

Written Testimony of Patrick McEnroe
House Committee on Education and Workforce
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

“Who Gets the Scholarship? How the Global Shift in College Sports Affects Americans”

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Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for having me. I have spent most of my life in tennis — as a player, coach, broadcaster, Davis Cup captain and now working with young athletes, their families, and the broader fan base of sports.

Earlier this year, I started raising an alarm about what I was seeing in college tennis. At the SEC and ACC men’s finals, only three of 24 singles players on court were American. Today, international athletes make up more than 60 percent of Division I tennis. At many schools, this is true for 90 percent or more of the team.

I called tennis the canary in the coal mine.

I’m here because the canary was right. This isn’t just about tennis anymore. The same incentives are increasingly showing up across college sports. Coaches are under enormous pressure to win now. And if you can recruit an older, fully developed international athlete — often someone who has already competed professionally — why spend several years developing an 18-year-old American?

And so this phenomenon is growing in basketball, soccer, track and field, cross country, golf, swimming, and other Olympic sports. Women’s teams are impacted equally if not more than men’s.

I understand the temptation. But we need to understand its consequences. Let me be clear about something first. I welcome international athletes. I played with them, competed against them and coached them. They make our teams better. They bring talent, culture and competition to American campuses.

This is about balance — and making sure we don’t close the door on our own kids in the process.

Because roster spots are finite. When one athlete gets the spot, another doesn’t. And the families who will feel that most aren’t the wealthiest ones.

Youth sports is already extraordinarily expensive. Families with means can buy more coaching, more tournaments, more travel, and more opportunities to be seen. Middle- and working-class families have fewer options when the pathway narrows. But there’s something else we shouldn’t underestimate: hope.

I work with young athletes and parents all the time. Most of these kids aren't going to be professionals. Their dream is much simpler: *Can I play in college?* Because college provides opportunity.

That possibility keeps kids practicing. Competing. Studying. Getting back up after they lose. And becoming our future leaders. But what does a 15- or 16-year-old American kid think when he looks ahead and sees college rosters filled with older, fully developed players from around the world — some with professional experience?

At some point, the message changes from work hard and you might earn your opportunity to maybe that opportunity isn't really there for you anymore.

For millions of kids, college sports isn't a professional dream. It's the next rung on the ladder. Take away enough rungs and eventually kids stop climbing.

For decades, college sports served as one of America's most important talent-development systems. Universities helped young athletes mature physically and academically.

They produced Olympians, national team players, coaches, business leaders and countless successful professionals whose careers had little to do with sports. The goal was not simply to identify finished products.

That's why this is bigger than tennis. And it's bigger than sports.

College athletics has always been one of America's great engines of education, development, leadership and opportunity.

We should continue welcoming talented young people from around the world. But American colleges also have a responsibility to develop American kids.

We can do both. We just need to restore the balance.

Chairman Walberg's TEAM USA act places a reasonable cap on international participation. It would still leave room for international athletes. It would also keep a real path open for American kids.

I look forward to your questions.

Thank you.