

Going Big Time: Binghamton University and the Quest for Division I Basketball Glory

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A new \$33 million events center, a conference championship, a trip to the Men's NCAA Basketball Tournament – Binghamton University (BU) accomplished all of this by 2009. However, reaching these goals did not occur without controversy: player arrests and suspensions, an international manhunt for a player accused of beating a fellow student, and claims that coaches pressured a professor for better grades for players. Are these circumstances to be expected when a university makes the choice to move from Division III to Division I, or was this an extraordinary situation for BU? How have these issues altered the image of BU as a “public ivy” institution? How has the America East Conference responded to BU's approach to fielding a successful men's basketball team? This analysis examines the BU case from a broad-ranging perspective including the economy in the greater Binghamton area during BU's transition to Division I, the funding of the new events center, and the specifics of the pending academic and criminal cases. Recent evidence shows that BU's approach to success in intercollegiate athletics was not well received by fellow coaches in the conference. Additionally, the academic scandal leaves in its wake the resignation of the athletic director, the firing (and eventual rehiring) of a professor, the dismissal of several players from the team and, most recently, the retirement of BU's president. However, the scandal has not damaged the academic reputation of BU as it still maintains high rankings for the quality and value of its education. All of these issues and more will be discussed to understand consequences of the quest for glory in intercollegiate athletics.