required and the amount of risk that is involved, they generally agree upon the notion that it is rooted in a bevy of past success stories. As noted earlier, Ivy League

institutions furnished the original paradigm, but at different points in time a number of institutions have been able to replicate and in some cases exceed this original model of success. Thelin (1996) offers extended accounts at Louisiana State University, the University of Georgia, the University of Southern California, and the University of Notre Dame. To these Toma (2003) adds the University of Houston, Brigham Young University, Michigan State University, Northwestern University, the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, and the University of California, Los Angeles. Clotfelter (2011) chips in with stories from the University of South Florida, Binghamton University, and the University of Connecticut. Among institutions mentioned by other scholars are Southern Methodist University and the University of California, Berkeley (Chu, 1985; Oriard, 2001).

Among all of these examples, however, Notre Dame's use of football to transform its institutional fortunes remains the paragon. As with most success stories of any type, there is a strong sense that Notre Dame benefitted from a "right time, right place" set of circumstances (Sperber, 1993; Toma, 2003). Its Catholic mission and identity appealed to the waves of Catholic immigrants pouring into the country in the early 1900s, and through media coverage football became a nationally transmitted rallying point. As the football team stockpiled victories, a network of "subway alumni" formed in urban centers comprising Catholics who affiliated with the institution despite having no formal tie of any kind. In this way, the university kindled a nationwide booster spirit, fed not by regional interests but instead by religious and ethnic fervor (Thelin, 1996). Soon, football had given Notre Dame an "identity and leverage unsurpassed in American higher education" (Thelin, 1996, p. 90). Most importantly, the institution was able to capitalize on this leverage point. With its football team as a foundation, administrators were able to trade upon the publicity and recognizable image to build a renowned academic institution over

time. In the present day, big-time athletics and serious intellectual work occur side-by-side, and the pursuit of excellence in both areas sparks persistent tension (Sperber, 1993). Yet, as members of the community assert, despite the iconic standing of Notre Dame's football team the university no longer rises and falls based on the results of the previous Saturday's game; the campus's academic pursuits command the attention of its inhabitants during the other days of the week (Toma, 2003). In this way, Notre Dame's use of big-time athletic success to project its story and build a standalone, preeminent academic structure represents the dream scenario for many institutions still fighting to ascend in the rankings, whether football or academic.

The Costs of Big-Time Athletics

Stories like that of Notre Dame linger in the memory of administrators and fuel the powerful perception that big-time athletics can be a critical resource in the ceaseless effort to amass prestige and resources. However, as noted earlier, in seeking to use this resource administrators are playing with fire: they might cast light upon their institution, or they might send the whole place up in smoke. Indeed, the backdrop to the writing of this paper has been the crisis at Baylor University, where the Board of Regents removed president Kenneth Starr from the presidency and terminated head football coach Art Briles for their role in the university's collective failure to address a wave of sexual assault reports, a number of which involved football players. For weeks the story dominated the headlines in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, not to mention ESPN.com, with *The Chronicle* at multiple points referring to the findings of an independent law firm as "damning" (Kelderman & Wilson, 2016; Zamudio-Suaréz, 2016). Starr's presidency, seen by many in the community as a success up until this point, was characterized in no small part by his hitching of the university's fortunes to its athletic program, and in particular its football team (Tracy, 2016). For a while his faith appeared to be

well-placed: unprecedented success across multiple revenue-generating sports resulted in 2011-12, only the second year of Starr's presidency, being dubbed the "Year of the Bear." Over the next few years, the university broke fundraising records, increased research funding, boosted enrollment while lowering its acceptance rates, and ascended the *USNWR* rankings. As one faculty member observed, although these accomplishments were set in motion before Starr's arrival, the success of Baylor's football team during his presidency had been the biggest contributor to the university's overall rise (Watkins, 2016). As stories like this one make clear, while scholars might still debate the value of intercollegiate athletics, none can deny that its capacity for scandal is shocking, especially when something far greater than NCAA rules has been violated. For this reason, despite the intent of this paper to focus on the positive aspects of the enterprise, a brief accounting of its risks and shortcomings is essential.

The underbelly of big-time athletics can be understood in three related segments, all of which are quite visible in Baylor's story: mission compromise, high-profile moral and ethical failures, and a commercial-driven arms race. As Thelin (1996) notes, despite the apparent centrality of intercollegiate athletics to the operations and strategic decisions of many universities, the enterprise is curiously absent from institutional mission statements. Baylor's mission, for instance, is "to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community" (Baylor, 2016b, para. 1). On the webpage elaborating this mission, no mention is made of athletics. Yet, on the university's website, mission is one of several components listed under Baylor's values and vision, joining top-tier academics, Christian commitment, caring community, research, and, of course, athletic excellence. The "athletic excellence" webpage is topped by the following

quote: “No pressure, no diamonds. We compete, we win. We are Baylor.” (Baylor, 2016a, para. 1).

The conflict between academics and athletics has little to do with the perceived value of participation in sports at the varsity level, as the general consensus has long been that such extracurricular pursuits fit within the classical model of a holistic education (Atwell, 1985; Clotfelter, 2011). Instead, the tension springs from the commercial quality and demands of big-time athletics; from its inception, the scale of the operation and the pressure to win have resulted in “accommodations that are inherently contradictory with academic values” (Toma, 2003, p. 110). And as Shulman and Bowen (2001) contend, the gap between academic and athletic values is only widening over time. Double standards for admission, diluted academic programs, separate residential facilities, and exorbitant demands upon players’ time all factor into concerns that major athletic programs mar the integrity of the institution.

From the beginning, when football germinated within the student population and quickly passed into the hands of alumni and administration, faculty have been boxed out of the governance of intercollegiate athletics (Rudolph, 1962). The lack of a substantive faculty presence in the oversight of these programs often results in the university’s operating core being either antagonistic or, more frequently and problematically, apathetic to the entire operation (Lawrence, Hendricks, & Ott, 2007a; Lawrence, Hendricks, & Ott, 2007b). Further distancing athletics from academics is the fact that its day-to-day governing principles—from the hierarchical and bottom-line ways that athletic directors manage the department to the authoritarian environments that many coaches establish with their teams—directly clash with the central academic values of freedom and decentralization (Adler & Adler, 1988; Clotfelter, 2011). The pursuit of a non-academic, hidden mission to win major sporting events becomes a

particular affront to the traditional scholastic purposes of the institution when sparkling new athletics facilities are erected, even as academic buildings deteriorate or faculty salaries lag (Gumprecht, 2003; Lester, 1995). These tensions are only aggravated when the pursuit of this hidden mission contributes to significant moral and ethical failures on campus.

The greatest risk to institutions in maintaining big-time athletic programs is an episode similar to that at Baylor, where Title IX appears to have been almost completely ignored and football was widely understood to operate according to its own rules (Tracy, 2016; Zamudio-Suaréz, 2016). History is littered with stories of such crises that stretch back to the origin of big-time college football (Thelin, 1996). In recent years, a massive cheating scandal involving paper classes and scores of athletes has enveloped the University of North Carolina, while Duke University continues to live in the fallout of a sexual assault case involving members of its men's lacrosse team. Accounts of the Duke case in particular demonstrate how an athletic scandal can detonate underlying tensions, sever a fragile university community, and leave precious few of its constituents unscathed (Taylor & Johnson, 2007). In such cases, criminal charges are pressed, jobs lost, and NCAA sanctions levied. Additionally, negative publicity mushrooms, for "the value conflicts that get the most headlines are the ones that are the most blatant" (Clotfelter, 2011, p. 180). Nevertheless, the wounds can heal quickly and, counterintuitively, the bandage might be woven from the very substance that inflicted the damage. When Kenneth Starr assumed the presidency at Baylor in the 2010, the men's basketball program had just completed a seven-year probation, one of many penalties stemming from the 2003 murder of a Baylor player by his teammate that in turn exposed, as Wise (2003) memorably and without any hyperbole puts it, "the lying coach, the cheating program, drugs, secret tapes, clandestine meetings, and an attempted cover-up at Baylor University" (para. 2).

Amid the memory of the 2003 scandal, upon taking office Starr focused his fundraising efforts on the construction of the $266-million McLane Stadium (Maisel, 2016; Tracy, 2016). The stadium, known informally as the "House That Art Built" (Maisel, 2016, para. 16), crowned the rise of Baylor football from a perennial cellar-dweller to a conference champion and national title contender during Coach Art Briles's eight-year tenure. Yet, it also symbolizes the arms race that drives big-time athletics. Clotfelter (2011) reveals that the budget for athletics at a leading university can match that of its medical school or the combined budgets of its library and law school. And expenditures only continue to rise, for "in the winner-take-all environment of athletic competition, in which success is defined only in relation to the competition, there is no natural stopping point to spending" (Clotfelter, 2011, p. 21). Though some economists contend that aggregate-level data used to produce profit and loss accounts for athletic departments is both misleading and incomplete (Clotfelter, 2011; Goff, 2000), it is generally accepted that many commercial-oriented programs lose money each year and must be subsidized by their universities (Clotfelter, 2011; Hobson & Rich, 2015; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Toma, 2010). In this environment only a handful of institutions—some 20 to 30—spend large amounts of money each year on athletics, enjoy widespread success, and remain self-sustaining. The remaining institutions that operate big-time programs—often labeled either the almost-haves or the have-nots—spend their time and money chasing the haves (Clotfelter, 2011; Toma, 2010). The resulting arms race, while not new, has intensified in the past few decades, as signified by capital construction projects and skyrocketing pay for head coaches in football and men's basketball (Clotfelter, 2011). Prior to his termination, Art Briles was one of college football's highest paid coaches, with an annual salary approaching $6 million; Kenneth Starr's base salary, on the other

hand, was slightly more than $600,000 (Kelderman & Wilson, 2016; Tracy, 2016). The cost, even to attempt to move from a have-not to a have, is enormous.

The Communities of Big-Time Athletics

To balance this picture, scholars typically provide a list of the perceived benefits from big-time athletics and then discuss them one by one (Clotfelter, 2011; Goff, 2000; Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008; Toma, 2003). To be sure, there is nothing wrong with such an approach. Yet, it can quickly acquire the feel of a ledger, and the conclusion that athletics is a net positive for institutions does little to shake loose its commercial stigma. Returning to the booster roots of American colleges and universities, it is instructive instead to view the positive aspects of a big-time athletic program through the single lens of community. From the outset, American colleges were designed to be responsive and accessible to the local community, an objective that became increasingly difficult as their size, operations, and research activity swelled. Likewise, this expansion in scope made the formation of community inside the campus boundaries a trickier prospect. To sustain its growth, the American university has pushed beyond its campus boundaries, beyond its local community, and onto the national stage, making the general public a community of interest as well. In the modern competition for prestige, community is central: it is unlikely that a university can acquire prestige without drawing more and more people into its orbit, while simultaneously keeping hold on those who are already there (Brewer, Gates, & Goldman, 2002). By looking at the circles of community in and around the university's walls, it becomes clearer as to why so many institutions continue to put their faith in college sports.

The general public. Central to the investment in big-time athletics is one of higher education's long-running assumptions: "national publicity is the lifeblood of institutional prestige" (Thelin & Wisemann, 1989, p. 21; Toma, 2003). Newspaper sports pages and college

athletics have been joined since birth (Rudolph, 1962), and there is good evidence to suggest that football and basketball continue to drive the media cycle for universities. Clotfelter (2011) uses appearances in the *New York Times*, television coverage, and Google hits to argue that these two sports alone garner more publicity than all other segments of the university combined. Moreover, Goff (2000) suggests that while athletic success dramatically boosts media exposure, even in a normal year athletics accounts for nearly 70% of the attention that a university receives in leading news outlets; Goff's findings are especially noteworthy given that his analysis centers on two institutions—Northwestern University and Western Kentucky University—with middling athletic programs. Thus, this express lane to national publicity means that big-time athletics offers a "widely understood, public forum in which institutions—even otherwise unremarkable institutions—can claim status" (Toma, 2003, p. 6).

Two aspects of this effort to claim status in the eyes of the general public demand further consideration. First is the notion that athletics can provide institutions with an opportunity to tell their larger story on a national platform; that is, athletics stories are not solely about athletics. Media coverage, especially in times of unexpected success, can provide the general public with a window into the rest of the institution. Central to Toma's (2003) understanding of the role of spectator sports is the idea that "athletics cannot make a university; it can only complement what a university is doing," an idea captured in the preceding examples of George Mason, Notre Dame, and Baylor (p. 214). Toma provides his own example in the case of Northwestern University, whose football team made a surprise run to the Rose Bowl during the 1995-96 season. Coverage of this athletic success opened a new channel for the university to communicate its academic reputation; for two years, stories about the football team also featured tidbits on the university's high admissions standards, the success of its athletes in the classroom,

and even the MCAT score of one player. The school's sterling image generated interest abroad as well, as one administrator cited a large number of inquiries from the media in the United Kingdom and Japan. If institutions have a positive story to tell, athletic success can furnish a valuable sliver of time and space in which to do so. Such opportunities are rare, yet vital for universities desperate to distinguish themselves in the general public (Lords, 1999; Suggs, 1999).

The second factor of note in the status-snatching capacity of athletics is the relative ease of raising a university's athletic profile when compared with the prospect of enhancing its academic standing. On a national level, prestige is largely rooted in the public image of an institution; such an image takes a great deal of time to develop and is often difficult to manipulate (Toma, 2003). Most institutions have few means of convincing members of the general public of any demonstrable difference in their academic programs (Goff, 2000; Toma, 2003). The difficulty in measuring traditional signals of academic quality, such as learning and research productivity, is compounded by the general public's lack of interest or expertise in interpreting such signs. Athletic success, on the other hand, is clear-cut and accessible, able to be digested in a newspaper headline or a highlight reel (Mulholland, Tomic, & Scholander, 2014). For many, the image of a winning athletic program can transfer rather fluidly to one's image of the entire university (Chu, 1989; Goidel & Hamilton, 2006; Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008). Though such an image transfer might seem unsophisticated, there is evidence to suggest that even those in academe are not immune. In studying the assessment scores that administrators and faculty give to peer institutions for the *USNWR* rankings, Mulholland, Tomic, & Sholander (2014) found that success on the football field is associated with higher peer assessment scores and thereby a higher overall ranking. Like the general public, "administrators and faculty appear to treat football performance as a signal of institutional quality and fitness" (p. 88).

In the realm of the general public, then, intercollegiate athletics is perhaps best conceived of as a brand, and one with particular strength (Clotfelter, 2011; Toma, 2003). At a baseline level, particularly in certain regions like the South, the simple presence of a big-time program is necessary to qualify an institution as a "real university" (Gardner, 2015; Kelly & Dixon, 2011; Steinberg, 2006; Suggs, 1999; Toma, 2003). More than that, however, it is one of the few ways by which a large, impersonal university can differentiate itself from its peers (Toma, 1999; Toma, 2003). This distinctiveness is encapsulated in the many symbols—the colors, logo, mascot, and cheers—that come to define an athletic program and, by extension, its university. These icons are carried around the country on the shirts and hats of supporters, a shorthand that is immediately recognizable and an almost guaranteed feature in any high traffic public space. Beyond its prevalence, the strength of an athletic brand is rooted in its constancy and the loyalty it inspires. In terms of brand constancy, Clotfelter (2011) highlights the fact that 60% of the country's most successful college football teams remain the same in 2009 as they were in 1920, a remarkable figure when compared to nearly any other consumer good. Likewise, in terms of brand loyalty, Clotfelter notes the unusual fervor that surrounds college athletic teams: fans are often fiercely loyal to only one program and, regardless of whether they attended the institution or not, tend to identify closely with that team. For Clotfelter, an analysis of a big-time sports program as a brand yields two important insights: first, whether they acknowledge it or not, many American universities are in the entertainment business; second, in light of this fact, a team that competes in a high-profile sport represents an "asset with genuine commercial value" for its university (p. 116).

If, as Zemsky (2009) suggests, higher education has reached the point of no return and is a full-fledged market enterprise, and if unabashedly commercial behavior has penetrated even

the traditional functions of the academy through activities such as the patenting and licensing of faculty research (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2011), then the marketing effects of an intercollegiate athletic brand must not be overlooked in the current environment. In addition to geography, athletic programs stand as the only distinctive feature on a national scale for many universities (Toma, 2003). However, a distinctive brand is only valuable insofar as an institution is able to use it to draw supporters into a closer relationship with the college. As Toma (2003) notes, "the payoff for building strong brands is in the expanded ability to marshal the resources needed to realize the ambitions of institutions that are constantly looking to build" (p. 207). Accordingly, an analysis of the sphere of community consisting of the university's various external supporters is necessary.

The booster community. As Rudolph (1962) demonstrates, almost from its inception football became a university's principal public relations tool because it

> inspired the most enthusiasm, enlisted the most interest, and brought into the camp of college and university supporters people for whom the idea of going to college was out of the question but for whom the idea of supporting the team was a matter of course (p. 385).

Here, Rudolph is primarily referring to the local booster community. In many regions of the country, athletic programs and in particular the teams competing in big-time sports such as football, basketball, and occasionally ice hockey or baseball, became the "single most powerful symbol of localism and community loyalty" (Roberts & Olson, 1989, p. 216). Pride of place, and in some cases the entire story of a college town's development, is inextricably intertwined with a region's signature team, especially in rural parts of the country that are often overlooked (Gumprecht, 2003; Phillips & Rice, 2011; Suggs, 1999; Toma, 2003). As Clotfelter (2015)

reveals in an analysis of obituaries, the most diehard fans of such teams are far more likely to have simply resided in the university's region than to have actually attended the school; further, a number of these loyalists hold blue collar jobs and did not attend college. For this reason, "fan loyalty represents a genuine link between bastions of intellectual elitism and common people" (p. 382). Athletics' ability to draw the local community into the affairs of the university, to as Toma (2003) states "humanize" these institutions, is of major significance (p. 10).

In another study, Clotfelter (2011) highlights the spillover effect of this relationship. Using surveys employed by marketing firms, he reveals the extent to which locals are invested in a university's leading athletic program. In Lexington, Kentucky, for instance, 40% of survey respondents attended at least one Kentucky basketball game per season, and almost 75% of respondents followed Kentucky basketball in the news and regularly discussed it with others. Perhaps most tellingly, almost a third of those surveyed agreed that they "live and die" with the Wildcats' fortunes on the basketball court. Borrowing a term from economics, Clotfelter suggests that the enjoyment that fans derive from following college sports teams, even after all of the time and money spent on that pursuit, is a consumer surplus: "Whether the team wins or loses, the acts of following, cheering, and hoping add up to something like happiness" (p. 199). This oft-ignored benefit, while admittedly strange and nearly impossible to measure, represents a noteworthy public service on the part of American universities that ought to be taken seriously in any evaluation of big-time intercollegiate athletics.

A more tangible connection between the university and the booster community comes in the form of external support; perhaps the most enticing prospect of the athletics program is resource acquisition, through relationships either with state legislators or donors. Evidence of the extent to which universities use big-time sporting spectacles as lobbying venues is potent.

Clotfelter (2011) cites a number of examples to demonstrate how, in states across the country, football tickets are one of the most valuable perks available to state legislators. In 2007, members of the state and federal government received tickets to Alabama and Auburn football games that totaled more than $100,000. In other states, government officials are given the opportunity to buy season tickets at face value, using campaign funds if they so desire; in 2008, Ohio State sold nearly 800 of these season tickets. Whether such benefits have any effect on state appropriations remains debated, but lawmakers' attention to athletics at the universities within their states is further revealed in their frequent concern for teams' scheduling and conference affiliations (Clotfelter, 2011; Gumprecht, 2003). Here again, in the very least athletics provides an appealing space for universities to seek to influence key constituents on their behalf.

In a similar fashion, athletic contests have long been perceived as a critical venue for building relationships with donors, though the evidence concerning the link between big-time athletics and donations to other parts of the university is mixed and inconclusive (Clotfelter, 2011; Goff, 2000; Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008). Once again, Clotfelter (2011) provides perhaps the most useful perspective. By examining lists of guests in presidents' boxes at football games, Clotfelter demonstrates how universities use sporting events to cultivate ties with the "movers and shakers" of the area (p. 144). While three distinct groups populate the guest lists—members of the university community, government officials, and prominent members of the local business community—the latter tend to predominate, pointing to the intended purpose of the time spent in the president's box. Though the financial fruit of such relationships is far more difficult to ascertain, the continued use of the president's box in this fashion indicates in the very least a strong perception of the value of this practice. In terms of the effect of sudden success in a spectator sport on donations to the institution, Clotfelter tentatively concludes that there does

appear to be a spike among alumni giving, but that most such donations go directly to the athletic program rather than any other university operation. This finding should come as little surprise given the historically close ties between alumni and big-time athletic programs. As multiple studies reveal, university decisions regarding the fate of athletic programs and in particular their football teams are often shaped with alumni engagement as a principal consideration (Feezell, 2009; Kelly & Dixon, 2011; Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008; Suggs, 1999). Further, the composition of booster clubs and athletic foundations at universities across the country reinforces the notion that alumni remain the most vigorous embodiment of the booster spirit when intercollegiate athletics are involved.

One final segment of the booster community worth discussion consists of prospective students. Here, the phenomenon in question is known as the "Flutie Effect," a term used to describe the windfall of applications that is believed to come on the heels of nationally publicized athletic success. Investigation of the connection between athletics and enrollment is far from new, as Charles Eliot examined and rejected this very notion in his annual report for Harvard in 1900-01 (Clotfelter, 2011); however, after stories of the surge in applications at Boston College following quarterback Doug Flutie's dramatic Hail Mary pass and Heisman Trophy-winning season, scholars renewed their attention to the proposition, finding varying degrees of merit (Chung, 2013; Goff, 2000; Pope & Pope, 2009; Sperber, 2001; Toma & Cross, 1998). The general consensus among these studies is that an increase in applications does indeed follow a successful season in either football or men's basketball, but that such an upswing has a shelf life of several years at most. In the most recent of these studies, Chung (2013) contends that athletic success affects both the quantity and quality of applications: although such success is more influential on students of lower academic ability, students at all levels of academic ability

demonstrate some sensitivity to the performance of an institution's football team in the previous season.

The inclusion of prospective students in the booster community might seem an odd choice, but an increase in applications alone is a valuable lever for institutions attempting to climb the prestige hierarchy. Not only does it grant the institution more flexibility to shape the student population according to mission and vision, but it also can influence the institution's place in rankings systems that are the most commonly (if begrudgingly) accepted measures of relative prestige, namely the *USNWR* (Brewer, Gates, & Goldman, 2002; O'Meara, 2007). Thus, the best-case scenario for a Flutie-Effected institution is that it can capitalize on the application swell to strengthen the student body's size and credentials while lowering its acceptance rate, both of which can bolster the university's *USNWR* ranking. In this way, like other stakeholders who fit into the booster population, prospective students reveal how this second sphere of influence is the primary leverage point for universities. Athletic success means very little, and indeed is likely to cost the university far more than it is worth, if institutions cannot convert the attention of those in this middle ground into tangible resources. To round out the picture of athletics as a community builder, however, one must finally explore the experiences of those who have stepped from these outer circles into the innermost layer of daily life on campus.

The campus community. On campus, the convening power of intercollegiate athletics is unmatched. As Toma (2003) notes, only commencement rivals a major sporting event in its ability to join all segments of campus with the extended university community at the same place and time. Gathered in stadiums or arenas, people partake in the rituals, bear witness to the myths, and imbibe the many symbols that give a university a distinct cultural feel (Toma, 2003). Critically, spectating is a participatory rather than a passive activity. Not only do those in the

stands preserve and nurture the cultural expressions of the institution, but they also play an essential role in the action that unfolds on the playing surface (Melnick, 1993). Thus, a win feels like a collective accomplishment and, if particularly memorable, can generate a palpable buzz on campus (Toma, 2003). Such experiences are vital to continued efforts to foster community on large campuses. Toma (2003) argues that a "collegiate ideal" still shapes the vision that most Americans have of higher education. When they search for, attend, or simply interact with an institution, no matter its size they still expect an experience that mirrors that of the traditional liberal arts college (Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Toma, 2003). As such, at many universities the desire is for big-time sporting events to serve "as a surrogate for the more intimate community-building activities traditionally found on smaller residential campuses that are the basis of the collegiate ideal" (Toma, 1999, p. 82).

For some, the potential benefit of a strengthened campus community exceeds even that of the publicity-grabbing capacity of athletics. In a content analysis of the feasibility studies for six Division I institutions that either added or considered adding football from 2009-2013, Kelly and Dixon (2011) found that a sense of community was the most frequently mentioned benefit across the studies by a sizable margin. This community-building capacity is especially significant as campuses grow not only in size, but also in the diversity of their populations. As Connolly (2000) asserts, "although nicknames and mascots are intended for use by athletic teams, at institutions composed of increasingly heterogeneous groups and perspectives they may be one of the few things that constitute a common institutional identity" (p. 538). Other scholars echo this notion that those on campus with few commonalities can nevertheless bond over athletics, even going so far as to suggest that, as other segments of campus struggle to forge community amid difference, they might look to their athletic teams as a model for doing so (Wolf-Wendel, Toma,

& Morphew, 2001). For students, the connection to such a community is especially important. Indeed, Clotfelter (2011) argues that the "strongest educational argument in favor of spectator sports on a campus" is its ability to combat the isolation that many students can feel and instead plug them into a shared identity with their peers (p. 154). Furthermore, if universities are able to establish this sense of belonging among their students, then the odds improve that, upon their graduation, students will lodge within the booster community and continue to support the institution over time.

Big-Time Athletics in the Present Day

To get a sense for the standing of intercollegiate athletics in the present day, consider the following quote:

> College athletics, under the spur of commercialism, has become a monstrous cancer, which is rapidly eating out the moral and intellectual life of our educational institutions. College rivalries have been erected into the dignity of little wars, enlisting an elaborate cult of loyalties and heroisms. The securing of prize athletes, the training of them, the exploiting of them in mass combats, has become an enormous industry, absorbing the services not merely of students and alumni, but of a whole class of professional coaches, directors, press agents and promoters, who are rapidly coming to dominate college life and put the faculty on the shelf. "Drives" are instigated and funds raised for the building of "stadiums," and these, being a source of income, are a continual stimulus to new activities. So this evil, also, is one which breeds itself. (Sinclair, 1923, pp. 370-371)

Then ask: if Upton Sinclair's muckraking was able to able to bulldoze the meat packing and journalism industries nearly a century ago, why did it fail to make so much as a dent in intercollegiate athletics?

Whether published by sharp-tongued reformers like Sinclair or respected national organizations like the Carnegie Foundation, since the early 1900s such critiques of commercial college sports have appeared decade after decade, each one sounding remarkably like its predecessors (Clotfelter, 2011; Thelin, 1996). Rather than wilting in the glare of such criticisms, however, intercollegiate athletics absorbs the heat and continues to flower—thorn, petal, and all. Yet, it does not do so on its own or in isolation: scanning the landscape, university decision-makers continue to tend to this bizarre creation they have inherited. Exceedingly rare is the college president who dares to uproot it, shuddering at what else in the university's fragile ecosystem might come with it; more common, in fact, is the administrator who decides to plant the seeds of a big-time program in previously untilled ground. Most curious of all, however, is the fact that, contrary to concerns about the soul of the university now more than a century old, American institutions have flourished in all of the traditional and time-honored functions of the academy, even with big-time athletic programs right in their backyard. Why do some ultimately see fertilizer where others see muck?

Scholars offer a number of conclusions. For Clotfelter (2011), it is a fairly straightforward matter of accounting: for so many intelligent and sensible leaders to continue to invest in big-time athletics year after year, they must believe that the benefits, quantifiable and otherwise, of this choice outweigh the combination of costs and risks. While Toma (2010) also highlights the many different rewards of commercial athletics, he ultimately suggests that the competitive marketplace drives the decision; legitimacy trumps sustainability, and universities continually give in to isomorphic pressures that point to a big-time athletic program as essential for legitimacy on the national scene (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). For Beyer and Hannah (2000), it is the permeability of higher education institutions to American society that fortifies

intercollegiate athletics: until the American penchants for utilitarianism, pragmatism, and especially winning at all costs fade, or universities choose to ignore them, it makes little sense for administrators to scale back athletic pursuits.

Each of these lines of reasoning is valid, and it is likely a mixture of all three that not only buttresses the status quo but also continues to encourage aspirational leaps of faith in the present day. Toma (2003) cites a litany of institutions in the past few decades that have decided to move their entire athletic programs from lower NCAA classifications to Division I or have petitioned to raise their football programs to the highest qualification: South Florida, Connecticut, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Southeast Missouri State, the flagships in the State University of New York system, and so on. Perhaps even more illustrative of this trend is the number of schools that have added or considered adding football teams in recent years: writing in 2011, Kelly and Dixon identified 38 schools over the previous five years who fit this bill. Clotfelter (2011) provides an amusing if telling story about one such school: when Georgia State formed its team, National Public Radio featured a story on its choice of fight song, which prompted a professor at the university to quip that he had questioned the decision to add football until he saw firsthand that a fight song could garner more national publicity than the school's research activities. This dynamic often applies even to those universities with stronger academic profiles: in the 1990s, the University at Buffalo moved its football team in to the NCAA's highest classification after determining that it was the only "flagship public institution anywhere in the United States that wasn't playing on the Division I level" (Lords, 1999, para. 12).

Yet, for all of these explanations, the following must be asked: from universities with powerhouse programs all the way down to the doormats, how much of a choice do decision-

makers really have? The status of football at three universities in Alabama illustrates this idea. Gumprecht's (2003) detailed account of the parallel growth between the college town of Auburn, Alabama, and the University of Auburn's football team reveals the deep intertwining of civic and athletic fortunes. Not only do football crowds keep many local businesses afloat, but Auburn's athletic department is the equivalent of the second-largest private employer in the town. Auburn's former mayor routinely planned the city council's agenda based on how the football team had performed the previous Saturday, avoiding controversial issues following a loss, and the city's budget was fashioned each year with a football schedule in hand to account for the type of traffic that would flow into the city in the fall. Beyond an economic perspective, a near-religious fervor surrounds game days at Auburn, and Gumprecht (2003) convincingly demonstrates how football affects nearly every aspect of daily life in the city.

Within the same state, the University of Alabama-Birmingham fields a Division I football team as well, though a perennially unsuccessful one by nearly any measure. Writing in 2003, Toma, ever the proponent for intercollegiate athletics, used UAB's program to suggest that perhaps the market for college football in Alabama was oversaturated given the strength of the programs at Alabama and Auburn. Perhaps, he alluded, it would not be much of a loss to anyone if UAB were to scale back on the sparsely attended football games that frequently end in a loss yet still run up a deficit each year for the university. In December of 2014, UAB's president Ray L. Watts followed a similar line of logic in deciding to eliminate the school's football program. The decision ignited numerous sectors of the university community, triggering votes of no confidence from the faculty senate, the alumni society, and both the undergraduate and graduate student governments. Six months later, Watts reinstated the team. Boosters had pledged enough money to cover the program's deficits over the next five years, estimated at $17.2 million, as

well as an additional $2.6 million toward capital construction for football facilities (Gardner, 2015).

In the shadow of Legion Field, where UAB resumed playing football in the 2017 season, sits Birmingham-Southern College. In 1999, the college's board voted to move its athletic programs to the NCAA Division I level after many years of competing in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). Seven years later, the board voted to reclassify its programs to the NCAA Division III level, providing a rare example of de-escalation in intercollegiate athletics. In studying the dynamics of this decision, Bouchet and Hutchinson (2011) reveal the precise set of circumstances that enabled such a decision, most notably the absence of long-standing financial or emotional investment in Division I athletics and the presence of a new president with a significant degree of influence in a relatively small organization. They conclude that the central factor in successfully de-escalating the commitment to big-time athletics is "the embeddedness athletics has on an individual college campus" (p. 277). At universities like Auburn and UAB, the roots of these programs simply run too deep and have become too entangled with the on-campus and extended communities to be dislodged. The options left to many administrators are either to ignore their football programs or to tend to them in hopes that they might one day realize the age-old vision of athletics as an institution builder.

The Rise of Men's Basketball

In the present day, however, there is evidence to suggest that men's basketball might represent a more prudent investment, especially for those institutions not wed to big-time college football programs (Bishop, 2013; Brewer, Gates, & Goldman, 2002). In its infancy, college basketball flourished in both rural and urban settings but remained a local phenomenon. Beginning in the 1930s, the game grew more commercialized and slowly came to resemble "a

scaled-down version of college football" in terms of its popular appeal and revenue-generating capacity (Rader, 1990, p. 286). In 1979, however, a confluence of events "helped to catapult basketball, and especially the NCAA tournament, into the national consciousness" (Davis, 2009, p. 8). The first was the rise of cable television, and specifically ESPN, which launched that year and acquired the rights to broadcast the tournament's opening round games beginning the following year; as ESPN's founder would later reflect, the network's explosive growth in subsequent years stemmed primarily from college basketball. The second was the creation of the Big East, an athletic conference built around men's basketball and comprising universities in major television markets on the East Coast; beginning with its inaugural season in 1979-80, the Big East provided evidence that a basketball-centric conference could prosper in much the same way as football-based conferences at the time. The third factor was the spark that lit all these wires: the original Cinderella story played on the budding sport's largest stage. In the 1979 NCAA championship game, "nearly a quarter of all television sets in America" watched Larry Bird's small conference, underdog Indiana State team attempt to topple Magic Johnson and Michigan State's powerhouse program (Davis, 2009, p. 4). Though Indiana State lost, within six years the country witnessed two dramatic upsets in the championship game and the expansion of the tournament field from 40 teams to 64 teams.

Since that time, a number of universities have been able to leverage the postseason success of their men's basketball teams to increase their national prominence (Anderson & Birrer, 2011; Clotfelter, 2011; Johnson, 2013; Toma, 2003). To be sure, despite its affordability compared to football, a competitive, big-time men's basketball program still requires a substantial financial outlay (Bishop, 2013; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Yet the sport provides an

enticing path to national exposure—especially for universities with have-not athletic programs—primarily because of the enormity of the NCAA tournament in the modern day.

Simply put, March Madness is big business. As noted earlier, the right to broadcast the tournament cost television networks $19.6 billion over a 22-year-period (Deitsch, 2016). Since 2006, television ads during the tournament have generated more than $8 billion in revenue, with the price of a thirty-second commercial during a Final Four game costing $700,000 (Kantar Media, 2016; Smith, 2013b). Given that the tournament is such a cash cow for the NCAA, the organization funnels a significant portion of its annual revenue into a basketball fund that rewards success in the tournament with payouts, over six-year terms, to athletic conferences (NCAA, n.d.). Based on these payouts, in 2013 each victory in the tournament was worth $1.5 million, with a run to the Final Four—five victories—generating $7.7 million over six years for the team's athletic conference. In that same tournament, the head coaches of the teams who advanced to the Final Four earned a total of nearly $1 million in bonuses for their teams' performances (Smith, 2013c). As the head coach of the championship-winning team, Rick Pitino alone collected a bonus of $325,000, and his team, the University of Louisville Cardinals, was valued at $38.5 million even before they raised the trophy (Smith, 2013a; Smith, 2013b).

The Gonzaga Model

More than anything, the tournament is the distinguishing aspect of men's college basketball, and its dividends warrant further investigation (Taylor, 2016). In this regard, Gonzaga University merits attention as the gold standard for a mid-major men's basketball program and an instructive case for the present study. Gonzaga's Cinderella story began, as all do, in relative obscurity. As Bishop (2013) notes, "those who looked at Gonzaga before 1998-99 did so mostly by accident" (para. 21). In terms of basketball success, the school had precious few claims to

fame: a single noteworthy alum in NBA Hall-of-Famer John Stockton, who graduated in 1984, and only one previous appearance in the NCAA tournament in 1995. The basketball program was low budget, with a relatively modest footprint on campus: there was no administrative staff, the coaches earned meager salaries, and the college bookstore and local malls carried no basketball-specific apparel (Bishop, 2013; Dohrmann, 2012; Forgrave, 2015). Contrary to big-time programs, where players dine like royalty, Gonzaga's team often had to race to the student center after practice to grab food before it closed (Bishop, 2013). In this way, the program echoed the precarious fortunes of the larger university, where financial pressures were severe enough to warrant consideration of withdrawing from Division I athletics altogether (Anderson & Birrer, 2011). Amid this backdrop, the men's basketball team earned the program's second berth in the NCAA tournament in March of 1999 and caught fire, storming to the Elite Eight before losing to that year's eventual champion, Connecticut. Along the way, Gonzaga remained such an unknown commodity to the rest of the country that their head coach Dan Monson concluded each of his press conferences with instructions on how to pronounce the institution's name (Bishop, 2013).

During the summer of 1999, as debate about the fate of the institution's athletic programs continued, another familiar trope arose: Monson accepted the head coaching position at the University of Minnesota, a big-time program in a power conference. As Bishop (2013) reveals, "the dollars were so different, the gulf in resources so wide, that Monson thought he had no choice" (para. 25). In many ways, the loss of a star player or an ascendant coach is often the final chapter in the Cinderella story. Though Gonzaga had already identified assistant coach Mark Few as its head-coach-in-waiting, and though a number of talented players from the previous season were returning, Monson's departure brought the university to an existential consideration

of how much it wished to invest in men's basketball (Anderson & Birrer, 2011; Dohrmann, 2012). University leaders chose to funnel more resources into the program, and Gonzaga entered the 1999-00 season with prospects for continued success and a spot in the AP Poll's top 25 teams in the country. Yet by the end of December, after facing a difficult schedule with many road games against power conference opponents, Gonzaga had fallen out of the top 25. Upon winning the West Coast Conference tournament, they received another 10-seed in the Big Dance and again pushed past the tournament's opening weekend into the Sweet Sixteen. The following year, Gonzaga weathered the departure of several key players who had graduated and earned another spot in the tournament, this time as a 12-seed. Once more, they scored an opening round upset, beat a fellow upstart in the second round, and found themselves in the Sweet Sixteen. With this third consecutive Cinderella run, Gonzaga laid the foundation for its transformation into a big-time program and created a blueprint that scores of other mid-major programs have since attempted to follow (Anderson & Birrer, 2011; Bishop, 2013; Dorhmann, 2012; Forgrave, 2015).

Anderson and Birrer (2011) describe this unprecedented run of Cinderella success as the "Sweet Sixteen Resource" and view it as the principal source of Gonzaga's sustained competitive advantage over other mid-major basketball programs during the past two decades. By managing to bottle lightning three years in a row, Gonzaga's basketball program harnessed

> an element worth preserving in much the same way a corporation would seek to protect and preserve a patent critical to its success. Effective management (e.g., decision-making) of that resource subsequently led to extensive media exposure for the university's basketball program, enabling Gonzaga University as a whole to capture the

> attention of a greater number and broader range of potential students, athletes, and donors. (p. 15)

By viewing this collection of Cinderella runs as a resource, Anderson and Birrer are able to use a concept from the strategic management literature known as the VRIO framework to identify the factors at play in Gonzaga's sustained success. Through this framework, they briefly analyze the value, rareness, and imitability of the Sweet Sixteen Resource before focusing on how the organization—in this case, chiefly Gonzaga's athletic department—positioned itself to leverage this unique asset. In so doing, they highlight the following factors: Gonzaga's exceptional ability to retain its coaching staff and particularly Mark Few, who remains the head coach to this day; fundraising for and construction of a $25-million basketball facility that, in concert with continued on-court success, has dramatically affected the caliber of player Gonzaga is able to recruit; prioritization of regional and national media exposure, particularly on ESPN; and, lastly, the support of the university's top administrators, who entrusted the athletic department to take full advantage of the Sweet Sixteen Resource. In this way, Anderson and Birrer pull the curtain on Gonzaga's fairy tale to reveal a set of actors and a sequence of decisions in operation both before and after the on-stage success.

Through a journalistic approach, Bishop (2013) and Forgrave (2015) also tug on the same curtain. Forgrave in particular yanks hard at the beginning of his article: "These moments seem random and magical, but behind every unexpected story in college basketball are years of smart planning" (para. 6). With different methods, the journalists corroborate and in some cases extend the scholars' account. Bishop, writing in 2013 as Gonzaga was on the cusp of receiving its first ever number-one ranking in the AP Poll, likewise highlights Few's continued presence and the winning culture he has established as the dominant factors in the basketball team's success.

However, to this through-line Bishop adds signs of the university's increased investment in creating a big-time athletic program, starting with the crucible moment following Coach Monson's departure in 1999 and building to the present, wherein the team travels by private jet, and its coaching salaries, recruiting budget, and apparel contract all rival those of power conference programs.

Forgrave (2015) adds further detail, tracing the "exact moment" when Gonzaga began to lay the groundwork for its rise to the summer of 1998 (para. 7). At that time, Gonzaga's athletic director Mike Roth and several other key decision-makers rebranded the athletic program's logo and colors, scheduled more high-profile opponents for the basketball team, and, most importantly, used a substantial portion of the department's budget to purchase regional television coverage for the team. From there, Forgrave pinpoints two additional factors that have contributed to the uniqueness of Gonzaga's transformation. The first—continuity in leadership positions—is familiar, though in addition to the coaching staff Forgrave does well to note that Roth has held the athletic directorship since 1997. The second is the university's location in Spokane. Citing interviews with athletic department staff and former players, Forgrave posits that Gonzaga's isolated, down-home setting has not only attracted a certain type of team-first recruit to the basketball team, but has also furnished the program with a fierce and generous booster community. Civic and alumni pride have mingled to elevate place over individual, with the men's basketball team as the chief catalyst.

Finally, and most importantly, all of the authors indicate that Gonzaga's NCAA tournament success has been leveraged for the benefit of the entire university. Bishop (2013) speaks of the "ripple effect born of basketball" (para. 13), and Forgrave (2015) cites the university's parallel growth as "perhaps the biggest miracle of all" (para. 39). Anderson and

Birrer (2011), both longtime members of the Gonzaga community, offer the most substantive treatment of this idea. They contend that a clear "link exists between the Sweet Sixteen resource and the overall university's competitive position," and rehearse the full package of benefits that emanates from this relationship, including gains in enrollment, exposure, fundraising, merchandising revenue, brand recognition, and prestige (p. 16). Further, they argue that collaboration between university and athletics leadership enabled the men's basketball program to "generate resources to strengthen the university's mission, instead of the university being forced to prop the program" (p. 20).

Together, these accounts of Gonzaga's extended Cinderella story point to four basic but essential features for the present study. First, the authors recognize that Gonzaga's unusual postseason success constituted a distinct resource in need of careful management. Second, this success was a product of decisions stretched across campus and across significant periods of time as well, with each of the authors opening a window more than a decade wide in order to understand Gonzaga's transformation. Third, the story is deeply contextual; as Forgrave (2015) argues, the Gonzaga blueprint was "specially fit for that place and for that moment in time" (para. 13). Fourth, there is a glimmer of evidence that under the right circumstances Cinderella success in men's basketball does indeed produce a halo effect across the entire institution.

These four features are signposts for my study, but they also mark a point of critical divergence. In each of the three articles, the locus for all events and decision-making is the athletic department; the university in turn remains peripheral. Though Anderson and Birrer (2011) predictably widen the lens a bit more than the sports journalists, they find an "athletically challenged president" who mostly just gets out of the way of athletics leadership (p. 17). Further, they devote only two sentences to the decision to double down on the investment in athletics

rather than scale back in the face of university-wide financial pressure during the late 1990s, and they consistently analyze Gonzaga's Sweet Sixteen Resource as a source of sustainable competitive advantage for the athletics program alone rather than the institution as a whole. Despite allusions to its much broader effects, in the end the "biggest miracle of all" receives the least amount of attention.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Often, we catch stories of leveraged Cinderella success only in journalistic flecks. There is an initial burst of attention—*Who are these guys? Where did they come from?*—that lights up local and national media outlets with glimpses into what it feels like to live this euphoric moment for various members of the campus community (Dosh, 2013; Gleeson, 2013; Hackett, 2013; Klingaman, 2013; Manfred, 2013; Rishe, 2013). Within a year, this flash has dimmed to final reports on Flutie-affected admissions numbers (Brennan, 2014), references in the periphery of another institution's turn in the spotlight (Prisbell, 2014), or the occasional keen-eyed portrait of life after the thrill is gone (Ritter Conn, 2014). To rekindle the attention beyond the booster community requires continued surges of postseason success or a shock of nostalgia. Given the difficulty of the former, it is the journalistic oral history—occasioned by some meaningful anniversary of the original story—that turns our attention backward and reminds us that those inside the university community have continued to live in the glow of that moment long after everyone else has moved on. These oral histories offer clues that significant events both preceded the Cinderella run and were subsequently sparked by it as well, often not only within the athletic department but across the entire institution; they indicate the presence of multiple actors making decisions of consequence not just on a basketball court in March, but in administrative offices across campus and across time (Keefer, 2016; Kilgore & Steinberg, 2016; Robinson, 2016).

In this medium, however, such hints at the longitudinal and diffusive quality to this phenomenon are often confined to prologue and epilogue. For the journalist and the sports fan alike, the Cinderella run from that one March five or ten years ago remains the centerpiece; the answer to the question, "What happened?" is largely confined to basketball arenas and frozen in

time. This study seeks to extend that same question beyond locker rooms and gymnasiums and into administrative offices across campus, exploring the Cinderella story as an institution-wide resource pursued and developed over many years. For this reason my two primary research questions—first, how does an institution position itself for a Cinderella run in the NCAA tournament, and second, how does the institution seek to leverage this resource in both the short- and long-term to build other facets of the university—warrant an in-depth study of a sizable time period that incorporates the voices of numerous institutional decision-makers.

Qualitative Case Study Research

Stake (1995) defines case study as an exploration of "the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). As noted earlier, Gonzaga's story emphasizes this idea of particularity with its elements of context, timing, and place; likewise, the presence of many actors and the multi-year time frame point to its complexity. By expanding the unit of analysis from the athletic department to the institution as a whole, the demand for particularity and complexity only increases, making a qualitative case study a natural fit for my project. Case study inquiry makes use of multiple sources of evidence; when these pieces of evidence begin to converge, illuminating and reinforcing one another, the researcher has the first traces of a cohesive narrative (Yin, 2003). The further shaping of that narrative is, first and foremost, an act of interpretation: the purpose is for insight rather than explanation, the research is personal rather than impersonal, and the knowledge is constructed rather than discovered (Stake, 1995).

In some ways then, you're stuck with me. Stuck with my belief that big-time intercollegiate athletic programs and serious institutions of higher learning can be mutually beneficial under the right circumstances. Stuck with the products of my interview questions, the

way I choose to ask those questions, the people with whom I am able to connect, and the way I translate their voices. Stuck with my ability to track down additional pieces of information, my decisions on how to interpret them all, and, finally, my choices—word to word, sentence to sentence, and chapter to chapter—on how to present them. In large part due to these personal touches, Stake contends that the responsibility of the qualitative researcher "is not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it" (p. 43). The final product, seen through its narrator's eyes, is not intended for "veridical representation so much as stimulation of further reflection, optimizing readers' opportunity to learn" (p. 42). In this way, qualitative research can instructively spark the imagination: a story is passed from person to person, filtered through a different lens, and applied at each turn to a fresh context that nevertheless bears some resemblance to the original one in question, much as I have taken my cues from Gonzaga's story and snatches of others like it in newspapers and even casual conversation.

In the end, we learn from good stories well told. Research becomes a matter of trust between the researcher and the researched, and writing a matter of trust between writer and reader. Yet, research—even highly qualitative research—is not built upon solipsism. Alongside the hints that personal experience, word of mouth, and media coverage have furnished, I have also taken my cues from several bodies of literature that scholars have developed over many years through rigorous inquiry. Concepts that are central to my study—from the booster spirit and the open charter of American higher education's roots to prestige and the halo effect in the present understanding of higher education as an industry—derive from their work and guide my exploration. Further, scholars have honed a set of recognized methods that allow me to investigate my research questions and analyze the resulting evidence with integrity. If the story is

to be well told, then these methods chart a well-trod course. To ensure I have followed this path and balanced subjectivity with the accepted techniques of social science, the choices that have given my project its basic shape warrant explanation, none of which is more important than the decision to focus the study on a small, private university in Indiana.

Site Selection: Butler University

To generate an initial list of potential sites, I printed brackets from past iterations of the NCAA tournament and identified every mid-major program that advanced to at least the Sweet Sixteen. Advancing to the Sweet Sixteen is essential in that it provides enough space for the Cinderella story to be told. The tournament's opening round occurs on a Thursday and Friday and the second round on a Saturday and Sunday; the third round—the Sweet Sixteen—does not resume until the following Thursday. By moving beyond the second round, a team ensures its institution a significantly longer stay in the media cycle and, therefore, in the general public's attention. In so doing, they are thereby better positioned to tap into the "good story phenomenon" (Toma & Cross, 1998).

Next, I removed the teams whose Cinderella runs occurred either prior to 2000 or after 2011. Because of the importance of interviews to my study, I reasoned that those teams which fell into the former group were less likely to have a sufficient number of institutional actors with a firsthand experience of the Cinderella run still employed at the institution. On the other hand, teams whose runs occurred more recently would not have enough distance from the event for me to really begin to understand how long the immediate effects of the Cinderella run might last, as scholars posit that the halo effect of athletic success generally lasts anywhere from a year to four years (Brewer, Gates, & Goldman, 2002; Chung, 2013; Pope and Pope, 2009; Toma, 2003).

From there, I returned to the idea of the "good story phenomenon" and selected a handful of cases with distinctive features, whether a star player like Stephen Curry at Davidson in 2008, a dramatic victory like Northern Iowa's upset of Kansas in 2010, or a lengthy Cinderella run like George Mason's in 2006. For this handful, I conducted a more granular analysis, gathering information on basic institutional characteristics, turnover in key personnel, and the fortunes of its basketball team since the standout moment of success. Based on this set of criteria, as documented in Table 1, Butler University in Indianapolis, IN, emerged as my first choice for the study.

Table 1. Site Selection Criteria

Criterion	Justification
- Mid-major program	Have-not athletic program; underdog story
- Advanced at minimum to Sweet Sixteen	Extended media cycle
- Timing: Cinderella run between 2000 and 2011	Halo effect; presence of actors with institutional memory
- Distinctive features to narrative	Good story phenomenon
- Financial indicators (private/public, endowment, enrollment)	Relative cost of investment in big-time athletics
- Mix of stability and turnover in key personnel (president, athletic director, head coach)	Decision-makers with institutional memory; decision-makers who have inherited big-time athletics program
- Prestige measures (*USNWR* ranking/Carnegie classification)	Potential for striving behaviors (i.e., movement in the prestige hierarchy)

A common justification for the use of a single case is the selection of either a typical or an extreme example (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Yet, these classifications need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, when determining my site of interest, Butler presented a case with both

extreme and typical features, which are perhaps most evident when viewed in light of the gold standard. Like Gonzaga, Butler secured a unique resource in terms of on-court success for a mid-major, having advanced to the tournament final in both 2010 and 2011 and coming within a half-court heave of winning the national championship in 2010. This "Final Four Resource" makes Butler's experience one-of-a-kind as far as Cinderella stories go. However, other features of the institution and its team bring Butler back to the pack. Unlike Gonzaga, they have not completely sustained their success in terms of tournament appearances, having failed to gain bids in both 2012 and 2014. Likewise, as happens to the majority of rising mid-major powers, Butler's coach Brad Stevens eventually transitioned to a more prestigious position when he became the head coach of the Boston Celtics in 2013. Yet, just prior to Stevens's departure, the school was able to leap from the Horizon League to Atlantic 10 and then to the Big East Conference, realizing the goal of many mid-major programs to secure a more lucrative conference affiliation.

Additionally, a number of other features make Butler the type of "information-rich" site that is necessary for a compelling qualitative case study (Patton, 2002, p. 242). Its Carnegie classification as a master's institution and its *USNWR* ranking as a regional university left ample room for movement in the prestige hierarchy, and recent quotes in *The Washington Post* from current president Jim Danko suggested a clear desire to aggressively pursue national prominence (Johnson, 2013). Likewise, Butler's historic status as a private university with a relatively small enrollment and endowment heighten the financial risk of investing in the men's basketball program as a path to institutional prestige. Also of interest, the combination of turnover in the presidency and continuity in the athletic directorship offered an opportunity to simultaneously understand what it was like for an administrator to inherit an athletic program on the march toward big-time status while also ensuring that at least one key administrator possessed

institutional memory of the initial Cinderella run. Lastly, the state of Indiana—known widely for its infatuation with the sport of basketball—stood as a fertile but perhaps saturated market for a rising power, with one of college basketball's preeminent programs in Indiana University, two additional power conference programs in Notre Dame and Purdue, and two other well-known Cinderellas in Indiana State and Valparaiso.

Finally, there was the old saw: where there's smoke, there's fire. Multiple media accounts indicated that Butler has indeed experienced a wholesale, institutional lift from its back-to-back Final Four appearances (Bishop, 2013; Hackett, 2013; Johnson, 2013). Officials estimated the value of the exposure the university gained to be in the neighborhood of $1 billion, with additional and related effects on admissions, merchandise sales, web traffic, and fundraising (Johnson, 2013). In certain instances, the phenomenon even earned its own catchy name: the "Butler Bounce" (Hackett, 2013). For all of these reasons, Butler met Stake's (1995) principal criterion for selecting a case, which is "to maximize what we can learn" from it (p. 4). With a deep, contextual investigation, Butler seemed capable of functioning as an instrumental case study, able to illuminate the broader phenomenon in question regarding the use of a Cinderella story to develop the institution as a whole.

As Stake (1995) asserts, there is "no particular moment when data gathering begins" (p. 49). Impressions, hunches, hearsay—even the late-night, bleary-eyed web search—are all a part of the process, yet these initial bursts of inquiry will give way to more formal techniques and more focused investigations over time. In this sense, then, I began my data collection online in the early months of 2017. Based on media reports, I knew that Butler's investment in men's basketball was the product of a distinct "philosophic position" (Bishop, 2013, para. 17). I knew that, by a number of metrics, the team's Final Four success provided a lucrative and "absolutely

magical" bounce across the entire university (Hackett, 2013, para. 24). I knew that the university had ambitions to leverage this resource "to move beyond what was once a local university, then regional, to more national prominence" (Johnson, 2013, p. 13). And I knew that some members of the community fretted that this attempt at transformation, with basketball at its center, was a "dance with the devil" that put Butler's identity at risk (Johnson, 2013, para. 5).

All of these quotes came from leading figures in the Butler community; all were also contained in journalistic accounts built on quick hooks for the reader and limited exposure to both place and personnel for the author. To begin to deepen my understanding of Butler University, I followed my first impulse as a former history major: I looked backward. In so doing, I discovered a rich institutional history that set the mold for the more contemporary story I hoped to tell through primary research. Though the product of secondary analysis, this historical background is essential information, revealing first a hard twist in Butler's early relationship with big-time athletics followed by the seeds for the growth of its men's basketball program in the present day.

Historical Overview of the Case

In the fall of 1928, as Butler University prepared to move its campus for the second time since its founding in 1855, only two buildings stood on the new site at Fairview Park. The first was Jordan Hall, a massive granite structure with "walls three feet thick, wide corridors, high ceilings, and four broad staircases [that] provided airy spaciousness" (Waller, 2006, p. 291). Construction had been delayed on the building while one of its architects and two of the university's board members toured Europe, seeking inspiration from its hallowed seats of higher learning. The final design, approved by consulting architects from New York City, called for three Gothic-style buildings connected at the joints by two towers to provide one hulking

showpiece for the "new Butler" that the university's power brokers had envisioned more than a decade earlier. Practically speaking, the scale was necessary, too: the building was to house nearly all operations for a university with an enrollment of 1,864 students. When the dust settled that year, Jordan Hall had cost the university $917,000.

The second structure on the new campus was an architectural marvel as well. Set a few thousand feet over the eastern shoulder of Jordan Hall, its stature rivaled that of Butler's central building, though its feel was far more homespun. Its design traded granite for brick, Gothic influence for agrarian. From the fields of Fairview, architect Fermor Spencer Cannon raised an outsized barn, its tiered roof lined long ways with windows racing toward the building's gables, where seven more windows—thick and vertical, like haystacks—collected light and let it spill through the curved steel ribs of the ceiling down into the yawning space below. Simple yet sturdy, vast yet warm, its beauty was evident from the outset. At the building's opening earlier that year, a member of Butler's board and one of the original 41 incorporators of the structure proclaimed it "the last word in convenience and utility of construction. In fact, we are told that there is in this country no similar building of as large a capacity or superior construction" (Allan, 2011-12, p. 16). He spoke to a crowd of 12,000, some 10,000 more than the university's student body but still a few thousand shy of the number the barn could hold. The occasion? Notre Dame was in town to play Butler in basketball and christen the new fieldhouse, which, with an adjoining 36,000-seat football stadium, had cost around $1,000,000 to complete.

For more than a decade, Jordan Hall and Butler Fieldhouse were the only permanent structures at Fairview Park. The rest of the 240-acre campus sat untouched between them, a tangle of tree, field, and muddy unpaved road. Yet, the empty space provided ample room for Butler's leadership to imagine the institution that might take shape in the shadow of these two

monuments. For Waller (2006), writing on the occasion of the university's sesquicentennial more than 70 years later, the interplay of the academic building, the athletic plant, and the untapped campus between them proved an enduring image and a turning point in the university's history: "spacious grounds, a handsome main building, and a spectacular athletic facility nourished the vision of a greater university that would claim a place in American higher education" (p. 228).

Almost immediately, though, there were problems with this foundation. Three years into life at Fairview Park, Jordan Hall was falling apart from head to toe: beams in its bell tower had splintered, the roof was leaking, mortar crumbled, the boilers failed, and the basement flooded with every storm. One board member, an architect himself, proved prescient in his suspicion during the building's construction: "the ground on which Jordan Hall was rising," he contended, "was unstable" (Waller, 2006, p. 227).

The Rise and Fall of Big-Time Athletics at Butler

Butler followed a blueprint similar to that of many other universities across the country in the construction of its athletic program. Loosely organized club teams in football and baseball appeared soon after the university's move to its second campus in Irvington in 1875. Swiftly, football moved to the fore: Butler tussled sporadically with other schools in the early 1880s before joining a league with five other colleges and universities from the state in 1886. Yale graduates trickled into Indianapolis to train the team, players petitioned the board for equipment on account of the prominence they were bringing the institution, alumni began to jockey for control of the entire athletic operation, and a donor funded the construction of a 2,300-seat football venue that opened in 1905 and gave the program an instant advantage over its in-state rivals. To the board of directors, which was long "dominant in the management of the university," all of these measures seemed suddenly necessary if Butler were simply "to be a

'standard college'" (Waller, 2006, p. 165, 198). World War I checked the growth only momentarily, and "after the war, Butler set its course for big-time intercollegiate competition" in earnest (Waller, 2006, p. 170).

Consistent with the times, the attention and resources given to football represented an early attempt on the directors' behalf to leverage the sport's popular appeal. On the heels of the war, the board sensed the institution faced a pivotal moment in its history: enrollment was surging, Indianapolis was on the rise, and, with the right decisions, Butler was positioned to ride both waves. As Waller (2006) suggests, the use of football to service this ambition was a straightforward decision:

> A "new" Butler had been under discussion since 1914. The small college at Irvington was to become a real university on a new campus to serve the capital city's needs for a major institution of higher education. The directors felt compelled to transform its athletic program accordingly. The public wanted big-time athletics. (p. 177)

Expansion moved rapidly: the university hired Pat Page, a disciple of the famed Amos Alonzo Stagg at the University of Chicago, as athletic director and multi-sport coach, and paid him more than the university's president right out of the gate; seating at the football field was expanded four-fold and still could not accommodate crowds for football games against Butler's biggest rivals; fueled by student initiatives, the university popularized its blue and white color scheme, bulldog mascot, and "Butler War Song"; and, the board of directors apportioned more than 25% of an annual $35,000 emergency fund to bolster the athletic program and simultaneously ceded control of the department to a standing committee of 25 alumni boosters.

Faculty and administration pushed back on the expansion, and for a time the institution wobbled. Page's salary was wrenched into line with that of senior faculty members at the

institution. As football began to turn a profit and the athletic program was able to pay back loans from the university's endowment, Page sought to capture an additional portion of the profit for equipment needs and requested an increase to the athletic program's annual subsidy; the directors, however, responded by tightening control on spending practices and checking the program's budget. Page resigned in 1926, and the next year proved fateful as the university pivoted again and renewed its chase for big-time athletics.

In 1927, the directors made three key decisions that dramatically altered the shape of athletics at Butler in the short-term, though the effects would reverberate for generations to come. First, they hired George "Potsy" Clark as athletic director and coach for both the football and baseball teams. Clark was "a rougher character than Page," and evidence points to his penchant for skirting the university's standards for admission and brokering payments for players from boosters (Waller, 2006, p. 175). With Clark's hire, salaries for Butler's top athletic personnel again zipped past those of the president and senior faculty. Second, the directors incorporated a School of Physical Education and Athletics that existed outside of the purview of any faculty or administrators but nevertheless governed all facets of the athletic program as well as the physical education curriculum. Third, and most significantly, the university broke ground on the fieldhouse at Fairview Park (Waller, 2006).

On the surface, this last decision appears outrageous: the basketball facility was to rival Madison Square Garden in size, yet rather than a bustling metropolis, the building site was the unformed campus of a university so small its entire community would fill only 10% of the arena (Angevine, 2015; Caldwell, 1991). However, a look inside this decision reveals much about the board's desire to curry favor in the state of Indiana, their reliance upon basketball to do so, and the amount of risk they were willing to assume in service to this aspiration. By 1927, Indiana's

love affair with the sport of basketball was decades deep, and the most precious possession in the relationship—shared by all towns, tiny or teeming, across the state and handed down from generation to generation—was the state high school basketball tournament. Schwomeyer (1990), the tournament's native chronicler, describes the cultural phenomenon of Hoosier Hysteria as a "basketball frenzy which sets in at the beginning of each season, and reaches its peak with the crowning of another State High School champion" (p. 1). After its inauguration in 1911, the tournament bounced between four different sites, but in 1927 the Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) proposed a deal that could anchor both the tournament and Butler on the state's landscape (Schwomeyer, 1990). Waller (2006) recounts the specifics:

> If a 13,000-seat fieldhouse and stadium were built, the IHSAA would pay $40,000 for a ten-year lease plus $6,000 annually from April 1928 to April 1933, renewable for ten more years and thereafter for five-year periods, with successive rents capped at $10,000 annually. The association would require use of the fieldhouse four days in March each year for the state boys' basketball tournament and use of the stadium two days each fall for the state football contests…The university was to receive all profits from concessions and would be protected from liability. Heat, light, dressing rooms, and janitorial expenses would be borne by the university. Since this offer was contingent on availability of the fieldhouse by March 1928, the board acted promptly to accept it and start building. (p. 177)

The deal carried plenty of risk, especially for a university chronically strapped for cash, but basketball was and still is a language of the heart in Indiana: in building the fieldhouse, Butler was courting the entire state.

The directors raced forward. In April, they approved the creation of a separate athletic corporation, consisting of 41 board members and alumni, to finance the construction project. In October, they parceled 40 acres at Fairview Park to the new School of Physical Education and Athletics for the facilities (Waller, 2006). On March 7, 1928—months before the rest of the university would complete its move from Irvington—Butler's basketball team opened the new venue with a victory over Notre Dame. President Robert Aley canceled classes the following day, prompting some students to hoist him on their shoulders in celebration, while others led cheers for the basketball team and professors joined in from the windows of their classrooms. Barely a week later, the high school state tournament took center stage ("Butler students gain holiday," 1928). The fieldhouse crawled with people; scalpers priced tickets as high as $25, or the equivalent of around $360 in today's dollars, for a chance to see Muncie Central defeat John Wooden, playing in his final game for Martinsville, on a last-minute basket (Angevine, 2015). Here, within a span of ten days, was surely the mass euphoria upon which Butler's directors hoped to capitalize. Almost just as quickly, however, the fieldhouse attracted the wrong kind of attention.

In April of 1930, the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools suspended Butler's accreditation, and the university's athletic program received the brunt of the accrediting agency's criticism. Three years prior, North Central and the Carnegie Foundation had released a set of guidelines regarding the institutional governance of intercollegiate athletics; Butler was in violation of every directive. Though numerous other institutions in the region were similarly culpable, the "grandiose scheme for athletic prominence" that the directors had begun to implement in 1927 "had made the university an obvious scapegoat" (Waller, 2006, p. 296). Under Potsy Clark, exorbitant coaching salaries, lax admission and academic eligibility

standards, illegal recruitment of and benefits for athletes, and lavish road trips proliferated through the athletic program. However, the feature that "set Butler's transgressions apart from abuses of other institutions" was the establishment of an autonomous athletic corporation (Waller, 2006, p. 296). The implications for governance were clear: the president and faculty had no control over any aspect of athletics. A single faculty member oversaw athletes' eligibility and all other decisions—appointment of coaches, scheduling, financial aid—rested either with the board of directors or the corporation. Worse still were the financial implications of the arrangement. The corporation had assumed significant debt to build an athletic facility that could swallow the university whole. Of the million-dollar investment, some $750,000 remained outstanding, and rather than generating revenue to pay off the loans, the athletic department was now running a deficit each year. As Waller (2006) makes clear, this situation was the "principal issue" for Butler's accreditors:

> In North Central's view, Butler had incurred a moral obligation to make good on the athletic corporation's indebtedness if income failed to meet expectations. Directors had mortgaged the university's meager endowment that was dedicated to education. If the athletic corporation defaulted, endowment would be depleted. (p. 296)

The fieldhouse had become a lightning rod—both the symbol and substance of college athletics grown out of scale—and for a time, its glow cast a shade over the university.

Reclaiming Athletics

As they had with the deal to construct the fieldhouse, the board of directors again moved quickly. Policy was easiest to rectify: within months, faculty and administration had resumed oversight of athletics. Coaching salaries were brought into line with the faculty scale, and a faculty committee was appointed to manage matters of eligibility. Perhaps predictably, Potsy

Clark soon left for greener pastures. Various arms of the university sought to manage Butler's image in the press and with the general public, while the directors attempted to assuage faculty concerns that rumors and misunderstandings of North Central's action were percolating through the student body and prospective students. And quietly, without many of the other directors' knowledge, board president Hilton Brown forged an agreement with a donor to create a trust that would cover the debt on the fieldhouse and the stadium if the athetic corporation defaulted. By March of 1931, the accreditors judged the retrenchments sufficient and renewed the university's accreditation.

The university still labored to find its balance in the immediate aftermath of the crisis. In 1932, new president Walter Athearn was inaugurated in the fieldhouse, a building he saw as both a "dead horse" and a "veritable millstone about the neck of Butler University" (Waller, 2006, p. 314). Later that year, Athearn was forced to consider putting more money into the dead horse on account of its leaky roof, the need for a new basketball floor, and another proposal from the IHSAA, this time to share the cost of installing new bleachers. Around this same time, a former Butler athlete who had gained entry to the university with a falsified transcript and then departed after eligibility requirements were tightened published a fictional, though thinly veiled, account of the athletic program's indiscretions entitled *Star's Road*. And DePauw University continued to refuse to play Butler in any sport, a boycott that began in 1930 with the discovery that one of Butler's basketball players had previously played professional baseball. Thus, while the policy changes and coverage of the athletic corporation's debt helped reverse course, a more stable influence was necessary over the long-term. In this regard, Butler found a stroke of good fortune: through all the tumult, perhaps the most important asset in the athletic program's recovery had been there all along.

Paul "Tony" Hinkle had played for Pat Page at the University of Chicago and joined him in the coaching ranks at Butler in 1921. He coached basketball, football, and baseball throughout his time at the university, and from 1934 until his retirement in 1970, he served as the head coach for all three sports as well as Butler's athletic director. Caldwell's (1991) meticulously researched biography demonstrates how Hinkle crafted the blueprint for a new kind of athletic program with basketball at its core. In many ways, he operated counter to the prevailing practices in big-time athletics that had begun to proliferate at Butler under his former boss Potsy Clark. Most important was Hinkle's loyalty to the institution and its mission: "he was proud of the university's academic reputation, a reputation that carried over into a strict interpretation of the rules as they pertained to athletes" (p. 75). He had little taste for recruiting, eschewing fluffy sales pitches in favor of a "factual rundown" of the university and relying mostly on the "fieldhouse mystique" to bring players through the doors (p. 75, 109). Toward the end of his tenure, when the university began to offer athletic scholarships, his grand gesture for doing so was apparently to ask a recruit his shoe size and then tell him that Butler did indeed have that size in stock (Woods, 2009). The offer of footwear speaks to Hinkle's willingness to run the athletic department on a shoestring budget: contrary to lavish athletic spending at other universities, he was famously reluctant to cough up any money at all, whether his or the university's (Caldwell, 1991).

Amid these constraints Butler still had its fieldhouse, and Hinkle leveraged this core asset to establish a basketball program of local and occasionally national renown. Big-time programs wanted to play in the fieldhouse, allowing Hinkle to schedule prominent opponents throughout the entirety of his coaching tenure. The IHSAA state tournament brought a stream of the state's best players into Hinkle's backyard year after year, meaning his rosters were often stocked with

native Hoosiers and local heroes. Hinkle took "the best of what was left after the big schools carved the pie" and drilled them in a relentless system of play built upon fundamentals, constant ball movement, and well-defined roles (Collins, n.d., para. 12). The formula worked. In 1928-29, the first full season in the new fieldhouse and Hinkle's third as head coach, the team was recognized as national champions by the Veterans Athletic Association of Philadelphia. He won 100 of his first 126 games as head coach and posted winning seasons in 13 of his first 16 years before being called away from the university for military service during World War II (Caldwell, 1991; Woods, 2009). By that time, the foundation for the right kind of athletic success was firmly in place.

The war transformed the campus at Fairview Park. The fieldhouse morphed from basketball arena to barracks, its hardwood floor taken up and stored, appropriately, in a barn (Angevine, 2015). The navy first inhabited the space, the army soon followed, and for a two-month span more than 1,000 cadets from both arms of the military actually lived and trained in the facility together. Enrollment at the university dropped from 1,730 students at the start of the war to 1,088 in 1944 as Butler students joined the armed services, but faculty kept busy teaching physics, geography, history, English, and math to the cadets on campus. When Tony Hinkle returned at the end of 1945, the university stood on perhaps the most solid ground in its history. Funds from the military programs had enabled Butler to finally pay off the fieldhouse, and president M.O. Ross, who had taken the reins in 1942, managed to balance the annual budget for the first time in 90 years. That January, enrollment soared to 2,216 on the strength of the G.I. Bill, allowing the university to add faculty as well (Waller, 2006). Ross kept the university on a "slow but steady course" (Waller, 2006, p. 382) while Hinkle tended to the athletic program,

leading the basketball team to its first NCAA tournament in 1962, where it upset Bowling Green to advance to the Sweet Sixteen in a then 25-team field (Woods, 2009).

When Ross retired in 1962, the campus that comprised only three buildings at the beginning of his administration now included two residence halls, a student center, a theatre, an observatory, and buildings for both the College of Pharmacy and the College of Religion (Waller, 2006). Hinkle coached his final basketball game in 1970 before a reported crowd of 17,000 in the fieldhouse that had been renamed in his honor four years prior. Two years later in 1972, the IHSAA state tournament vacated the fieldhouse as well. Though Hinkle remained at the university for another 20 years as a special assistant to the president, and though he maintained an office in the fieldhouse, there is strong suspicion that he had been forced to retire from his coaching duties as the university and the athletic program shifted gears under president Alexander Jones. During Jones's time in office from 1962 to 1976, Butler "lost momentum" as both the board's leadership and the president "sought no innovative measures to move the university forward and embrace larger visions or ambitious new goals" (Waller, 2006, p. 423, 430). Enrollment lagged. The endowment, a persistent weakness for the university, remained paltry and grew even more so when the administration began to draw from the fund in the latter years of Jones's term to meet an annual budget that had more than doubled (Waller, 2006). Hinkle Fieldhouse fell into disrepair as the athletic program, operating with a meager budget, ran up deficits and losing seasons. The campus at Fairview Park lay dormant, in need of a spark.

Data Sources, Collection, and Analysis

To uncover how decision-makers at Butler produced this spark and then managed its energy, I relied upon evidence from the three categories that Stake (1995) deems necessary for case studies: interviews, document analysis, and observation. As both Stake (1995) and Yin

(2003) contend, the use of multiple information sources is essential for a qualitative study as it serves to provide the type of thick, contextual description necessary for such work while also bolstering the validity of the research by allowing for triangulation. I gathered evidence of all three types during two site visits to Butler: the first from April 24-26, 2017, and the second from October 18-20, 2017. I also conducted additional interviews in person and by phone after both of these visits.

Interviews formed the centerpiece of my study for, as Stake (1995) notes, "the interview is the main road to multiple realities" (p. 64). I began by contacting Barry Collier, vice president and director of athletics at Butler. Collier had played at Butler and formerly served as the men's basketball head coach before eventually returning to his alma mater in an administrative role. Due to his position and institutional memory, I reasoned that he was the key contact at Butler for my study. Once I had his permission on behalf of the institution to conduct the study, I began lining up additional interview subjects. To identify the appropriate members of the Butler community, I took my initial cues from the literature, making requests to administrators working in areas whose fortunes might be affected by the basketball team's success, such as admissions, advancement, and marketing and communications. From these initial contacts and interviews, I used a snowball sampling method whereby I asked each interviewee to suggest additional subjects who might be able to add perspective to the study. Through this approach, I was able to identify a diverse and knowledgeable set of voices across a variety of university functions. Table 2 indicates the final set of interview subjects as well as their position and tenure at the university.

Table 2. Interview Participants

Name	**Title**	**Tenure at Butler**
Marc Allan	News Manager	2004 – present
Bruce Arick	Vice President of Finance and Administration	1990 – present
Barry Collier *	Vice President and Director of	2006 – present (1989 – 2000, Men's

	Athletics	Basketball Head Coach)
Jim Danko	President	2011 – present
Dr. Steven Dolvin	Professor and Eugene Ratliff Endowed Chair of Finance	2004 – present
John Dunn *	Former Trustee and Chairman of the Board	1996 – 2013
Lori Greene	Vice President of Enrollment Management	2015 – present
John Hargrove *	Former Trustee and Chairman of the Board	2001 – 2011
Graham Honaker	Senior Development Officer	2012 – present
Michael Kaltenmark *	Director of External Relations; Caretaker of Butler Blue III	2002 – present
Dr. Joseph Kirsch *	Professor of Chemistry	1970 – present
Todd Lickliter *	Former Men's Basketball Head Coach	1988-89, 1996-97, 1999-2007
Dr. Kathryn Morris	Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs	2012 – present (1996 – 2012, Professor of Psychology)
Dr. Susan Neville	Professor and Demia Butler Chair of English Literature	1983 – present
Chris Potts *	Associate Director of Admission	2003 – present
Brad Stevens	Former Men's Basketball Head Coach	2000 – 2013
Tracy Stevens	Trustee and Vice Chair of the Board	2014 – present
Betsy Weatherly	Executive Director of Development and Campaign Programs	2011 – present (2005 – 2007, Assistant Director of Annual Giving)

Note. In the case of an individual having held multiple positions at the university, the most recently held position is shown in the "Title" column. Arick, Collier, Danko, and Hargrove were interviewed twice.
* Denotes an alum of Butler University

During my first site visit in April 2017, I conducted nine interviews, using a semi-structured protocol for each. The protocol was piloted in the fall of 2016 through a set of interviews conducted with administrators in the athletics department at Harvard University, where the men's basketball program engineered a remarkable turnaround over the past decade, highlighted by four consecutive appearances in the NCAA tournament from 2012 to 2015 and back-to-back opening round upset victories in 2013 and 2014 (Tannenwald, 2016; Torre, 2010). Through the pilot process, I realized that my protocol was far too involved and my approach far

too mechanical. Accordingly, I revised the protocol to three general questions, each of which focused on one distinct time frame—before, during, and after the Cinderella run. Beneath these three general questions I incorporated a handful of follow-up questions to ensure that I broached the study's key areas of inquiry in each conversation (see Appendix A and Appendix B).

Through these nine initial interviews I gained a baseline of information that allowed me to customize subsequent questions for the snowball and follow-up interviews. Over the summer of 2017 I conducted three more interviews before returning to Butler in October of that year for my second site visit, during which I completed five more interviews. Following the site visit, I conducted two more interviews each in October and November and one final interview in December, bringing the total number of subjects for the study to 18 and the total number of interviews to 22. After the completion of each interview, I used an outside service for transcription, with the exception of four phone interviews for which I transcribed my own notes. An analysis of the transcripts revealed heavy saturation despite the different capacities and years in which the respondents were affiliated with the university, giving me confidence in the information gleaned through this central form of evidence.

Alongside interviews, documents also provide a rich source of evidence in case studies. Butler's public website provided little information in this regard beyond marketing guidelines, a common data set, and a broad view of the institution's current strategic plan. Accordingly, I contacted the university archivist to help me track down other key documents. Here, as she quickly informed me, I was due to run into a problem: Butler does not maintain an integrated records management system. Files are housed in individual offices, if they even still exist. Furthermore, Butler's status as a private institution meant they were under no obligation to share any particular information with me. I requested access to certain records, reports, and data,

particularly pertaining to financial metrics within the athletic department, but to no avail. Accordingly, I shifted gears to incorporate questions around these data into my interviews and scheduled follow-up conversations with those who would be particularly well-positioned to at least speak to these metrics in general terms.

Despite this hurdle, the archives still yielded several important sources of documentary evidence, namely past strategic planning files and old editions of *Butler Magazine*, an in-house publication primarily geared toward alumni and other external audiences. For the historical dimension of the study, the "Howard Caldwell/Tony Hinkle" collection within the archives helped to fill in some detail on the history of the men's basketball program. Table 3 indicates the primary source artifacts used in the study.

Table 3. Primary Artifacts

Name	**Date**
Butler Magazine (26 issues)	Summer 2008 – Fall 2017
Butler men's basketball season ticket brochure	2017-18
Butler University fact book	2016-17
Butler University style guide	2016
Butler University and Butler Athletics webpages	2017
Howard Caldwell/Tony Hinkle Collection, Butler University Archives (newspaper clippings)	1991
IPEDS data	2001-02 – 2016-17
Strategic plan: Dare to make a difference	2009 – 2014
Strategic plan: Dare to make a difference – year one update	Spring 2010
Strategic plan: Dare to make a difference – year two update	Spring 2011
Strategic plan 2005: The final report of the planning committee for the strategic planning process	1994 – 2000
The idea of Butler University (strategic planning document)	1993

I supplemented these archival sources with Waller's (2006) house history, several other books that had been written on different facets of the men's basketball program at Butler, and a handful of articles from popular sports media outlets. Taken together, these documents enabled me to add dimension to the story in two different respects. First, they helped to frame the Cinderella runs

within the much larger historical narrative of the university. Second, in tandem with interviews of administrators outside of athletics, the archival records in particular widened the lens of analysis to include a campus-wide perspective on the phenomenon. Table 4 depicts the book-length secondary sources included in the project.

Table 4. Secondary Artifacts (Books)

Author	**Title**	**Date**
Angevine, E.	*Hinkle Fieldhouse: Indiana's basketball cathedral*	2015
Caldwell, H.	*Tony Hinkle: Coach for all seasons*	1991
Neville, S.	*Butler's big dance: The team, the tournament, and basketball fever*	2011
Waller, G.	*Butler University: A sesquicentennial history*	2006
Woods, D.	*The Butler way: The best of Butler basketball*	2009
Woods, D.	*Underdawgs: How Brad Stevens and Butler University built the Bulldogs for March Madness*	2012

Finally, observation allowed me to attempt to provide the reader with the "vicarious experience" necessary to stimulate meaning-making (Stake, 1995, p. 63). Through attention to the physical environment during the site visits, my goal was to place the reader on Butler's campus as much as possible, creating an ethnographic overlay to the case study that echoes the genre's demand for contextual exploration and interpretation. Following Marshall's and Rossman's (2006) prescription for unobtrusive and unstructured observation, I recorded field notes using a basic two-column design, with the left column used for descriptive notes and the right column reserved for emergent ideas and interpretations. On my first site visit, I took the field notes by hand; the second time around, I used a laptop. During both site visits, I also took pictures of different campus features on my phone to supplement my field notes and aid my memory during the writing process. Altogether, I returned from Indianapolis with 25 pages of field notes and 107 pictures of campus landmarks and minutiae. Together, the field notes and photos proved vital in capturing the sensory details of the research experience.

For data analysis, I used Atlas.ti software to code all three forms of evidence. I employed process coding for the first cycle method, which relies solely upon gerunds in order to trace and convey action in the data. As Saldaña (2016) notes, process coding entails a search for "actions intertwined with the dynamics of time, such as those things that emerge, change, occur in particular sequences, or become strategically implemented through time" (p. 111). Such an approach seemed the best fit for my research questions, which center around the development and leveraging of a strategic asset by a variety of institutional decision-makers. After much coding and re-coding, the first cycle ultimately yielded 14 distinct codes, which I then synthesized into three broader categories through pattern coding during my second cycle of analysis. According to Saldaña (2016), pattern codes "are explanatory or inferential codes" that should be used to describe "a major theme, a pattern of action, a network of interrelationships, or a theoretical construct from the data" (p. 236, 238). To keep the focus of my analysis on strategic actions and decision-making, I again used gerunds during this second phase. In this way, the second cycle codes allowed me to begin to discern the contours of a larger narrative across the data. Table 5 illustrates the results of both coding cycles: the corresponding colors indicate how I folded the first set of codes into the second, with each code followed in parentheses by its number of occurrences.

Table 5. Coding Results

First Cycle (Process Coding)	**Second Cycle (Pattern Coding)**
Nurturing culture in athletics (177)	Building a flagship program
Resourcing athletics (167)	
Navigating personnel changes (107) *	
Winning basketball games (55)	
Navigating personnel changes (107) *	Finding synergy between flagship and university
Leveraging basketball (90)	
Managing risk (41)	
Marketing the university (143)	Building a national profile
Raising boosters (122)	
Engaging campus community (83)	

Playing rankings game (74)	
Developing name recognition (72)	
Negotiating peers (71)	
Managing enrollment (65)	
Transforming campus (33)	

Note. Because I reasoned that the men's basketball head coach and athletic director were positions with institution-wide importance, I included them in the "navigating personnel changes" code alongside other key institutional actors. During second cycle coding, I realized that this code was central to Butler's effort to build a flagship athletic program and connect it to the larger university. Hence, the "navigating personnel changes" code is depicted twice in this table.
* Denotes the same code

Finally, during the coding process, I also made regular use of analytic memos to help me keep track of additional questions and emerging ideas around the data (Saldaña, 2016). I eventually collapsed the memos into four categories: topics for follow-up interviews, notes on coding decisions, topics for further investigation, and emerging conclusions. The analytic memos proved invaluable at multiple points during the lengthy phases of data analysis and in preparation for my second site visit.

Limitations and Generalizability

As alluded to above, the greatest limitation I faced in conducting the study was access to certain pieces of data, particularly financial indicators from the athletic department. This information seems to be the missing piece to a number of studies on the business of athletic departments, and in choosing to study a private institution, I knew I ran a high risk of the same fate. I tried to work around this limitation by asking certain respondents to speak to key trends or data points in general terms, which they were often willing to do. I trust their responses.

Another limitation is the reliance upon interview subjects' memory for certain segments of the study. In some cases, I asked them to describe events from nearly 25 years ago, which calls into question the accuracy of their recollections. I attempted to account for this limitation by triangulating the information with other sources of evidence, such as institutional strategic plans,

alumni magazines, other primary sources from the time, and media coverage. Likewise, as I reached a saturation point with many of my interview topics, I felt more comfortable in the collective veracity of my respondents' memories (Patton, 2002; Saldaña, 2016).

Qualitative research centers on the researcher's interpretation of evidence, so I must acknowledge a potential for bias based on my background as a student-athlete. My experience from middle school through college has been that academics and athletics can be mutually reinforcing, and while I tried to approach the situation at Butler with a healthy skepticism, there is the potential that my own positive experience and the resulting favorable disposition toward intercollegiate athletics colored my interpretation too brightly. I have tried to counter this potential bias by including the direct words of interview respondents as often as appropriate in my findings and by sending an executive summary of those findings to all interview participants as a means of member-checking.

Lastly, single case studies are often faulted for their lack of generalizability, but as Stake (1995) notes, the single case is not intended for widespread generalization. However, if done well, it still provides ample fodder for learning. Here, Stake distinguishes between explicated and naturalistic generalizations. The former are ideas taken on the authority of the author; they are, in short, the assertions that I make in the concluding chapter of this study based on my interpretation of this particular case. Naturalistic generalizations, on the other hand, arise within the audience through the prism of experience. In one sense, readers can take the case before them and "add their own parts of the story" based on their previous experiences and knowledge of the topic (p. 86). In another sense, the writer can create a vicarious experience, using the details of time, place, and person to whisk readers into the case and allow them to use the richly described environment to form their own interpretations. These are the generalizations intended to blossom

as I describe my findings. Yet, as Stake notes, these two different types of generalizations—explicated and naturalistic—are not separated either by time or process in the reader's mind. They weave in and out of each other, occurring simultaneously, yielding a single set of applications "through two doors" (p. 85). It is my job, as researcher and writer, to open both doors as wide as possible.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Building a Flagship Program

For everyone I interviewed with either direct experience or knowledge of the turnaround in the men's basketball program, the starting point was unequivocal: 1989, when Geoff Bannister assumed the presidency and tabbed Barry Collier as head coach. When Bannister formally took office on January 1, 1989, he inherited a bundle of issues identified during the administration of his predecessor John Johnson. A trustee review of the first three years of Johnson's presidency, issued in 1981, asserted that "the athletic program appeared lacking in viability. Its staff required 'restructuring.' Public relations was weak and unimaginative. It was failing to project an image of Butler's real worth as a high-quality institution" (Waller, 2006, p. 454). Three years later the Nelson Report, essentially a feasibility study for an upcoming capital campaign, again highlighted the university's relative obscurity as a concern:

> Butler had an image problem. Beyond the immediate area it was known only for its pharmacy college and its dance program. Those and other educational assets were as good as the best in the state, but even many city people whose support would be sought remained without a clear perception of the university or its potential as a vital resource. (Waller, 2006, p. 458)

Bannister was "quirky but visionary," "a very bright guy," and a native of New Zealand, "so he didn't really know basketball" (S. Neville, personal communication, April 25, 2017; J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017; B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017). He was also a geographer. As Professor of English Susan Neville suggested, this disciplinary perspective helped provide a keen understanding of the relationship between people and place, suggesting an equation to solve Butler's image problem: "Here's Indiana. Indiana

prides itself on basketball teams, and we want the university to grow. What we need to do is put money and excitement into the basketball team" (S. Neville, personal communication, April 25, 2017). In Kirsch's recollection, there was one additional piece to the formula:

> I think Geoff Bannister basically said something to the effect of, "You know if we had a little tiny gymnasium, I'd probably just say we're doing fine. Let's move on." But I think Geoff Bannister said something to the effect of, "Good God. We've got this building that seats"—at that time 12,000 people, sitting pretty closely—he said, "We need to utilize that." (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

Like so many other presidents at prestige-seeking institutions across the country, Bannister saw that a gamble on big-time athletics could net a large enough return to address multiple shortfalls at the university; the difference was that, with the university's location in Indiana, the fieldhouse, and Tony Hinkle's legacy, Butler possessed a competitive advantage over many others in the field. From the outset of Bannister's presidency, men's basketball "was more or less declared the flagship sport" (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017). The central question, if the university would ever be able to reap dividends from this investment, became how to rebuild and then sustain a program that, at the time, was more flagging than flagship.

Win-loss records and postseason performance generally provide a fair barometer of an athletic program's stature over time, and a look at Butler's from 1989 into the present day provides an overview of the program's development. Figure 1 plots win totals on the left axis and postseason success—as shown by the round to which the team advanced in the NCAA tournament—on the right axis.

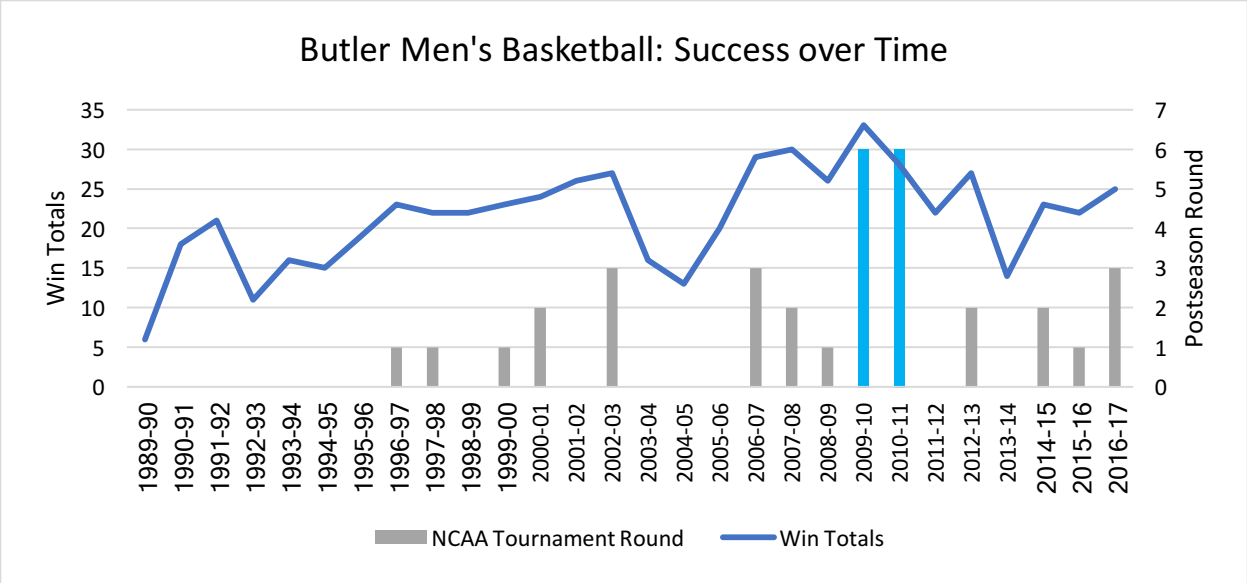

Figure 1. Butler Men's Basketball: Success over Time

The figure provides the broad strokes of a narrative: building the program in the early 1990s, breaking into the postseason in the mid-to-late '90s and early 2000s, declining briefly, and then, with a Sweet Sixteen appearance in 2006-07, surging into a period of unprecedented and fairly well sustained success, punctuated by back-to-back appearances in the national championship game in 2009-10 and 2010-11. To drive this turnaround, Butler made consistent efforts in four distinct areas: winning basketball games, transforming the resource base in the athletic department, nailing hires in the key positions of athletic director and head coach, and nurturing a compelling organizational culture. In many ways, the pattern of on-court success depicted in Figure 1 mirrors the trend line in the accompanying three areas: from a wide lens, the picture is one of gradual growth, but zeroing in reveals a more jagged ascent.

Winning Basketball Games

David Woods, a longtime journalist at the *Indianapolis Star* who has covered the Butler basketball beat for many years, published an ode to the history of Butler basketball in 2009 that details the program's most memorable teams, players, coaches, and games. After Butler made its first Cinderella run to the national championship, he published a second book the following

year—this time with a much more well-known press—that provides an inside look at the season. When the team promptly waltzed to the national championship for a second consecutive season, he revised and expanded the second book in 2012 to capture the sudden surplus of magic. The accounts are well-researched and well-told, reanimating the on-court ebbs and flows of Butler basketball's finest moments. Through these books and piles of postgame recaps from his years on the Butler beat, Woods has become the principal scribe and storyteller for the program. The volume of his work, combined with the broader scope of my own study, makes dwelling on this dimension of Butler's success unnecessary. Yet, wins are essential in the construction of a flagship program, making an abridged account important.

As noted above, Butler built its road to the Final Four with steady gains over time. The team climbed the ranks within its conference, a regional collection of schools known as the Midwestern Collegiate Conference (MCC) before its renaming as the Horizon League in 2001. With a conference championship win in 1997, Butler "finally broke through" to the NCAA tournament; a few years and a few tournament berths later, Butler began to win some games in the postseason, crashing the Sweet Sixteen in 2003 and again in 2007, in the process earning a reputation as a "plucky mid-major" (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017). From there, Butler appeared in the next four NCAA tournaments, took up frequent residence in the AP Top 25 poll, notched multiple conference championships and a couple 30-win seasons, and became the first team in the history of the tournament to reach consecutive Final Fours without being a 1- or 2-seed. Unlike many Cinderella stories, Butler has managed to sustain this success: in the six years since its second Final Four, Butler's overall record is 133-72, despite moving to more competitive conferences in the Atlantic 10 in 2012 and the Big East the following year.

Over that same time period, Butler has earned four NCAA tournament appearances and record of 4-4 in the Big Dance.

Yet, the arc has not been without its wobbles, often on the heels of the program's biggest successes. The Sweet Sixteen in 2003 was a "particular attention grabber" for those around the program (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017), yet Butler followed it with records of 16-14 and 13-15 in the two subsequent seasons. Brad Stevens was an assistant coach at the time, under head coach Todd Lickliter. With hindsight, it is easy to view those years as only a blip in the larger trajectory, but Tracy Stevens, the current vice chair of Butler's board of trustees and Brad's wife, made clear their difficulty:

> We had those tough years after the 2003 [Sweet Sixteen]. We had a couple tough years. Those were really hard on Todd and Brad. They just kind of—they had a handful of kids leave just like—I don't know. You can ask Todd and Brad about those, but those were some tough years. (T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017)

Later on, a few years removed from the Final Four and competing in the Big East for the first time, the program hit another trough in 2013-14. The Big East is one of the country's premier basketball leagues, and Jim Danko, Butler's president, remembered Brad Stevens telling him the team "wasn't quite ready to compete at that level" (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Making the transition even steeper, Stevens accepted the head coaching position of the Boston Celtics before the school year began. His replacement, Brandon Miller, led the team to a 14-17 record (4-14 in the Big East) before leaving the program for health reasons. Though 2004-05 and 2013-14 stand as Butler's only losing seasons in more than 25 years, they represent moments of adversity when the future was uncertain.

Much as Tony Hinkle did in a different era, Butler navigated these downturns by staying the course. Those inside the program have long maintained high expectations for their performance. Early in the 2002-03 season, Lickliter posted a goal for the team in the locker room: two years prior, they had finally won an NCAA tournament game, so the next logical step for the program was to win two games and advance to the Sweet Sixteen. Joel Cornette, a senior on the team, thought the goal looked a little off: "Joel took a Sharpie, crossed it out, and wrote 'national champions.' He wasn't looking for the next step. He was looking for the biggest step" (T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017). Barry Collier, who returned to Butler as athletic director in 2006, echoed this mindset in Woods's 2009 volume: "There's never been this grand design 20 years ago to arrive at this point, because we really don't think we've arrived. We're trying to get better than where we are now" (as quoted in Woods, 2009, p. 17). Coaches continued to recruit to Butler's system, finding "those types of kids who had a chip on their shoulder, and played really, really hard" (T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017). They also took the long view, keeping their highs and lows in perspective. "There wasn't that big of a difference between the level of teams we had in the early 2000s and the Final Four teams," Brad Stevens reflected. "The first team I coached on as an assistant [in 2000-01] was really good. The second team that went to the Final Four was not that much better, so I don't think we really felt the difference between the teams so much" (B. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017).

College basketball is big business, and the skill level of the players combined with the seriousness with which teams, schools, media, and fans treat the games can obscure the fact that it is still, on some level, a bunch of kids trying to manipulate an inflated orange rubber ball. By staying the course, Butler positioned itself for on-court success over the long-term amid the

sometimes unpredictable twists of the short-term. Stevens believes that, with talented players in place, it was "all of the intangible stuff" that so often gave Butler an edge in two- and four-point games (B. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017). Even so, the program caught some lucky breaks. Stevens pinpointed one Butler team that was better than those both before and after it: the first Final Four team in 2010: "Gordon was the difference," he said, referring to Gordon Hayward. "He was a different level of player" (B. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017). He was also a late bloomer and a local kid, and it is arguably those two factors that left any room at all for Butler in his recruitment; had his growth spurt hit just one year earlier, he likely would have been a blue chip prospect and on the radar of every program in the country (Woods, 2012). When Hayward left Butler early for the NBA, the team still managed to return to the Final Four in 2011, but to get out of the tournament's opening weekend they had to win their first game on a buzzer-beater and their second in what one Butler employee and self-professed hoops junkie told me was "the craziest ending to an NCAA tournament game I've ever seen" (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017). Games and seasons can turn on the slightest bounce. When the bounces landed in Butler's favor, they were ready to capitalize; when luck broke the other way, they simply tried to get better the next day. It has proved a winning approach.

Resourcing Athletics

On June 8, 1989, *The Indianapolis Star* ran a story on the front page of its sports section with the headline "Plan for Hinkle Fieldhouse will bring upgrade." Next to these big bold letters was a large photo, black and white, clearly staged. On the right of the frame, a young tall man in a dark blazer, tie, and khakis holds a large sheet of paper in his right hand and gestures to its contents with his left. Beside him, on the photo's edge, stands a much older and shorter man,

hunched slightly, balding, in suit and tie himself. He holds the other end of the paper with his left hand and follows his companion's gesture. Both show little expression, their eyes angled sharply downward so as to look almost closed. The paper, partially unrolled like a scroll, is in the center of the frame, angled upward from aged hand to youthful one, its contents inscrutable. Behind the pair on the left side of the frame stretches an empty, splotched expanse of pavement, the parking lot for the massive building that rises over the first man's shoulder and is, presumably, empty as well. The picture glows in retrospect: it's Barry Collier, talking to Tony Hinkle, a blueprint for the future suspended between their hands! But the generic headline, the bare bones article, and the featureless image convey the dismal state of Butler basketball at the time. Yes, Barry Collier was returning to his alma mater as part of its "renewed commitment to men's basketball" ("Plan for Hinkle," 1989, para. 9); yes, the $1.5 million renovation of the fieldhouse was a "major priority for the institution" and would be finished in time for the tipoff of the 1989-90 season ("Plan for Hinkle," 1989, para. 3); and yes, Butler still had Hinkle—both man and building—in its back pocket. But, at the time there was little reason to believe that these pieces would coalesce into a definitive turning point in the university's history.

Only a decade prior, the program was plagued by a crumbling resource base: Tony Hinkle's successors at both the athletic director and head coaching positions lacked sufficient funding to compete at the most basic level, as the basketball program lacked a recruiting budget and the fieldhouse fell into disrepair. "Bill Sylvester would padlock the nets so no one could play during the summer," John Dunn, a player at the time and later chairman of Butler's board, said of the then athletic director. "He didn't want to have to replace the floor" (J. Dunn, personal communication, July 25, 2017). Barry Collier was Dunn's teammate and is fond of recalling how the locker room paint that was peeling when he played was still peeling when he returned as

head coach 13 years later (Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017; Woods, 2012). In fact, when filmmakers arrived at the fieldhouse in 1985 to shoot the climactic scenes of *Hoosiers*, the "interior of the building required very little alteration to appear as it did in the 1950s" when tiny Milan High School won the state tournament in the Cinderella story upon which the film was based (Angevine, 2015, p 106).

Meanwhile, the team piled up 14 losing seasons in the first 19 years after Hinkle's retirement, routinely finishing at or near the bottom of the Midwestern Collegiate Conference standings, so attendance dwindled as well, running around 1,000 on average and rarely eclipsing 2,500 (Woods, 2009, 2012). "When I first came to Butler in the early '70s," professor of chemistry Joe Kirsch recalled, "the lower part [of the fieldhouse] would have people in it, the upper part would be empty. The faculty would come and sit up in the upper part, turn their kids loose, and they'd play around the outside" (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Woods (2012) reveals that of the 612 season ticket subscriptions for Collier's first season as head coach in 1989-90, only 15 were paid. The other 597 were on the house.

Yet, Collier's hire turned out to be momentous, and despite his modest deflection of this idea almost 30 years later, he made clear that Bannister's initial investment was the first breath of life for a moribund program:

> There was a coaching change. I actually was the one who was hired and given the resources, and I'm not sure that if they hadn't just given the resources to the people they had at that time they would have been just as well off. We were at the bottom. (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

Collier pinpointed four types of resources as essential to success: facilities, financial aid, staffing, and operating expenses. Bannister promised and delivered in all four areas. The facelift at Hinkle

was a "cosmetic but helpful" boost to the university's central athletic facility. In terms of financial aid, Butler made three critical shifts by moving partial scholarships to full scholarships in men's basketball, allowing athletes to live off campus, and funding summer classes for players. The university "fully staffed" the men's basketball team with assistant coaches and an administrative assistant, and though the "pay wasn't very good," the positions were now in place. Finally, the "operating dollars picked up to allow more resources for recruiting, more resources for traveling, scheduling, equipment, pretty much A to Z." Together, these changes represented a "pretty significant increase for Butler—[it] probably didn't put us anywhere near on the same level as our competition, but it certainly closed the gap" (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017).

Within a couple years, the university arrived at another critical decision point with regard to its resource base for athletics: changes in NCAA legislation forced Butler to revisit its commitment to football. In January of 1991, the NCAA required all Division I schools to compete at the Division I level for all sports. Butler's football team played in Division II at the time, leaving the university with three options: pull all other sports down to Division II, raise football to Division I, or drop football altogether. None were palatable. Dropping all other sports to Division II seemed unwise, especially given the university's ambitions with men's basketball. Likewise, dropping football was a non-starter given its contribution to the enrollment picture and its significance to alumni. The remaining option, jumping to Division I football, would have required the university to triple the number of scholarships allotted to the sport and make corresponding adjustments to its offerings in women's athletics to comply with Title IX. So, Butler banded together with several other like-minded institutions to devise a fourth option: the creation of the Pioneer Football League, a non-scholarship football league consisting of Division

I institutions. The decision cemented a distinct split in approach to college athletics' two primary revenue-producing sports—football and men's basketball—at Butler that began more than 50 years earlier in response to the accreditation sanctions (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017).

This solution, though further solidifying the athletic department's resource base, did not appeal to everyone in the university community as "there were alumni that were very, very unhappy" (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Nevertheless, Butler's resolution of "the football question" has proven a major asset over time (B. Arick, personal communication, April 25, 2017; B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017; J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017). The philosophy remains the same today and differentiates the university from many of its peers in the big-time athletics arms race. Both Arick and Collier referenced conversations with peers at unnamed institutions who were envious of Butler's position in not having to support a struggling, big-time college football program (B. Arick, personal communication, April 25, 2017; B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Collier reflected in general terms on the difficulties that many institutions in the five major football conferences face:

> The group of five are losing their rear ends financially for the most part. Big subsidies from the universities. We don't really have any interest in that. All this is tied together with being a relatively small private. You'd be silly to chase something like that without having the wherewithal financially to do it. (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

The de-escalation of football into the present day is apparent: the stadium, once envisioned to hold 72,000 fans, is a cozy 5,647-seat facility nestled between Hinkle Fieldhouse on one side and

a row of stately brick dorms on the other. Yet, despite being a "friends and family sport," the program succeeds in all four areas of importance to the leadership in Butler's athletic department: it provides a great student-athlete experience, wins games, serves as a credit to the university community, and remains fiscally responsible (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017). With its priorities in men's basketball and football clear, the foundation for growth was in place. Yet, even as the men's basketball team ascended, the department's ability to generate revenue remained grounded.

By the summer of 2006, the resource base needed an overhaul, and once again Barry Collier returned to campus with a vision for the job, this time as athletic director. Collier had been the men's basketball coach at the University of Nebraska since 2000. Earlier in his career, he had held posts at the University of Idaho, the University of Oregon, and Stanford University. Drawing from these different experiences, he identified a number of areas in which the athletic program at Butler lagged behind its competitors: "We weren't doing the same things that other Division I schools were doing in terms of driving attendance and branding and fundraising and sponsorships. We were kind of nipping around the edges a little bit" (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017). With the budget set for 2006-07, any major economic changes had to wait for at least a year, leaving Collier with time to do some digging. He soon found that athletic revenues had been flat from 2001 to 2006, despite the men's basketball team making a Sweet Sixteen appearance in 2003; central to this problem was the ticketing strategy for the university's flagship sport.

At the time, Hinkle Fieldhouse could seat 11,000. During the 2005-06 men's basketball season, in which the team turned in a respectable 20-13 record, the athletic department sold around 22,000 total tickets for its 13 home games. For some games, fans could grab a general

admission ticket for as low as four dollars. Even then, the reported attendance for those games indicated to Collier that a significant number of those in the stands were not paying anything at all, with one particular group occupying the arena's primary real estate:

> The entire east sideline was nothing but media seating. We had zero courtside seating. Here's the funny part about all this. I asked, "Well, who sits there?"
>
> "Well, the media sits there."
>
> "What media sits there because we're not getting any coverage, next to none? Well, that's all changing. They're out. We're moving them all up to a different part of the arena where they are now. We're putting in courtside [seating]. We need revenue for God's sake, and they're not covering us! They come to watch the game!"
>
> In fact, here's one thing that I've found—and people in the city in sports would tell me this, too—that if you couldn't get a free ticket to a Butler game it's because you were just brand new in town, because all you had to do was call somebody. (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

Ultimately Collier discovered that this antiquated approach to ticket sales for the flagship program was tied to a larger and more central problem: trying to do too much with too little.

A look at data from exit interviews with senior student athletes in previous years clued Collier in to a budding crisis. As part of the interviews, senior athletes were asked whether they would return to Butler if they could go back to high school and choose again. For two years running, 50% of respondents said they would choose to go elsewhere. The evidence was damning. "If this were the case at any institution, or in any business," Collier said "The alarm would go off. You would stop everything. We're messing up here somehow" (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017). The alarm sounded particularly shrill in this case

because the problem was isolated to athletics; the rest of the student body did not have the same reaction to their university experience. In digging into the issue, Collier discovered a lack of resources at the root once more:

> The reasons were our facilities are run down. We spend the night on Aunt Susie's floor in Chicago when we go up to play soccer. We don't get pre-game meal. I have to buy my own shoes. We were non-scholarship in football, and we didn't pay for the shoes of the football team. So if you don't mind playing barefoot, it's a pretty good deal. Our two soccer programs were paying $200 per person out of their own pockets for their competition fee, I think they called it. Well, what's that? Well, that's what we use to pay for their practice gear and their shoes…We didn't even buy shoes. High schools don't even do that. So no wonder. (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

Collier approached Butler's president at the time, Bobby Fong, to inquire about additional funding, but the answer was firm: the university would not provide any more money for athletics. In addition, at the time a three-percent driver in the athletic budget was reducing the university's contribution each year. Fong would allow the athletic department to reinvest any funds generated from ticket sales, but that stood as only a longer-term solution. The short-term required difficult decisions within athletics (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017, and October 20, 2017).

In 2007, Collier made two critical yet unpopular adjustments (J. Dunn, personal communication, July 25, 2017). The first was a no-brainer—raising ticket prices for men's basketball. The decision met some resistance within the university community: there was a certain quaintness to paying four dollars for admission to a Division I basketball game, and it kept Butler's most tradition-laden sport accessible to faculty and other segments of the university

(B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017; J. Dunn, personal communication, July 25, 2017; S. Neville, personal communication, April 25, 2017). The second was "incredibly difficult" yet just as necessary given the dire need to reconfigure the department's financial structure: in January, Collier announced that Butler would drop men's lacrosse and men's swimming with the start of the next fiscal year, lowering the number of university sports from 21 to 19 (B. Collier, personal communication, October 20, 2017). This decision made gripes about the change in ticket prices seem like small peanuts:

> When we dropped those two sports in '07 in the middle of all this, what I would consider, mess, it was like, "Somebody's going to complain about the price of tickets." That's not going to register on the complaint list because of the kids that we looked at in the eye and said, "You didn't do anything wrong when you came here, but we're dropping your program. You have to go away now." Can you imagine what that was like? (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

From this low point, however, the athletic department positioned itself to pursue longer-term sustainability by driving revenue.

Work on ticket sales and fundraising began immediately with the implementation of a priority points system for the 2007-08 basketball season. The system, still in place today, allows season ticket holders to accumulate points based on a set of eight scaled measures, such as their giving activity to both Butler Athletics and the university and their loyalty to the men's basketball program as expressed through consecutive years as a season ticket holder. Boosters are then able to select the exact seat they would like within their season ticket zone based upon their point rank ("2017-2018 Butler Men's Basketball Season Tickets," n.d.). With the system in place, the men's basketball team played its part in driving ticket sales as well. They followed a

second Sweet Sixteen berth in 2006-07 by posting a school record 30 wins the following season and scoring another victory in the first round of the NCAA tournament. By the 2008-09 season, season ticket packages ranged from $249 for upper level adult seating to $389 for the lower level and $999 for the new courtside seating ("Bulldog bulletin," 2008).

Meanwhile, other fundraising efforts gained momentum. Sensing the budgetary pinch, a number of trustees quietly funneled their charitable gifts toward the athletic department (J. Hargrove, personal communication, July 18, 2017). The department also began to realize payoffs from the university's ButlerRising capital campaign, a six-year effort that raised over $154 million for the institution by its close in 2009. The locker rooms for three women's teams in Hinkle Fieldhouse were upgraded and the baseball stadium received a significant overhaul, but the Butler Bowl was the main focus of the drive and with it "securing the place of football and soccer within the University's future" ("ButlerRising campaign update," 2008-09, p. 6). The Bowl received a new turf field and scoreboard, and ButlerRising funds combined with donations to the Bulldog Club, the athletic department's booster organization, enabled a multi-million dollar renovation completed in 2010 that included the installation of bleachers salvaged from the RCA Dome, former home of the Indianapolis Colts, to expand seating from 2,000 to over 5,000 as well as the construction of a 3,300-square-foot press box ("Bud and Jackie Selleck Bowl," 2017; "Bulldog bulletin," 2010; "ButlerRising campaign update," 2008-09; Stephenson, 2009). With these gains in ticket sales, fundraising, and facility improvements, Butler Athletics began to fortify its fiscal situation. When the Final Fours hit, they accelerated a movement that had already been building for several years.

Specifically, the Final Four runs propelled Butler to make three immediate transformational moves. First, the university increased its outlay for coaching salaries in the

men's basketball program. John Hargrove, who was chairman of the board at the time of both Final Four runs, recalled losing both Barry Collier and Thad Matta in earlier years because Butler could not offer competitive salaries (J. Hargrove, personal communication, July 18, 2017). During the first Final Four run, Brad Stevens became one of the hottest names in coaching and the threat of losing another successful head coach to a larger program loomed large. Hargrove recalled flying home to Florida the morning after Butler had lost to Duke in the national championship game, turning on his phone on the runway, and listening to a message from Barry Collier. Phil Knight, co-founder of Nike and mad booster of the University of Oregon's athletic program, was flying to Augusta, GA, for the Masters Golf Tournament and wanted to swing through Indianapolis to talk to Stevens about the opening at Oregon. Collier and Hargrove moved quickly to counter and within two days had signed Stevens to a 12-year extension with an annual salary in the seven figures. The following year, after a second Final Four run, Collier and Hargrove again approached Stevens about restructuring. As Hargrove recalls, Stevens came up with "this goofy figure after the Connecticut game. [I said,] 'Where'd you come up with that?' He said, 'Well, I added it up for my assistants, who are underpaid. This is what I want to pay them. He didn't want anything for himself." Though the salaries for both the head and assistant coaching positions still paled in comparison to those offered by college basketball's leading programs, Butler was able to increase its competitiveness while also clearly signaling to Stevens his value to the institution (J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017).

Second, the university launched the Campaign for Hinkle Fieldhouse, an extensive renovation to the Butler Athletics' centerpiece facility that ultimately cost $36 million. The scale

of the project was massive, but the success of the men's basketball team emboldened the university:

> We hadn't done anything close, remotely close, to the work that we did on Hinkle for 80 years. The amount of dollars that were put into that would not have been possible, and I think we would've been maybe scared away from raising those dollars to taking on that if we hadn't had that success and thought that was possible. (B. Collier, personal communication, October 20, 2017)

Two development officers echoed this idea. Betsy Weatherly worked in annual giving from 2005 to 2007 and then returned to Butler in 2011 to manage the Campaign for Hinkle. She recalled the unusual speed with which the university moved to capitalize on the enthusiasm that trailed the first Final Four run. The campaign had been announced before her position was even put into place, and the university did not follow the conventional practice of raising 60% of the project's goal before going public. Without the major gifts typically secured during the quiet phase of a campaign, Butler "did not have the pipeline to support that we were going to raise all of the money for the project" (B. Weatherly, personal communication, October 18, 2017). Likewise, Graham Honaker, whose first project upon arriving at Butler as a senior development officer in 2012 was the Campaign for Hinkle, recalled how a campaign consultant believed the university would be lucky to raise $12 million for the project (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017). It was a grassroots effort, with features on the history and heart of Hinkle littering six straight editions of *Butler Magazine*, development officers "pounding pavements," and the largest individual gift topping out at only $1 million (B. Weatherly, personal communication, October 18, 2017). When the campaign officially launched in November of 2012, however, the advancement team had raised around $12 million and set its goal at $16

million. They ended up raising $19 million. Indicative of the cohesion within the athletic department, "all 374 student-athletes on its 19 teams and all 68 coaches and athletic staff members" contributed to the campaign during the 2013-14 academic year ("Bulldog bulletin," 2014).

By capitalizing on the building's status as a National Historic Landmark, the university made up another $4 million through tax credits and grant money, such as a $700,000 Save America's Treasures grant to cover tuck-pointing and replacement window panes. After taking on some debt, the athletic department has covered the remaining balance through its revenue streams and annual funds from the Bulldog Club (B. Arick, personal communication, April 25, 2017; B. Collier, personal communication, October 20, 2017; "Indiana Landmarks honors Butler," 2015; B. Weatherly, personal communication, October 18, 2017). By the start of the 2014-15 season, renovations had outfitted the fieldhouse with new office space for administrators and coaches, an academic support center, a sports medicine center, a strength and conditioning facility, new office/locker room suites for both basketball teams, a new scoreboard with video capability, and more comfortable seating in the arena ("Bulldog bulletin," 2014-15). Most importantly, the overhaul managed to "keep Hinkle, Hinkle," bringing the fieldhouse into the modern era with enhancements to the student-athlete and fan experiences alike, while simultaneously preserving the building's historic charm and even restoring much of the interior to its original 1928 feel (Angevine, 2015; B. Arick, personal communication, April 25, 2017; "Indiana Landmarks honors Butler," 2015). "We got it right," reflected Honaker. "I think we really got it right" (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017).

Third, the Final Four runs enabled Butler to realize the dream of so many mid-major programs around the country: a move up the athletic conference ladder. In 2012-13, the

university transitioned from the Horizon League into the Atlantic 10. However, the real coup came the following year, when Butler again traded on its postseason success and joined the Big East. The effect of the conference switch on revenue and publicity is hard to overstate. Joe Kirsch, Butler's faculty athletic representative (FAR), recalled a meeting with other FAR's when Butler was still in the Horizon League. At some point during the meeting, he asked the league's commissioner how much money the conference received from its television deal. "Joe," the commissioner said, "We pay them" (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017).

In 2009-10, Butler had landed a deal with a local television station that carried no rights fee but still resulted in all but four of the men's basketball team's games appearing on television that year (Woods, 2012); the Big East, however, represented a different ball game with regard to television revenue and exposure. In 2013, the conference had splintered as its members' interests diverged: schools with strong football programs had been defecting to other power conferences over the past few years, prompting the "Catholic 7"—a group of seven basketball-centric Catholic institutions—to reform the Big East while keeping its name and its trademark conference tournament location at Madison Square Garden intact. Butler joined the Catholic 7 along with Creighton University and Xavier University. At the same time, the Fox Sports Media Group was also trying to get its new sports channel, Fox Sports 1 (FS1), off the ground. The two entities reached an agreement, with FS1 paying the Big East $500 million over 12 years for media rights to the conference's athletic contests. According to reports at the time, the deal meant that conference members like Butler would receive a $3 million annual payout (McMurphy & Katz, 2013; Sandomir, 2013).

By joining a much stronger basketball league, which places multiple teams in the NCAA tournament every year, Butler also opened the door for additional revenue from the NCAA's

basketball fund, which, as a point of reference, awarded $1.5 million per tournament victory to a team's athletic conference in 2013 (Smith, 2013c). The presidents of the Big East schools arranged a formula whereby three-quarters of all accumulated funds from the NCAA tournament would be divided equally among its ten members, with the remaining quarter going to the schools that participated in that year's postseason (B. Collier, personal communication, October 20, 2017). Thus, Butler Athletics has not only reaped the benefits of qualifying for the tournament the past three seasons, but has also profited from the success of its Big East peers, including Villanova's national championship run in 2016.

To be sure, competing at a higher level has demanded additional investment. However, as Bruce Arick, Butler's longtime vice president of finance and administration, made clear, increased revenues offset the uptick in university dollars:

> As we changed conferences, new investment was needed, but greater return was there as well…As the program got more successful and moved into different conferences, the revenue that they were able to generate through tickets and conference distributions and everything grew sufficiently to more than cover the additional investment in making those moves and so forth. (B. Arick, personal communication, April 25, 2017)

In looking at the opportunities for revenue-generation and publicity, Arick called the move to the Big East both a "home run" and a "no-brainer," a sentiment common to nearly all of the staff and faculty that I interviewed (B. Arick, personal communication, April 25, 2017).

By revamping Hinkle Fieldhouse and conference-hopping to the Big East, Butler turned the prospects opened up by the Final Four runs into concrete, long-term assets. The fiscal picture within Butler Athletics in the present day is remarkably different from only a decade ago. In the ten years since Collier's return as athletic director, athletics-generated revenue has increased

tenfold, with the gains plowed right back into the department (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017). In particular, on the heels of the Final Four runs, "athletics' ability to generate revenue is just substantially different than what it was five years ago" (B. Arick, personal communication, October 19, 2017).

Ticket sales have driven most of the revenue increase. Collier recalled that during his 11 years as head coach in the 1990s, the men's basketball team sold out a single game. By contrast, the 2016-17 season saw nine sell-out crowds stuff the fieldhouse (B. Collier, personal communication, April 27, 2017). Augmenting the increase in number are the increase in price and the priority points system for season tickets, as Table 6 demonstrates with a comparison of season ticket packages from 2008-09 and 2016-17.

Table 6. Season Ticket Pricing in 2008-09 and 2016-17

Seating	2008-09	2016-17
Courtside	$999	$2,900
Lower level	$389	
100-level center		$790
100-level sideline		$740
100-level baseline		$595
Upper level	$249	
200-level center		$680
200-level sideline		$595
200-level baseline plus		$475
200-level baseline		$295
300-level padded		$295
300-level unpadded		$195

In October of the present fiscal year, ticket sales were already 20% ahead of where they were at the same point in time last year, with other sports carrying their weight in this regard as well: my visit to campus in October happened to coincide with the Butler men's soccer team hosting Indiana, which was ranked number one in the United Soccer Coaches poll at the time. The announced attendance of 6,105 was a new record for the facility since its 2010 renovations.

Furthermore, in addition to ticket sales and conference payouts, revenue has also expanded significantly due to licensing, sponsorships, concessions, commissions, and parking, all driven "in large part because of men's basketball success" (B. Collier, personal communication, October 20, 2017).

As a result of all these developments, the university's subsidy to its athletic program—perhaps the key indicator in the health of an athletic program from an institution-wide perspective—has plummeted. At the conclusion of the 2005-06 fiscal year, the university was subsidizing 80% of the athletics budget; with steady gains in revenue and fundraising, the subsidy dropped to 30% over the ensuing years and is holding steady at that rate in the present day. According to Arick, the university is comfortable with this position. "I don't know if you remember the term 'tub on its own bottom,'" he asked me, before continuing:

> I would say athletics at Butler is as close to that as we see at Butler. And they obviously are not entirely on their own bottom because we do have some subsidy, but we have locked that in with some agreement on escalation. Otherwise, they are sustaining themselves with our operating revenues and fundraising and those types of things. I think it's a good model. (B. Arick, personal communication, October 19, 2017)

Navigating Personnel Changes

Graham Honaker fell in love with basketball when he was ten years old and someone gave him a copy of Phillip Hoose's *Hoosiers: The Fabulous Basketball Life of Indiana*. I interviewed Honaker over lunch a couple miles away from Butler's campus, but when I later visited him in his office, he pulled three separate copies of Hoose's book from a shelf. Though Honaker only arrived at Butler in 2012, he is well-versed in Indiana basketball lore and had been captured by the Bulldogs since their first Final Four run in 2010. From his perspective though,

there is a plotline in the Butler story even more magical than those Cinderella runs: "the Final Fours were amazing, but what's more impressive is this 20-year run with so many different coaches. No one talks about that. The Final Fours were unbelievable, but that to me is more impressive" (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017). The idea echoed one that Brad Stevens put forth in Woods's (2012) account when commenting on Butler's comparatively small resource base next to college basketball's giants: "Resources are not dollars. Resources are people. And we have great resources here" (as quoted in Woods, 2012, p. 44). Indeed the transformation of Butler Athletics' resource base has been both enabled and amplified by a countercultural approach to hiring that has yielded remarkable success in the key positions of athletic director and head coach, even amid consistent turnover in the latter.

Between my first visit to Butler in April 2017 and my second in October of the same year, the university again found itself in familiar territory with a head coaching vacancy, the third since Stevens moved to the Celtics in 2013. In June, Chris Holtmann accepted the head coaching position at Ohio State, succeeding another former Butler coach in Thad Matta. Butler was coming off of a Sweet Sixteen berth and its third consecutive NCAA tournament appearance under Holtmann. When I was on campus in April, community members raved about the direction of the program under his guidance. News broke of his departure while the Butler's trustees were on campus, and Tracy Stevens, who had caught wind of the news beforehand, recalled the scene:

> I can't remember which meeting I was in, but I was kind of sitting there going "Wait for it, wait for it, wait for it," and then everyone's phones went "Bzzzzz," and it started. Everyone was incredibly concerned about the turnover, and how that was going to be handled. Because after Brad was there we had Brandon Miller, who then got ill and left so he was only there for a year, and then Chris was the interim coach and was only there

> a total of three years as the head coach. Everyone was really worried about the constant changing. The tone of the board was somber. The fact that a coach was leaving resulted in kind of a gray cloud over the meeting… their concern was both emotional—because they're emotionally attached to the basketball program—and more of an intellectual [concern of] "What does this mean for a program that's incredibly important for the university?" (T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30)

The collective response makes sense, even though Butler had weathered a number of previous departures, including that of Holtmann's predecessor Brandon Miller, who took a medical leave of absence on the eve of his second season as head coach and never returned. Yet, this time around Tracy Stevens was not concerned. Holtmann himself expressed similar confidence in a tweet directed toward the Butler community: "We all know that at Butler, despite change, those special and amazing moments will only continue. I'm certain of that. It's Butler" (Holtmann, 2017). Holtmann posted his tweet on Friday, June 9; by Monday, June 12, the Bulldogs had a new coach in place. By the end of the summer, the athletic office had sold hundreds of additional season ticket packages (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017). Who could inspire such confidence in the future of the program?

On one hand, the answer is LaVall Jordan, Butler's new 38-year-old head coach with only one year of head coaching experience on his résumé at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, during which he tallied a record of 11-24 and finished last in the Horizon League. On the surface, Jordan's hire appears odd, but not to those in the Butler community:

> If you gave people a blind résumé, took it and bolded out that he went to Butler and played at Butler, and you said, "Okay, this guy's been an assistant at a good program, but he's only been a head coach one year. At the school, they went [something like] 11-22 in

> the one year," almost any fan base would be like, "What are we doing?" But, Butler guy—went to school here, played here—the fan base says, "This is awesome." (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017)

On the other hand, the answer to the question of who could inspire such confidence is Barry Collier. The idea that Collier has something of a magic touch in the hiring process became so clear in early interviews that I began to ask directly about it in later conversations. John Dunn, Collier's former teammate at Butler and former chairman of the board, explained that "Barry just has a knack for knowing a person, reading a person, and then inspiring them… He handled Brad in a great way, he handled Holtmann in a great way, and now he's going to do the same with LaVall" (J. Dunn, personal communication, July 25, 2017). Tracy Stevens echoed this sentiment: "He's really good, and he does it by himself. There's not a search committee. There are no board members interviewing potential coaches." She pinpointed his demeanor, his track record, and his institutional knowledge of the basketball program as the primary reasons why "it's absolutely 'In Barry we trust'" (T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017). Graham Honaker cited a couple additional qualities that, from his perspective, distinguish Collier's hiring practices: "Part of that foundation has been built on taking chances and making risks…Barry's doing it again with LaVall…It's a genius, but it's also courage because the odds are telling you to go with the safe bet" (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017).

Finally, I went to the source. "I certainly don't profess to have any secret sauce," Collier said, "but I always look for the best combination of five things that I can find and also take into account the understanding of our program and what we're trying to do." Integrity is the non-negotiable—"you can't get to second base if you don't have that"—followed by a high IQ, a relentless work ethic, and great communication skills. The succession of coaches, and the

consistent ways in which people speak about them, seems to indicate that Collier is not paying lip service to these qualities, particularly the integrity piece; however, it might be the fifth quality that distinguishes his approach—relative experience. The distinction hinges on his definition of "relative":

> I say "relative" because you don't have to have a ton of experience if the experience you do have is good. That ties into this understanding of the program from within. If you've got experience within the program, we don't really see the need to completely change what we're doing because it's been successful.

To that end, Collier noted that Brad Stevens had an eight-month interview as an assistant coach, Chris Holtmann a 15-month interview as first an assistant and then an interim head coach, and LaVall Jordan the longest interview period of all given that Collier recruited him years ago as a teenager to play at Butler (B. Collier, personal communication, October 20, 2017).

In a sense, both perspectives are true. There is more than a hint of magic in Collier's string of hires, particularly in pegging Brad Stevens as his first big hire only eight months into the job as athletic director, in the process making the 30-year-old first-time head coach the second youngest in all of major college basketball (Woods, 2012). Many people at Butler have stories of their first encounter with Stevens, most of which sound similar to John Hargrove's, to indicate their initial shock at a choice that now looks genius:

> [Todd Lickliter] was replaced with this kid. He looked so skinny. I remember going to a breakfast to meet him. I was at his table, and I think I was vice chair at the time, and he was wearing this button down collared shirt and tie. And the shirt collar was so big, he just looked like a kid…I said, "Who are you?" And he said, "I'm Brad Stevens, the new

> basketball coach." You could have knocked me over with a feather…this child." (J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017)

Yet, from another angle, one can see Collier's hires as a continuation of a practice that began in 1989 when Geoff Bannister, searching for someone who "bled Butler blue," hired Collier himself as a 34-year-old with no head coaching experience to lead the revival of Butler basketball (J. Hargrove, personal communication, July 18, 2017). Likewise, the habit of promoting from within by sliding people down the bench from assistant to head coach persisted in Collier's absence, when his departure made room for two of his former assistants—first Matta and then Lickliter—to assume the reigns. By the time Collier returned to Butler, the expectation that the head coaching position, when vacated, would pass from assistant to assistant like an "heirloom" was deeply engrained in the players (Woods, 2012, p. 29; Woods, 2009).

Hiring wizard or not, Collier does stand as a point of continuity in the long arc of Butler's rise and the key decision-maker in Butler's ability to weather the coaching changes that so often put an end to the Cinderella story at other institutions. Furthermore, his ability to develop and support these coaches deserves attention. Collier emphasizes that all Butler coaches should "make decisions that are good for 15 and 20 years, not two and three and five years" (B. Collier, personal communication, October 20, 2017); later, when I asked Brad Stevens if he found this to be the case during his time at Butler, he jumped on the question:

> Every day. Every day. If we had to suspend a kid for not going to class, he's all for it. If we went on a three-game losing streak, he never focused on it. If we had a great year, he would invest more in the program. If we had a bad year, he would invest more in the program. He knew we had to do things the right way because we had a role to represent

> the school. He always was forward-looking. (B. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017)

Even when the offer from the Celtics came, Collier's backing persisted and "made it almost impossible to leave, to the point where it made us uncomfortable with how well he was supporting us when we left." Because of relationships like this one, the Stevens family remains "as invested, as involved, as we've ever been" at the university, even with their move to Boston (B. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017). At Butler, the coaching carousel spins in an entirely different direction.

Nurturing Culture in Athletics

The front of Hinkle Fieldhouse is nearly as unadorned today as it was back in 1928, when the building first opened. Save for a few black awnings with small white numbers marking different entrance gates, it is unclear where a first-time visitor ought to enter. As it turns out, all the doors are open and any of them work just fine. I chose the middle gates my first time and was greeted by a modest display case stocked with jerseys, trophies, images, and placards documenting the building's history. Front and center in the case sits the 2010 West Regional trophy, commemorating the team's first trip to the Final Four. In April 2017, two dark blue road jerseys wrapped around its base. In white block letters the name "Smith" stretched across the top of the left one, the number 44 in white with slim gray trim beneath it. To its right a number 33 jersey, same hue and slightly larger font, curled around the side of the trophy, the name "Cornette" fading from view. The jerseys belonged to Andrew Smith and Joel Cornette, both former big men for the Butler basketball team, both "Butler guys" through and through, both having died young the previous year. Smith joined the program later, a member of both Final Four teams, and passed earlier, in January 2016 of non-Hodgkin lymphoma and leukemia at the

age of 25. Cornette, who played on the 2003 Sweet Sixteen team, was 35 when he passed to coronary atherosclerosis in August 2016.

Had I entered through either of the two side gates, I would have instead come first to a curved wall at the corner of either concourse, the one on the left backing the men's basketball offices and the one on the right backing the spirit shop. The displays are mirror images: on a gleaming white field in large, shining silver text sits "The Butler Way." Beneath, in the dark blue of a Butler road jersey, the definition is crystallized: "demands commitment, denies selfishness, accepts reality, yet seeks improvement every day while putting the team above self." "The Butler Way" is the watchword for the organizational culture of Butler Athletics. It greets you from the start and seems to permeate every nook and cranny of the program: I could scarcely get through a conversation, whether casual or formal, without it taking center stage, often unbidden. People described it in different terms, citing stories and exemplars from different times, yet leaving this much clear: the Butler Way bears many fingerprints, and they belong to the coaches and players who cycle through but rarely depart. Tracy Stevens is married to the guy whose name popped up as much as any other, but it is people like Joel Cornette and Andrew Smith, she told me, who were "the epitome of the Butler Way." Through tragedy and triumph, culture has been "by far the biggest asset" for Butler Athletics (T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017).

Coaches deserve much of the credit for the formulation of the Butler Way. Predictably, it stretches back to Tony Hinkle. "There's a direct line, a handshake," wrote Neville (2011), "between Hinkle and the later coaches including Collier, Matta, Lickliter, the current assistant coaches, and Brad Stevens" (p. 34-35). The line is spiritual, transmitted in the character of those who nurtured the athletic program closest to the community's heart. Yet, it is also tangible: Collier played off of Tony Hinkle's model, eventually pinpointing five core concepts for the

program—humility, passion, unity, servanthood, and thankfulness; Matta inherited the ethos and christened it "the Butler Way"; Lickliter came next and wrestled the thing onto paper, with Stevens as both his scribe and co-author (T. Lickliter, personal communication, December 5, 2017; T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017; Woods, 2009; Woods, 2012). When the concepts were finally codified, Stevens typed up the results; years later as the Butler Way continued to gain currency, he framed his original steno pad notes and gave them as a gift to Lickliter (B. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017). A little more than a month after Stevens mentioned this gift to me, I spoke to Lickliter and asked him if he still had the framed notepad. He chuckled: "it's hanging in my family room" (T. Lickliter, personal communication, December 5, 2017).

The image speaks to the alchemy within Butler Athletics: everyday materials transformed through everyday effort into a showpiece of lasting value. Indeed, the years that Lickliter and Stevens spent honing their philosophy were angled always toward the future. "He and I would labor over how to present everything," Lickliter recalled:

> We wrote missions, we wrote visions, we wrote the creed—everything imaginable, we put down. We wanted a program. We didn't want to have just a team. We wanted this to be something that would be passed on and would allow sustainability. (T. Lickliter, personal communication, December 5, 2017)

If the head coaching position is an heirloom at the university, the Butler Way is the substance of real value, tended and polished by each successive generation. Those who have since followed Lickliter and Stevens, from Miller to Holtmann and now to Jordan, have preserved its essential quality even as the resources and attention all around it have grown.

Yet, if the coaches are the brains behind the Butler Way, it is the players who so often give the culture its soul. David Woods's (2009, 2012) work is chock full of stories wherein Butler players embody this culture, but the two that Tracy Stevens highlighted as her favorites capture the delicate balance at its heart:

> We made the tournament [in 2001] and Wake Forest was really good…They interviewed players the week before the game saying, "Do you know where Butler is?" They were like, "Minnesota?" "Butler, no I've never heard of them." "What's Butler?" They were all dismissive of it. They didn't know where Butler was, or know anything about it. We go, and the halftime score was like 45 to 13. We just demolished them, and the teams ran down the tunnels together to go to the locker room after halftime. Brandon Miller, who was a Bulldog through and through, said, "I bet you know where Butler is now."

She followed that story with one of the more popular ones from Butler lore, when in 2003 the Bulldogs were competing in their first Sweet Sixteen since Tony Hinkle's days as coach:

> This was well written about, but there was a story about [after] they lost to [Oklahoma]…in Albany, New York. [Seniors] Joel Cornette and Brandon Miller were walking down the tunnel, and there was trash on the floor, and they had just lost, so their career was over. There was trash, and they stopped and picked it up, and threw it away. They were like the biggest competitors ever with huge hearts. (T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017)

Taken together, the stories illustrate on the one hand an abiding "chip on the shoulder" mentality and, on the other, a persistent privileging of others over self. Like so many underdogs, Butler has managed to intertwine confidence with humility. Yet, following the program's first Sweet Sixteen, this balance demanded attention as the team's ethos flickered.

The years between the program's first and second Sweet Sixteen appearances in 2003 and 2007 stand as a crucible period in the formation of a durable culture wrapped around the Butler Way. When Todd Lickliter assumed the head coaching position in 2001, he inherited "some of the finest players" in the program's history. After those players graduated following the first Sweet Sixteen appearance, Lickliter assumed the coaches would be able to trade on the program's success to recruit "the next level of player." Instead, the team stumbled to a 16-14 record in 2003-04 and then a 13-15 record the following year, its first losing season since 1989-90. The coaches racked their brains for solutions and, at some point, somebody gave Lickliter a copy of a book called *Unstuck*. "I gave one to every coach," Lickliter recalled. "We went through it. I've got notes all over mine. We learned the lessons."

Those lessons centered on recruiting. "What I learned in particular is that vetting is incredibly important. There needs to be alignment," Lickliter said. As an example he referenced a typical practice at other big-time programs, where coaches attend an AAU game, see a player they like, and offer him a scholarship based on that sliver of exposure. "You can't do that if you want to have a program like Butler," Lickliter concluded. "You don't know enough." Instead, coaches committed to "recruit with substance," which entailed giving prospective student-athletes the "full picture of the environment" at Butler, talking about "fit and reality," and stressing that the program only wanted those who would "sincerely seek a degree" (T. Lickliter, personal communication, December 5, 2017). Soon, the team was back in the Sweet Sixteen, and when Lickliter took the head coaching position at Iowa in 2007, he again left the roster stocked with the right type of players for his successor.

Through this period the coaching staff tested, refined, and solidified its approach to recruiting in the wake of unprecedented on-court success, doubling down on the Butler Way. "I

don't know that we'd have been as good," Lickliter reflected, "if we hadn't gone through that trial, committed to an identity, and decided, 'We're not wavering from this.'" The key change was to recruit players whose values already matched the Butler Way. To wit, when a local principal asked Lickliter to come speak to the students at his school on the topic of instilling values, Lickliter told him, "I can't. We don't instill them. We just enhance them" (T. Lickliter, personal communication, December 5, 2017). Barry Collier echoed this idea that recruiting boiled down to the Butler Way or the highway, so to speak: "You're not coming here just for sports. We're in the wrong house—we don't ever *get* to that house if that's the case. [Prospective student athletes] can either self-select or we select out before you ever get there" (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017).

Brad Stevens lived through this crucible experience with Lickliter, and it clearly shaped his approach to recruiting and his ability to keep the program grounded in its value system even as it ascended to new heights. "One of the best things we did was the way we recruited," remembered Stevens. "Sharing the values of the school was something we were doing for a long time, and it's not going to be perfect, but generally if a kid chose Butler, it was for the right reasons" (B. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017). Indeed, when I poked around the idea of the basketball program getting too big for its britches after the two Final Four runs, a variety of people cited the athletic department's culture as the buffer against this temptation. Joe Kirsch spoke in colloquial terms of a collective identity being the anchor: "I think keeping your feet on the ground is the right thing…When you begin to fly and you're not a bird, there's something wrong, you know" (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Michael Kaltenmark, a 2002 alum and the current director of external relations at Butler, located the cultural through-line in the upper levels of leadership:

> I have a feeling if we played a Final Four in Indianapolis this weekend and classes were in session, Jim Danko and Chris Holtmann would make sure our players were in class just like Bobby Fong and Brad Stevens did the day of the game. If we had that opportunity, we would do it because that's just how we operate. It's what we do. I feel like we've stuck true to the Butler Way. We've held on dearly to that because we understand that that got us to where we were and the second you start thinking you're bigger than that, then that's when problems happen. (M. Kaltenmark, personal communication, April 25, 2017)

Multiple people cited Collier's and Stevens's workaday response to the madness of the first Final Four as grounding, and Woods (2012) details how Stevens's "aim to maintain normalcy" extended into subsequent seasons (p. 174). Characteristically, though, Stevens himself deflected attention back onto the players:

> Going from fairly anonymous to pretty well-known happened to all of us overnight. If we weren't at Butler and we didn't have the foundation, the values, it may have been harder to handle…We talked about all of the values so much that I didn't see a lot of the issues. Our guys were incredible. They used their platforms well…Social media was just coming into being a problem, but our guys were so good. They cared about their school and they still do. (B. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017)

In the end, after so many conversations, it became clear: the culture of the athletic department—the Butler Way—turns on the endless loop of relationships between player and coach. It connects past, present, and future, revitalizing a dormant basketball program, animating an entire athletic program, and lighting the path forward when the glow of so much national attention might have otherwise threatened to blot out the whole thing. Likewise, it is the fruit of

this culture, if not portions of the culture itself, that have made the athletic program so consistently valuable to the university as a whole. One final story encapsulates this entire web of relationships between player and coach, basketball and university, pride and humility. Marc Allan, news manager and adjunct instructor in the School of Journalism, told of a walk-on named Alex Barlow who played his way into a starting position on the team during the 2012-13 season:

> What I always tell my classes is, most of us are Alex Barlow. We don't have the talent, we're not LeBron James, we're not Michael Jordan, we don't have the talent. If you work hard, and maybe you get an opportunity, or maybe you prove yourself, or maybe you're just thrust into the situation and you make the most of it, whatever it is, Alex Barlow is our lesson…[Once] I was really angry at my class. A lot of them were just being very lazy. This is a class called Writing for Print Media…It's the intro class for journalists…I was trying to think of what to say to them in the class. I brought up Alex Barlow. I emailed Brad Stevens at the time and I said, "I really appreciate that you started Alex because it's a lesson for my students to see that if you work hard, you do what's expected of you, you have a positive effect on others, that you can be a starter, you can advance over other people." Brad, at this point, he's already played in two national championship games, he's an enormous star on campus. He's an enormous star in the world. I emailed him that. He emailed me back in six minutes. Literally six minutes. He said, "Alex is a great kid. He always affects the game the same way. He always affects the team the same way. That's the kind of person that you look for when you're trying to build a team." (M. Allan, personal communication, April 26, 2017)

Finding Synergy between Flagship and University

From Barry Collier's first year as head coach in 1989 to his return as athletic director in 2006, Butler developed a flagship program with ultimately limited value to both the athletic department and the greater institution. This ceiling was in part a product of the athletic side of the house not being in order. As Collier said in recalling the scene upon his return as athletic director, "It's ridiculous the things we weren't doing because it was the same old deal" (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Even as the basketball team continued to win games, Collier's first two years as athletic director were spent tending to the athletic department as a whole, making the difficult decisions necessary to transform its resource base and bolster the student-athlete experience across all sports. Over time, these problems were resolved, with ticket sales and fundraising on a steady rise and over 90% of Butler's student-athletes answering the "repeat customer" question positively (B. Collier, personal communication, October 20, 2017). John Dunn, former board chairman, confirmed the pivotal quality of Collier's work as athletic director: "It all goes back to Barry Collier, and I'm not just blowing smoke up his butt…He changed the way the university looked at athletics." (J. Dunn, personal communication, July 25, 2017).

Yet, even as the athletic department began to realize the full benefit of its flagship program, a portion of the ceiling remained, hindering the university as a whole from reaping the same full-bodied return. From Geoff Bannister's initial decision to invest in men's basketball in 1989, the formation of a big-time athletic program was always in service to a larger university that was attempting to alter its own fortunes. However, by tracing efforts to leverage basketball across presidential administrations—and in particular focusing on the types of risk that each different executive was willing to assume—it becomes clear that fusing the energies of a

program and an institution on the move took time and frequent negotiation. Only with Jim Danko's arrival as president in 2011 were flagship program, athletic department, and university aligned to take full advantage of an unprecedented resource for a prestige-seeking university: back-to-back Final Four appearances.

The time frame for this story spans three presidential administrations: Geoff Bannister (1989-2000), Bobby Fong (2001-2011), and Jim Danko (2011-present). (Gwen Fountain served in an interim capacity from 2000-2001 as a bridge between Bannister and Fong.) All but two of my interview respondents were affiliated with the university in some capacity during Fong's presidency, and a handful had lived through all three administrations. In discussing the influence of each chief executive upon the university, a pattern emerged that was best articulated by Bruce Arick, who joined the community at the beginning of Bannister's presidency and by 1997 had assumed the position of vice president for finance. Arick described Bannister and Danko as "accelerator presidents" with Fong sandwiched between them as a "stabilizer" (B. Arick, personal communication, October 19, 2017). Numerous others echoed this idea of an ebb and flow between presidencies. "Things come and go," said Susan Neville, before adding, "I pay very little attention to it unless it has something to do with teaching writing" (S. Neville, personal communication, April 25, 2017). Indeed, each person with whom I spoke had different levels of interaction with the three presidents and gravitated toward them differently based on their strategic focus or personality. Yet, in taking the long view, the broad consensus echoed Arick's words: "I think each of them brought to the table for Butler exactly what it needed at the time" (B. Arick, personal communication, October 19, 2017).

Managing Risk and Leveraging Basketball in the Bannister Presidency

As noted previously, Bannister receives credit across the board for his vision and initial investment in a flagging men's basketball program. In some ways, this whole thing was his idea. Yet, the strategy is curiously absent from an essay Bannister penned in 1993 entitled "The Idea of Butler University," in which he kick-started a strategic planning cycle by imagining Butler as it would appear 12 years in the future during its sesquicentennial. The few direct references to athletics rehearse traditional benefits, such as community building and engagement of trustees, and place it in the same breath as intramural activities in fostering physical activity and building character within the student body. Over the course of 14 pages, Bannister offers no hint of the momentum building in Hinkle Fieldhouse that, years later, would constitute a significant portion of his legacy. One can only speculate at the reasons for this omission, and indeed as Thelin (1996) highlighted that same decade, despite their apparent centrality to university budgets and strategy, big-time athletic programs rarely appear in mission and vision statements. Perhaps Bannister wished to avoid this tension surfacing at a time when dollars were tight and ambitions were vast at Butler. Perhaps he reasoned it would have distracted from the central focus of the essay, the pursuit of a "collegiate university" ideal at Butler. Perhaps, despite the investment in men's basketball, athletics remained functionally disconnected from the university's decision-making apparatus, as suggested by the fact that the five planning committees for "Strategic Plan 2005," which charted a course for the university from 1994 to 2000, featured no representatives from the athletic department.

Yet, one additional explanation arises from what, with hindsight, seems a formative passage:

> The university is a learning institution, and all of Butler's members share this mission. The registration clerk who oversees the grading systems and maintains records is monitoring the student's progress and helping the professor to teach and the student to learn; the groundskeeper tending a newly planted tree is developing an environment conducive to reflection and creating a practical demonstration of the university's commitment to the appreciation of beauty; the coach who guides a team to success by challenging students to find their own limits of physical as well as scholarly competence is building institutional reputation, alumni confidence and student capacity; the librarian cataloging a new addition to the collection, the computer programmer debugging software, the secretary typing an examination, the assistant tracking down a professor for a student appointment, the budget manager tracking expenditures, the development officer asking for assistance, the trustee weighing policy and promoting the university, the public relations officer pitching a story, and the alumni, parent and career planning staff member maintaining bridges to the broader community, are engaged in the same process. (Planning Committee for the Strategic Planning Process, 1993, pp. 18-19)

Here, Bannister positions athletics as one of many functions that exist outside of the traditional teaching-learning-research axis yet buttress it nonetheless, alluding to athletics' connection to student learning while also recognizing its capacity to bolster Butler's reputation and community. In this view, athletics is an institutional citizen, but one piece of an operation that hums only when all constituents pull their weight with whatever tasks and resources fall to them. This explanation sounds hokey, but grows less so as one becomes familiar with the ethos at Butler. There are distinct echoes of this perspective, for instance, in Brad Stevens's stance on the

basketball program years later: “We all have a role to play and we’re all playing our role for the benefit of the organization” (B. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017).

In line with this notion of institutional citizenship, Bannister backed up his vision with risk-taking and investments across the entire university landscape. In this regard, the investment in athletics did not stand out because it was par for the course with an accelerator president in office. I asked Susan Neville if she sensed any trade-offs when resources were funneled toward athletics. “No,” she replied, “because other things happened at the same time.” She continued:

> From my point of view in the English Department, Dr. Bannister also helped us find money to start a visiting writers series, which is now one of the biggest visiting writers series in the country. It’s the most well-funded, we’ve had Nobel Prize winners, Pulitzer Prize winners, sometimes we’ve had eight to 12 writers a semester visiting. So that also brought people onto campus. It was kind of, from my point of view, a kind of synergy. There were risks taken: let’s put more money into basketball, let’s put money into this, let’s put money into trying to get something more for theatre, into a new dorm. (S. Neville, personal communication, April 25, 2017)

Joe Kirsch noticed the same pattern of spending, particularly with regard to the grounds:

> Geoff made a significant contribution to the university in turning it into what it is today. And not only through basketball but other things, too… when Geoff came here we had kind of a drive-through campus. It kind of looked like a commuter school…One of the major things he did was do a major renovation not of buildings, but of the actual site. When you go out there and walk across the malls and you’ve got the fountains and the benches, that was Geoff Bannister. (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

Indeed, the campus transformation is the most visible feature of Bannister's legacy and the one most often mentioned in tandem with his investment in men's basketball. As described by the "Commission on the Future of Butler University" in 1986, the campus Bannister inherited did not match its increasingly residential quality: "landscaping was limited, the automobile dominating, and buildings presented an institutional and sterile atmosphere. Principal entrances and boundaries of the campus were poorly defined" (Waller, 2006, pp. 469-470). Bannister churned the landscape outside his office in Jordan Hall, turning the central mall into "a small lake" to address the campus's longstanding drainage problems (Waller, 2006, p. 477). By the end of his term, however, Bannister had dressed up the ground between Jordan and Hinkle, an impact as lasting as the teak wood benches that suddenly sprouted all over campus and came to symbolize the makeover (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017).

However, this portfolio of improvements came at a cost. As Arick framed it, "with some of that acceleration that we saw during President Bannister, financially we started bumping up against some barriers" (B. Arick, personal communication, October 19, 2017). Bannister himself spelled out one such barrier in a letter to the community dated October, 24, 1994. The university had just wrapped the "Partnership for Excellence" capital campaign, which brought over $75 million into the university's coffers, $25 million of which was designated for its endowment. According to Bannister, the influx of endowment funding "allowed us the luxury of leaning more heavily than would have otherwise been prudent on our endowment income." Bannister reported that these "heavy endowment draws" were at an end (Bannister, 1994, p. 1), yet they left their mark on the university's financial picture.

Strapped for cash, yet feeling the need to spark a stagnant university, Bannister had depleted portions of the endowment to jump-start a wide variety of programs and capital

improvements (B. Arick, personal communication, October 19, 2017; J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19). Athletics was no exception in this regard, with the $1.5 million renovation of Hinkle Fieldhouse constituting a "capital expense to the university" (B. Collier, personal communication, October 18, 2017). When Bannister's successor sought to shore up these cracks in the financial base, the athletic department would be forced to operate under a hard set of constraints. Basketball could still serve as a leverage point, but in terms of funding additional growth and building on its success, the athletic department was largely on its own.

Managing Risk and Leveraging Basketball in the Fong Presidency

Bobby Fong was, without question, a sports fan. In profiles and published accounts, references to his passion for baseball and the New York Yankees seem always to go hand in hand with his scholarly love for Oscar Wilde ("The Butler community comes together," 2014-15; Waller, 2006; Wang, 2014). He owned more than 30,000 baseball cards, wrangled his way into teaching courses on the sport at two previous institutions, and published in the *Baseball Research Journal* (McFeely, 2010). When Fong departed Butler to assume the presidency at Ursinus College following the 2010-11 academic year, the spring issue of *Butler Magazine* celebrated his tenure with an article entitled "Ten Great Seasons": a ribbon of photos framed to look like baseball cards lined the top of the pages and a watermarked baseball scorecard filled their background. When Fong passed in September of 2014, a service at Butler's Clowes Memorial Hall concluded with a rendition of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" ("The Butler community comes together," 2014-15).

The enduring image of Fong's presidency is that of a sports fan as well: the diminutive executive hoisted atop the shoulders of three football players, beaming from ear to ear, arms extended to balance the jubilation of a sudden take-off and four fingers raised on each hand.

Butler had just made its first Final Four, and Bobby Fong was crowd-surfing. At the end of his tenure at the university, Fong cited this moment as his top memory; his reason for doing so is telling: "I was deeply touched that I could be seen as somebody who was accessible and approachable enough by the students to do more than shake hands" (Allan, 2011a, p. 20). For Fong, the basketball euphoria presented an opportunity to showcase the Butler community by rallying around its students and allowing them to thrust the institution upward.

Fong's track record screamed liberal arts when, as a dean at Hamilton College after previous appointments at Berea College and Hope College, he was recruited for the presidency at Butler. After initially rebuffing the idea, two experiences changed his mind: through a conversation with a dance mistress in upstate New York he learned of Butler's sterling ballet program, and then he watched as a close friend's son chose to attend Butler over Dartmouth. One sees the flowering of these seeds ten years later in Fong's public responses to the Final Four berth. In giving an interview for *The New York Times*, he positioned Butler's Department of Dance as "just as uniquely important to the university as the men's basketball team" (Rhoden, 2010, para. 17). Ten days later, his op-ed in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled "How Butler Won the NCAA Tournament" used the crowd-surfing image as a hook to champion the academic chops of the university's student-athletes. Butler had "caught a wave," but the wild ride on both the campus and the hardwood was "a metaphor, a trope, for the larger story of Butler University" that centered, always, around its academic mission and values (Fong, 2010, para. 4, 20). Here, as he did throughout his tenure, Fong envisioned athletics and specifically men's basketball as a "front porch" to the university. During the Final Fours, the crowd on the front porch "looked through the windows of the university in admiration of its academic seriousness" (Neville, 2011, p. xii).

Fong's admiration for Butler's student-athletes and his deftness in using the sudden platform furnished by the Final Fours to share Butler's story with the general public are unmistakable. Yet the front-porch ideal both focused and limited his vision for how the men's basketball program ought to be leveraged within the university. A front porch can be a warm point of welcome for guests, but it can just as easily feel like a distant periphery for those who have to live there.

As mentioned previously, Fong placed firm financial parameters around the athletic program: there would be no additional investment from the university and a budget driver would actually reduce the institutional subsidy by a small percentage each year, even as the cost of doing business in Division I athletics continued to rise. This approach is consistent with Fong's role as a stabilizing president in the wake of Bannister's accelerant behaviors. The first order of business was "to deal with some of the fallout of those risks" taken during the previous administration. Fong inherited a budget that was "way out of whack" and an endowment stuffed with IOU's after Bannister-era borrowing. John Hargrove, who joined the board of trustees the same year Fong arrived at Butler and almost immediately devoted himself to addressing the endowment issue, recalled how quickly the new president plugged the leaks. In terms of the annual budget, Fong "imposed his own sentence: [he said], 'I'm going to get this thing done in three years.' He had it balanced in one year," kicking off eight straight years of budget surpluses (J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017). Hargrove, a lawyer by trade, helped see the university through the process of structuring repayments to the endowment, and on the strength the ButlerRising capital campaign that netted the university $154 million by its close in 2009, Fong replenished the endowment in around half of the appointed term for doing so. When his tenure at Butler concluded, the endowment had grown from $93 million to $143 million

(Allan, 2011; J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017). Thus by the time Butler launched the "Dare to Make a Difference" strategic plan in 2009, the university could claim with confidence that its "fiscal position never has been stronger" ("Dare to Make a Difference," 2009, p. 14).

Concurrently, Fong tended to the university's academic profile. During his presidency Butler's retention and graduation rates jumped from 81% and 68% when Fong took office to highs of 89% and 74% respectively toward the end of his tenure ("Dare to Make a Difference," 2009). Much of the money raised during the ButlerRising campaign targeted academic and residential projects, including a 40,000-square-foot addition to the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences facility (Allan, 2011). Fong also pushed Butler's application for a Phi Beta Kappa chapter, a recognition for which the university had applied and been turned down back in 1912 (Waller, 2006). Phi Beta Kappa, the most prestigious academic honor society in American higher education, is highly selective and notorious for requiring institutions to reapply before gaining approval. It appears that after 1912, Butler took 94 years off before resuming its application.

Hargrove recalled that for a long time the general stance toward renewing Butler's pursuit of a chapter was apathy, especially given the university's commitment to combining strong professional programs with its liberal arts offerings. But Fong embraced the challenge:

> Bobby was Phi Beta Kappa in Harvard. He said to me, "John, let's get going on this. Let's kick some butt, and let's see what we can do." So we did, and we got it. That was Bobby. That was the academic side of things. That was the kind of risk he was willing to take. And if athletics happens to be the front porch that everyone wants to look at, fine. But let's really enhance the fiscal responsibility here to an art form, enhance the

> recognition of our academics by a Phi Beta Kappa chapter. They did it in a short period of time, but everybody else said, "It's not worth trying." (J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017).

Of particular note, Butler only needed one application cycle to receive approval, a remarkable accomplishment that *Butler Magazine* picked up on in a one-page article highlighting the installation ceremony from February 2010: "Applying for Phi Beta Kappa is a three-year process…Normally, the delegation will recommend needed improvements, requiring a second three-year cycle of application. Butler beat those odds, initiating its application process in 2006 and receiving approval in October 2009" ("Phi Beta Kappa," p. 5).

Landing a Phi Beta Kappa chapter was a coup for the university—Butler's current provost Kate Morris recalled her dad, an academic himself, crying when he heard the news (K. Morris, personal communication, November 15, 2017)—but the story was overshadowed by Butler having beaten even longer odds later that same year: the men's basketball team had made its first Final Four. This success sent shockwaves through the university's decision-making apparatus. In a belt-tightening context, it is easy to see how "athletics was not a priority" for Fong and any strategic risks aimed instead at bolstering Butler's academic profile (J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017). In this regard, the president and the trustees had differing visions for what Butler ought to be, and the first Final Four run thrust those differences into stark relief (J. Dunn, personal communication, July 25, 2017).

Butler had lightning in a bottle, and it seemed that every twist in their Cinderella story cranked the voltage even higher, from the Final Four's location six miles down the road in Indianapolis, to the echoes of the Milan Miracle and *Hoosiers* pinging off the walls in Hinkle

Fieldhouse, to the final image of the national championship game itself: Butler against Duke, the ball and the game hanging in the air as the buzzer sounds.

> If it went in, it would be the most famous shot in college basketball history: the first desperation toss to win a national title and the last step in the ascent of a tiny mid-major school to the top of the sport. If it did not go in, it would be among the most famous misses, elevating the game simply through the delicious possibility that it might have dropped. Either way, the heave became historic as soon as it left [Gordon] Hayward's fingertips. (Layden, 2011, para. 3)

Who could blame Bobby Fong for holding that kind of energy in hand, looking across time and place at all the universities burnt by big-time athletics, recognizing the special quality of his own university, weighing all the risks, sensing danger, and wanting to tuck the bottle in Butler's back pocket? And who could blame the trustees for holding that kind of energy in hand, looking across time and place at all the universities sparked by big-time athletics, recognizing the special quality of their own university, weighing all the risks, sensing opportunity, and wanting to squeeze the bottle for every last flicker of value?

On the day of the national championship game, Bobby Fong and Duke's president Richard Brodhead met in Fong's office in Jordan Hall: both Ivy Leaguers, both English scholars and teachers, both college presidents, both avid baseball fans. Together, they put the remarkable accomplishments of their basketball teams within the larger context of their universities, connecting the work of student-athletes to that of dancers, musicians, and scientists on their campuses. The meeting, the similarities between the two presidents, and—by inference—the similarities between the two universities were the subject of a piece in *The New York Times* the next day (Rhoden, 2010).

Later that summer, Butler and Duke rubbed shoulders again, this time without any media coverage and with Fong a more peripheral participant. A friend of the university who was also a Duke alum arranged for a small contingent from Butler to visit Duke's campus in Durham. Fong was there, as were Barry Collier, current board chair John Hargrove, and previous board chair John Dunn, among a few others. Though the universities differed in a number of ways, their athletic programs shared one key feature: a flagship program in men's basketball that was housed in a revered arena and had just earned significant exposure through the Final Four. Kevin White, vice president and director of athletics at Duke, hosted the group for a day of touring facilities and talking shop. For Collier, the trip confirmed that Butler was moving in the right direction: "I wouldn't say it lit a fire or anything, but it was good information, affirmation of what we were doing, and certainly some ideas that we took away that we could build on" (B. Collier, personal communication, October 20, 2017). For Dunn, "it was huge to see what they do behind the scenes for fundraising" (J. Dunn, personal communication, July 25, 2017). For Hargrove, the idea of the visit centered on leveraging the basketball program and its recent success:

> We were hoping that we could fine-tune our model at Butler based upon the Duke model, because we are first and foremost an academic school but we have this very, very visible marketing component called basketball, and we wanted to know how we could meld that into a one plus one equals three type of equation. (J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017)

In the end, Hargrove found the visit to be "a heck of a pep rally" that energized as much as it informed, but one practical takeaway was clear. In the course of conversation, Hargrove learned that White had made it a condition of his coming to Duke that he hold the title of vice president, and that idea "planted the seed" for Hargrove that Barry Collier needed to be elevated

to the same stature at Butler. For Hargrove, this adjustment was essential if the university was to find that elusive synergy between academics and big-time athletics over the long-term:

> the significant takeaway then from Duke is to make sure that if you're going to position athletics as a complement to academics—again, I'll use that hacky term one plus one makes three—you want to make sure that there's credibility within athletics, that they're not always going to be riding in a sidecar. They're not always going to be riding shotgun. So, I set out to do that after the meeting. (J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017).

This structural change as well as the rising salary for the head coach of the men's basketball team was a sticking point for Fong, indicative of the trustees leaning too heavily into Butler's flagship athletic program. Sharpening this divergence in vision was an uncommon unity in the board's thinking. Their desire to push basketball was as resolute as Fong's desire to check its expansion, and both saw their strategy as being in the university's best interests. The friction mounted, until in the fall of 2010 Fong announced that he would assume the presidency at Ursinus College at the end of the academic year. The search for his successor would heat up just as Butler was, improbably, bottling lightning once more.

Managing Risk and Leveraging Basketball in the Danko Presidency

Butler's second consecutive Final Four run served as a backdrop to the search for the university's 21st president. In a number of ways, the second run was more surprising than the first. Gordon Hayward had departed for the NBA, and the team struggled out of the gates. A loss to Youngstown State in early February gave them a three-game losing streak in the Horizon League and dropped their overall record to 14-9. From there, they did not lose again until the national championship game against Connecticut, reeling off 14 straight wins. During the Sweet

Sixteen, the presidential search committee was stuck in the Hilton at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago; Butler had drawn an eight-seed in the tournament, meaning a second round game against a one-seed, and the committee had not expected the team to advance out of the opening weekend. While the Butler basketball contingent headed south to New Orleans, members of the search committee were left in Chicago, kicking themselves for the scheduling mishap and scrambling to bars after interviews to catch the games (J. Hargrove, personal communication, July 18, 2017).

Jim Danko remembered interviewing during the madness, and ideas for how to leverage the basketball team's unprecedented success were a significant topic of conversation. John Dunn, still serving as a trustee at the time, confirmed this memory: the trustees felt the university had not taken full advantage of the opportunity, so "that was one of the big questions for any candidate." In fact, along with fundraising capacity and a vision for Butler's growth, the ability to leverage basketball stood as one of the three main qualities members of the search committee hoped to see in the new president (J. Dunn, personal communication, July 25, 2017). In this regard, Danko had an advantage. At the time he was dean of the School of Business at Villanova University, a position he had assumed in 2005, 20 years after Villanova's basketball team won a national championship by playing what *Sports Illustrated* journalist Tim Layden (2015) called "the perfect game" to upset Georgetown. In 2004, Layden wrote a retrospective on the game that opened with the line "This game never lets go," a reality that Danko had experienced during his time at Villanova. More than 25 years later, the buzz from that single game still permeated the campus, giving Danko some historical familiarity with the phenomenon then occurring at Butler:

> It was still *very* important at Villanova. In fact, that was a pretty important point when I presented my case to become president [at Butler]. When I met with the board with this

> run going on and having had it, I was able to reference [how] Villanova went through this in 1985. They still talk about it, but…I don't think that in the '85 forward era to any great extent did they leverage that. So my point to the Butler trustees is, you've got to move aggressively at this point in time when you have it…as I presented to the board, I said, "You've got to really be very intentional and you've got to kind of grab that lightning in a bottle moment, and how you leverage that is going to be really critical."
>
> (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017).

Danko posited that the difference lay in the time period: in 1985, universities were not cognizant of "the name recognition, branding, and admissions play" presented by high-profile athletic success. This strategy constituted a new "way of thinking" for modern universities operating in a more market-driven and corporate-minded climate (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017). The environment changed, and whether to survive or thrive, whether at the vanguard or in the middle of the pack, universities adapted their practices accordingly.

In this regard, a final point of context merits discussion before analyzing the specific ways in which Butler capitalized upon the Final Four runs across the university and sustained this momentum across time. In discussing the differences between Villanova in 1985 and Butler in 2011, Jim Danko tuned my attention to a convergence of three historical trends during the 1980s that I had yet to consider in relation to one another. First, rankings systems began to proliferate higher education. Second, in part to play the rankings game, schools developed the marketing and branding arms of their operations. Third, the NCAA tournament expanded from 32 teams in 1975 to 64 teams in 1985 just as ESPN roared to life and rewrote the market for televised college sporting events, thereby creating fertile ground and ample visibility for the Cinderella story to flourish in men's basketball.

Danko spoke from years of direct experience with the first two trends, which he watched play out in holding posts at business schools around the country, from the University of Michigan to the University of Washington to Dartmouth College. The movement began with *BusinessWeek*'s inaugural set of rankings and spread from there: "I think business schools started to pave the way around marketing and branding because they were really starting to manage business school rankings that started by *BusinessWeek* in 1988, whereas universities lagged." Fast-forward, and higher education institutions of all shapes and sizes have become "marketing machines," adopting a number of the practices that first appeared on the business school landscape years ago. When a Cinderella waltzes across the stage today, or even when a more recognizable program like Villanova wins a national championship, as it did in 2016, large marketing and communications teams back on campus are "cranked up and pushing that information out there, and able to take better leverage of it" (J. Danko, personal communication, October 19, 2017). In this way, there is indeed a new language and methodology to capitalizing upon athletic success. At bottom though, this new-look strategy chases the same goal that institutions have long envisioned when investing in big-time athletics: building and retaining communities of support around the university.

At Butler, Bobby Fong's careful solidification of the economic base and nourishment of the academic program served as fuel for another period of acceleration under Jim Danko. When Danko assumed the presidency in 2011 with a fresh bottle of lightning in the university's stores after the second Final Four run, he knew, as he told the trustees, "You've got to move aggressively at this point in time when you have it." To this day, Butler continues to benefit from that approach. As Danko reflected in the present day, "I think my point to the trustees has paid

off when I was being hired. It was like, 'You've either got to go big or go home'" (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017).

Building a National Profile

From their inception into the modern day, big-time intercollegiate athletics might best be understood as the American university's attempt to negotiate community: their value originated in the on-campus community with the student body, spread like wildfire into the alumni and booster population, and then attracted local supporters within the city and, for flagship institutions, across the state. Over time, as supporters scattered across the country and games broadcast on radio and then television enabled them to remain connected to their university of choice, teams began to acquire national followings or in the very least nationwide recognition for their institution. Done well, athletics can bridge divides between the university and its communities of interest, smoothing the ivory tower's public relations problems and raising human capital.

For decades, Butler stalled at the local level: in a basketball-crazy state, Indiana University was king while Purdue and Notre Dame crowded the court, leaving little room beyond Indianapolis for the Bulldogs. The push for regional acclaim exploded on a national scale with the Final Fours, matching a concurrent effort "to climb toward recognition as one of the nation's best comprehensive master's institutions" (Dare to Make a Difference, 2009, p. 11). Three years after the first Final Four appearance, Butler's move to the Big East conference solidified many of these efforts while simultaneously opening a number of additional doors. Through the growth of both the athletic program and the institution over the past decade, Butler has extended its reach into new communities and tightened its hold on existing ones. By

considering two distinct circles of community, the significance of the basketball program in the university's drive to bolster its national profile and engage its support base becomes apparent.

The General Public

Developing name recognition. In the 2010 NCAA tournament, Butler drew a 5-seed in the West Regional, sending them to San Jose, CA, for the first and second rounds. David Woods (2012) recalled the scene where, far from home, the team and its support base set up shop: "The Fairmont lobby was transformed into an informal Butler headquarters, where everyone gathered to discuss the tournament and Bay Area sightseeing. Other guests repeatedly asked about Butler, what it was, where it was, and why so many people were wearing Butler gear. Butler was as foreign to them as Burundi" (p. 126). Two and a half weeks later, however, the voice of the President of the United States echoed off the walls of Hinkle Fieldhouse: Barack Obama was on the speakerphone in Brad Stevens's office, the team huddled around to receive his congratulations despite finishing as the tournament's runner-up. In a flash, Butler had become a household name across the nation.

As media bum-rushed Butler looking for stories on what the Cinderella run meant to the university, Marc Allan connected numerous news outlets to Butler personnel. One of his favorite targets on campus was Tom Weede, then vice president for enrollment management. Weede coined a go-to line that resonated at the time and still surfaced seven years later in a couple of my own interviews. "One hundred percent of students," Weede would say, "don't apply to a school they've never heard of" (M. Allan, personal communication, April 26, 2017). Weede's adage applies well beyond admissions and cuts right to the heart of the leading benefit that Butler accrued in the wake of its first Final Four run: name recognition. This is the password that unlocks access to any constituency of interest within the general public.

Geoff Bannister had recognized this problem when he took office. As noted earlier, the Nelson Report of 1984 contended that Butler had an image problem: despite the robustness of its academic offerings, only the dance and pharmacy programs garnered attention outside of the local area. Even locally, Butler was something of a forgotten institution. Joe Kirsch, a 1964 alum, recalled the usual song and dance: "The story on Butler was you say, 'I'm going to Butler,' and people would say, 'Oh yes, that's in Indianapolis, isn't it? That's a really good school.' Then their minds would go someplace else…They'd kind of forget it and move on" (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Such was the dynamic driving Bannister's assertion in strategic planning documents from 1994 that "We must not only be very good, we must be known to be very good" (Planning Committee for the Strategic Planning Process, 1994, p. 3). Men's basketball represented a means to this end, its absence from the strategic plan belying the fact that Bannister felt athletic success was a much easier path to widespread visibility than academic excellence (B. Arick, personal communication, April 25, 2017).

The seeds of Butler's name recognition were planted in 2006-07, when the men's basketball team started the season with surprise victories over Notre Dame, Indiana, Tennessee, and Gonzaga to win the preseason NIT tournament—with the latter two games played at Madison Square Garden—and finished with a Sweet Sixteen run (Angevine, 2015; T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017). However, they bloomed in full with the Final Four run. Ten years after Bannister's term concluded, Butler saw firsthand the wisdom in his plan for acquiring visibility through athletic success:

> It's easily measurable. You know who won and who lost. Who has the best chemistry professor? We don't know. But who has the best basketball team? We can measure that.

> My favorite story from this is when the day after we lost to Duke, we had two of our chemistry professors get the first patent in the university's history. That got almost no attention. I mean, tiny little story. I don't think any TV mentioned it or anything like that. It just led to me saying, "We could cure cancer and it would be a three-day story, but the basketball goes on forever." That's the ultimate benefit to our university…people who've never heard of Butler now start looking at this school and, hopefully, we have the goods to show them we've got some other things here. (M. Allan, personal communication, April 26, 2017)

To grab the attention of the general public, a different language is necessary. As Allan memorably put it, "Nobody's trading baseball cards for chemistry professors…basketball is our ticket" (M. Allan, personal communication, April 26, 2017).

The Butler community teems with stories of this name recognition, with most following the same pattern: some token of Butler identification—a shirt, a logo, a passing reference in conversation—that formerly went unnoticed suddenly draws knowing attention. Taken together, these stories reveal the variety of audiences with whom Butler acquired cachet: TV writers in California, old friends from college in the East, co-workers down in Nashville, Greek lawyers on train rides to Athens, colleagues at professional conferences across the country, high schoolers from the West Coast later sitting in Butler classrooms, future employers of Butler students, and future employees of Butler University (M. Allan, personal communication, April 26, 2017; J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017; K. Morris, personal communication, November 15, 2017; Neville, 2010; B. Weatherly, personal communication, October 18, 2017; Woods, 2012).

The latter two in particular begin to indicate the value of broader name recognition. Professor of Finance Steven Dolvin mentioned how he had heard from quite a few employers that Butler's name recognition was now keeping alumni's résumés from being tossed without a second glance during job applications. He referenced one former student who had just landed a position at Google and speculated that, ten years ago, the student's résumé might not have received the attention it did in the present day (S. Dolvin, personal communication, April 26, 2017). Likewise, Dolvin himself was one of several current employees at Butler whose first awareness of the university resulted directly from the basketball team's postseason runs. Dolvin joined the university in 2004, on the heels of Butler's breakthrough into the Sweet Sixteen one year earlier. Lori Greene was a more recent convert herself: when we spoke, she was in her second year on the job as vice president of enrollment management. Greene recalled first learning of Butler the same way that many others did:

> Even though I'm a basketball fan, the first time I knew of their presence was when they were playing Duke in the final game. I just remember that. I remember where I was sitting in my home on my couch and staying up and being like, "Okay, can they pull this off?" I don't have much of a reference prior to that. (L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

Though each story represents only a single data point, together they begin to add up, painting a picture of coast-to-coast awareness and opportunities to expand the university's community across multiple lines.

The move to the Big East in 2013 further enhanced Butler's name recognition, particularly on the East Coast. When I met with Graham Honaker, a senior development officer at Butler, he and ten students had just returned to campus after spending the previous week in

New York City rubbing elbows with several hedge fund firms. The university has been able to develop corporate partners in the city who "know Butler a lot more—Butler's in the Big East, [so] we're coming there every year for the Big East tournament." As Honaker further noted, Butler's name recognition has increased even though the team has yet to win a game in the Big East tournament. Through his travels, Honaker also discovered the importance of Butler's name recognition to alumni in Big East cities: "When you go to D.C., when you go to New York, the alums are really proud because when they first moved there 25 years ago, nobody knew about their alma mater. Now everybody knows about their alma mater" (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017).

The ripples of name recognition from the Final Four runs continue into the present day, particularly in the sporting world. By laying claim to the Cinderella story with such dramatic force, Butler cemented its status in NCAA tournament lore. "The thing is, we'll always be talked about," said Allan. He continued:

> It goes away but it doesn't completely go away. You're always in the back of their minds. You're talking about how many games there are in the tournament. It's 60-something games. They have to have something to talk about during those two hours, and they're going to talk about us occasionally. (M. Allan, personal communication, April 26, 2017)

The connection with the Cinderella story extends beyond basketball, as John Dunn recalled that Coastal Carolina was referred to as "the Butler of baseball" during its stunning run to a College Baseball World Series in 2016 (J. Dunn, personal communication, July 25). Beyond the Cinderella narrative, those Final Four teams also sent two players and one coach into the NBA. Butler remains glued their names. "Every time Gordon [Hayward] is mentioned, he's a Butler guy." Allan observed, "Shelvin [Mack], the same thing. And Brad [Stevens] of course, too. Two

players and the coach of the most successful franchise in the NBA. It's pretty good" (M. Allan, personal communication, April 26, 2017).

Three months after our conversation, Allan's words proved especially prescient. Splashed across the front page of ESPN.com on July 19, 2017, was a seven-year-old picture of Stevens and Hayward from their Butler days. In a story that dominated the sports news cycle, Hayward had signed as a free agent with the Boston Celtics. On ESPN, the headline read as follows: "Celtics called on their ultimate weapon to land Gordon Hayward: Boston pulled out all the stops during its pursuit of Hayward. In the end, it came down to master recruiter Brad Stevens and the power of the Butler Bulldogs connection" (ESPN.com home page, 2017).

Marketing the university. Almost as soon as I landed on Butler's campus for the very first time, I was on the hunt for a bathroom. I found one on the bottom floor of the student union building in an area that seemed to receive at best a moderate amount of foot traffic. I pushed through the door to find a clean but somewhat dated facility, penciled graffiti here and there on the walls, gray tile floors, navy tile walls, and speckled blue linoleum countertops with a pair of faucets, stripped of their original sheen and browning. In other words, it looked like most every other bathroom I've seen at an educational institution of any level. Except for the dispensers. The casings around the soap and paper towel supplies were bright blue unblemished plastic, each with a nameplate that read "Butler University" in sharp white letters and a font that already felt familiar from all the time I had spent on the university's website before my trip. The dispensers screamed "new." And they screamed "branded." In that moment, I wondered if I had stumbled upon the first sign of tension at Butler, a costly and visible effort to project an artificial image about a place in which truth-seeking is paramount and resources flow unevenly.

My hunch never panned out. I heard the words "real," "authentic," and "sincere" used to describe the community across numerous interviews and again in casual chatter after I had stopped recording. Without question, marketing and branding efforts have surged at Butler in the years after the Final Fours; increased name recognition is of little value if unattached to lengthier messaging about the place behind the name. Yet for decades, members of Butler's community did the hard work first: they created something of consistent value. When the spotlight swung toward their campus, in one sense they were ready, because they were able to share stories about the university that packed the punch of authenticity. In another sense, marketing represented the single greatest leverage point presented by the Cinderella story and, simultaneously, one of the university's most under-developed operations (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017). When this function became a strategic priority upon Jim Danko's arrival, the trick was taking full advantage of the opportunity while maintaining the authenticity that had long been one of the community's most quietly marketable assets.

"Strategic Plan 2005" (1994-2000) identified the need for a more coordinated and robust marketing effort during Geoff Bannister's presidency while also affirming the idea that Butler's nagging problem was an issue of visibility rather than quality:

> While Butler has relied upon "word-of-mouth" and "walk-on" methods of recruitment, friend-raising and fund-raising for many decades, the future will require a clear and structured institution-wide approach to persuading critical constituencies of the worth of the institution. Butler needs to make every effort to ensure that its reputation reflects its quality. (Planning Committee for the Strategic Planning Process, 1994, p. 15)

To that end, the plan prescribed the development of a university-wide strategy for communicating Butler's quality to a wider audience. Among the components of this program

were a comprehensive marketing plan, the projection of a consistent image for the university, upgrading the quarterly alumni periodical to a magazine format, and increasing exposure in regional and national media. As evidenced in the "Dare to Make a Difference" strategic plan (2009-2014), these concerns persisted some 15 years later, even as the university sought to establish itself on a national level. Under the plan's ninth and final priority to "increase Butler's national profile," the implementation of a coordinated marketing communications plan took precedence, alongside a desire to launch public relations and advertising initiatives.

Such was the context for the university in the spring of 2010, when the men's basketball team swept into the Final Four—which just so happened to be in Indianapolis. The campus pulsed with near-constant activity from the moment the Bulldogs earned their Final Four berth on Saturday, March 27, to the following Monday, April 5, when they played Duke downtown in the season's final game. Woods (2012) recounts the madness at its epicenter in the college bookstore:

> The workforce [increased] from 8 to 50, with reinforcements coming from Illinois, Ohio, and Kentucky. Employees worked 14 to 19 hours a day to keep up with the demand for T-shirts and hats. The store welcomed a shipment of 700 Nike hats on Monday, and sold all 700 that day. Online sales were so brisk—including requests from Canada, Europe, and U.S. military bases worldwide—that the bookstore's website temporarily shut down when orders hit 2,000 a day. So many items went online that sellouts occurred before they could be shipped to stores. T-shirts were wheeled in on utility racks carrying about 400 per rack, still warm off the press. The store went through three to five racks a day…Over nine days, the bookstore sold 40,961 more items than in the same time period

> the year before, representing an astounding increase of 5,364 percent and more than $1 million in sales. (p. 169)

Amid the foot traffic, Butler caught even more ears and eyeballs through local and national media coverage. The Bulldogs graced the front page of *USA Today* that Monday, the same day that Brad Stevens appeared on four national radio broadcasts. The next day Stevens was featured on three ESPN programs and two CBS programs. Over the course of the week, the team's radio announcer gave 50 radio interviews with outlets across the entire country. Butler's live bulldog mascot Blue II received coverage with the CBS Early Show, *Sports Illustrated*, the Associated Press, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, among numerous other shows and publications (Woods, 2012).

Communications staff within the athletic department could not keep up with all of the media requests, so others from the university level were pulled into help. Marc Allan highlighted how staff members at Butler never imagined this sort of attention:

> When Brad Stevens was hired in 2007…I introduced myself. I said, "I work in media relations. The only time that you'll ever see me is if something really bad happens." He said, "Let's hope we never see each other." [In] 2010, we're in the Final Four and I have to go over to Hinkle and there's a lot of media there and all. I reminded Brad of this and I said, "I told you, you'd never see me unless things go wrong. I didn't know they could go this right." That was my introduction to basketball. I was a fan but I never had any idea that this could happen. (M. Allan, personal communication, April 26, 2017)

Given the volume of inquiries, Allan recalled that staff members were "just fulfilling requests" rather than trying to push any kind of narrative about the university. There was no time to coordinate efforts, drive particular stories, or issue talking points. Though the demand tapered

some when the Bulldogs again made the Final Four the following year, this time in Houston, the communications team still did not have a playbook. “Those years we didn’t have any plan in place,” Allan said, “Who knew?” (M. Allan, personal communication, April 26, 2017).

After the first Final Four, the athletic department commissioned two media groups to assess the value of the publicity earned through print, television, and online coverage of the tournament run. According to a press release from April 2011 on the athletic department’s website, the total value was north of $639 million, with more than $450 million coming through online publicity and $100 million from CBS’s broadcast of the national championship game against Duke. A formal update on the university’s progress toward its strategic plan goals from around the same time lists slightly different numbers, pegging the overall value at $447 million based on a valuation of online coverage at $337 million for over 51,000 articles. Likewise, the two documents couch website traffic in different terms, with the press release reporting 68,192 hits and the strategic plan update citing an increase of 291% in visits to the Butler website (“Butler reaps publicity value,” 2011; “Strategic plan update,” 2011). As these reports were released, the athletic department again contracted with Borshoff Media to provide a follow-up study assessing the effects of the second Final Four run. When the dust settled, the final valuation for back-to-back Cinderella stories was somewhere north of $1 billion. Again, the number varied depending on the source: a *Washington Post* article pegged it at around $1 billion, as did David Woods in his book, while a column on ESPN.com cited $1.2 billion (Dosh, 2012; Johnson, 2013; Woods, 2012). When we spoke, Barry Collier put the number in the middle, at $1.1 billion (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017).

Across numerous interviews, people within the Butler community acknowledged that while the billion-dollar figure made for a splashy headline, the calculation represented the best

estimate of a value that is inherently difficult to measure, perhaps accounting for the difference in numbers between even internal publications. Yet, despite the fuzziness of the exercise, it seems safe to conclude that the volume of earned media for the university was enormous. Just as important and far more concrete than the dollar figure were the *kinds* of stories broadcast alongside the Butler name, as Collier emphasized:

> Those are soft numbers somewhat, but it was a big deal. It wasn't just that another team made the final game. It was this Cinderella, who's Butler, and going to class, and being this physical team and having this 14-year-old coach the team, and all this stuff that was tied together with that. (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

The stories told during the first Final Four, when the glare of the spotlight was at its most intense and decision-makers at Butler had little time or capacity to manage the publicity, formed an authentic narrative base for the university's public image that resonated both inside and outside the campus boundaries.

In this regard, Bobby Fong served as a model spokesperson for the university. His humility matched Butler's profile, and he was "so smart and so articulate" in always bending the attention back toward the university's academic mission and quality (J. Dunn, personal communication, July 25, personal communication). Across multiple platforms Fong stressed that Butler was and would continue to be "a university with a basketball team, rather than the other way around" (Fong, 2010a, 2010b). The best illustration of this idea, and the story from that time period that still elicits the most pride from the Butler community, was that the players—as many as eight according to Woods—attended class the morning of the national championship game (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017; K. Morris, personal communication, November 15, 2017; Woods, 2012). Another popular story started with Stevens walking into the locker

room to the sound of an argument and ended with him discovering two players scribbling on the whiteboard, debating a problem from that morning's physics exam (Neville, 2011).

When these accounts appeared in the media, they resonated with campus insiders because of their authenticity. "The stories were true. That was the thing. This was not made up. It wasn't hype," recalled Allan. "I saw Gordon Hayward leaving his math class and getting in a car and going downtown. I think it was 10:50 in the morning the day of the game" (M. Allan, personal communication, April 26, 2017). Likewise, John Hargrove remembered firsthand the locker room physics session: "It was not apocryphal," he stressed. "I saw it" (J. Hargrove, personal communication, July 18, 2017). Likewise, Neville's (2011) book is littered with similar accounts from Butler professors: one player was offered a short extension on a paper that was due around the time of the Sweet Sixteen, and he turned it in early from a locker room in Salt Lake City; another player was knee-deep in studying algorithms that entire spring semester. It was well-known that the team routinely practiced in the morning to avoid conflicts with classes and that players did not miss class, even in the summer. Thus when outsiders looked in, they found the type of behavior that had been going on all along. The diversity of majors represented on the team, from engineering to economics to education, surprised a member of the Drake Group, an organization of scholars formed to advocate for academic integrity in intercollegiate athletics (Woods, 2012). When CNN phoned Bobby Fong to inform him that their reporters were coming to campus to investigate the players' classroom attendance, Fong welcomed them, saying the university had nothing to hide (Neville, 2011).

In this way, the attention from the Final Four runs enabled the university to finally address its difficulty in making known its academic quality on both a regional and national level.

The Winter 2010 progress report on the strategic plan noted how these gains in visibility contributed to the larger goal of increasing Butler's academic profile nationally:

> Our ongoing efforts to burnish our academic reputation, however, were given enduring lift by the coverage of the men's basketball team during the Final Four. Beyond the fact that Butler was the only school in the nation that could claim two men's basketball Academic All-Americans, the happy circumstance of the Tournament being held in Indianapolis made it possible for the players to go to classes, even on the morning of the Championship Game. Butler has become a byword for academic seriousness as well as athletic excellence. We will continue to publicize evidence of our educational outcomes, but the events of this year have combined to reward our efforts with unprecedented opportunities for renown. ("Strategic plan quarterly update," 2010, p. 20)

The goal was judged "substantially completed," making it only the second of the strategic plan's 38 goals to receive this designation just one year into the plan. At the same time a corresponding goal to bolster public relations and advertising initiatives was deemed still "in process," speaking to the persistent need, even after the first Final Four, for the development and coordination of the university's marketing arm ("Strategic plan quarterly update," 2010).

When Jim Danko assumed the presidency in the summer after the second Final Four run, marketing and branding rocketed to the top of Butler's institutional priorities. In little time, the university began to build a strategy around the narrative substance that had long existed on campus. Butler hired a vice president for marketing and elevated the position into a direct report to the president, centralizing the work of the office in the process. Simultaneously, Danko pushed for a unified marketing and branding strategy across the entire university. "There's been a really intentional move," Danko said of this effort, and numerous actors across the institution

could, some six years later, feel its effect in their everyday work (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017; J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017; L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017; M. Kaltenmark, personal communication, April 25, 2017; J. Kirsch, April 24, 2017). The deliberate leveraging of the basketball team's success can be seen in this regard through two distinct strategies, both of which gained traction during Bobby Fong's presidency and then took off with Danko's arrival.

The first strategy was the development of "the Butler Way" as a central concept in the university's brand. Traces of this effort dot the end of Bobby Fong's term in office. In fact, the strategic plan goal for a coordinated marketing communications plan was actually built around the concept:

> "The Butler Way" has gained currency with the external news media which, in contexts increasingly beyond athletics, uses it to convey a sense of programmatic excellence and institutional integrity. In this respect, "The Butler Way" has become an organic part of the University's identity and values. We now have an opportunity to shape its connotations. (Dare to Make a Difference, 2009, p. 17)

The slogan also played well with alumni, as evidenced by the creation of a DVD presentation entitled "The Butler Way—Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" designed to engage graduates in the ButlerRising capital campaign ("ButlerRising progress report," 2008).

Internally, however, the adoption of the Butler Way as a university-wide mantra met resistance from the faculty. Opposition was stiff enough that when the concept began to take root outside of athletics, Butler's faculty senate voted against the use of the term in any academic context. Kate Morris, who joined the psychology faculty at Butler in 1996 and became provost in 2012, suggested that any language of "family" or "team" can complicate matters with the faculty,

given that those words do not adequately describe their work. However, she confirmed the idea that I had heard from several others around campus: that faculty opposition to the Butler Way "was largely due to the fact that it had come out of athletics and we are an academic institution and there is always going to be that tension" (K. Morris, personal communication, November 15, 2017).

Jim Danko encountered lingering whiffs of this sentiment when he arrived at Butler in 2012, so "there was a little bit of tiptoeing around the Butler Way and how that might expand." Yet, he also realized that the concept felt "sticky" across multiple segments of the university community, so it became an intentional leverage point in the branding effort (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Though pockets of faculty still have not warmed to the idea, Morris senses that, in the present day, resistance to the concept has lessened (K. Morris, personal communication, November 15, 2017).

When the university finally rolled out its unified brand strategy in 2014-15, the announcement in *Butler Magazine* came by way of a bold headline in two colors from the brand's primary palette—Butler blue and bright blue—and a mixed typeface of Liberator and Sackers Square Gothic, two of the brand's five approved fonts (Butler University, 2016 Style Guide). It read: "a great brand is a perfect vehicle for telling stories, and Butler University has a truly remarkable story" ("Telling the Butler story," 2015, p. 18). According to the brand message map on the university's website, the key messaging and the brand promise carried by these stories revolve around a single concept: "The right outcomes. The right way." What exactly is the right way and what, for that matter, is the institution's role in illuminating it? The answer is elaborated under the "key messaging" section of the brand map: "The University's humble-yet-determined spirit rubs off, leading our graduates to do things the right way—*the Butler Way*"

("Brand message map," 2017, para. 6). Even though it remains a bit of a contested expression when applied to the full breadth of the university's work, the Butler Way emerged in athletics and, for many within the community, became an apt description of the distinguishing features of a Butler education. Yet, despite the slogan's branded power, in the years immediately following the Final Fours another gift from athletics superseded the Butler Way as the university's most effective marketing vehicle. With its live mascot, Butler struck gold.

Similar to Hinkle Fieldhouse, Butler's live English bulldog mascot went dormant somewhere in the 1970s after a long period of "unofficial-official" versions living in fraternity houses or with parents of student-athletes ("Butler Bulldogs," 2017). The official program began in 2000, with a naming contest on campus that resulted in the mascot being dubbed Butler Blue. Michael Kaltenmark, the current director of external relations, was a student then and on staff by 2004, when Butler Blue's owner moved west and took the bulldog with her. In a staff meeting, Kaltenmark pushed to find the dog's successor and volunteered to take care of it:

> It was a handshake agreement and a pat on the back. We didn't even have a memorandum of understanding of how I would take care of the dog. With me, I had a vision in mind. I had UGA and Handsome Dan. It's like "I want to get to that" but we don't play major football and we're not in the Ivy League, so I've got to figure out what it's going to be. I'm like "I think it's going to be basketball. I just need them to win some games and I'll do the rest"…Back in the day, Blue I only came on Fridays. I'm like "I'm bringing this dog to campus every day unless somebody tells me not to." My wife was in grad school. We didn't have any kids. So, it's like, if there's a student event or any event and I think the dog can go, I'm taking the dog. I really worked hard to build up his visibility, his presence, his profile, his persona, the whole deal, so that if the basketball

> team ever went to a Final Four, we'd be ready. It just worked out. (M. Kaltenmark, personal communication, April 25, 2017)

When the first Final Four hit, Kaltenmark took every opportunity "to leverage the dog's personality and persona and presence and everything about him to put attention onto Butler." He and Blue II would rise with the sun to make appearances on the morning news and would not be back to bed until deep in the night, only to wake up the next morning and repeat the same schedule (M. Kaltenmark, personal communication, April 25, 2017). In particular, the dog took off on social media, with Kaltenmark running the Blue II Twitter account. His followers doubled during the first Final Four run, from 900 to 1,800; at the end of the second Final Four run, the total had risen to more than 6,000, with 1,400 additions in the nine days between the time the team reached the semifinal and played in the national championship game. By that point Klout, one of the first companies to attempt to measure social media influence, had recognized Blue II's Twitter feed as one of the country's top ten accounts representing a higher education institution ("ButlerBlue2 tweets," 2011; Woods, 2012). When Blue II passed away in September of 2013 and his Twitter account was retired, he had amassed 12,600 followers and issued 32,000 tweets.

Each Final Four proved critical in elevating the mascot to the focal point of Butler's marketing efforts, though for different reasons. The first Final Four in Blue II's own backyard established his celebrity and solidified Butler's live mascot strategy as a point of distinction. "We're not unique in the sense that we have a live mascot—other schools do," noted Kaltenmark, "but we are sort of unique in the way that we leverage it and the way that we activate our live mascot program. We don't hold much back. We go for it" (M. Kaltenmark, personal communication, April 25, 2017). Here, Kaltenmark referred not just to a willingness to entertain any idea for the use of the dog's time—"I mean, this dog has its own tuxedo," he

grinned—but also an ability to turn every twist of fate into another marketing opportunity. The latter quality was on full display during the team's run to the second Final Four. NCAA rules prohibit live mascots from entering the arena for any game prior to the Final Four round. Despite Blue II's well-behaved celebrity turn the previous year, the NCAA held firm to this policy, a tidbit that David Woods included in an *Indianapolis Star* column prior to Butler's first round game in Washington D.C. Though Kaltenmark had not anticipated this plot line, he sensed an opportunity:

> I sent an email down to the NCAA because I know those guys, one of them I grew up with. I was like "Hey, Woodsy reported on this. I didn't realize but I'm going to run with it. You guys do you, you got a tournament to run. I'm not going to throw you under the bus but I'm going to run with this." I don't think they care. So, I did everything I could not to cast a bad light on the NCAA…but I was going to milk that "Let's get to the Final Four so the dog can go" [storyline] as much as I could. (M. Kaltenmark, personal communication, April 25, 2017)

The hashtag #FreeButlerBlue2 ignited and, as if Butler needed another underdog element to its persona, Blue II's quest to join his team on the arena floor gained momentum throughout the tournament's opening rounds. When the team broke through to the Final Four in Houston, Blue II was the talk of the town, hopping a charter flight, appearing on CBS's Early Show, and even having a martini named in his honor at the city's Intercontinental Hotel (Clarke, 2011).

Amid the publicity, the second Final Four offered another benefit: traveling to Houston provided "good perspective about just what the mascot program was capable of out of our market in Indianapolis." Two years later when Butler moved to the Atlantic-10 conference, opening up several new markets on the Eastern seaboard, Jim Danko approached the marketing

and communications team to see how they might leverage the opportunity. By this point Blue II was mentoring his successor Blue III, popularly known as Trip, so Kaltenmark suggested that the dogs could hit the road. Danko liked the idea, and the first "Big Dawgs Tour" was born (M. Kaltenmark, personal communication, April 25, 2017). Over 18 days, the dogs covered 5,487 miles; visited 11 cities, including major markets like New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C.; and appeared in more than 400 photos on Flickr, frequently in front of well-known landmarks. Local media often picked up the story, and the university found another source of earned media, touting a return on investment of more than $82,000 ("The Big Dawgs Tour," 2013). When Butler moved into the Big East the following year, the dogs were back at it, this time looping St. Louis, Chicago, and Boston into the route. In addition to the dogs' appearances on national television and in print media, the trip's hashtag #BigDawgsTour landed in one million Twitter timelines ("On the road again," 2014). The tour has continued every year since, even as Kaltenmark and others have expanded its purpose beyond marketing to include other university functions, most notably enrollment and recruitment.

Kaltenmark continues to seize every opportunity, no matter how off-kilter: when Trip vomited on the floor of Madison Square Garden before a Big East tournament game in 2015, Kaltenmark plucked a Gatorade towel to clean the mess and then his phone to make something of it. He fired off a tweet; tagged the Garden, the Big East, and Gatorade; and, with media coverage of the incident from outlets like CBS Sports, acquired around 800 new followers by the end of the next day ("Getting social," 2015; Norlander 2015). In this way, Butler has ridden the social media wave on the back of their mascot.

When the new brand officially launched in December of 2014 with admitted students as its first audience, Trip served as ambassador, delivering branded acceptance letters to 37 homes

across seven states ("Personal delivery," 2015). In the university's brand message map, the brand tone includes traits like ambitious, tenacious, and dependable ("Brand message map," 2017). Referencing the brand's tone during our interview, Kaltenmark chuckled and pointed at Trip, who was sitting in the room with us, chewing a plastic water bottle: "It's that guy. He's a living embodiment of it. Both physically, as a specimen, as a bulldog and his character traits, but then how we've crafted his voice on social media." Kaltenmark was quick to point out, however, that the key to the mascot's sustained effectiveness has been the basketball team's sustained success. Without wins, the dog's value becomes limited, and Kaltenmark imagined the whole live mascot program would become more "folksy…a quaint thing we do" if attached to a losing team. To that end, the NCAA tournament remains the promised land: "I tell people all the time that one, make it to the tournament, and then, make it to the second weekend…you're one of sixteen teams being talked about but then we've got the magic bullet laying on the floor right there" (M. Kaltenmark, personal communication, April 25, 2017).

Trip was a bit late to my meeting with Kaltenmark—he was finishing up an appearance that morning at a TedX event on Butler's campus—but I had already seen his likeness and heard of his influence all over campus. The day before—my first on campus—I had followed painted blue paw prints over several crosswalks to get to Robertson Hall for my meeting with Lori Greene, the vice president of enrollment management. Her office is on the second floor. Had I not taken the stairs, I could have used the elevator just to my left, located next to a framed picture of Butler Blue and painted with the bulldog logo covering the entirety of both doors so that when they open, visitors are swallowed whole. Greene was fresh off a meeting regarding communication flows, during which the topic of conversation was the discovery that "every email that's sent from the mascot's point of view has a higher open rate." The strategic response

to this data point was obvious: “we’re like, ‘Scrap the rest of them,’” she said, referring to all non-mascot missives (L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017). The next day I was back in the same building to meet Kaltenmark and get the full story on Trip and his predecessors. As we were parting ways, he handed me a plastic bag and began to stuff it full of Blue II and III paraphernalia: a coloring book, stickers, a 2017 fundraising calendar, decals, patches, a hardback children’s book entitled *Good Boy, Blue*, and a poster that Kaltenmark signed in Trip’s name for my three-year-old son. “The dog’s a marketing machine,” he’d said minutes earlier, “that’s sort of inherently what he’s about.”

Negotiating peers and playing the rankings game. Jim Danko had run a surgical supply business when, in his late-thirties, he decided to return to school. He began taking classes at his undergraduate alma mater, John Carroll University, which was also driving distance from the company, but soon got the urge to explore the possibility of enrolling in a full-time MBA program:

> What was always intriguing [was], “I wonder what it would be like to go to a top ten university.” I was at a book store in Cleveland called Burrows, long since out of business—B-U-R-R-O-W-S—and, son of a gun, up on the shelf was this book, *The Insiders Guide to the Top Business Schools*. (J. Danko, personal communication, October 19, 2017)

As we talked, Danko plucked the book from a shelf in his office and began thumbing through the pages. “There’s the Wharton admissions number,” he said, gesturing to a scribble in the margins. One institution extended him a scholarship but he left the offer on the table because the school was not in the book’s top ten. He ended up at Michigan, where he also secured a job connecting business school students with major companies in the area to complete action learning projects.

In large part on the strength of that program, Michigan scaled the *BusinessWeek* rankings, and Danko himself began scaling the administrative ladder within the business school word, running through posts at three different business schools before landing an associate deanship at Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business and then the deanship at Villanova's School of Business (Allan, 2011b; J. Danko, personal communication, October 19, 2017). At each of these institutions, he witnessed the influence of the rankings: schools wanted either to find a spot on the list or to climb from their current one. This desire drove behaviors both good and bad while also shaping many of the initiatives Danko pursued in his leadership positions (J. Danko, personal communication, October 19, 2017). In this way, since making the decision to return to school Danko can trace the thread of business school rankings across his personal history, first weaving into his own decision as a prospective student and then on through his work as an administrator. When he left Villanova for the presidency at Butler, he traded the business school rankings for a larger, more diverse set, but their influence was no less significant.

At Butler, the specter of the *U.S. News and World Report* (*USNWR*) rankings began to gather during Geoff Bannister's presidency before mushrooming during Bobby Fong's administration. Under the focus area of "Reputation," Bannister's "Strategic Plan 2005" established a goal of ranking consistently "within the top five within Butler's category of Midwest Regional Universities in the annual survey by US News and World Report"; other goals around metrics included in the *USNWR* formula, such as graduation rates, also appear in the plan, but the preceding objective is the only direct reference to the rankings (Planning Committee for the Strategic Planning Process, 1994, p. 15).

Most importantly, the goals and language of the plan reflect a more local ambition common to this period in Butler's history. Elsewhere, the strategic plan pinpoints the university's

mission "to be the leading regional independent comprehensive university for the state of Indiana" (Planning Committee for the Strategic Planning Process, 1994, p. 2). Any wider ambitions were rooted firmly in Butler's local identity, as evidenced by the expressed intention to be "a regional university of national stature," and in fact, the prospect of making a move on the national scene was viewed as a threat to the university's identity: "translating Butler from a regional to a 'national' university would remove Butler from its context, change its service base and character, and blend it into the larger number of national universities whose context is indefinably different" (Planning Committee for the Strategic Planning Process, 1994, p. 4, 24).

By the time Fong launched the "Dare to Make a Difference" strategic plan in 2009, however, this regional focus had fused with national aspirations. On three separate occasions, the plan proclaims a desire to achieve recognition as one of the nation's "top ten," "best," or "top" comprehensive master's universities. In each instance, this larger goal is billed as the payoff to a different ancillary goal, whether boosting retention and graduation rates, retaining quality faculty and staff, or bolstering the university's physical and technical infrastructure. These references are not isolated instances: elsewhere the plan focuses on establishing Butler's national "reach," "prominence," and "profile." Characteristic of prestige-seeking universities, the shift in level of ambition is clear, as is an increased attention to the *USNWR* rankings. The plan frames the rankings and their associated metrics as a lever in the pursuit of a national reputation:

> *U.S. News & World Report* compiles four-year averages for freshman-to-sophomore retention and six-year graduation rates. Nationally, only eleven of 570-plus master's institutions consistently attain both 90% freshman-to-sophomore retention and a six-year graduation rate of 75%. Our annual freshman-to-sophomore retention rate has been as high as 89%, as compared with the 2001 rate of 81%, and our six-year graduation rate as

> high as 74%, as compared with the 2000 rate of 68%. By 2014, we aspire to *average* a 90% retention rate and a 75% graduation rate. Improving retention and graduation rates entails improving the quality of the educational experience. Thus these rates are shorthand benchmarks for our progress in enabling students to develop and succeed. Consistently reaching these benchmarks would strengthen our claim to become one of the nation's top ten master's comprehensive universities. (Planning Committee for the Strategic Planning Process, 1994, p. 6)

One year later, when the university judged the goal to increase its national academic profile substantially complete, a variety of *USNWR* rankings took center stage as evidence. In rapid succession, the strategic plan update cited Butler's spot on five different rankings:

> Butler University achieved a new level of distinction in the 2009-10 *U.S. News & World Report* tabulation of America's Best Colleges. It placed second among Midwest master's universities, its highest ranking ever. Butler was also recognized as a best financial value among Midwest Master's schools (ranking 8th in that group), as one of 34 colleges and universities nationwide with an outstanding program for study abroad, as one of 77 institutions nationally designated "Top Up-and-Coming Schools" for having "made the most promising and innovative changes in academics, faculty, students, campus or facilities," and one of 80 colleges and universities in the nation identified by experts as having "an unusual commitment to undergraduate teaching." ("Strategic plan quarterly update," 2010, p. 19)

Two sentences later, the update also hails the first appearance of the College of Business in *BusinessWeek*'s top 100 undergraduate business programs, a relatively new set of rankings that,

coincidentally, Danko himself had lobbied for and helped devise during his time at Villanova (J. Danko, personal communication, October 19, 2017; "Strategic plan quarterly update," 2010).

Butler's standing in these various rankings became a point of pride and publicity, as evidenced by their appearance in nearly every issue of *Butler Magazine* from at least 2008 onward. Fong continuously plugged the drive toward a spot in the nation's top ten master's comprehensive universities, framing it as the primary goal in both the ButlerRising capital campaign and the "Dare to Make a Difference" strategic plan ("Butler University dare," 2009; Stephenson, 2009). By the time he left office, Fong had seeded the ground for Butler's continued growth into a nationally recognized university with a combination of rhetoric, strategy, and results. During his tenure, Butler jumped five spots in the *USNWR* ranking of Midwest master's universities, from number seven to number two (Allan, 2011a).

With his understanding of the rankings systems and his emphasis on the marketing and branding operations of the university, Jim Danko has assumed leadership in Butler's pursuit of national clout. "Butler 2020" is the university's current strategic plan, and timelines in *Butler Magazine* and on the university's website depict the road to this vision as beginning in 2011 with the president's announcement of a goal to "position Butler as a national leader in higher education" ("Butler 2020 imagine, 2014; "The road to Butler 2020," 2017). The initiatives contained within the plan "serve as a roadmap to our broader ambition to not only keep pace as a leader among regional universities but to emerge as a national university," the language, whether intentional or not, a clear echo of the two different categories *USNWR* maintains for universities. While the men's basketball team might figure somewhere in the formula for several of the plan's goals, it is central to one of the key initiatives already underway: "expansion of marketing and recruiting efforts to key regional and national markets, including the BIG EAST" ("Butler 2020 a

roadmap," 2017, para. 4). Indeed, the move to the Big East is the only athletics-related mile-marker included in the timeline on the public website that documents progress toward 2020 ("The road to Butler 2020," 2017).

The Final Fours played a large part in opening up this opportunity for Butler, as did Danko's connections and negotiations. Danko recalled an exchange with Villanova's athletic director Vince Nicastro and men's basketball head coach Jay Wright after he had accepted the Butler presidency but had yet to leave Villanova. The fissure between football schools and basketball schools in the original iteration of the Big East was widening, and while at that point a full-blown collapse seemed unlikely, the three discussed the possibility of "a fantasy basketball conference of like-type schools." Danko told me this story in response to a question about competitive advantages for Butler that stemmed from the Final Fours, so his point was much less to describe his role in the university's eventual move to the Big East and much more to indicate that "Butler was now in the conversation" and seen as a "good match" from both an academic and athletic perspective with many of the conference's other members. Danko stayed in touch with his contacts at Villanova; when Butler leapt to the Atlantic 10 in 2012, he even went so far as to disclose to them that Butler was willing to exit their new conference if the Big East ever did splinter. When that very thing happened the following year and the Big East went looking for additional teams, Danko aligned Butler with another appealing candidate in Xavier University:

> I said, "Listen, we're going to lock arms on this thing. We're going to use the same law firm and we're going to go in lockstep: either you take us both or you don't get either." It was a good a negotiating strategy. (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

In this way, Butler traded on the success of the Final Four runs to secure a more lasting resource with its membership in the Big East. Across all of the interviews I conducted, the move to the

Big East was seen as the single most important leveraging of the Cinderella story, described as a win-win and in some cases a more valuable asset than the Final Four runs themselves. The expansion of marketing and recruiting efforts into Big East markets figures prominently into this calculus, but so too does the perceived effect on Butler's stock of prestige.

Of those I interviewed, Danko was the only one to view the synergy between Butler's athletic success and its institutional ambitions in the explicit terms of a prestige hierarchy. He first discussed a set of aspirant peers in Boston College, Villanova, and Wake Forest that offer a mix of liberal arts and professional programs and have transitioned from regional to national universities. Then, he framed his vision for Butler:

> My attitude has been you either drive to that part of the pyramid of these types of universities or you hunker down and you manage by a budget and you compete with DePauw and Wabash. I've never been comfortable in that space. Part of it is this basketball thing. We're playing on a bigger court. We want the university to play on that same court. So being in the Big East now has us in the same conversation with those types of schools, and that's really been the strategy. (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

For better and worse, in the current landscape of higher education the road up the prestige pyramid follows the curve of the *USNWR* rankings. "I could tell you from my own experience the value of those things," Danko said in reference to the rankings. "I could also tell you from my experience that it's driven a lot of inefficiencies in our industry and a lot of costs" (J. Danko, personal communication, October 19, 2017).

These inefficiencies stem from attempts to manipulate the rankings, and the key metric for doing so is "undergraduate academic reputation," which accounts for 22.5% of the current

USNWR ranking formula and is determined through a peer assessment survey of presidents, provosts, and heads of admissions (Morse, Brooks, and Mason, 2017). In this environment name recognition is essential, because it can be flipped into a shiny ranking and then into even greater name recognition among external audiences, in particular prospective students. For many universities, this equation points to increased marketing operations as the costly if questionable solution:

> Awareness becomes a big deal, which is driving a lot of universities into marketing and branding and awareness mailing. My God, when the US News—if I had to fill out that [peer assessment] survey say in October…you could rest assured that for six weeks leading into that, the stack of mail that I'm getting from other universities is like this [*gesturing head-high*]. Is that a good use of money? I could tell you how many of those I just flip into the garbage. (J. Danko, personal communication, October 19, 2017)

Danko readily acknowledged that universities are playing the rankings game, but, he asked, "how could you not?" For this reason, the path up the prestige pyramid is more of a "tightrope." To keep its footing, a university must push on elements of the rankings in ways that align with its identity and existing strengths. "You can't let the emotion of those things take you off your primary mission," Danko concluded (J. Danko, personal communication, October 19, 2017).

In this context, the move to the Big East struck the right balance amid the often competing demands of the industry and the academy. While Danko looked at the conference change through the lens of the rankings, most others spoke in terms of its positive effect on Butler's reputation. At the request of the athletic department, Professor of Finance Steven Dolvin studied the incremental changes in a variety of measures after the Final Four runs, including enrollment, ticket sales, sponsorships, and giving. After plenty of number-crunching, he

ultimately concluded that the Big East was a "more significant move" for the university than the Final Fours, and for a reason much more difficult to quantify:

> You then get attached to other universities and so you get co-reputational effects that cross over. It's not viewed as a fluke necessarily anymore, and so you're considered in a higher tier and that has more than just athletic effects. It has academic effects as well. (S. Dolvin, personal communication, April 26, 2017)

Kate Morris, Butler's provost, echoed Dolvin's conclusion about both the Big East being the ultimate resource and co-reputational effects the dividends:

> I would say probably the biggest direct academic impact would be that it allowed us to get ourselves into the Big East, where the academic quality of our cohort in the conference is just so much higher than what we were in before…Moving to the A-10 was a good step in the right direction, and then moving to the Big East even more so. (K. Morris, personal communication, November 15, 2017)

Numerous others confirmed that the move to the Big East, while ambitious, generated widespread enthusiasm across campus because of the new academic company in which Butler now found itself.

For the time being, the distinction between climbing the prestige hierarchy in the rankings and bolstering the university's academic reputation might be a moot point. Schools that fall into the *USNWR* category of regional universities are always ranked in one of four regions, and Butler has essentially brushed the ceiling of its grouping for a decade, having been ranked second in Midwest Universities for the past nine years (fellow Big East member Creighton has held the top spot for more than a decade). There is not much room left in this segment of the pyramid; to move into the category of national universities and begin climbing again, the

university would have to launch doctoral programs in research fields. More important than terminology is the twin sentiment that Butler's academic stature is surging nationwide but that such growth has not altered its well-established mission or character. In this sense, the university at large and the athletic department share a commitment: striving to succeed at the highest level while not getting too big for their britches. In this way, Butler has built a sturdy bridge on a delicate balance, forming a pathway for members of the general public to become a part of the university community in Indianapolis.

The University Community

Transforming campus. In the quest to convert outsiders into insiders and, subsequently, to keep insiders engaged in the community, universities may have no more effective tool than the campus visit. For the past three decades Butler's presidents have tended to the development of the university's campus. As noted earlier, Geoff Bannister was the pivot point, transforming the grounds at the old Fairview Park from a car lot for commuters to a green space for residents. Through the ButlerRising campaign, Bobby Fong continued the refurbishment with a focus on academic and residential spaces. And in the present day the shape of the campus shifts almost month to month under Jim Danko.

Construction sites seem a fixture at many universities, but the speed with which Butler continues to rise is impressive. When I arrived for my first visit in April of 2017, I pulled my rental car into the lower deck of a new 1,038-space parking garage, opened the year prior with another 15,000 square feet of retail space on its front side. It was early in the morning, but by the time I found my way toward the middle of campus, a symphony of beeping trucks, crunching gravel, and clanging metal already filled the air. Chain-link fences, yellow caution tape, orange cones, and a backhoe littered the West Mall on the back side of Jordan Hall; on the building's

other side, a massive fenced-off area indicated the site of the next big project, which was just set to get underway with a beam-signing ceremony the following week. Through later digging, I discovered the site would soon hold a 647-bed residence hall, to be paired with the 633-bed Fairview House that had opened just the previous semester (Allan, 2017). On the edge of the South Mall a large Butler blue sign politely requested visitors to "Pardon our dust" in neat, brand-sanctioned font with the "Butler 2020" logo beneath it.

When I returned to campus in October, the same soundtrack filled the air but issued from different places altogether. The fences and machinery had vanished from the West Mall, and the once open ground on the front side of Jordan Hall now held a four-story shell for the residence hall, a gray stone façade already beginning to cover the white Tyvek wrap on the structure's far edge. The new dorm felt like old news, replaced by another fresh site in between the East Mall and the library. Fences bordered the new site, covered with Butler blue tarp and lined with branded messages about the value of a Butler education. "Building a brighter future," read one, and behind it cranes hoisted metal grating high above the dirt toward the top of the first concrete pillars in a new building for the School of Business. As the business school readies to vacate its current building, word on the street is that the move will kick off a major renovation and expansion of the neighboring facilities for the university's science programs.

For many members of the Butler community, the changing face of Butler's campus is indeed a point of engagement, symbolic of the good work that has long occurred behind the scenes:

> You definitely feel a sense of pride in all of it. Because Butler was always a great school. It was always a great education. It was always a great school with really great people with really great work happening in the classrooms. None of that's changed. It's just now

> we have the buildings that we should have. (T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017)

Yet, in balance with this enthusiasm is the sober realization that the building boom symbolizes something else as well: as American higher education appears to be on the verge of contraction, tuition-dependent institutions like Butler must fight tooth and nail to attract students, and part of that fight involves responding to the demands of the market. "They say kids came to Butler in spite of the housing," Marc Allan observed,

> Now, they come because of the housing, in addition to everything else. These dorms—my daughter's a sophomore here. She lives in Fairview. She'll tell you how great it is. When she was looking at schools, one of the schools we looked at was Lehigh. Lehigh deliberately shows you their worst dorm, which I always found that really interesting. That was a real turn-off for my daughter. They said, "We don't have luxury housing. We put our money into our classes and our academic space, and all this other stuff." I'm like, "Yeah, good," because how nice your dorm is should not play a huge role in it, but that's what 21st century kids want. We're just giving them what they want. (M. Allan, personal conversation, April 26, 2017)

Managing enrollment. Despite Butler's tuition dependency, Bobby Fong placed a hard ceiling on the growth of the undergraduate student body for most of his tenure. From the time Fong arrived in 2001, the admissions target for the entering class was 915 students each year, allowing the university to maintain a full-time undergraduate FTE around 3,800 since 2003. At the time of the "Dare to Make a Difference" strategic plan in 2009, Butler remained committed to this strategy, even as tuition and student fees accounted for 76% of the university's annual budget the preceding fiscal year. Demographic changes—largely the declining number of high

school graduates nationwide and particularly in the Midwest—led decision-makers to conclude that "it would be sound policy to seek to sustain our present student body size, which will take increased effort, particularly in attracting a larger applicant pool" ("Dare to Make a Difference," 2009, p. 10). In addition to the demographic influence, the reason behind the enrollment cap appears to have been mission-related. One year later, when the stance shifted in part due to a national economic recession, the decision to begin recruiting larger classes was framed in terms of Butler's academic program: "there is a gathering consensus that we can sustain our mission of personalized liberal and professional education even if the full-time undergraduate student enrollment were to rise to 4200" ("Strategic plan quarterly update," 2010, p. 10). To kick-start this change, the university budgeted an additional $325,000 for admissions work in 2010-11 and banked upon the additional resource of the first Final Four to "help us in enlarging the applicant pool" ("Strategic plan quarterly update," 2010, p. 11).

When the search began for Fong's successor, the trustees wanted someone "who could take Butler to the next level," which in large part meant increasing enrollment, visibility, and fundraising (J. Dunn, personal communication, July 25, 2017). Jim Danko fit this bill, in part because of his belief that surviving the gloomy forecast for smaller institutions in the present day demanded pushing on the enrollment lever:

> You could just make a cost-containment play, a real conservative play, but I don't know that we would have gained anything or we would have been able to say, "Hey, we're better off"…What I see is a lot of these smaller universities only getting worse and worse, so in my mind, there really is only one play to achieve what you want to and that's you've got to compete for more and more students. You need to grow the applicant pool. (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

Danko insisted the university could sustain its mission and educational product beyond the 4,200-student threshold set at the end of the Fong era. Accordingly, the "Butler 2020" strategic plan calls for the growth of undergraduate enrollment to 4,700 students by the 2020-21 academic year ("The road to Butler 2020," 2017). While being careful not to overbuild, the university nevertheless contracted with American Campus Communities for the construction and maintenance of its two new dorms, speeding the addition of nearly 1,300 beds to the campus in the span of only a few years (Allan, 2017; J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017). The enrollment picture over the last ten years gives good reason to suspect that Butler will be able to fill these beds and meet the goal set in the current strategic plan.

When I interviewed Lori Greene, Butler's current vice president of enrollment management, in April of 2017, she slid a sheet of paper across the table to me. The paper, available online as part of the university's 2016-17 fact book and reproduced in part in Table 7, showed a ten-year enrollment summary from the fall of 2007 to the fall of 2016.

Table 7. Ten-year Enrollment Summary of First-year Applications, First-year Full-time Enrollment, and Undergraduate Full-time Enrollment

	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015	Fall 2016
FY applications	5,625	5,923	6,246	6,670	9,518	9,682	9,357	10,103	9,948	12,937
FY full-time enrollment	987	934	945	1,049	926	1,101	1,014	969	1,024	1,255
UG full-time enrollment	3,845	3,825	3,897	4,051	4,034	4,173	4,296	4,229	4,211	4,458

One month prior to our meeting, Greene had used these numbers and a bit of additional admissions data to craft a presentation for the board of trustees. It was March, and basketball was on the brain:

> I wanted to share with them what I was seeing. I said, "Here's some quick facts reflecting on the NCAA first [championship] game tournament appearance from 2010 and then joining the Big East from July of 2013. We had seen a 107% increase in first-year applications from the fall of 2009 to the fall of 2016. It's moving from approximately 6,200 applications to 12,900. That's a big jump. When we look at the full-time undergraduate enrollment from 2009 to fall '16, a 14% increase, so again another jump. When we look at just first-year applications since joining the Big East, that would have been fall '14 to fall '16, [a] 38% increase. Then the first-year applications that I had from fall '14 to our current counts at that time, because of the Big East we were seeing a huge increase in some of those states: Wisconsin, New York, all of those areas. So, we talk about that Big East hit, I pulled all of those states in those markets and…that's where we had a 32% increase. (L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

As Greene's comment shows, decision-makers at the university are still trying to understand the full payoffs of the Final Fours and the Big East move on enrollment, but to a person, those I interviewed shared a belief that Butler had experienced some measure of both the Flutie effect and the halo effect in this area.

The increase in applications certainly jumps off the page. Associate Director of Admission Chris Potts, who graduated from Butler in 2003 and has worked in the enrollment office since, suggested that given the timing of the admissions cycle, one would expect to see evidence of the Flutie effect at least one and more likely two years out from the event in question (C. Potts, personal communication, November 10, 2017). Butler's trend line fits this notion, with a 42% increase in first-year applications one admissions cycle removed from the first Final Four.

The surge took root, with periodic jolts in subsequent years that peaked again with a record-high 15,000 applications during the fall 2017 cycle (Danko, 2017).

In studying the effects of the Final Four runs across the university, Steven Dolvin suggested that the incremental value of the increase in applications, not to mention all of the earned media, hit a ceiling pretty quickly given that the university could only accommodate small increases to the size of the student body in the years immediately afterward. He did, however, find more of an effect on the composition of the student body (S. Dolvin, personal communication, April 26, 2017). Butler began to draw students from a broader region, and in the fall of 2011 the university enrolled the first incoming class with an out-of-state majority in its history (Woods, 2012). This trend too has persisted into the present day, with 56% of the fall 2016 cohort hailing from outside of Indiana ("Residence of full-time undergraduates," 2016). Dolvin further speculated that different colleges likely received more of the enrollment windfall than others, if only because athletic success might have a greater appeal to students inclined toward certain majors. He spoke solely from his experience in the School of Business, where the "perfect storm" arose: the school's steady climb in national rankings systems dovetailed with the increased visibility from the Final Four to nearly double the number of students in the business school in less than a decade (S. Dolvin, personal communication, April 26, 2017).

The bulk of the evidence suggests that the situation in the School of Business parallels that of the larger university, with the Final Fours serving at most as an accelerant. As Potts suggested, enrollment at Butler was "on an upswing for sure," perhaps owing in part to Sweet Sixteen appearances in 2003 and 2007, but as he continued, "I don't know if we would have ever gotten to where we are now, or at least in the timeframe that we did, without those two back-to-back Final Four runs" (C. Potts, personal communication, November 10, 2017). Similar to

Boston College in the 1980s, where Doug Flutie's famous Hail Mary pass only "cemented" enrollment gains after a decade's worth of other successful admissions strategies (McDonald, 2003, para. 7), the Final Fours accelerated trends that began to surface in the final years of Bobby Fong's presidency (B. Arick, personal communication, April 25, 2017; S. Dolvin, personal communication, April 26, 2017; C. Potts, personal communication, November 10, 2017).

In the fall of 2010, Butler matriculated the largest first-year class in its history, before the first Final Four run could exert any substantive influence on the numbers; at that point applications were up nearly 40% from 2004 after a fairly steady increase over the preceding six years. Subsequent to the Final Fours, Butler brought in two more record-breaking classes in the fall of 2012 and 2016, and applications continued to climb. Likewise, the academic profile of the incoming class held steady during Fong's presidency and continued to do so after the Final Fours: over the 16 years for which IPEDS data are available, running from the first year of Bobby Fong's presidency in 2001-02 through 2016-17, ACT scores in the 75th percentile ranged from 28 to 30, SAT math scores at the 75th percentile from 630 to 650, and SAT reading scores at the 75th percentile from 620 to 630. According to issues of *Butler Magazine*, the average high school GPA of the incoming class was 3.74 in the fall of 2009, 3.8 in the fall of 2012, and 3.8 in the fall of 2016. Despite the difficulty of documenting the Flutie effect, data both quantitative and qualitative at Butler indicate that perhaps it lurks in the rising number of applications and matriculates, as well as in the shifting balance between in-state and out-of-state students, while giving little juice to the academic profile of incoming classes.

Regarding the halo effect, those in the Butler community agreed that the glow of the Final Four successes, at least from an enrollment perspective, had already petered by the time I

arrived on campus some six years after the second run. In her experience, Lori Greene had only encountered “a handful” of prospective students in recent years with any substantive awareness of the Final Four teams; most were around ten years old at the time and had little memory of the Cinderella story (L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Similarly, Joe Kirsch could not recall any conversations about the Final Fours from admissions events he had attended in recent years (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Though traces of its direct influence remain, whether in parents’ memories or in the occasional student who learned of Butler through the tournament runs, the halo fades almost as quickly as it arrives for those working in admissions. Once again, in this regard the move to Big East that was enabled by the Final Fours now holds more promise as a lasting point of leverage.

Most significantly, the conference change opened new markets for recruitment, particularly along the East Coast. For years the university employed a regional representative in the Chicago area, often working the markets associated with the Horizon League, but Butler had “tapped out everything that we could as far as exposure and interest” in the region (C. Potts, personal communication, November 10, 2017). When Butler athletics moved into the Atlantic 10 and then the Big East, the university hired another regional position based in the Washington, D.C. area. As multiple individuals noted, the addition of a permanent staff member on the East Coast has been a “big boon” for Butler’s recruitment efforts in and around the nation’s capital (C. Potts, personal communication, November 10, 2017).

Into this fertile ground also waddled the university’s rainmaker. Though the early Big Dawgs tours focused on using the live mascot for marketing purposes, soon Trip’s energies were redirected toward enrollment and recruitment. In the spring of 2015, the bulldog delivered acceptance letters to students in seven different Big East states, kicking off an annual recruitment

tradition. When a knee injury kept Trip off the road in the spring of 2017, the university employed his "great nieces and nephews" to deliver admissions communications to more than 40 prospective students in Indiana, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. ("Recruiting the class of 2021," 2017, p. 5). As Michael Kaltenmark explained, with the tour focused more on recruitment than marketing, "the markets stay new now because you have a new crop of admitted students there that you want to go see." More importantly, as it turns out Trip knows how to seal the deal: he is such an effective recruiter that Kaltenmark is currently writing his master's thesis on the bulldog's yield rate. According to IPEDS, over the past three years Butler has enrolled between 13 and 15 percent of admitted students; yet when Trip delivers the acceptance letter, that figure jumps to 37 percent (M. Kaltenmark, personal communication, April 25, 2017). By October of 2017 when I returned to campus, Trip had recovered from his injury and was back at it, embarking on his fourth consecutive year of visits. I heard the news the same way that many others in the Indianapolis area did: through the front page of *The Indianapolis Star*, under the headline "Butler's admission process goes to the dog" (Herron, 2017, 1A).

Ultimately, the overlap between athletics and admissions extends beyond resources to philosophy as well. To hear Chris Potts talk of the university's recruitment strategy in the present day calls to mind the approach of generations of Butler basketball coaches in fielding their teams, from Tony Hinkle on down:

> What I appreciate about Butler is that…we want everybody, from the time that they start looking at Butler, looking at colleges, to the time they graduate from here, and even as alums, we want everyone to know, "This is who we are. We're not trying to put on a false front. We're not trying to sell you something." And I think that's worked well for us over the years…it does us no good to bring somebody here, or to really sell somebody on

> Butler, and then they get here and say, "Well, this is not what you said it was going to be." That's just not good for anybody. So we are very passionate overall about living by our values and helping people find the right fit. (C. Potts, personal communication, November 10, 2017)

Kate Morris further drew out the similarities, noting how the student body, much like Butler's basketball players, has become the keeper of this culture as much as any employee of the university:

> When you come to visit our campus, you get the sense that the students really are all in in a special way. And if you like that as a prospective student, then you come here, and if you don't, then you don't come here. (K. Morris, personal communication, November 15, 2017)

Philosophical similarities aside, in the present day Butler athletics also remains an important enrollment tool in ways that reflect the university's "big school feel with an ideal size" (L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017). In the former sense, athletics and particularly a big-time basketball program continue to serve as a roaming front porch for prospective students in national markets. In the latter sense, Butler's small size and tuition-dependence are reflected in the fact that football remains an essential lever for attracting a significant portion of male students to the institution each year (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Yet, Joe Kirsch senses that Butler has now forged "a pathway independent and outside of athletics to grow the university." With regard to enrollment, "the university has its own agenda," Kirsch suggested, "and if athletics can help, that's fine" (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017).

Perhaps nowhere is this dynamic more evident than back at Hinkle Fieldhouse. During my visit in April, Lori Greene mentioned how her office often hosts groups of college counselors. Just two weeks prior, a contingent from Michigan was on campus and per the usual practice, Greene and her staff reserved Hinkle for a few minutes to let the counselors hoist a few shots in the historic gymnasium. “It is a huge hit,” she reported, “they love it, so that’s a connection for us” (L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Curious about how the admissions staff also might leverage the building with prospective students, I tried—and failed—to hop into a campus tour when I returned in October. So, I asked Chris Potts whether the tours pass through Hinkle when we later spoke by phone. Through the receiver, I could hear the wistfulness in his voice: “We’d love to, but everyone would want to stop and take pictures. We just—the footprint of campus is getting so big that we don’t have time really” (C. Potts, personal communication, November 10, 2017).

Raising boosters. As the rest of the campus grows, the fieldhouse and the men’s basketball team remain the connective tissue between the university and its booster community. Graham Honaker relayed a story that captures the magnetism of Hinkle Fieldhouse for Butler’s supporters, whether or not they have any previous affiliation with the university. On a Saturday morning in the middle of winter a couple years back, Honaker picked up his young daughter from choir practice and swung by the fieldhouse to drop off some tickets for the Georgetown game later that evening. His daughter was cranky because she had not eaten yet, so they ran inside, dropped the tickets off at will call, and turned to head right back to their car:

> As I’m walking out, these three guys start sprinting at me. There’s three guys from New Jersey. They’d never been to Indiana. They’d never been to Hinkle. It was this guy, I think his brother, and this guy’s son. Huge sports fans, huge sports fans. Saturday

> morning, Hinkle, the doors usually are locked. He's like, "Man, is there any way I could see inside? We drove all the way for the game tonight." I'm balancing a hungry kid, [and] I'm balancing this group from New Jersey. I said, "Alright." I've given probably 100, more than 100 tours, I think. Probably closer to 150 over the years. My usual tour's about 45 minutes. I'm going to give them a ten-minute tour, 15-minute tour, [and] I'm going to bribe my daughter that I'm going to do something for her. She's kicking and screaming. This guy—I like to think I know a lot about basketball—this guy was just a junkie…I took him around for 15 minutes, and at the end he goes, "What do you do," and I'm like, "I'm on the fundraising side." He pulls out his checkbook, and he writes a $1,000 check to Butler. I couldn't make up that stuff if I tried. There's a lot more; they're just all buried in my head. The point being is the impact [Hinkle] has on people, the emotional impact it has on people. (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017)

The building's hold on those within the state runs even deeper, strengthened over time by the abiding sentiment that "basketball in Indiana is as important as your mother's cooking, as learning how to speak English, as anything you can do" (J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017). When Geoff Bannister reaffirmed Butler's regional focus in "Strategic Plan 2005," the justification was simple: "The University exists to serve its community. It enjoys the catholic function common to all sets of higher learning, but it recognizes also a special rootedness in its place" (Planning Committee for the Strategic Planning Process, 1994, p. 2). With hindsight, it is plain to see basketball as the secret ingredient in that foundational relationship.

The construction of the fieldhouse placed Butler as the spiritual and physical center in a web of basketball facilities that stretched across the state. "It was kind of to be always the ur-

building that represented what all the high school fieldhouse represented to their towns, and then kind of to the state," said native Hoosier Susan Neville (S. Neville, personal communication, April 25, 2017). Speaking first of this network of high school gymnasiums and then of the specific building in New Castle, Indiana, where she grew up, Neville (2011) elaborates in her book:

> Large but in scale with the community, they are buildings draped around the true spirit of a place. They mean something to the generations…[In New Castle] the team was their greatest loyalty, the thing that bound them to their community and to generations of their own families. It was culture-making and perhaps even soul-making. It was, more than anything, community-building in a place that had very little going for it economically." (p. xv-xvi)

Even after the IHSAA state tournament vacated the fieldhouse, the web's strands still tingled with meaning. In 2009, Indiana's governor Mitch Daniels stood in the fieldhouse to address Butler's graduating class at Commencement. He referenced Tony Hinkle and the school's fight song, which he professed to know better than that of his own alma mater after spending his childhood watching games in the fieldhouse. His advice for the graduates was rooted in the building, too: "go into the world 'with the values written on the locker room wall at Hinkle' Fieldhouse—humility, unity and thankfulness" ("Commencement 2009," 2009, p. 10). The good vibes from the state's chief executive only grew the following year, when the basketball team scored a spot in the Final Four and with it invitations to celebratory barbecues at the governor's house, one of which the Chinese consul attended but left early so that he could purchase a Butler shirt at the bookstore before it closed (Neville, 2011). "To me," Daniels said at the time, "the Butler team personifies the state of Indiana and Indiana basketball" (Woods, 2012, p. 155).

Nowhere is this idea more evident in the booster community than Indianapolis, where the first Final Four run elevated Butler's standing within the city.

Geoff Bannister recognized the symbiotic relationship between Indiana's capital and the university. The institution's strategic plan in 1994 held that "much of Butler's recent success is directly attributable to the social and economic success of Indianapolis over the last few decades," and elsewhere the report acknowledged a "self-interest…Butler needs Indianapolis to be a successful community" (Strategic Plan 2005, 1994, p. 3, 21). Picking up on this thread, one of the primary goals in the Bobby Fong-era "Dare to Make a Difference" strategic plan was to "position Butler as a service-oriented, intellectual, cultural, social, civic and recreational resource of choice for Indianapolis" ("Dare to Make a Difference," 2009, p. 7).

This plan went into effect the year before the first Final Four in Indianapolis; then the madness hit, shoving city and university together in the week-long rush between the team's Final Four berth and the national championship game. For anyone, resident or visitor, tuning into the local television or radio airwaves, Butler was a constant presence: "In a city where the Bulldogs were regularly obscured by other sports news, the daily media message was all Butler, all the time" (Woods, 2012, p. 159). The university co-hosted two rallies in the heart of the city with Indianapolis's mayor that drew thousands ("What a Run," 2010; Woods, 2012), and crowds flooded the campus six miles away, where basketball-fever had magnetized Hinkle Fieldhouse. "The camera-toting pilgrims to campus, both tourists and members of the media, seemed awestruck," Neville (2011) wrote. "Some of the visitors—most of them, in fact—were almost worshipful of the place," so much so that tour guides occasionally found it difficult to coax them out of the building and onto other parts of campus (p. 2-3). The team's open practice at Lucas Oil Stadium the day before its semifinal game drew an astonishing crowd of well over 20,000, nearly

filling the arena's entire lower bowl for an event that is sparsely attended during typical Final Fours (Woods, 2012).

The city shined, in large part as a reflection of the university's long-hidden luster. In the wake of the madness one year later, their relationship was fast evolving, the basketball team an undeniable influence in the movement:

> Butler continues increasingly to be regarded as an Indianapolis resource. Whether it be the appearance of former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright under the aegis of the Celebration of Diversity Distinguished Speakers Series or the men's basketball team's achievements in the NCAA Tournament, the city has embraced the University's representatives and programs. ("Strategic plan quarterly update," 2010, p. 7)

Years later Michael Kaltenmark, who oversees community and government relations for the university when not sprinting off to another function with the live mascot, reflected on the impact of the Final Four from this perspective:

> Certainly before the Final Four, I felt like Butler was sort of a best kept secret, even in Indianapolis. Now, we have a bit more cachet, a bit more of a presence in Indy, which is good. I think we can have even more but I think people look to us with a bit more respect and see us as a true anchor…Our lawmakers and elected officials and politicians, I think they all feel like Butler has some stature and some clout…I don't think they us see us as a sleepy little liberal arts school in Indianapolis. I think they see us as a player in Indiana and a leader in higher education nationally. So, I think they listen and I think it's served us well. (M. Kaltenmark, personal communication, April 25, 2017)

As the symbiotic trajectory of both Indianapolis and Butler University soared, the university published the Winter 2014-15 edition of *Butler Magazine* with a cover that read "Great

University. Great City. A model for collaboration and innovation." On the inside of the front cover, Jim Danko set the tone for the issue by detailing how both the university and the city were climbing the rankings, Butler in *USNWR* and Indianapolis in *The New York Times*' list of "52 Places to Go in 2014." He also referenced a speech offered during the annual Butler University Convocation, in which an alum and current vice president at Visit Indy, the city's official tourism and promotion arm, highlighted the similarities between the university and its city, noting in Danko's words that "both have been considered underdogs; yet they consistently exceed expectations and gain national attention for excellence" (Danko, 2014, n.p.).

Perhaps these parallels explain in part a curious segment of Butler's booster community that Betsy Weatherly refers to as "adopted Bulldogs." "I feel like we're Indianapolis's school," she said, "and regardless of the many individuals that live around campus and in Indianapolis that went to IU or Purdue or Notre Dame, they still all love Butler. So, they've adopted us" (B. Weatherly, personal communication, October 18, 2017). Woods (2012) suggests that the affection might run well beyond Indianapolis, too; during the first Final Four, sporting goods stores in Bloomington and Lafayette, home to Indiana and Purdue respectively, could not keep up with the demand for Butler merchandise. The phenomenon is counter-intuitive since, as Clotfelter (2011) notes in his analysis of big-time intercollegiate athletics, the brand loyalty inspired by university sports teams often leaves little room for secondary affinities, especially, it is reasonable to assume, with in-state rivals. Yet, whether because of its underdog persona or its sterling basketball program or other forms of outreach like its esteemed fine arts programs, Butler draws locals onto its campus and into its community, and then does not let them go (B. Arick, personal communication, October 19, 2017; B. Weatherly, personal communication, October 18, 2017). As Graham Honaker observed, "I've never seen a school more people love

having an affiliation [with], even if they didn't go here" (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017).

As to whether this affiliation generates additional financial resources for the institution, particularly in lieu of the basketball team's success, the picture is fuzzy. Butler clearly capitalized on the Final Fours to solicit donations to the athletics program through the Campaign for Hinkle Fieldhouse, but the effect across other segments of the university is more difficult to discern. In his internal study of the Final Four fallout, Steven Dolvin found that "giving didn't necessarily go up, it just changed what people gave to"; consistent with the literature, he believed athletics to be the beneficiary and found no evidence of a halo effect in fundraising for other university functions (S. Dolvin, personal communication, April 26, 2017). From her vantage point as a trustee, Tracy Stevens felt that the advancement office was not "properly staffed" in the years immediately following the Final Fours, which hindered Butler from taking full advantage of the fundraising opportunities presented by those runs. "We're making up for it now," she said, largely in reference to the silent phase of an upcoming capital campaign, and part of that effort involves an attempt to figure out how to measure and track the giving that stems from athletics-driven engagement (T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017).

From his vantage point on the advancement frontlines, however, Graham Honaker was convinced that the basketball team's success opened a bevy of opportunities for the university to tap its donor base. Currently Honaker is involved with fundraising for the construction of the business school's new building, and he believed that the project would not be possible without the visibility and relationships stimulated by the Final Four runs:

> Butler's never been that successful in raising lots of dollars. We wouldn't be in the space we're in trying to raise money like this without the Final Fours and the notoriety and

> moving into this national limelight…2016 was the best fundraising year in our history. Last year was our third best in our history. Two years ago we had the largest gift in the university's history from a non-alum. None of this stuff would be possible. (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017)

When I pushed a bit more, he rattled off a list of donors who had given to the academic program but were "influenced heavily" by their affinity for the basketball program. Their fondness for Butler stemmed from athletics and then left room for conversations about the other good work going on at the school. "People are giving to the business school because we have a good business school. We're doing really good things," Honaker continued, "but there's a psychology to it of the visibility, the notoriety, affiliating yourself with a winner, affiliating yourself with a program that does it the right way" (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017).

Honaker's comments hint at the difficulty of measuring or even tracing the halo effect through institutional fundraising efforts outside of the athletic department. The basketball team's continued success underlies a variety of advancement opportunities, whether opening doors to enhanced relationships in major financial hubs on the East Coast or even leaving space for a consideration of how to leverage the live mascot in the upcoming capital campaign (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017; M. Kaltenmark, personal communication, April 25, 2017). Weatherly's perspective on the value of the move to the Big East perhaps best demonstrates the wide-ranging and long-brewing influence of athletic success on advancement strategies that in turn makes measurement so difficult:

> [The conference change] diversifies our student body [and] diversifies our parent prospective donors, which is good. These parents have wonderful connections for potential internships that our students may not have had, and then those students will then

> be Butler alumni, and we're hoping that we're trying to create that culture of philanthropy. But it just doesn't happen overnight. (B. Weatherly, personal communication, October 18, 2017)

The scenario is not far-fetched: Butler's move to the Big East, and all the marketing and recruiting efforts that have accompanied it, expands the pool of students and parents who will interact with the university, experience its campus environment, and eventually be motivated to give to the institution years down the line. On one hand, this scenario points back to Bobby Fong's favored front porch metaphor, but with a post-Final Four twist offered by John Hargrove: "We don't have a front porch. We have a big veranda going three quarters of the way around the school, a 270-degree view when you walk in, and it's called a basketball program" (J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017). At the same time, it also indicates the importance of the university's greatest asset within the booster community: its alumni.

Much like Hinkle Fieldhouse, Butler's alumni base needed a shot of energy when Geoff Bannister took office. When he penned "The Idea of Butler University" in 1993 and imagined Butler's future, he pegged alumni as the institution's "best calling card" and "most important long-term community asset" (Planning Committee for the Strategic Planning Process, 1993, p. 19, 21). Despite this awareness, when Bannister shared an early draft of "Strategic Plan 2005" with the trustees, they urged even more "attention to alumni as strategic assets" (Planning Committee for the Strategic Planning Process, 1993, p. 5). Again, the thread stretched on to Bobby Fong, who identified alumni as "at once the largest constituency we serve and our greatest resource" ("Dare to Make a Difference," 2009, p. 15).

That shot of energy came soon thereafter as the first Final Four run ignited the alumni base and helped activate this strategic asset. Many alums re-connected with their alma mater in

person, flocking to the campus in advance of the semifinal game and congregating at the bookstore to purchase t-shirts. “The week before the championship weekend,” Neville (2011) wrote, “I saw students who’d graduated from almost all the years I’d been teaching, standing in line together as though time had all along been nothing but an illusion…It was as if there was no such thing as graduation” (p. 8). Others tuned in from afar. The Office of Alumni and Parent Programs tracked more than 140 viewing parties for the games during the course of the tournament, and reported receiving “expressions of support” from alumni in Iraq, New Zealand, and Europe (“What a Run,” 2010, p. 6).

Through the efforts of Butler staff and the subsequent success of the men’s basketball program, this momentum continues to course through the alumni base. A look through issues of *Butler Magazine* reveals regular alumni profiles, numerous of which contain some mention of how basketball figured into the subject’s connection to the university. For example, in the Spring 2011 issue, the cover of which depicts the basketball team celebrating its second run to the national championship game, an article on legacy students at Butler profiles three alumni whose children later decided to attend the university. The first alum, a former cheerleader, was helping to organize and fund the project to make Hinkle Fieldhouse into a walking history museum through the installation of a series of plaques during the “Campaign for Hinkle” renovations; the second alum, who married a former Butler basketball player, had just taken her sons to the Butler Bulldog Brunch during the Final Four weekend in April; the third had gone on the road with the basketball team as a student radio broadcaster several times, including one of Tony Hinkle’s final games as head coach, and was now a trustee of the university. Toward the conclusion of the article, an admissions officer attributed the recent rise in the number of incoming legacy students at Butler, from 104 in 2009-10 to 161 the following year, to “Butler’s presence in the news for its

academic achievements and the success of its men's basketball team" (Hawman, 2011, p. 13). This storytelling trend persists through subsequent issues, down to the most recent one that I picked up when on campus in October, which profiles an alumnus whose donations to the university named both the Dawg Pound student section in Hinkle Fieldhouse and an interview suite in the new business school building in honor of his wife (Allan, 2017, p. 31).

Honaker told another story that illustrates the connection between continued basketball success and alumni engagement. On January 19, 2013, 13-ranked Butler hosted 8-ranked Gonzaga at Hinkle Fieldhouse in a clash of Cinderellas that drew ESPN's College Gameday crew to campus for the first time in Butler's history before the network aired the game that evening. In a wild finish, Butler was down by one with under five seconds to go when Roosevelt Jones stole an inbounds pass and hit a buzzer-beating jump shot to give Butler a one-point victory. The game was on a Saturday night. On Monday morning, Honaker received a call in his office from someone who wanted to donate to the Campaign for Hinkle. "Usually when you get somebody just calling out of the blue, it's $50, $100. It was $25,000," he recalled. "He was a 1984 graduate. He had never really done much in terms of the way of giving. Great guy, but had never done that." Though the event stood out in Honaker's memory, it only nicked the surface of the larger trend: "There's just tons of stories like that. There's probably a lot of stories people don't know. I've kept my own notes. Someday I'd love to write my own book on these stories" (G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017).

Whether or not the basketball program inspires giving, and whether or not those links can be tracked to any extensive degree, the team's convening power remains vital in the university's connection to its alumni and their connection to each other. During the 2011-12 regular season, alumni chapters gathered to watch the Bulldogs play, either in person or on television, in Atlanta,

Washington D.C., Cincinnati, central Indiana, Chicago, and the Bay Area. Other alumni groups, such as the Black Alumni Association and the Young Alumni Association, sponsored their own events around home games in Hinkle. Short profiles of chapter presidents that have appeared in *Butler Magazine* over the past few years always include the alum's best Butler memory and best chapter memory. Without fail, their answer to one and sometimes both of the questions centers around a men's basketball game. During the team's Sweet Sixteen run in 2017, I tracked the chapter activity through viewing parties registered with the university and advertised on its public website. For the team's opening round game, ten chapters and two additional regions sponsored viewing parties at 18 different locations. The next week, prior to the team's Sweet Sixteen appearance, ten formal chapters again promoted viewing parties but were joined by ten additional regions across the country for a total of 23 different events. One assumes, of course, that had the team kept winning, the alumni gatherings would only have continued to snowball.

Within Butler's booster community the links between adopted Bulldogs and alumni Bulldogs, and between generations past and present, continue to materialize and throw off dividends of all shapes and sizes. "I hear stories about this all the time," said John Hargrove, the board chairman during both Final Fours.

> Case in point, my wife is the treasurer of her antique club in Palm Beach County, Florida. And she received a dues check from a lady and it had a return sticker on it. She brought the envelope to me. She said, "Is this a Butler bulldog, or is this a Georgia bulldog?" I said, "That is a Butler bulldog." So she looked the lady up, and the lady had a daughter that was going to Butler. She said, "Well, my husband used to be chairman of the board of trustees there" and struck up a friendship in South Florida over this little bulldog…My niece, who works for the State Department in Washington, applied for a

> job. When she went to the interview, the guy's looking at her resume, and he graduated from Butler also. So these connections, they seem to be growing. (J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017)

Hargrove's reference to the relationships that can sprout from small tokens of identification brought to mind the old seats in Hinkle Fieldhouse. In the spring of 2014, the athletic department ripped the old slatted folding seats out of the fieldhouse to make room for padded seating as part of the campaign renovations. The seats were then put up for sale, with the proceeds going in part to fund the Hinkle renovations and, through a partnership with People for Urban Progress, in part to fund their installation at bus stops and other spots around the city of Indianapolis. About 150 of the seats were available exclusively to season ticket holders on a Friday; a line formed more than two hours before the sale opened and the seats were gone within an hour, leaving only around 50 seats available for the general public to purchase the following morning ("Butler fans excited," 2014). I bumped into two of those slatted seats in a restaurant right next to the fieldhouse my first day on campus and two more the following day when I met Bruce Arick in his office. Their story has stuck with me ever since: members in and around the Butler community, lining up to take pieces of Hinkle Fieldhouse into their homes, the city, and who knows where else.

Engaging the campus community. "No, that can never happen again." That's what Susan Neville, the English professor, tells her husband, the sports fan, whenever they reminisce about Butler's first Cinderella run right into the heart of Indianapolis. For Neville, that "particular confluence of story and reality"— the mythology of the underdog, the long history of a university doing good work in unseen spaces, the echoes of Indiana basketball heroes from bygone eras flowing right into the actual players and coaches whom the Butler community knew

so well sweeping through the tournament and landing back home in Indianapolis for the climactic game—takes too long to build and turns on too many surprises to hit the university again any time soon (S. Neville, personal communication, April 25, 2017). Although the basketball team stunned the sporting world with another Final Four berth the very next year, after a tougher season and with a less talented team to boot, they—both team and community—had been there before. And this time, the team was in Houston, more than 1,000 miles away from home in Indianapolis.

In terms of unity and fervor, community on Butler's campus peaked with the first Final Four run, particularly during the two weeks between the Elite Eight and the national championship. When Butler played the Syracuse Orangemen in the Sweet Sixteen in Salt Lake City, students back home boycotted oranges and the fruit was nowhere to be found in campus dining spaces. When they beat Kansas State in the next round to move into the Final Four and word spread that they would arrive back at Hinkle Fieldhouse after midnight, thousands waited outside in the dark and rain until 3:00 am to cheer their return. In the week leading up to the semifinal game, the campus got an impromptu makeover: "fountains were dyed blue, banners hung from buildings, signs with players' numbers were displayed in yards, blue ribbons wrapped around trees and campus statues, and Clowes Memorial Hall shined at night with a lit bulldog on the wall" (Woods, 2012, p. 168). For those two weeks, as Neville (2011) wrote, nearly every soul in the Butler community identified as either a basketball player or a basketball fan, and nothing else. When we spoke, she racked her brain trying to think of another type of event that could bring together a community in the same way. Ultimately, as underscored in her musing, it was equal parts pride, focus, timing, and the drama of athletic competition that made the experience singular:

> If we had a Misty Copeland or something in the ballet program—but then it's still not this big competition where everyone's heart is laying on the line. I don't know…It's one moment, you know. It's one moment. Joshua Bell, the violinist, went to IU, and they're very proud Joshua Bell is one of their graduates, as they very well should be. But it's not like there was a moment when the whole university was thinking about this one thing. (S. Neville, personal communication, April 25, 2017).

The emotional dimension of the event ultimately became its defining characteristic for many in the Butler community. In her book, Neville (2011) cites a survey in which around 600 respondents were asked about their memories from the Cinderella run, and the words most often used to describe the moment were "electric" and "surreal" (p. xvii). She herself describes the tournament as "a center of energy that caused a small community to feel glittery and surreal and important and oddly, at times, disconnected from reality" (p. xvii-xviii). If Butler caught lightning in a bottle, then everyone from the community was trapped inside the glass with it, simultaneously feeding and being drained by the energy.

Neville (2011) captures too the uncertainty of the moment and the threat of playing with fire. Such was the glow and heat and intensity of the event that the university community hung in the balance. For Neville and many others who were proud of the Butler University they knew, the national championship felt like one of those rare "historical moments when something threatens to pull everything into it and renew or destroy it" (p. 4). What would come of the whole experience remained a mystery, but it was easy to imagine the energy that had briefly fused the campus soon ripping it apart. Seven years later, however, Neville could recall the time with fondness, and her memory of one particular and oft-cited moment—when the myth and reality of

the student-athlete flowed into one another—provides all the necessary clues as to why the basketball team was and still is a source of pride for the Butler community:

> That morning [of the championship game] you would see them walking across campus going to their classes, and it almost makes me cry now thinking about it, because it was like "Oh my God. We're all doing the same thing today, and we're trying—despite this kind of weird magical energy—we're still all doing what we're supposed to be doing." You know: being human and doing our jobs. So that was kind of beautiful. (S. Neville, personal communication, April 25, 2017)

As this moment illustrates, the first reason behind the community's appreciation for the basketball program is that the players are an authentic reflection of the student body as a whole. When the players took the floor at Lucas Oil Stadium for the national championship game, the community knew who they were from seeing them around campus, doing all the things normal college students would do (Neville, 2011). The goodwill that followed the team into the national spotlight was earned over many years as coaches ensured their players meshed with the campus community. "We want the student body to support us," Todd Lickliter would tell his teams. "They need to see you in the class, they need to see you working, they need to see you as a peer so that they can feel good about supporting you" (T. Lickliter, personal communication, December 5, 2017). Brad Stevens in turn sustained this point of emphasis: "The team was really representative of the typical Butler student…there was a lot of alignment between the athletic department and the faculty and the general student population, and that was important to me" (B. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017).

I spoke to five former or current faculty members, and all shared stories of having basketball players in their classes; whether before, during, or after the Final Fours, the players

remained the same. “Every once in a while I’ll see a basketball player, and they don’t come in [to class] like, ‘You should know who I am’ or anything like that,” Neville said. “I’ll just figure it out by looking at their transcripts” (S. Neville, personal communication, April 25, 2017). Kate Morris, who served as a member of the psychology faculty before becoming provost, had similar experiences. The basketball players “were kind of like everybody else,” she recalled. “The ethos among our student-athletes is the same as the ethos among all of our students: engaged, all in in everything they’re doing” (K. Morris, personal communication, November 15).

As a psychologist, Morris quickly grew fascinated with the student culture at Butler upon joining the faculty in 1996. She had spent her entire life in an academic environment, the child of two faculty members who lived in a faculty housing neighborhood. When she compared Butler to that environment, or to her undergraduate and graduate institutions, the student culture felt different. “I could never quite put my finger on what it is about these Butler students,” she recalled.

> The only thing that I could say is you know they’re really engaged, and they’re kind of all in in everything they do. And it doesn’t matter if it’s sports or volunteer work or academic work or whatever, or even decorating the Greek houses for homecoming. I mean, they’re just so all in on everything they do. (K. Morris, personal communication, November 15, 2017)

So, she tried to figure it out, empirically. At the time a group of psychology professors had formulated a study to try and measure the ephemeral concept of school spirit across institutions. Based on her hypothesis that Butler students were different, Morris later joined the study, tracking Butler students according to a handful of indicators, such as the number wearing Butler gear on a random day in a random class. “Every single time that I did this,” she said, “our Butler

students showed statistically higher than the group as a whole." She now tells this story at enrollment events to illustrate the idea that "there is, in fact, a special sauce here." The special sauce is "palpable on campus," to the point that prospective students can feel it and either decide they want to be a part of the community or choose to look elsewhere. "That," she concluded, "is how the student culture has perpetuated itself across the 20 years that I've been here" (K. Morris, personal communication, November 15, 2017). From an anecdotal standpoint, Lori Greene echoed this same idea when she came to Butler years later: "this is just something that as an outsider sticks in my head, when you first come on campus and you start walking around…I have yet to be on a campus where you have so many of your students wearing your own gear" (L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017).

Yet, despite fitting in the basketball players still stand out. Neville's reference to different jobs for different members of the community also indicates an awareness that the basketball players, particularly at a school in the state of Indiana, occupy a position of prominence. As Joe Kirsch said, "we're not stupid people. We realize that the NCAA and the visibility of the men's basketball program and the TV coverage, it's there" (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017). For this reason, the men's basketball team continues to serve as an unparalleled rallying point for the campus community. Lori Greene felt drawn into the community even before she had worked her first day on the job, recalling how she was listening to a radio broadcast of a game while driving into town on her move and being so disappointed when the team lost. "I remember getting off an exit and I'm like, 'Noooooooo!'" she said, before realizing, "Gosh, they've already got me" (L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017). For Greene and other basketball fans like her, the excitement for the start of a new season begins

building well in advance of the first game; in season, the campus buzzes on game nights and the result will always shape the next day's water cooler chatter.

Yet, similar feelings hold for non-basketball fans. Greene also reported, "my husband is not a huge basketball fan. He is now a huge basketball fan. He gets to the point where he can't watch the game" because of the excitement (L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Kate Morris cares much more for Butler's ballet performances than its basketball games, but she expressed a similar sentiment: "I'm not a big sports person. However, I have always held excitement about Butler basketball, and it's really, really fun to go…it's hard not to catch that fever" (K. Morris, personal communication, November 15, 2017). Despite the program's success, the team still unites rather than divides the campus, and men's basketball has retained the capacity to get the community "centered around one thing in that moment" (L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Undoubtedly, part of this affection owes to how the team has handled success in the years since the Final Four, but perhaps an even larger part of the explanation involves their response to adversity.

Certainly, the team and the community have weathered together the departure of two beloved coaches in Brad Stevens and Chris Holtmann; Stevens's departure, "the day that rocked Butler University" according to an article that originally ran in *The Indianapolis Star* and was later picked up by *USA Today*, came as a particular blow (Keefer, 2014). However, these were not the difficulties that people had in mind; instead, as Tracy Stevens put it, "there is kind of a tragic component of this" (T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017). As mentioned earlier, between January 2016 and August 2016 two former players—Andrew Smith, age 25, and Joel Cornette, age 35—passed away; in between their deaths, former player and current basketball staff member Emerson Kampen lost his eight-month-old son. In a *USA Today*

article, Nicole Auerbach (2016) beautifully described the Butler community's response to this series of tragedies, detailing how players and coaches, past and present, rallied around the families of those who passed and around each other as well. "This stretch of unfathomable grief and untimely death would put a strain on any community," she wrote, "But here, at Butler, it's also highlighted an unbreakable bond that's been tested repeatedly, but never broken, during the past year" (para. 7).

Indeed, even before I had found and read Auerbach's piece, this tragic dimension cropped up in my interviews nearly as often as the highlights. Lori Greene recalled being in the school of business on "a random Tuesday" when Andrew Smith was ill:

> They had a jersey and they were asking us to sign it along with a poster to write a handwritten note. They were taking it to him in the hospital…There was a faculty member who said, "We just want to thank him and acknowledge who he is as a member of our community." (L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

Honaker remembered the way that the university embraced Smith's widow, a Butler student as well, after he passed. "It's beautiful," he said, simply. Tracy Stevens found this same grief-stricken beauty when former players gathered for dinners after Smith's funeral service and the night before Cornette's. In listening to the players share stories, she "realized how incredibly close these guys are, and how special they are each as individuals. There is certainly something about those tragedies that reminds you how special those groups were" (T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017). The community bore the tragedies together, including those who were new to the university. "I've never felt like an outsider to that piece," Lori Greene, who was less than a year into the job when Smith died, said, "If anything, it's drawn me in" (L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017).

Her words echoed those of another outsider. Jordan Cornette played basketball at Notre Dame but, in arranging a memorial service for his brother at Hinkle Fieldhouse, found the Butler community distinct in its response. His words to Auerbach (2016) bear repeating here:

> As proud as I am to say I played at Notre Dame, it's almost hard not to root for Butler above everybody else for how they rallied around my family…I can tell you this, and I'm not just saying this to wax poetic: There is no program like Butler, and I know teams have lost players and family members have lost people involved in programs. I don't think there is another program that would go to the great lengths Butler would to take care of their own. It just blew me away. I think it's one thing to commit to a program and say you're going to play basketball there, and you hope the program looks after you after you leave, but when you're a part of Butler, you're a part of that place forever. They look after you like you're their own. (para. 46, 47)

Despite their position of prominence, despite the constant churn in coaching and playing personnel, the members of the men's basketball program have continued to inspire pride in the larger community through the way they have handled both soaring highs and plunging lows.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The Cinderella Story as Catalyst

When I was on campus in October, Graham Honaker handed me a copy of the Fall 2017 issue of *Butler Magazine*, hot off the presses. It's entitled "Transformations: A Thriving Butler Community." A sturdy tree trunk fills the middle of the cover, its branches and leaves reaching skyward and out of the picture. On either side of the tree are Butler students. On the left, the students kneel in the dirt or lean against the tree, awash in grayscale. Their picture, pulled from the 1969 edition of Butler's yearbook, drifts into a full color image of six more students from the present day on the right side of the tree. The students on the left—all female in a nod to Ovid Butler's founding impulse to offer women the same higher educational opportunities as men—wear blouses and skirts, some plaid and others solid, some dark and others white. The students on the right wear Butler blue, five of them in t-shirts that bear the fingerprint of the fieldhouse that rests somewhere over their left shoulders, well off camera. Two of the shirts feature the bulldog logo and the name of the university in its familiar branded font; another depicts different basketball jerseys in a nod to the "new BIG EAST"; a fourth plays on a quote from a popular movie, with an image of Butler's live mascot and the words, "You're my boy, Blue"; and the last shirt, front and center in the cluster of six students, reads in simple block white font on a deep Butler blue background: "Home sweet Hinkle."

The rest of the issue follows this pattern, merging images from the past into ones from the present. Students at the university's most recent Commencement ceremony in Hinkle Fieldhouse snap a cap-and-gowned selfie in front of an old picture of the men's basketball team. An article on Butler's residential communities depicts a cluster of eight female students bounding down the front stairs of their dormitory in black and white while another group in color

walks into the new Fairview House residence hall. An old picture of LaVall Jordan in his Butler basketball uniform, intertwined with the branded phrase "What Bulldogs dream they do," sits to the left of pictures of the press conference announcing his return as men's basketball head coach. On the back cover, Michael Kaltenmark and his family relax on a bench with Trip, to their left an old 1970s photo of former president Alexander Jones holding one of those "unofficial-official" Butler mascots on a leash. Articles on progress in the present day—a new business center in the Andre B. Lacy School of Business, a $5 million donation from an alum to support the sciences, the beam signing ceremony for the new residence hall, a naming gift from the Sellick estate for both the Butler Bowl and the Registrar's office—weave through articles that look with affection on Butler's past. A fold-out in the center of the magazine spills the stories of three legacy students and their families: "each branch of this family tree sprouted on campus," reads one subtitle.

As usual, President Danko's column occupies the inside cover, decorated with a black and white picture of him as a three-year-old "already on the move" in a toy car. "Butler's forward momentum is palpable," he begins, citing the construction projects on campus and the record 15,000 applications for the incoming fall class. He speaks of students "rolling up their sleeves" and alumni "building outstanding careers." Then, in the column's last full paragraph, he attempts to strike three separate balances: between past and present, academics and athletics, campus and booster community, all of which remain critical to Butler's identity and growth in the present day:

> When an institution is moving forward so swiftly, it's important to periodically step back to reaffirm and celebrate its foundational culture. Indeed, the more things change at Butler, the more our University's traditions and core values remain the same. Butler

> began as our founders' effort to champion inclusivity and equality among all people. Today, we continue to strive for these priorities. Outstanding undergraduate education has always been at the heart of our mission, and this focus continues today. Generations ago, Hinkle Fieldhouse came to life with cheering fans. Today, the electricity in Hinkle is only getting stronger. And Butler's historical commitment to serving as a cultural and educational resource to Central Indiana is more robust than ever. (n.p).

These balancing points reflect tensions familiar to decision-makers in many American universities: the weight of tradition formed centuries ago against the demands of a far more marketized present, the oddity of commercial athletics side by side with serious academic pursuits, and the persistent ivory tower perception amid obligations to serve the local community and so many other different stakeholder groups. The popular gravity of the Cinderella story threatens each of these balances, tempting to pull universities off mission and off tradition. Yet, Butler's case demonstrates that, harnessed, the Cinderella story is a resource of unrivaled potential for universities on the move.

In positioning for and especially leveraging such high-profile athletic success, administrators at Butler hit upon the most essential characteristic of the Cinderella story as a resource: it works only as a catalyst. It can ignite whatever resources and initiatives are already in place, and accelerate whatever strategic direction the university is already angling toward, but without kindling its energy is soon spent. In each of the first cycle codes discussed in the previous chapter—from resourcing athletics to marketing the university to managing enrollment—movement began well before the first Final Four run. Joe Kirsch, who possessed the longest institutional memory of anyone I interviewed having graduated from Butler in 1964 and returned to teach in 1970, echoed this idea with the characteristic modesty that makes so many

things at Butler glow for those who are finally looking: “I think there were a lot of things laying on the ground around here that looked pretty good and when we got to the Final Four all of a sudden people walking around said, ‘Boy, that’s kind of cool’” (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017). At Butler, the Final Fours stimulated two long-burning energies on campus: the formation of a flagship program in men’s basketball and the transformation of a regional university into a national player. Further, the convergence of these movements held particular strength in this context given that the team’s Cinderella runs echoed the university’s underdog spirit in a language familiar to so many members of the community in Indiana—basketball.

Within the athletic department, the seeds for growth were planted by the time the first Final Four run hit. Men’s basketball had been elevated to the flagship level during the Bannister era, and Hinkle Fieldhouse received enough of a facelift to jump-start recruiting. Under Barry Collier and his coaching successors, the team began to turn in winning seasons again and ascend the ranks of the Horizon League. During this time, the coaches and players also resurrected and fine-tuned an organizational culture, as expressed in the idea of the Butler Way, that would prove invaluable as attention to the program mushroomed. Most importantly, they learned to recruit to this culture with an unflinching commitment, regardless of how successful the program became. When Collier returned as athletic director, he put in place a number of vital changes to the department’s resource base so that ticket sales and fundraising could maximize revenue in the wake of the first Cinderella run. The Campaign for Hinkle Fieldhouse, the move to the Big East, and the reliance upon men’s basketball to further drive revenue and bolster the student-athlete experience across all sports were natural growth points after the Final Fours.

Likewise, when the Final Four runs occurred, the university as a whole was already stretching toward a national profile. Geoff Bannister's investments in the campus proved prescient as the school leaned into its residential identity and sought to attract more and more people to campus. Bobby Fong straightened out the annual budget and ran a successful capital campaign to bolster Butler's financial position. He began to articulate Butler's national ambitions, tying them to the popular ranking systems of the day and tending to the university's academic reputation as the chief means of movement up the ladder. Likewise, at the very end of his term, the university began making the necessary investments to expand its recruiting markets and boost its undergraduate enrollment, as exemplified by the then largest first-year class in the university's history in the fall of 2010, before the effects from the Final Four could work any real magic in admissions. Where Fong's presidency lagged in marketing and branding efforts, despite an awareness of their importance reflected in strategic planning materials from the time, he nevertheless proved an invaluable spokesperson for the university amid the Final Fours, planting and pushing stories that authentically communicated Butler's faithfulness to its academic mission. When Jim Danko arrived with the specific mandate to capitalize upon the Final Four resource, the university was well-positioned for another period of growth, risk-taking, and acceleration toward a bona fide national profile.

Certain features of Butler's story are nearly impossible to replicate. First, Hinkle Fieldhouse is a singular basketball facility and, as such, an asset that few schools of Butler's size or standing could ever approximate. Second, the 2010 Cinderella run reaching its climax with the Final Four only six miles from campus was a particular stroke of good fortune. As Woods (2012) noted, the last time a men's basketball team competed in a Final Four in its home city was nearly 40 years prior, when UCLA played in Los Angeles in 1972. Yet, even this instance is a poor

corollary: UCLA was a powerhouse program and the 25-team tournament was not yet a national phenomenon. In this regard then Butler's experience is one-of-a-kind, a hometown underdog in a basketball-mad state with the entire country watching. Without Indianapolis hosting the 2010 tournament, Butler's campus would not have been flooded by visitors nor could its players have attended class the morning of the game. Finally, when Butler returned to the Final Four the very next year as an eight-seed, they were the first program ever to reach consecutive Final Fours without holding a one- or two-seed, and they matched several other teams in being the lowest-seeded team to reach the national championship game in tournament in history (Woods, 2012). Nevertheless, despite these distinguishing features, Butler's story holds a number of different implications for scholars conducting research in this area and administrators seeking to build or leverage Cinderella stories of their own.

Implications for Research

University leaders continue to invest in big-time athletic programs in the present day, some tending to popular programs with long traditions of success, and others choosing to dive into the game by adding football programs or reclassifying to Division I. As Clotfelter (2011) notes, the fact that such behavior persists despite the costs of participating in an arms race and the risks of scandal and mission deviation suggests that either the potential benefits of maintaining big-time athletic programs outweigh the costs or the programs have become so ingrained in the fabric of university life that the idea of removing them represents the height of impracticality. If big-time athletic programs are here to stay, and if a strong oral tradition of their capacity to boost institutional fortunes endures among administrators, then further research into the phenomenon is essential.

Men's Basketball as Flagship

The few extended accounts of administrators using athletic success to build their institutions revolve around football as the lever. Yet, the rise in the cultural sway and economic impact of the men's basketball tournament ought to shift or in the very least expand this focus. Qualitative inquiries into the decision-making around building and leveraging men's basketball programs as flagship sports at prestige-seeking institutions remain scarce. Future research in this area ought to consider three distinct populations: established programs such as Duke and Villanova, relative newcomers such as Gonzaga and Butler, and those still searching for their Cinderella moment in the modern era such as William and Mary. Though in-depth single case studies hold promise, comparisons between institutions within these three different groups would allow researchers to explore a bevy of different questions: for example, what is the difference in institutional value between a Sweet Sixteen run and a Final Four run? What do the costs and benefits look like for an institution still searching for a tournament run compared to one with such a narrative tucked into its back pocket? Regardless of the research questions, it is clear that institutions who have designated men's basketball as a flagship program represent an untapped field of research.

Some such calls for research have begun trickling out within academe. Writing on the heels of Villanova's national championship in 2016, Taylor (2016), a marketing professor at the university, marveled at how the title was "especially big" for the institution, particularly in heightening the sense of community inside the university and in the surrounding area (p. 617). In light of this experience, Taylor suggests that "research aimed at not only understanding the effect of such titles, but also how to extend and capitalize on the opportunity would be highly beneficial" (p. 619). Yet, his exhortation is narrowly drawn, focusing primarily on the marketing

effects and opportunities of NCAA tournament success rather than the full package of benefits. Furthermore, he misses one of the more compelling features of March Madness success from the perspective of universities with less prestigious athletic programs: six wins and a championship are not necessary, only a Cinderella story.

Certainly, administrators are hungry for more information in this regard. Barry Collier, Bruce Arick, and Jim Danko all referenced conversations with their peers about how they might pursue the Butler model at their own institution (B. Arick, personal communication, April 25, 2017; B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017; J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Likewise, once Butler found themselves in possession of a Final Four resource, administrators and trustees sought case lessons from peer institutions who either had experienced Cinderella stories of their own or struck a balance between serious academics and big-time men's basketball programs. The trip to Duke following the first Final Four was the most visible and extensive bit of fact-finding, but the names of numerous other schools surfaced across my interviews. The references to other schools were plentiful enough that one of my initial codes consisted of instances where Butler administrators mentioned "learning from peers," before I later folded these references into the larger code of "negotiating peers." Nevertheless, institutions like Gonzaga and Villanova—"places that it's really worked," as Jim Danko phrased it—emerged as models for Butler in the attempt to leverage Cinderella success in the short-term, while universities like Wake Forest, Harvard, Vanderbilt, and Stanford loomed as examples of leading academic institutions that nursed major college basketball programs (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017; J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017; J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017). That administrators at Butler and beyond are swapping tips and seeking success stories indicates a potential avenue for practice-minded

research, and given the contextuality and breadth of such stories, scholars would be well-trained to fill this void.

Model Athletic Programs

As noted in Chapter One, despite the many ills associated with big-time college athletics, I focused my study on the growth opportunities generated by the enterprise. Nevertheless, I did expect to encounter some hostility toward athletics during my interviews, especially after the lightning strike of back-to-back Final Fours. To be sure, the story's unfolding was not without its tension points: Bobby Fong and the board of trustees differed in their vision of how best to build toward and capitalize upon athletic success, the "Butler Way" remains a somewhat contested institutional slogan, and interview respondents acknowledged that a small minority of community members feel that basketball is too big at Butler. But, I found no open wounds. Instead, much to my surprise, Butler appears to have constructed a model big-time athletics program in an industry where scandal often dominates the news cycle.

Two relative newcomers to the community in positions that typically feel the most pressure from a big-time athletics program—Jim Danko as president and Lori Greene as the head of enrollment—shared my surprise at this reality. "Surprisingly enough, I have not heard that," said Danko. "There is no real sense here that 'Oh my God, you're letting athletics dominate.' Sometimes I think I've been more paranoid about that because I've seen that" at other institutions. Later in the conversation, he returned to the idea, noting that Butler's men's basketball program "still means a lot because it's something we can point to with pride. Nobody is able to latch onto a negative story, even the internal academics" (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Greene expressed the same sentiment: "I don't think there is a tension. I don't get that here. I would have to say that I think that's one of the most attractive

pieces about this community" (L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Kirsch, who has been around much longer, said simply, "We're never embarrassed. We're never embarrassed" (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017). Those three interviews all happened my first day on campus—the message was clear, and backed up across nearly all subsequent interviews with stories that I've sprinkled throughout the preceding narrative to illustrate just how well-regarded the men's basketball players have been and continue to be on Butler's campus.

When I began my research, a sexual misconduct scandal was ripping apart Baylor University, with football at its epicenter; as I came down the home stretch, another shockwave hit: an extensive FBI sting tore Louisville's basketball program from its moorings and implicated apparel companies, sports agents, AAU coaches, and numerous other major programs in a recruiting scandal that may yet, as one former NCAA official suggested, "be the biggest college sports story of our lifetime" (Thamel, 2017). The story broke in late September of 2017; the following month I was on campus to conduct my second round of interviews, and I asked Barry Collier for his thoughts on the ordeal:

> I've mentioned this a few times since that came out that I'm not in favor of bank robberies but I am in favor of catching the bank robbers. That's what happened a couple weeks ago. Beyond that, the depth of the improprieties I don't know. I believe that it's not anywhere close to as widespread as what some in the media have said: 'college basketball has always been this way and everybody does this.' That's just not true. I know that for a fact—it's not true that everybody does it. What we don't know is how prevalent it is. (B. Collier, personal communication, October 20, 2017)

Reform efforts continue, with leading scholarly voices continuing to call for policy and governance reform and the NCAA forming a Commission on College Basketball to recommend legislative changes to its bylaws, with the goal of enacting "meaningful change, not trivial change" before the 2018-19 season (Sherman, 2018, para. 6; Gurney, Lopiano, & Zimbalist, 2017).

Yet, the confidence with which Collier expressed his belief in other programs who approach big-time athletics the right way, combined with my own study of Butler's program, convinced me that there are additional ways in which scholars might be able to promote change, namely by studying model athletic departments and producing well-researched accounts of the decisions, commitments, and sacrifices necessary to strike the right balance. As Clotfelter (2011) contends, even with major athletic programs in their backyards for more than a century, numerous American universities have continued to thrive as academic institutions. If intercollegiate athletics can be salvaged, perhaps an increased focus from scholars on the positive stories in tandem with the negative can provide more nuance to the field of study and blueprints for administrators seeking to develop winning programs with integrity.

Organizational Saga

Lastly, in analyzing the weight of evidence across two of my larger codes—"nurturing culture in athletics" and "engaging the campus community"—I found myself revisiting the concept of organizational culture. When I began the doctoral program at Boston College, I was captured by Burton Clark's idea of an organizational saga, which he defined years ago in *The Distinctive College* and a series of accompanying publications as a "collective understanding of unique accomplishment in a formally established group" (1972, p. 178) and the "central ingredient in the making of the distinctive college" (1970/1992, p. 8). Clark's work kicked off

the study of organizational culture within higher education and beyond, but it quickly gave way to the popular idea that university communities are too fragmented, with too many different sub-cultures, for a culture either unitary or distinct to take root (Dill, 1982; Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983; Silver, 2003). I wanted to explore the concept of saga in the present day, perhaps even retrofitting the idea to make room for athletics given that Clark's (1970/1992) central concern was academic organization and that he drew his theory from three liberal arts colleges that were "explicitly defined and were operationally managed against dominant ideals of college sports and social life" (p. 64). Eventually, though, I gave up on this line of thinking; intercollegiate athletics did seem too divisive and universities too big.

Yet, at Butler, there might be reason to believe saga is not quite dead yet. With each passing interview, and even in casual conversation with staff members whose words do not appear in my study, evidence mounted that some strain of a unitary and powerful organizational culture existed. For most, the "Butler Way" encapsulates this culture and infuses the everyday work of the community's members. Numerous people told me, "The Butler Way is real"—sometimes in those exact words—and even as their descriptions of its details varied, they always placed a similar set of values at its heart. Reflecting on his landmark work in a preface to the 1992 reprint, Clark (1970/1992) reached a nearly identical conclusion about organizational sagas: "values are finally what *The Distinctive College* is about, values made real, values brought alive" (p. ix).

Yet, all of the talk about values is not what ultimately tipped me off; instead, it was the mix of affection and wonder with which people spoke of the Butler community. Clark (1970/1992) often described saga participants as sensing that they are in on a "beautiful secret" (p. 235). It is for this reason that saga is "first of all a matter of the heart" (p. 9) and that its

principal benefit is organizational devotion. At Butler I heard references to a "secret sauce," a "special sauce," a "best kept secret," a "special place," and a "special culture"; comments were prefaced by "it sounds corny" or "it sounds I think perhaps hokey to some people"; there was talk of "all those Butler Way hokey sayings" and "a big kumbaya event stretching over years and years"; "I don't know, it's hard for me to articulate" said one person, while another confessed that "it's a lot of the cliché stuff" before finishing "but the difference at Butler is that's the way it's operating" (J. Dunn, personal communication, July 25, 2017; L. Greene, personal communication, April 24, 2017; J. Hargrove, personal communication, July 18, 2017 and August 19, 2017; G. Honaker, personal communication, October 18, 2017; M. Kaltenmark, personal communication, April 25, 2017; K. Morris, personal communication, November 15, 2017; B. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017; T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017; B. Weatherly, personal communication, October 18, 2017). In listening to people gush about their experience at Butler, I was persuaded that Clark's (1971) old argument for the most valuable byproducts of saga—namely belief in and loyalty to the organization—still carries weight today:

> There are such rich personal and institutional returns from sagas as to argue strongly for those forms of academic organization that make them most likely. Even in modest strength, a saga adds much meaning to the work of administrators and faculty and the transitory participation of the students. When seen as a matter of degree, rather than all-or-nothing, we can encourage ourselves to create, even in adverse settings, those general conditions that are conducive to this and other forms of normative bonding. (p. 515)

The "rich personal and institutional returns" from Butler's culture were evident across my conversations: people believed in and labored for something bigger than themselves. In light of

this experience, renewed attention to Clark's concept of institutional saga might be warranted, particularly at smaller and less prestigious universities and this time taking into account the cultural value of intercollegiate athletic programcs. Further, if Clark's advice that decision-makers can and should strive to create such conditions is taken seriously, and if, as he surely did not anticipate at the time, a big-time basketball program can help energize such an institutional change, then a final question remains: what facets of the Butler story hold the most interest for administrators at other institutions?

Implications for Practice

The questions at the heart of my study concerned the decisions that actors within the Butler community made to build toward and then leverage the men's basketball team's Cinderella run. As noted in Chapter Three, I used process coding for my initial analysis of the data in order to maintain this focus on strategic decision-making. The three pattern codes that emerged during my second coding cycle—building a flagship program, finding synergy between flagship and university, and building a national profile—in turn reflect the three loci of administrative action. Though Butler's case possesses its share of distinct features, the management approaches in each of these three areas remain instructive for administrators across a variety of institutional contexts.

Building a Flagship Athletic Program

Early in my research, I imagined I would see the growth of the men's basketball program in three stages: (1) an initial bottoming out and rebuilding phase culminating with the team's first appearance in the NCAA tournament in 35 years (1989-1997); (2) a period of escalating success, marked by semi-regular appearances in the tournament and peaking with the consecutive Final Fours (1997-2011); and, (3) continued efforts to sustain a national championship-caliber program

(2011-present). I coded data along these lines for the majority of my study, slotting each basketball-related bit into one of three windows of time. In writing my results, though, I finally realized that such a scheme rested on a faulty assumption: that the decisions of the primary actors would change with each new level of success to which the program ascended. In other words, I anticipated that the decisions made during a rebuilding phase would differ from those made when Butler began to appear regularly in the national tournament, and in turn, that competing in two national championship games would spur choices fundamentally different from any in the preceding eras. Instead, Butler has raised and sustained a flagship program on the national scene chiefly through its consistency over the past three decades, even as the scale of its operations and the stage on which the men's basketball team performs have changed dramatically. This consistency is most evident in the athletic department's leveraging of its historical assets, balancing of patience and risk, and hiring of insiders.

Invoking institutional history. After the first Final Four in 2010, Susan Neville suddenly found herself with a book deal from Indiana University Press and a short window in which to place the madness that had just descended upon her campus into page and context (S. Neville, personal communication, April 25, 2017). In *Butler's Big Dance*, she meditates on how a sudden burst of basketball success summoned the university's faded past:

> Our connection to the tradition or history is what we lost for a while…It was as though a fog we'd been laboring under was somehow lifted and some true experience was revealed, revealing in turn the text and the tradition, revivifying all of it. (Neville, 2011, p. 32)

I asked about this particular passage when I interviewed her, and she doubled down on the idea:

> It's like the end of a story. You see the end of a story, it's prefigured all the way through, and it could be a lot of different endings, or a lot of different climaxes. It doesn't mean it's the end of the whole story, because there will be other stories, but you know you can go back through everything and find a thread and pull it through. (S. Neville, personal communication, April 25, 2017)

Across all of my interviews, document analysis, observations, and even casual conversation at Butler, it became clear that the university's history is a dynamic force in the present day. Four distinct but intertwined threads from the university's history merit attention, as they demonstrate how institutional actors in the present day developed the athletic program out the historical assets and narratives they were handed.

First, the suspension of accreditation in 1930 marked a distinct point of divergence in the university's pursuit of big-time athletics. It is unclear how lasting a scar it left on the institutional memory; likewise, it is difficult to know what direct influence, if any, it had on the way that Tony Hinkle ran the athletic program or that Hilton U. Brown, who served as board president from 1903 to 1955, managed the directors in subsequent years. Caldwell (1991), in fact, asserts that the "actual effect of the suspension was minimal" (p. 42). Yet, its immediate impact on the relationship between the university and its athletic program was to check the breakneck expansion of athletics, force the program back into line with the central mission and governance of the institution, and chase a bad apple in athletic director and coach Potsy Clark out of town.

Second, the combination of the suspension and Clark's controversial tenure seems to have accelerated a critical shift in focus that began in the early 1920s: basketball, and not football, would be the university's flagship sport. It was not so in the early years. At the Irvington campus, the football team played on one of the state's premier fields while the

basketball team held court in a gym so small that there was not a single seat for spectators; the university actually had to cancel the 1913-14 season because no other teams were willing to play in the facility (Caldwell, 1991). The basketball team eventually inherited a building the government had constructed for an officer training program during World War I, and by 1919 seating could nearly accommodate a student body numbering around 600; by contrast, around the same time seating was expanded at the football stadium from 2,500 to 10,000 and still overflowed during the team's biggest games. In the 1920s, Pat Page's coaching, the basketball team's success, and the fast-growing popularity of basketball in the state brought the sport even with football at Butler (Caldwell, 1991; Waller, 2006). When the university moved to Fairview Park, plans for the Butler Bowl, which adjoined the mammoth fieldhouse, called for an equally imposing 72,000-seat stadium. However, the bowl's capacity never reached more than its original 36,000 seats and was reduced to 20,000 in 1955 to make room for, of all things, an outdoor theatre that housed off-Broadway musicals (Butler University, 2017; Caldwell, 1991). The "de-emphasis of football in the post-Potsy Clark days" created enough space for basketball, with all its native advantages, to cement its status as the university's most popular sport (Caldwell, 1991, p. 44).

Third, despite its shaky financing and a leading role in the accreditation episode, Butler Fieldhouse provided the university with an unrivaled asset. As the locus of Hoosier Hysteria, the fieldhouse annually attracted the eyes and admiration of the entire state. Its enchantments also profoundly shaped the type of basketball program that the university was able to field, drawing undersized yet talented locals who were unafraid of the big stage and big-time opponents who paraded through the building year after year. As such, the fieldhouse gave Butler a direct claim on the affections and a prominent place in the memories of generation after generation of Indiana

natives. Beyond basketball, the facility proved a unique leverage point for the university. In the three decades following its completion, the fieldhouse welcomed two U.S. presidents: President Herbert Hoover drew a crowd of more than 22,000 to the fieldhouse for a campaign speech in October of 1932, just eleven days before he ran for reelection against Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and President Dwight Eisenhower followed in 1954 to address the National Institute of Animal Agriculture. The barn proved versatile as well. In the 1930s alone, an indoor track meet called the Butler Relays drew sizable crowds and turned a profit in each of its ten iterations; 125 pianos and 825 pianists sprawled across the floor for the world's largest piano recital; and a six-day marathon bicycle race attracted around 30,000 people to campus. In these early years, the fieldhouse demonstrated a magnetic capacity to capture the general populace and, in the process, to stockpile historical events that could in themselves become assets over time.

Finally, throughout his lengthy tenure as athletic director and head coach, Tony Hinkle played a vital role in nurturing a culture within the athletic department that echoed the ethos of the university as a whole. He was beloved almost from the start, with board president Hilton Brown observing ten years into Hinkle's tenure at Butler that the coach was already "the idol of the school" (Waller, 2006, p. 305). His cultural sway seems by every account to have arisen organically: Hinkle was simply himself—modest, loyal, diligent, selfless—day after day after day, and over time his steady integrity permeated the fabric of the institution. His passion for place and university flooded everyday images: he lived two blocks from the fieldhouse, worked concessions at the facility in the offseason, raked the dirt and tended the grass at the baseball field, weeded the ground around the fieldhouse, and perhaps most tellingly, wept when Wabash students burnt a "W" in the football field on the eve of a rivalry game (Caldwell, 1991; Neville, 2011; Woods, 2009). Of course, it also bears noting that Hinkle quickly developed into a brilliant

coach, particularly in the sport of basketball—it is difficult to imagine any lasting cultural effect without a corresponding talent for the job. Yet, the concrete results born out in win-loss records enabled Hinkle to shape the university in a far broader, more difficult-to-measure fashion. As Neville (2011) asked years after his passing, "Why did we all love Tony Hinkle so much? He had a commitment to the university and the university had a commitment to him. What do we retain from him, perhaps unconsciously…Was it transmitted directly or is it woven into the fabric of the institution in some invisible way?" (p. 31).

By the late 1980s, these four historical threads—a chastened resolve to build an athletic program in service to the institution, a commitment to basketball as the flagship sport, a singular facility with an almost spiritual hold on the community, and an exemplary cultural influence—were frayed and fading, but far from gone. When Geoff Bannister and Barry Collier began the work of reviving the men's basketball program, they did not start from scratch, but instead were able to tug on a rich past and then weave it across the contours of the present. From a decision-making standpoint, the institution's history furnished not only the logic for a major investment in the men's basketball program but also a number of resources, physical and otherwise, for a renewed pursuit of success. At Butler, it seems that administrators look backward as often as they look forward in their attempt to negotiate the present.

Staying patient. Historical background aside, the story of Butler's investment in men's basketball and the eventual returns gleaned from this gamble remains a long one, spanning nearly three decades from 1989 into the present day. Barry Collier told me that administrators from other mid- and low-major institutions often ask him how they might pursue the Butler model. The part of the equation that "hardly ever gets mentioned," according to Collier, is patience:

> If you're doing the wrong thing and immediately thinking you're going to get something to happen in three to five years then you're going to fire the coach and fire the AD and fire the president…you can't do it that way. I think that Butler's values were always there…We're a value-based institution, and this is a value-based department and a value-based basketball program and kind of always has been. While we're not the same every year, we're pretty strong and we hold tight to those values. (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

As the back half of the quote makes clear, this patience is rooted in the department's longstanding value system. Other athletics programs have value sets, but often they bow to win-loss records. Given how quickly win totals can fluctuate, or how easy it is to justify a value compromise in the name of winning, the first gauge of whether to remain patient or make a change must come with a view toward something else. Collier spoke of patience as a reward, not earned through a long string of winning seasons but instead through a commitment to Butler's values:

> If you really believe in your core that these values that you have are why you exist, then it's kind of easier to speak to them. It's easier to hold to them. We reward accordingly, whether that be with an approval or patience or whatever the case might be. It's much more than just letting you win or lose. (B. Collier, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

Critically, this approach is longstanding. Angevine (2015) notes how Collier met with administrators in 1990 following his first season as head coach, during which the team finished with a record of 6-22. Collier reasoned that he might lose his job, but instead he received a four-year extension. Years later, after Collier had taken the head coaching position at Nebraska and

Butler had made its first Sweet Sixteen, the program slumped again under Todd Lickliter. Once more, no one panicked. “To our athletic director’s credit, our president’s credit, our fans’ credit, they hung in there,” Lickliter recalled, and all were soon rewarded with another Sweet Sixteen appearance (T. Lickliter, personal communication, December 5, 2017). Over a thirty-year span, this institution-wide patience with the flagship athletic program has positioned Butler to take advantage when fortune breaks their way and to stay the course when it does not.

Taking risks. Such patience, however, has not precluded risk. It was sown deep in the soil beneath Hinkle Fieldhouse when an athletic corporation of trustees and alumni swung a deal to build a massive gymnasium with money they did not have and were not likely to raise, banking instead on the popular appeal of basketball within the Hoosier state and ultimately mortgaging the university’s accreditation for a short time as a result. Geoff Bannister tapped into this same spirit when he spent out of the institution’s endowment to renovate the building and revive the men’s basketball program. One can imagine the howls of protest that such decisions would elicit today, and while I do not espouse such gambles, it is in the very least interesting to see how they have paid off over time.

Interwoven with such basketball-driven risks is the resolution of the football question: the move to de-escalate the football program in the wake of the accreditation loss in the 1930s and the commitment to non-scholarship football with the formation of the Pioneer League in the early years of Bannister’s presidency. Of particular note, though the latter decision was unpopular at the time with certain segments of the alumni base, it looks prescient today. Pioneer League teams compete in the NCAA’s Division I Football Championship Series (FCS), and the dictates of this classification allow FCS teams to award the equivalent of up to 63 full scholarships to football players. Not only has Butler sidestepped this substantial financial outlay

for football scholarships, but in so doing they have also avoided a corresponding expenditure for women's athletics to ensure their continued compliance with Title IX. For this reason, membership in the 12-member Pioneer League represents a significant competitive advantage for Butler over many of its peers in terms of cost-savings.

Through his experience at Villanova, which at one point considered expanding its football program, and his conversations with other presidents, Jim Danko acknowledged that institutions casting their lots with football face even longer odds in surviving today's arms race:

> Betting in a sport's direction is a high payoff, low probability. It could be a big payoff, but real low probabilities to do it with the basketball thing. Well, it's an *extreme* low probability and enormous high risk on football. (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

Taking Butler's approach to basketball and football together, one can discern a measure of prudence in athletics-related risk-taking. The investment in the fieldhouse and men's basketball, rather than football, represents a direct accounting for the university's physical location in Indiana, where basketball holds far more currency. When Bannister arrived, he combined this environmental sensitivity with a bit of common sense: in Hinkle Fieldhouse and the program established by its namesake, Butler possessed both a physical and historical justification for reinvestment in men's basketball. These assets lay dormant, but the fieldhouse in particular had already proven to be a competitive advantage for Butler athletics as well as a point of distinction for the university as a whole. In this sense, Bannister's risk now seems well-placed and perhaps can provide some insight to administrators weighing additional investments in supposedly revenue-generating sports in the present day.

Hiring insiders. The area in which this balance between patience and risk has played out to greatest effect is in Butler Athletics' commitment to navigate major personnel changes by hiring within the community. From Collier's hire in 1989 into the present, the head coaching position has always passed either to former players (Collier), current assistants (Stevens and Holtmann), or both (Matta, Lickliter, Miller, and Jordan). Collier, Matta, Lickliter, Stevens, and Miller had no experience as a head coach at the collegiate level when handed the job. Holtmann had three years of head coaching experience at Gardner-Webb and a career record of 44-44, while Jordan had one year of experience at UW-Milwaukee and a career record 11-24. If at any point Butler conceived of itself as a big-time program, none of those hires matched that ambition from an outside perspective. Butler has clearly bucked the trend within big-time athletics to pursue coaches with splashy names or winning records, instead looking for proven commodities in terms of the program's value system. The same theme holds true even when considering Collier's hire as athletic director with no previous experience in such a position. This risky practice has proven remarkably successful, especially with regard to Collier and Stevens, both of whom were described by numerous interview subjects as singular figures in terms of their talent for the job and their character. In the essential positions of athletic director and men's basketball head coach, Butler has established a tradition of hiring for culture above any other factor. The string of successful head coaches netted through this unconventional practice ought to garner the attention of athletic directors at mid-major institutions, particularly those whose programs have found some success and are looking to solidify their place on the national scene.

Finding Synergy between Flagship and University

Butler has created an ecosystem in which flagship program, athletic department, and university are aligned and feeding off one another as the institution continues to grow. Part of the

length of the story owes to the amount of tinkering required to rebuild each sphere, wrench them into line with one another, and then sustain these bonds as each evolves. Key periods of alignment consisted of Geoff Bannister's initial investment in the men's basketball program, Todd Lickliter's and Brad Stevens's hard-learned lessons on recruiting players who still fit the environment at Butler despite the program's increasing success, Barry Collier's first order of business upon his return as athletic director to attend to the flagging satisfaction levels of student-athletes in all sports and not just the flagship, Bobby Fong's ability to shore up cracks in the university's financial base after Bannister's risk-taking and then position Butler for its pursuit of a national profile, and the hiring of a president in Jim Danko who was well-suited and eager to capitalize upon the Final Four runs. In the present day, the hardwiring of these three units turns on a wholesale commitment to the student experience, a mutual adoption of the underdog spirit, and above and between all, a shared organizational culture.

Committing to the student experience. The innermost thread of alignment between the men's basketball program, the athletic department as whole, and the university is the student experience. Todd Lickliter recalled this emphasis existing at Butler as far back as his days as a student-athlete in the late 1970s:

> People who have some character, some maturity to them, can flourish in the environment at Butler because there is a real commitment to the growth of the individual. You feel that. And I tell you, it's not like you're nurtured and babied. It's a demanding environment, but it's one in which you know you have support. (T. Lickliter, personal communication, December 5, 2017)

When Brad Stevens arrived more than two decades later, this commitment to students persisted: "our hearts were all in the place to make it the greatest experience we could for the student-

athletes or for the students if you're on the faculty," a sentiment that I did indeed hear reflected across my interviews with faculty members as well (B. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017).

Kate Morris, the non-sports fan provost, painted a picture of this ecosystem that recognizes men's basketball as flagship while also acknowledging that, for faculty, support of the student body remains paramount irrespective of their sport:

> There are a lot of faculty members who have season tickets. I mean when you go to the games, there's a lot of faculty that you see there. So, I think generally speaking, the faculty like that there's something to rally around. Now as time has gone by, I think it's a little more than just that…you know our men's soccer team has done very well. Our cross-country team has done very well. I was heavily involved—for whatever reason, I think just because I had a couple of volleyball players [in class]—but I was often at volleyball matches. And there's a lot of faculty who go to those things as well. I think the faculty really like to support the students. And when faculty have students who are on the men's basketball team, that is a source of pride for them. (K. Morris, personal communication, November 15, 2017)

Because of the wholesale commitment to the student experience and the relatively small size of Butler's community, athletics remains an avenue for faculty and students to connect with rather than antagonize one another. This dynamic has persisted because, as noted earlier, coaches recruit players who are an authentic reflection of the student body in terms of their engagement on campus and their commitment to the academic mission of the university. In turn, the faculty largely recognize the value of students' extracurricular pursuits while demanding that they meet the standards required to earn a Butler degree. "I always tell the student-athletes when they come

in here that the majority of faculty members will be right behind you," Joe Kirsch said, before adding:

> This isn't the kind of institution where when you come in and you say, "I'm a student athlete," all of a sudden you have special things. If you're in my class and you're a football player, that's great. You've still got to do the chemistry. If you're in freshman English, you've still got to do freshman English, but I'm very supportive of you…my sense of this whole thing is that we're a community and athletics shouldn't trample all over academics and academics ought to allow the student athlete to have the opportunity to live a quality academic life and live a quality athletic life, and when they leave probably they're happy. (J. Kirsch, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

Tapping into the underdog spirit. In 1954, Butler Fieldhouse served as center stage for the apotheosis of basketball's Cinderella story, when Milan High School emerged from a field of 751 teams to win the IHSAA state tournament on a last second shot by Bobby Plump. Butler further staked its claim to the story when Plump spurned Indiana University to play basketball for Butler and, later, when *Hoosiers*—the film that immortalized the Milan Miracle with its release in 1986—shot its final scenes at Hinkle Fieldhouse. Butler's claim on the underdog story took root well before the Final Four runs and persists even after such unprecedented success.

When Butler readied itself to move into the Big East, Jim Danko asked Brad Stevens whether they were ready to compete in this new arena. As Danko recalled, Stevens responded by saying "We're going to be like Butler always is. We're lifting ourselves up by our bootstraps and trying to compete and playing a little bit over our head. But that's a story that we're used to, right?" (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017). As I analyzed interview transcripts, on multiple occasions I found myself staring at a passage like the preceding one, trying to

decipher whether the speaker intended to describe the men's basketball program, the university, or both. This shared underdog mentality is further reflected in the university's marketing and branding efforts, as signified in the current style guide, which posits that the Bulldog logo "represents a nearly 25-year tradition of athletic representation, but also exemplifies the tenacious spirit infused throughout the 160-year tradition of Butler University" (Butler University, 2016 Style Guide, p. 17).

From the perspective of both the men's basketball program and the university, Butler runs in crowded circles. In state, schools like Indiana, Purdue, and Notre Dame occupy the upper echelon; in competing against like Georgetown and St. John's, Butler faces the same dynamic in the Big East. As Tracy Stevens suggested, Butler's standing among its peers helps to preserve a critical part of the university's ethos:

> You never want to lose that underdog spirit. That's who we are. But I just don't think you worry about it…Whether we want to be an underdog or not, we are. From a financial standpoint, if you look at our endowment compared to the other schools in the Big East, it's not the same. If you look at our funding compared to the other schools in the Big East, we're towards the bottom half. (T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017).

This shared dynamic between the flagship sport and the institution as a whole serves as a rallying point for a small university that has long believed in its educational product and nursed high ambitions amid the challenges of a thin financial base and a history of obscurity. The underdog persona stands as one more longstanding way in which the team mirrors its university and thereby strengthens the connection between the two entities.

Sharing organizational culture. In the end, the alignment between the basketball players and the student body, as well as between the basketball program and the university,

points back to a larger and abiding culture on campus. “The story,” Tracy Stevens told me after I had stopped recording our conversation, “is the culture” (T. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017). For many in the community, the best available shorthand to describe this culture is the “Butler Way.” Again after I had paused my recording, John Hargrove circled back to the concept and compared me to the reporter in *Citizen Kane*. “The Butler Way is your Rosebud,” he said, referencing the mysterious word at the heart of the film. My task, he continued, is to search within a small piece of language for a vast array of meanings that shift from person to person depending on their perspective (J. Hargrove, personal communication, August 19, 2017).

Table 8 shows a small sample of the different terms used to describe the Butler Way, illustrating what is perhaps one of the concept’s most appealing virtues: its elasticity.

Table 8. A Sample of Perspectives on the “Butler Way”

Source	**Definition**
Athletic Department	The Butler Way demands commitment, denies selfishness, accepts reality, yet seeks improvement everyday while putting the team above self.
Jim Danko	It’s a great way to structure what you want to become. It really does apply to Butler in a more universal sense just outside of athletics. You really do have to work hard, team before self, be self-reflective, and there’s a lot of ways you could apply that in the universal set.
“Dare to Make a Difference” Strategic Plan	The Butler Way prepares a graduate not simply to make a living, but to make a life. Academic excellence through a challenging and supportive educational environment provides practical knowledge for careers or graduate school. A commitment to service, unselfishness, and a thriving intellectual and social community enables members of the Butler community to become reciprocally involved in the lives and welfare of other people. At its heart, the Butler Way requires that we aspire – every day – to improve ourselves and those around us.
Lori Greene	You hear the Butler way, that’s what it’s about: It’s the hard work, it’s the day to day, everyday choices.
John Hargrove	The Butler way always puts the concept of unselfishness and team first. That’s the mantra.
Graham Honaker	Well, the principles of it, the passion, the service, but for me, again, it’s the people that come first…We want to win, like anyone else, but the people element comes first. Doing it the right way, the humility.

Michael Kaltenmark	People who really stick to doing things by the book, doing it the right way, doing it the Butler Way, doing more with less, not making excuses.
Joe Kirsch	Basically what that is that you're on a team and your major effort is to make the team successful and hopefully you can get some benefits as an individual, but it's not about you as an individual.
Chris Potts	Doing things the right way, doing things with integrity, and living by example. Whatever your values are, making sure that you act in that way at all times, and showing the world, basically in this case, that what we were saying about us is actually true, that it's not a situation where we're saying one thing and doing another.
Brad Stevens	If you had to break it down into one phrase, it's conviction in action.
Tracy Stevens	I think the one thing about the Butler way is if you stay true, [if] you remain focused on the culture, I don't think you lose that [underdog spirit].
Betsy Weatherly	We are a small liberal arts institution that has a different culture, and I think a lot of it goes back to the Butler Way and those values: team before self and doing what's right when no one is watching…It's hard to say. It's not that it's ever spoken to students. It's just how people act, and it's what you do.

"Everybody throws their own definition at it," said Brad Stevens. "It's not something you can accurately or easily define in words. You can feel it. You know when you're a part of something that is bigger than yourselves" (B. Stevens, personal communication, October 30, 2017). Part of its size, and perhaps part of the fussing over just the right term to describe it, stems from the weight of all the history it seeks to shoulder. Bruce Arick joined the Butler community well before the watchword hatched in bowels of Hinkle Fieldhouse but well after the feeling it sought to convey had permeated the campus:

> Butler was that, and a phrase came along, and people said "You know what, that's a pretty darn good description of how we would describe our culture, and a way we like to go about our business, both from a faculty/staff and student standpoint"…We weren't trying to take a phrase and then mold ourselves into it. It was the opposite. (B. Arick, personal communication, October 19, 2017)

The organic quality of the Butler Way and the elasticity of the term's meaning has enabled different members of the Butler community to assimilate into the organization's culture and locate their work within a broader value set.

As I have tried to uncover and narrate a fragment of Butler's story, Susan Neville's words have reverberated in my ear all along: "you can go back through everything and find a thread and pull it through" (S. Neville, personal communication, April 25, 2017). The thread that binds Jordan Hall to Hinkle Fieldhouse, that keeps them in sync as the campus continues to grow and as the community continues to renew itself, is cultural, and perhaps the tugs over how to name or define this culture are in the end a balancing mechanism, meant to keep each side on its toes as the world around both changes. For administrators, the cultural fit between their flagship sport, athletic department, and institution as a whole represents a key frame of analysis in seeking to integrate big-time athletics with serious academic pursuits.

Building a National Profile

If the Cinderella story functions most effectively as a catalyst for existing initiatives, then the principle strategic direction energized at Butler has been the pursuit of a national profile. In a different context, administrators might leverage the Cinderella story toward a different institutional end, or, if isomorphic pressures persist, might attempt to climb higher education's prestige hierarchy in a similar fashion as Butler (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Regardless, Butler's case suggests that the halo effect constitutes a legitimate opportunity generated by high-profile athletic success and that Toma and Cross's (1998) idea of a "good story phenomenon" might indeed ramp up the intensity of the halo. For administrators, the lesson is two-fold: first, for those able to grasp a good story on the athletic fields or courts, the window for capitalizing upon this success is short and requires intentional leveraging in order to maximize its benefit;

and second, for those pursuing or considering pursuing this type of athletic success, despite the prospect of such wide-ranging returns, the investment in big-time athletics remains an expensive gamble.

Capitalizing on the halo effect. From a qualitative perspective, my research at Butler yielded ample evidence for the validity of the halo effect. Interview respondents, whether long-term members of the community or relative newcomers, spoke with conviction about the manifold benefits of the back-to-back Final Four runs. Though these gains are often difficult to quantify, even for those who have access to all available data, Butler's case provides reason to believe that a Cinderella story can catalyze efforts across the variety of university functions reflected in my code set, including marketing and branding, enrollment and recruitment, civic and alumni relations, fundraising, and student life.

Of particular note, the traditional understanding of the halo effect often privileges its perceived value for enrollment and recruitment. Indeed, the so-called Flutie effect continues to spur debate in scholarly circles (Chung, 2013; Peterson-Horner & Eckstein, 2015) and to draw popular attention in sports media (O'Neil, 2017). However, as Taylor (2016) implies, in the current higher education landscape the most lucrative opportunities might lie in the area of marketing and branding. My coding results backed up this notion, as "marketing the university" was the most frequent code under the theme of "building a national profile." Jim Danko's response to my question about leveraging the Cinderella success captures this shift from admissions to marketing as the leading point of strategic emphasis:

> Well, what I [said] is "We've *got* to leverage this. How are we thinking about marketing and branding?" So one, I had seen enough from my business school activities to know you have to manage perceptions. So we are going to hire a vice president of marketing.

We're going to elevate that position. They're going to be a direct report to me as president. It's that important. And, we're going to have a unified branding marketing strategy across the university.

The mascot program, which was kind of started had some traction, but how do you think about that differently? So, there's been a really intentional move. They won this thing, but nobody was thinking strategically or in a more precise business way about how you build upon that. Even if you look at our admissions number as a metric of that, yes, applications jumped from 6,500 to 9,000 in the '10 and '11 period, held steady, but have now since gone up. Like this year, we're going to hit 15,000.

So, we had a nice incremental jump, but now we've had a nice steady upward trajectory by really pushing on the—we redid our imaging and our logo. I mean if I would have taken this table and spread out all of our brochures and everything, you wouldn't have thought they were from the same university. So now there is consistency of messaging and branding. We've used the mascot program. Even now, we get a lot of credit for the mascot delivering acceptance letters to students. So, there is a more sophisticated approach to that whole thing. We're more intentional about making sure we understand how rankings are done and who we have to influence to help us.

So, we're much more strategic as a result of it and if we get some basketball success, we're in a position to take full advantage of it. It's not a matter of, "Oh, hey, that was nice." Now it's a matter of, "Okay, this is what is happening, what do we do about it? How do we keep ratcheting up? How do we sell the story? How do we go out and market it? How do we keep pushing on this Butler Way? (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017)

From this perspective, marketing is the filter through which so many of the other potential benefits of the halo effect pass. In Danko's phrasing, for instance, enrollment gains and prestige-seeking behaviors occur downstream from messaging and branding changes. This business-minded approach gives reasonable cause for concern to academics. Peterson-Horner and Eckstein (2015) caution that institutions are "ill-advised to blindly and uncritically jump on the Flutie Factor bandwagon" precisely because the associated "overemphasis on sports-based branding leads universities to stray from their educational and democratic mission" (p. 81-82). However, Butler provides a corrective to this concern: because of the cultural synergy between the university's flagship program and its larger community, Butler has remained on-mission despite its athletic success and general growth trajectory. If, in the present day, the halo effect generates the greatest opportunity for marketing initiatives, then the flagship program in particular and the athletic program in general must be built with the institution's mission always in mind.

That said, although the halo effect offers numerous leverage points on a university-wide level, administrators must move quickly to capitalize on its energy. The selection of Jim Danko as president, the elevation of Barry Collier to the vice president level, the massive fundraising campaign for the athletic department's principal facility in Hinkle Fieldhouse, the increased staffing capacity in marketing and fundraising, and the decision to expand the traditional size of the undergraduate student body all represent strategic initiatives launched in the immediate aftermath of the Final Fours. Yet, to really extend the effect of the Cinderella story as a resource, the move to the Big East was essential and, for many in the Butler community, constitutes a more valuable asset in the long-run. In this regard, my research confirmed the idea in the literature that the halo effect lasts for somewhere between one and four years after the spark of

athletic success (Brewer, Gates, & Goldman, 2002; Chung, 2013; Pope and Pope, 2009; Toma, 2003). As such, the few years after the Cinderella run open a crucial window for administrators to capitalize on the story itself but also, just as importantly, to seek ways to cement its value over the long-term. That said, while the leap to a top-tier athletic conference represents the most coveted route to prolonged value, it might not be the most realistic. Jim Danko mentioned that every so often at gatherings of university presidents, his peers at similarly-sized institutions will inquire about the prospects of joining the Big East. His response is always the same: "Well, the odds aren't too good" (J. Danko, personal communication, April 24, 2017).

Gambling on big-time athletics. In the end, the investment in a big-time college athletic program remains a significant institutional gamble, with payoffs that can be long in coming and difficult to quantify. The case at Butler does not refute the strong warning that scholars like Peterson-Horner and Eckstein continue to sound for prestige-seeking institutions who "take a big financial and organizational risk by investing in more visible sports programs. Certain schools may indeed benefit from such a strategy, but many more probably will not" (p. 82). However, for administrators who inherit such pursuits and feel little choice but to continue them, or for those who do strike gold with a Cinderella story, Butler provides numerous points of instruction.

Despite all of its hard work and good fortune, and despite the unrivaled combination of assets in back-to-back Final Four appearances and a spot in the Big East, the story still unfolds at the university. "I always compare Butler to the family that won the Powerball, and then it's trying to figure out what to do with the rest of their life," said Graham Honaker.

> It's a bad analogy from the standpoint that what Brad and Barry [did], there was a lot more to it than luck. It was a lot of hard work. But your life changed overnight. Then,

> you're trying to figure out the next 20 to 30 years, and we're still in that space. We're still very much in that space.

Yet, from another perspective, Butler may have built toward and then leveraged its Cinderella story prudently enough to have permanently altered the footing and status of the university. Michael Kaltenmark drew on the gambling metaphor as well, and his words are as good as any to tie the threads of the story into a final bow:

> [The men's basketball program] is invaluable. It's pretty precious. Clearly, based on what we've done with it, the Final Fours and stuff, you take that out of Butler's history and this place looks vastly different. I don't think you can argue with that, especially in this state of higher ed we're in now. It's a real arms race out there with schools closing their doors. I really hate to think about where we'd be without that occurrence and what our team's done. Now, what that's allowed us to do is, it's allowed the university to stand on its own even more…yeah, we know what basketball can do for all those things and your future, so obviously you want them to keep winning. But I don't feel like all chips are in on it anymore…Back in the day, we shoved all those chips to the middle and just rode that hand because that's what we had. Yeah, we had some other good stuff, don't get me wrong, but we knew if those chips cashed in, the other good stuff was just going to get that much better and it did. Now we're at a point where it's like "Well, I'm going to take a stack of those chips and now put it over here with this and put it with this, and put it with this." We've diversified our bet. (M. Kaltenmark, April 25, 2017)

In this way, Butler has realized to some extent the dream shaped in the past by football schools like Notre Dame and Boston College, yet they have done so in the present day and through the vehicle of men's basketball. Butler's case suggests that there is still reason to believe in the

widespread payoffs from one shining moment, but that the true value of that moment hinges upon a network of decisions made by many administrators, coaches, and players over many years.

The Butler Model

Butler's story raises and leaves open several important questions, particularly with regard to the variables of sport, location, and university size. The Butler model spins on Division I men's basketball as well as the unique leverage point of the NCAA tournament, but such institutional opportunities might be available on a smaller scale through different, more regionally popular sports like ice hockey or baseball. Likewise, for schools that have invested heavily in football alongside men's basketball, a Cinderella run in men's basketball might present a different set of strategic choices. For instance, on the one hand the presence of an FBS football program changes the financial and cultural calculus for such schools: unlike Butler and its peers with FCS football programs, such institutions must continue to wrestle with the football question and the associated costs, risks, and pressures. On the other hand, the presence of an FBS football program might open the doors to membership in a Power Five athletic conference: as mentioned earlier, Butler's move to the Big East was essential for extending the effects of its Final Four runs, but the Big East represents the only real major conference landing spot for institutions without an FBS football program. Beyond these considerations, it is also unclear how completely the Butler model might transfer to universities of a larger size, in which a unitary culture and a small college environment are nearly impossible to maintain, and to institutions in different parts of the country, where sports other than basketball have captured the allegiance of the local populace.

Yet, for those looking to extrapolate the Butler model into other contexts, several elements are essential regardless of university type, location, or size. The first prerequisite and perhaps the distinguishing feature of Butler's story is institutional patience. This posture has characterized the management style across so many administrative relationships at the university, from board of trustees to president, president to athletic director, and athletic director to coach. It also diverges from prevailing management practices, especially in big-time athletic departments where emotional investments and knee-jerk reactions run high. The effects of such patience, however, are wide-ranging. At Butler, the emphasis on decision-making for long-term sustainability over short-term success, for building programs rather than teams, is evident everywhere. It seeps into the sideline demeanor of the coaching staff, perhaps best embodied by the famously unflappable Brad Stevens but echoed today in LaVall Jordan's radiant calm. It infuses the team's style of play: blue collar, possession by possession, a reputation for never being out of games hard-earned by a litany of surprising, last-minute victories. It appears even in odd places, like the team's fan base, always hungry to win but willing to stick beside the coaches and players even through seasons of adversity. Certainly, other administrators and athletic programs might find success with more fast-twitch decision-making, but Butler makes a case for the transformative potential of patience.

The second prerequisite is a source of continuity. Undoubtedly, the task of building a men's basketball program strong enough to become a Cinderella requires time, talent, and resources, but the more difficult undertaking might be sustaining this success in the years that follow. March Madness furnishes teams like Florida Gulf Coast and Georgia State each year, and a single Sweet Sixteen berth carries with it ample opportunity for national attention and institutional notoriety. However, programs like Gonzaga and Butler whose Cinderella stories

remain open-ended have reached another, more rarified level of achievement of a more enduring value to their institutions. Key to this effort to move from short-stay to mainstay is some source of continuity. At Butler, the path to continuity consists of a dynamic organizational culture and a singular arbiter. In an environment in which the churn of personnel is constant, by rule at the player level and by convention at the coaching level, the Butler Way is remarkable in its staying power and influence, forming a common bond over decades between these two transient populations. Yet, it is difficult to separate the Butler Way from Barry Collier, who sowed this culture during his tenure as head coach and continues to harvest it in the present day as athletic director. One person does not a culture make, but Collier has undoubtedly been an anchor point in the shape and growth of Butler Athletics. As Todd Lickliter explained to me, even in Collier's absence during the six years that he coached at Nebraska before returning as athletic director, his effect on Butler's flagship program remained significant as its two head coaches during that span—first Thad Matta and then Lickliter—had served as his assistants and resonated with his foundational philosophies (T. Lickliter, personal communication, December 5, 2017). In this way, the Butler model suggests that schools can navigate the head coaching changes that seem so often to stunt programs on the rise by either fostering a potent organizational culture or retaining charismatic leaders in the anchor position of athletic director, and likely some combination of both.

The third and final prerequisite is a mission-driven approach to growth, both within the athletic department and across the institution. Though Butler was not necessarily staffed or organized to take immediate advantage of the marketing and fundraising opportunities presented by the Final Four runs, over the long-term it is difficult to imagine an institution leveraging the Cinderella story more effectively. In this regard, a common understanding of the university's

identity and a fealty to its founding impulses across key leadership positions, particularly president and athletic director, shaped decisions on how best to use this new resource. In pursuing growth, administrators have been careful to preserve the institution's longstanding assets, most notably its small college feel, a symbiotic relationship with the city of Indianapolis, a compelling university-wide culture, and a singular athletic facility in Hinkle Fieldhouse. In other words, decision-makers at Butler have used all of the attention and opportunity presented by the success of the men's basketball team to amplify the university that others had established well before they arrived and well before the basketball team was known outside the state of Indiana. The Cinderella story represents a growth opportunity, but such growth—driven as it is by a polarizing force like big-time athletics—must remain in visible service to the university's mission and traditions if it is ultimately to prove more than a flash in the pan.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. What was the value of the men's basketball program to the institution prior to the Final Four runs?
    a) Can you describe the investment that the university has made in the men's basketball program?
    b) From your perspective, were there any trade-offs?

2. What was the value of the men's basketball program to the institution during the Final Four runs?
    a) What do you remember about the Cinderella runs themselves?

3. What has been the value of the men's basketball program to the institution after the Final Four run?
    a) What have been the effects of the Cinderella runs on admissions/fundraising/prestige/ publicity/merchandising/athletic department?
    b) What is the shelf-life for the institution in terms of the benefits from the Cinderella runs?
    c) What does the men's basketball program mean to this school now?

Appendix B: Consent Form

Boston College Consent Form

Boston College Lynch School of Education
Informed Consent to be in study "The 'Cinderella Story' as a University Resource: The Use of Intercollegiate Athletic Success for Institutional Growth"
Researcher: Jerry Logan
Adult Consent Form

Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study of the use of intercollegiate athletics for institution-wide growth.
- You were selected to be in the study because I believe you have some knowledge of this phenomenon based on your position at or relation to Butler University.
- Please read this form. Ask any questions that you may have before you agree to be in the study.

Purpose of Study:

- The purpose of this study is to examine the use of a "Cinderella Story" in the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament to develop multiple facets of the university. To that end, I am investigating the following three questions: First, how does an institution prepare for a Cinderella run in the NCAA Tournament? Second, what happens when the moment occurs? And third, how does the institution seek to leverage this resource over the long-term and thereby build other facets of the university?
- The interviewees in this study are institutional decision-makers in areas of the university in which the literature suggests potential effects based upon athletic success: admissions, advancement/fundraising, alumni relations, athletics, and marketing/public relations.

What will happen in the study:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to participate in an interview for 45-60 minutes either in-person on Butler's campus or via Skype (if schedules do not permit), with the potential for a follow-up interview of similar length based on the findings. Once I have written my findings from the interview(s), I will send you any relevant sections from a draft of the report to ensure that I have accurately reflected our conversation.

Risks and Discomforts of Being in the Study:

There are no expected risks to participation in this study. This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

Benefits of Being in the Study:
The purpose of the study is to investigate the institutional value of the Final Four runs in 2010 and 2011 at Butler University. There are no direct personal benefits to being in this study.

Payments and Costs:
There is no payment for participation in this study. Likewise, there is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Confidentiality:
The researcher will use the real names and positions of those who participate in this study. Given the distinguishing features of Butler's Final Four runs, the importance of the institution's identity to this study, and the availability of identifying information for participants online, granting anonymity to participants is both detrimental to the study and impractical.

Choosing to be in the study and choosing to quit the study:
- Choosing to be in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to be in this study, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University.
- You are free to quit at any time, for whatever reason.
- There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for quitting.
- During the research process, you will be notified of any new findings from the research that may make you decide that you want to stop being in the study.

Getting dismissed from the study:
The researcher may dismiss you from the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) it is in your best interests (e.g. side effects or distress have resulted), or (2) you have failed to comply with the study rule.

Contacts and Questions:
- The researcher conducting this study is Jerry Logan. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact him at 678-852-9295 or loganjl@bc.edu.
- If you have any questions about your rights as a person in this research study, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu

Copy of Consent Form:
You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:
I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form. I have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to be in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates
Study Participant (Print Name): _____ Date_____
Participant or Legal Representative Signature: _____ Date _____