



Reflections on an Economist's Earth Day Lecture

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GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

On April 22 the Alexander Hamilton Institute hosted Dr. Mike Rizzo, a lecturer in economics at the University of Rochester and a senior fellow of the AHI, to discuss American environmental

consumers may pollute more, by consuming more, during the lead-up to that policy change.) Similarly, in the "Jevons paradox," consumers use high-efficiency products or services, such as heat, more heavily because

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economics on what happened to be Earth Day. The event was part of the AHI continuing education course, "Science and Government."

In his lecture, "Conserved by Capitalism," he discussed the impact of the free market on the environment, offering an alternative to the conventional wisdom about their relationship. Rizzo explained capitalism's ability to provide a strong incentive for conservation of land and habitat, and for efficiency in the use of resources (for example, vehicle fuel efficiency reduces both emissions and costs). Rizzo also noted such examples of environmental progress as the improvements in air quality in recent decades.

At the same time, he pointed out certain difficulties in environmental policy, such as the "green paradox," in which environmental restrictions that will be tightened in the near future may lead to more pollution. (After the announcement of enforced emission reductions, for example,

the energy bill is now lower -- and the greater usage may keep energy consumption as high as it would have been without the efficiency gains. In addition, Rizzo noted that polls indicate the public does not consider action on the environment one of its highest policy priorities, despite widespread environmental activism.

By relating Americans' economic incentives and behavior to both favorable and unfavorable outcomes for the environment, the lecture displayed a refreshing, pragmatic perspective on environmentalism. It suggested that Americans can and often do improve their environmental stewardship by choosing economic behavior that, while still in their self-interest, is better for nature. The power of the free market cannot be neglected as a positive factor in the pursuit of environmental goals.

Most important of all, Rizzo's lecture was an example of intellectual humility and intellectual fairness --

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Re: "Ban College Sports"

ERIC FISCHER
STAFF WRITER

The April 23 edition of *The Monitor* features an article by Evan Weinstein '19 arguing that college sports should be banned, since they make life worse for athletes and non-athletes alike. I will attempt to respond to each of its arguments and defend college athletics.

Like 30 percent of our student body, I am a varsity athlete. As an athlete and a fan, I have come to appreciate the innumerable benefits

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that sports teams bring to our campus and campuses across the nation. Student athletes are privileged to take part in an extracurricular activity that forges deep bonds of friendship and trust, which last well beyond our college years. They have the opportunity to represent their school and engage in the kind of education that happens on a playing field. Non-athletes benefit as well, most obviously in the entertainment our sports provide. The hundreds of people banging on the glass of Sage Rink during the Citrus Bowl, and cheering

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traits the AHI continuously fosters and values -- in the environmental debate. This policy arena has long suffered from the influence of dogmatic ideology, coming from both the left and the right. The comprehensive use of evidence to analyze the intersections between America's economy and its environment, especially by a speaker like Rizzo who cares a lot about the environment, provided a fair-minded evaluation without excessive optimism or pessimism

about the future of environmental quality and sustainability, including climate change. It showed that those of us who are concerned about protecting the environment can still argue persuasively without being ideologues, recognizing both the encouraging and the discouraging factors in environmental progress.

In the American system of separation of powers and co-equal branches of government, only the formation of a political consensus through an examination of all available

evidence on an issue (not just that which is convenient for one side) can produce a forceful effort to address our problems. Forming a consensus based on a body of facts, while guided by the North Star of noble desire to serve the public good, can perhaps ease current political divides not just on the environment, but on a variety of other issues such as gun safety, health care, and criminal justice reform. Perhaps only then can we start to fulfill the Constitution's famous promise "to form a more perfect Union."

RE: "BAN COLLEGE SPORTS" *cont.*

on our men's basketball team during a deep playoff run, should make clear that our students enjoy watching their peers deliver electric performances. These are but a few of the virtues and benefits of college sports.

Mr. Weinstein's first complaint is that athletics are inherently exclusive because they form "cliques" among athletes. It is true that sports teams tend to have strong bonds, as is to be expected of people who spend 20-plus hours a week together working under arduous conditions. This closeness is critical for team success, since trust among teammates is essential in a game. Additionally, it's important to consider the nature of friend groups in general. Every friend group, whether it be associated with a broader organization or not, has some core values, interests, or activities that unite its individuals. By its nature as an association which is focused on something, a group generally won't include those who do not share those values or interests, or are uninvolved in those activities. Athletics are exclusive because not everyone can do what our athletes do. I cannot throw a football 20 yards into coverage while four 220-pound defensive linemen come barreling toward me. Nor can I sing or act, which precludes me from joining certain other clubs. Exclusivity also results from bonds created and abilities honed through hours and hours of dedicated practice. I suspect that,

upon closer inspection, Mr. Weinstein would realize that anybody who is truly dedicated to a discipline expects equal dedication from his or her peers.

The piece then raises the point of the economic barriers to participation in some sports, especially hockey and rowing. While his desire to see athletic opportunity for all is laudable, Mr. Weinstein misses several important details. As a rower, I can confirm that maintaining a rowing program presents significant costs for a college: boats are expensive, as are boathouses on waterfront property (although real estate in Central New York is relatively cheap). What aren't mentioned are the minimal barriers to entry for individuals. Hamilton's rowing team, for example, seeks out walk-ons, athletes with no previous rowing experience, at the beginning of each academic year, and thus provides an opportunity at no cost. While there is generally a cost to go on spring break training trips, teams take steps to minimize it, participating in fundraisers and doing their best to offer financial aid to students for whom the cost is a serious burden. Thus, at an individual level, access to athletics at Hamilton is largely limited by ability, not ability to pay.

Mr. Weinstein also mentions the tradeoff between sports and economic mobility. Luckily for us, Hamilton offers no merit scholarships -- including athletic scholarships -- so there is no tradeoff between athletic scholarships and academic ones. At

Division I schools, the socioeconomic concerns typically involve pay for athletes, a topic too complex to delve into here, except to point out that Hamilton athletes are not paid. The ultimate reward for college athletes is a college degree, a significant source of upward mobility, even without a professional athletic career later on.

I agree with Mr. Weinstein that injuries are an issue. No one wants to be injured or watch peers get injured, and I am certain that everyone wants to see progress in injury prevention, especially in preventing concussions. But our athletes still choose to participate, despite knowing the risks they assume. While we should work to minimize the short- and long-term consequences of injuries, removing the opportunity to play sports would be, especially for the sports with minor risk of injury, an extreme step which disregards the many positives of athletics.

The absolutist position of eliminating intercollegiate athletics completely is shaky at best. Mr. Weinstein asserts that "this debate is not about which claims are true or untrue," but has not demonstrated a basic understanding of college athletics, which would have prevented him from making wild claims. Athletics at all levels has provided formative experiences to myself and thousands of Hamilton athletes, current and past. Eliminating athletics would seriously hurt our school.

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Lecture
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#BanSportsResponse