

Episode 94: College Football: Money Culture Politics with John Tammy and Brian McNicoll

- Bill Walton: [00:08](#) Hi, this is Bill Walton, and you're listening to the Bill Walton Show. And I'm here with my friends and frequent collaborators, John Tammy and Brian McNicoll. Brian, as I think I've mentioned in the past, is a veteran newspaper reporter and editor who grew up in the sports department of the daily newspaper. John is the editor of Real Clear Markets and also has got an upcoming book called *When Politicians Panic*. And both Brian and John are certified college football fanatics. And the topic today is what's happening with the college football seasons fall 2020. It seems to be crazy all over the place. Some people are playing, some people are canceling. I guess the Big 10 is canceled. Brian, you want to lead off? Give us your thoughts on where we are.
- Brian McNicoll: [00:58](#) The season actually got underway Saturday night. It was a really good game too. Austin Peay played Central Arkansas and they play in Montgomery, Alabama. So it was not a home game for either team. Game went right down to the wire. The first play from scrimmage was a 75 yard touchdown by Austin Peay. It looked like football. They had limited crowd there. I think they had about two or 3000 people in about a 30,000 seat stadium. So they didn't get underway. You could hear crowds cheering and so forth.
- Central Arkansas, they're doing something interesting. Their conference, and in fact, both schools were kind of in this situation. Their conference canceled the season. So they don't have any league games, but they have put together a schedule. They have two home and home games. They have two teams they've arranged to play home and home. And I think they ended up with a total of eight or nine games. So they kind of made their own season out of nothing. So we are underway, but it's like the big boys don't hit tall, I think late this month. Did anybody go in earlier than the last Saturday?
- Bill Walton: [02:08](#) John, what have you heard?
- John Tammy: [02:09](#) Yeah, I think Brian's right. It's later on in September that it's officially going to get started, which is so sad because as we know, Labor Day weekend is usually the kickoff for this. It's a joyous... There's something so right and such a good feeling

about the fall. Yet alarmism is taking it from us and I'll just add my two cents. I think we can all agree that the political implications of this are huge. If I were President Trump, or if I were any politician, I would be all over Ohio. I'd be all over Los Angeles. I'd be all over Michigan, Iowa, central Pennsylvania, talking to them about what alarmism has taken from them, something so essential to the soundtrack of the fall has been taken from them and what they've taken from athletes in doing this.

- Bill Walton: [03:00](#) And it's funny because this cuts both ways. The Biden people are now running ads, showing empty football stadiums, blaming Donald Trump and claiming that the reason we're not having a football season is Donald Trump. But I don't think anybody in Ohio or Pennsylvania or Wisconsin or Michigan really believes that. Brian, what's your take?
- Brian McNicol: [03:22](#) Well, I actually last week, I was in Pennsylvania and Ohio and Indiana. Indiana is playing high school football. They're having games and-
- Bill Walton: [03:32](#) Wait, wait, are you talking about my Hoosier's from Bloomington?
- Brian McNicol: [03:36](#) [inaudible 00:03:36] university.
- Bill Walton: [03:37](#) I went to school there. They've always played high school level football. That was insulting, Brian.
- Brian McNicol: [03:47](#) We went to Bloomington and the drum corps people were practicing, like the people who marched the flag out and all that stuff we saw practicing on the field. And, but there's no football. I don't understand. I guess the Big 10 is starting to have some second thoughts. But I talked to people all over Ohio and Pennsylvania and they are absolutely furious about this. They even regardless of who they blame, some people blame Trump. Most of them don't blame Trump. They blame the other side, loosely defined. But they are furious. Like football is a cultural thing. And as a sports writer, I can tell you that I was never more valued by society than these two or three weeks of the year because everybody wants to know how their team is going to do. The sportswriters are the only ones who know at that point. Nobody's played a game. So everybody was like hanging on every word you wrote and all that stuff. And all that's gone this year. It's like, who knows what we're going to get?

Bill Walton: [04:53](#) Kevin Warren is a commissioner of the Big 10. And somebody wrote he's well known for his left wing political activism. And he was working earlier this spring to figure out ways he could defeat Donald Trump in the November 3rd election. So he obviously has a political agenda, but it's not clear whether the other commissioners do or how much sway he has. What are the politics? Let's stick with the Big 10 right now. How's that playing out among the commissioners and among the university presidents? What do they think?

Brian McNicol: [05:33](#) Three of them voted against it. Three schools in the Big 10 voted against canceling in the season. Also, the thing about Kevin Warren is his son plays at Mississippi State. His son's getting ready for a season, so his son will be out playing, but the league he runs will be canceled.

Bill Walton: [05:50](#) And the reason he gave were all the horrors associated with the virus. But as I understand it, they're still playing high school football in Pennsylvania with Penn State. They're still playing professional football in Pennsylvania with the Eagles. Same thing's true up in Wisconsin. The Packers are playing, the high school play, and people are playing. And so everybody else in football has decided that they can play at high school and professional levels, but not college.

John Tamny: [06:21](#) There's a former LSU player. His name escapes me, but when he went to play for the Carolina Panthers, he was so shocked by how much lower quality the facilities were for the Panthers versus LSU. And this was before LSU's major \$35 million rehabs of what was already great. And so keep this in mind, Bill, in terms of what you're saying. Ohio State, which is the most valuable college football program in the United States when they tried to put a valuation on it, has the best facilities in the world. Better than any pro team. They can't play college football.

But as you allude, high school football is taking place in Ohio. It's taking place in Pennsylvania. And think of what this means for Ohio State fans. They are ranked, presently ranked number two. They had a very real chance to win it all this year. Justin Fields, their quarterback, had transferred from Georgia was viewed as the front runner for the Heisman. These guys have had their season taken from them by this alarmism. This, it's not just sad. It's so cruel what they're doing the players, but you think of the political implications of this. If I were Donald Trump or if I were Biden, if Biden had a clue, I would camp out the rest of this campaign in Columbus, Ohio and just campaign from there.

- Brian McNicol: [07:44](#) Yeah. Well, and they have... The cancellation, also the timing of this. So like LSU has 22 guys signed for next year. And the NCAA is saying they're going to let everybody basically roll over their year of eligibility. So if you're only allowed 85 scholarships and you're bringing in 22 and you're not making anybody advance a year, how does that work out? Where did those guys... How do they fit on the roster?
- Bill Walton: [08:19](#) Well, and also the risks to the kids, the disease are almost nothing. The NFL has already opened its training camp and they're playing padded practice. And as I understand, they've got like 2,500, 2,600 players in the NFL all practicing now. And there's been one case of COVID-19 and they've been practicing for what six weeks. So the risk from this so-called disease are just not there for healthy kids like this.
- Brian McNicol: [08:53](#) We've been going by the government's figures of people under 44, there are fewer than 5,000 people have died of COVID.
- John Tamny: [09:04](#) And Bill, you and I have discussed this point numerous times. This alarmism about the coronavirus is about well to do elites who don't worry about making rent or how they're going to eat. And it's consistently hit those with the least. And so think about this, college football is more than a game. It is the way out for so many people. It is the way to better things. If you go to Columbus, Ohio today or Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Austin, Texas, the number of players that never played a down of the NFL that have great jobs in those cities because they were on these teams, because they were participating, because they got to know the alums was substantial. And so look at what you're doing to the people. This was their path to better things. But once again, because comfortable Americans don't want to be threatened with anything anymore, they are going to take away opportunity from those who was their way out. It is to talk about this is to become enraged.
- Bill Walton: [10:10](#) Well, this is just... We talked about this. This is sort of the elites operating in this. They have this disdain of football, particularly if you go on the campuses, the professors and the rest of the university really doesn't approve of the athletic program to begin with. And I saw a chart recently that showed the economic impact of this shutdown is if you look at the top 25% of income earners who are typically in the professional classes, they're right back where they were. They're even a little higher than where they were in January, February. And then the sort of the middle group is down 15% or so. But the bottom half is down still 40%, something like that and slow to recover. And so

this football thing hits those people in one of the things that's part of their joy.

- Brian McNicol: [11:00](#) And another untold part of this is like John, out of your league Pac 12, they're good at what we call minor sports. They're good in football, they have good football teams. The best team in the Pac 12 is one of the best teams. But they're also-
- Bill Walton: [11:21](#) You can't let him get away with just that. But anyway, we'll continue Brian.
- John Tamny: [11:24](#) You've now insulted me too, Brian.
- Brian McNicol: [11:34](#) And Stanford has something like 290 Olympians that are graduates of Stanford because Stanford makes a point of being good at all these sports. Well, those sports are all paid for by football. You have no football, Stanford's already cut like seventeen.
- John Tamny: [11:50](#) If Stanford were a country, it would have the most gold medals of any country in the world as of the last Olympics. And if USC, talking about another Pac 12 school, if USC were a country historically would have the second most gold medals, second to the United States. And to Brian's exact point, they've taken that away. And you think, again, what the... It's been terrible for the little sports because football floats the boat. But I think back to three years ago, every two years I go speak at Clemson and I stay at the Abernathy hotel.
- And Clemson has been utterly transformed by Dabo Swinney and the greatness of the football team. It used to be kind of an enclosed campus. Now it's a palace. And so I was checking in at the Abernathy and the girl behind the desk said, "I have my job because of Coach Swinney. Because of what he achieved, Clemson is a very well to do place now that employs thousands of people." You can't employ those people without football, but once again, elites who have no clue who will never miss a meal are taking away opportunity for the people with the least.
- Bill Walton: [12:55](#) John, you've written about football. It's a really big industry and assistant coaches-
- Brian McNicol: [13:01](#) Four billion in college.
- Bill Walton: [13:01](#) It's 4 billion?
- Brian McNicol: [13:03](#) Yeah.

- Bill Walton: [13:04](#) And how much of that's TV and how much of it's tickets and how much of it's alumni donation?
- John Tamny: [13:12](#) Yeah. Also the TV obviously helps, but you look at the endowment for Alabama since Saban got there. He earns what, 11 million a year. What he's meant to the school in terms of its wealth is incalculable. What Carol meant to USC, what Dabo Swinney meant for Clemson. It's now very hard to get into and the money flows in. So with football bribes, everything, and they've taken this all away. But again, Bill, as you look. There's opportunity beyond this. The average SEC assistant earns 253. No, average SEC assistant earns \$400,000 a year.
- Brian McNicol: [13:52](#) We have \$2 million.
- John Tamny: [13:53](#) Just in Georgia alone. No, no. 36 coaches in Georgia alone, high school level earn in the six figures. This is just Georgia. So football is the way. It's increasingly, it's a career for people. Yet as Brian alludes, in limiting the ability to play this year, you push some players out. They won't be able to get scholars. You're limiting really the career path for a lot of people that for most of them, that doesn't include the NFL. But LSU is the way to something else. And they've had it taken away from them.
- Brian McNicol: [14:24](#) There's a long list. There's something called Dandy Don, which follows LSU sports. And he has a long like pages and pages list of where the former players are. If you go read through it, there's a few of them. Yeah. There's a couple of them in prison or whatever. But almost all of them are they're either an executive of some kind or they own a business or they're law enforcement or whatnot. They get upstanding jobs. And like John said, it's jobs that those connections help them get. They knew they could go to a banker and they were like, I've met you before when I was playing at LSU. People don't understand what a huge plus... The towns, it's like Los Angeles can probably handle it that the Trojans don't play this year. But Manhattan, Kansas, Bloomington, Indiana. Those places are crushed by this.
- Bill Walton: [15:18](#) So let me understand, the basketball tends to not be a ticket to the middle class for a lot of the players that don't make it into the NBA. But what I'm hearing from you guys is that football is. And for whatever reason, the football players end up doing a lot of things successfully besides football when they graduate or get out of college. Is that accurate?
- Brian McNicol: [15:40](#) Well, basketball, there's more of this than you think. Basketball, those guys end up meeting people too. And there's a lot of coaching opportunities.

- Bill Walton: [15:47](#) Okay.
- John Tamny: [15:49](#) But yeah, Bill, certainly with football, it's true. And let's just ask the basic question. You've run businesses and so if some former Alabama player, a graduate, came to you, what would you ask him most? What he learned from Nick Saban or what he learned in accounting class? What you get from playing under these geniuses is incalculable. It makes you interesting to interviewers. And as Brian has been... It also connects you with the richest, most accomplished alums of those schools. You've got connections that any other kid with straight A's at that same school would give anything to have because you can suddenly open sorts of doors. And so when you shut down the plane, people say, "Oh, they're they're being exploited. It's not..." What I would give to know the richest alums from USC, LSU, Texas, Ohio State. These kids have that in addition to the possibility.
- Brian McNicol: [16:45](#) But what they've really learned is they learn how to play in a team and a system. And one of my trainers, Lamar, played at Ohio State. And he still has his playbooks from Ohio State. And the amount of discipline it takes to memorize that and do the things you need to do to be successful is extraordinary. But I got to push back, John. I taught accounting to work my way through business school. So I'm not going to be deeply offended because I will say that I got an MBA, did well, but the only class that really mattered was accounting. So pick something else. Pick marketing.
- Bill Walton: [17:24](#) You don't need marketing, you don't need business and all that. But you're right. I think the whole profile of somebody that... College in itself, this whole thing they're going through now. This has made colleges very vulnerable. And then we're talking about revenue here, but it's also made them vulnerable to what kind of experience are they providing to students? And if you can't get on campus, if you can't have football, what's the package the parents are paying for?
- Brian McNicol: [17:53](#) That's a very good point because if you're to say you live in Michigan, you're trying to choose between Michigan State and Oakland County community college. Why do you choose Michigan State? Because your classes are Zoom, there's no football, the things that brought national attention to the school are gone. Why would you not? And it's 1/15 the price, why would you pay all that money to... Your Zoom comes from Landing as opposed to Oakland, right? What's the difference there? What value is there of paying that money for that big name school if you don't have all this? Like you say, your

endowment and all that stuff goes up and these kids want... They like being on TV on Saturday night, waving at the camera. That's a bigger thing than people think.

- Bill Walton: [18:49](#) Well, it's September now. What's the landscape? How many college teams are there? What, 900, a thousand that have a football program?
- Brian McNicol: [18:59](#) There's about 300, the ones that matter. There's five conferences that matter basically.
- Bill Walton: [19:08](#) And how many of them are playing and how many of them have shut down? Is the Big 10 an outlier?
- Brian McNicol: [19:16](#) Big 10 and Pac 12 are out completely. So it's the Mountain West, the MAC, the Mid American Conference, SEC, Big 12, ACC are planned to play a schedule of only conference games. I think the ACC may be allowing you to play one non-conference game.
- Bill Walton: [19:34](#) Well, how are they social distancing and masking and all the... What are the crowds like? What adjustments have they made?
- Brian McNicol: [19:42](#) The SEC has not made a decision on whether to let people watch the game yet.
- John Tamny: [19:48](#) Hasn't Georgia said that it's 25% full? [crosstalk 00:19:53] That's the only one that I've heard of.
- Bill Walton: [19:56](#) To fill the stands with 25% or so if they got 100,000...
- John Tamny: [19:58](#) It just defeats the purpose. What makes the SEC the greatest conference in the world, that's a bone I'm throwing to you, Brian, is it's not just the players. I think one of the reasons they get such great players increasingly from around the country is the stadiums are filled. It is such an event at SEC schools on weekends. And because of this alarmism, the towns will be increasingly empty. And so it's a disaster for the economies of the towns. It's a disaster for the schools because the rich alums won't be flying their private jets there to attend the games. The implications of this go so far beyond just the players. But let's be clear. The players and the small businesses in the area and the schools are going to be hit in just tragic ways.
- Brian McNicol: [20:50](#) Yeah, LSU plays a home football game. There's about 105,000 people in the stadium and about 100,000 outside of the stadium cooking and celebrating and so forth. So they have these big

screens hooked up to generators. It's quite a... You've been there. It's a city [crosstalk 00:21:09].

- Bill Walton: [21:09](#) As a veteran of Indiana, Hoosier games were the real action was outside in the tailgating. We didn't go much to watch the football, but what... So let's talk about class warfare and let's talk about politics. I've characterized this as the elite. Certainly the university administrations are on the left and not all supportive of Trump. How much of the decisions about locking down, not locking down, are political?
- Brian McNicol: [21:41](#) Well if you look at who decided to play, ACC and SEC and Big 12, that's all Trump country. And who didn't decide to play? The West coast and the upper Midwest. Amazing.
- Bill Walton: [21:56](#) Well, so okay. So it is, again, this is like the 53rd item on our list of why this is not just about a disease. It's about politics. So circling back to Governor Witmer's Michigan. Does shutting down Michigan, Michigan State help, hurt Trump in November?
- John Tamny: [22:19](#) Oh, no way. Not a chance. It's got to help Trump. And I do not admit, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe you guys could inform me about this. I want to stress once again that if I were Trump, he's got Texas locked down. He's got Alabama locked down. He should spend all of his time campaigning throughout Ohio talking about the number two Buckeyes having been robbed of their season and go to Michigan the same thing. Michigan was going to be good this year. Go to Iowa, go to Pennsylvania. All these states that are thought to be on the edge. And then I would add if there's a few on the West coast that maybe are leaning. Go talk about what this has meant, because it's the easiest politics on Earth. As Brian alludes, there's a reason that... There's no way SEC states could have shut down college football. The political implications would have been so dire for the governor that oversaw this. There's just no chance.
- Brian McNicol: [23:11](#) That's right. Yeah. Ed came out, Ed Orgeron came out very early in this and said the country needs football. He's someone we share. He was USC before he came back to LSU. And I've known Ed since he was in college, since he was playing. And he's very forceful about A, he likes Trump. And B, Louisiana needs football. Alabama needs football. Mississippi needs football. It's not want, it's need.
- Bill Walton: [23:42](#) So have you talked with anybody? Have we seen any polls? Has anybody done an analysis of the battleground state guys analyze this and figured out how to run ads to message this?

Brian McNicol: [23:54](#) I think John has got the best thoughts on it I've heard. I think there's very little effort to take advantage of it. If I was Trump, I was thinking about your idea. I'd go to Ohio and say, "Y'all were going to kill Michigan this year." Then I'd go to Michigan and say, "Y'all were going to kill Ohio State." I know what I said. I was on the wrong side of the border. Penn State was trying too. And there was a couple of other Big 10 schools. The three votes against it were Penn State, Nebraska, and Iowa. And I think Penn State, Nebraska, were talking about joining another conference just for this year so they could play football. And the commissioner said if you do that, you're out of the Big 10 forever. So it's being politically foreclosed. No one is even pretending this has to do with health. [crosstalk 00:00:24:51].

Bill Walton: [24:51](#) Go ahead.

John Tamny: [24:51](#) You think about so LSU and Ed Orgeron. Last year's LSU team was arguably the best ever. But until then, no one really took Ed Orgeron seriously as a coach. He transformed his image last year and put so many players in the NFL. What coach missed out on the same opportunity to be this year's Orgeron? What players for all these schools missed out on their breakout season? And so they talk about spring football. If you have spring football, that means that there's no fall next year. You cannot go from spring to fall. So if the Pac 12 and Big 10 decide that we're going to do this in the spring, which no one would care about, that means they're gone for another real season. So what it means for Ohio State, Michigan, USC, UCLA, Oregon players. It really is cruel. And again, if I were Trump, I would nail this over and over again.

Brian McNicol: [25:45](#) Yeah, because people hate it. People are inflamed and raged by it.

Bill Walton: [25:51](#) So I'm not a scientist, but I am a statistician and done a lot of math work. And the latest that seemed to come out is that we've got 180,000 deaths from this COVID-19 supposedly or correlated or connected with. But it also turns out that 93% of those deaths had an average of 2.3 or 2.6 co-morbidities, which means if you take the six or 7% times 180,000, basically 9,000 people have died of COVID-19 only. And yet we've seen a spike in suicides that one number I saw yesterday was like 75,000 suicides that seemed to have been sort of on top of what normally happens during the last six months. Do you guys have any feel for what the real impact of this virus has been on people's dying or whatever?

Brian McNicol: [26:48](#) Well not only is it 9,200 or whatever it is, but half of the people who have died were 85 or older. Two thirds were 75 or older.

Bill Walton: [27:00](#) So nobody playing tackle for Ohio State...

Brian McNicol: [27:03](#) Is in the wheelhouse here at all. And they're just not. It's like, these are young guys. There's not been a single case of a kid giving it to an adult and the adult died. There are the number of people below 20 who have died of COVID is mid double digits, like 45 or 50.

Bill Walton: [27:26](#) So what's wrong with us that we're not terrified? The polls show, 60, 65, 70% of America is still very, very, very fearful. What am I missing?

Brian McNicol: [27:36](#) It's a full media onslaught telling you be safe, wear masks, it's caring of society.

John Tamny: [27:45](#) Brian, that's one area where I'm going to give some pushback. I don't buy the media narrative and here's why. We're all Facebook friends. And if you went through my Facebook feed, you'd be getting the information that we've just talked about about the 94% from the CDC. If you pick up even the New York Times, I get some of my best information about why this isn't very legal from the New York Times. They've been reporting for months that 40% of the US deaths were related to nursing homes. And so compare this if this happens in 1980, for one, you couldn't have had the lockdowns and the economy wasn't advanced enough to do something so decadent. But if you had it in 1980, our access to the information we're talking about would have been very limited. Nowadays, we're bombarded with the information that we're passing on. So I don't think it's a media thing. But I'm willing to be persuaded.

Bill Walton: [28:38](#) Media or social media or which one? Are we talking Facebook or the New York Times or both?

John Tamny: [28:46](#) Well, I think it's both. I think they're blurred. They're one and the same now. And if you looked at my Facebook feed and I think I can speak for all three of us, we are bombarded with information showing how overstated is the lethality of this and why people should just kind of relax. And so very confused as to why people are still buying into this because-

Bill Walton: [29:09](#) Well nobody's listening to the other side. I put out a blog a couple of days ago on these statistics I just cited. And I got

people saying, "Unsubscribe me. I don't want to hear that." And so we're canceling each other.

Brian McNicol: [29:24](#)

I'll tell you one thing that is happening though. Like I coach basketball, as you know. And I've coached girls... The girls I have now are going into high school, eighth grade going into ninth grade. And for a long time, we couldn't find anywhere to play. But later this summer, people started having tournament. So we ended up playing in five tournaments. And soccer people, the reason we stopped is soccer had started and we lost players to soccer. Lacrosse has started, we're losing players to lacrosse. So and it's not county sports. It's not school based sports. It's private sport. And the games are not in schools. They're in private gyms and so forth.

So the things people can control, people are voting with their feet to get back involved in this stuff. So there's that. I had 12 girls on this team. I had three of them who said we will not play at all this season. And so we were down to nine to start with, and then I have one who kind of came in and started playing. So there was caution and a couple of people were like, "We have immune system issues in our house." So I'm like, okay, well, you're at heightened risk. And we don't know. And so I don't blame you for that, but most people, they're like I had enough. And they're like, yeah, these kids can play. They're not going to get hurt.

Bill Walton: [30:56](#)

John. We got to wrap up here. I want to come back in a few weeks to kind of figure out where we are with football, that and some other things. John, you got any final thoughts and then we'll...

John Tamny: [31:08](#)

Well yeah, because I want to get Brian back for those main things he said about the Pac 12 and Indiana Hoosier. So [inaudible 00:31:17] some rankings in a few weeks too, but note that this is thank you so much for having this forum. This is such an important discussion because I really do think, once again, that this has been the reaction of a very small number of elites that has been disastrous for, again, those with the least. And I'm so glad that we can have these discussions. It means a lot to me.

Bill Walton: [31:38](#)

John, Brian, I agree with what you just said, John. And we'll be back to talk about other aspects of this in the not too distant future. So thanks for listening to the Bill Walton show and you can find us on iTunes and all the other major podcast platforms. Also, we've got a YouTube channel. And talk with you soon. Thank you.

Brian McNicol:	31:58	Go Tigers.
Bill Walton:	32:00	Go Hoosiers.
Speaker 4:	32:04	Thanks for listening. Want more? Be sure to subscribe at thebillwaltonshow.com or on iTunes.