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By HANNAH KARP AND KEVIN CLARK



Southcreek Global/Zuma Press

A young Miami Hurricanes fan makes the hand sign for 'The U' before a game at Sun Life Stadium in Miami Gardens, Fla., last November.

Since last week's technicolor allegations came to light, the talk surrounding the future of the University of Miami's football program has centered on one thing: whether the NCAA will smite this team with its executioner's axe of doom.

This is not likely. The NCAA hasn't administered the so-called "death penalty" to any football school's program since Southern Methodist in 1987 and there have been no strong indications that the option would be considered. An NCAA spokeswoman said speculation on penalties in the Miami case is premature, as it's still investigating the matter.

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But here's a question nobody seems to be asking: What if Miami decided to take matters into its own hands and dismantle its team? What sort of impact would this have on the institution? (The answer, college sports experts say, is that it might not be as traumatic as you'd think.)

To be clear, there's no indication this is going to happen. Jorge Perez, a member of the school's board of trustees, said Friday a number of trustees have met since the allegations were published last week by Yahoo Sports, but there has been no discussion of shutting down the program. Miami does not disclose financial records as a private institution and declined to comment for this story.

But for the sake of argument, here's our best take on what would happen if Miami killed its football program. First, here are the likely costs:

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- The school would take a big hit in ticket and television income. With an average attendance of 52,575 at its home games last season, the Hurricanes had about 40,000

fewer fans than in-state rival Florida. According to public financial documents, Florida generated \$17.5 million in football ticket sales in 2009, so if the two schools have roughly the same revenue per ticket, Miami probably earns about \$10 million per season from ticket sales. Although the school would lose all of that, it's also likely that the scandal, and any NCAA sanctions, will depress this revenue anyhow.

- The school would lose access to big bowl-game payouts. In 2010, each ACC team got \$1.75 million in bowl revenue. Miami would lose access to that cash. Teams also make money by playing in bowls, although it's not clear the Hurricanes will be going to a bowl game anytime soon. The NCAA could impose sanctions on postseason play.

- The school would probably have to give back a fair bit of the money it earns from the annual Atlantic Coast Conference's TV contract. The ACC last year signed a 12-year deal that gives ESPN exclusive rights to conference football and men's basketball games, effectively doubling the league's annual TV revenue to about \$155 million per year. That works out to an average of roughly \$13 million per school.

- The school would likely see a drastic decline in donations from its boosters and alumni. Miami has 4,945 boosters. It's not clear how much they give the school's programs annually, or how much of that is driven by football. (It's also safe to say that donations might grow lighter in the wake of the recent allegations.)

- Miami would likely be on the hook for the remainder of coach Al Golden's five-year contract, inked in December, which is worth about \$2 million a year.

- The school also signed a 25-year lease with the multi-purpose Sun Life Stadium, where the Miami Dolphins also play. While the terms haven't been disclosed, experts say the deal revolves mostly around the sharing of premium ticket revenue and is likely flexible.

On the other side of the ledger, a football-free Miami might see a few savings, and some other benefits:

- Running a football team isn't cheap. Miami doesn't disclose how much it spends on football, but according to public records, Florida's football program incurred nearly \$20 million in operating expenses in 2009. It's fair to say that Miami's costs are not far off and that a good portion of this would come back to the school.

- Cutting football would save on scholarships. Next to the football players themselves, the biggest losers in a football killing would be the school's other athletes, whose programs football likely subsidizes. (Holy Cross economics professor Victor Matheson, who studies college sports, said that if other big schools in major conferences are any guide, those other programs probably cost Miami about \$10 million per year.) If Miami cut football, sports economist Andrew Zimbalist said the school would not only be freed from the cost of 85 football scholarships, it might have to cut 85 scholarships on the women's side to maintain compliance with Title IX. (Of course, as Zimbalist noted, the NCAA is likely to limit the school's scholarships anyway as part of sanctions.)

- There's a chance that losing football could, in fact, have a positive effect the school's academic reputation—not to mention donations to support academics. Jonathan Willner, an

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economics professor at Oklahoma City University, said that in recent years, athletic donations have been eating into some schools' academic endowments: Some donors who would have given money to a university's general fund have started giving gifts directly to athletic departments instead. So while the end of football would "certainly see gifts to athletic department drop precipitously, it could increase gifts to university's other activities," he said.

While SMU's football team returned to the field two years after its suspension, it hasn't returned to its previous heights. The school has made other strides, though: it said its average SAT scores for incoming students are up compared to 10 years ago. The school said its endowment has grown to \$1.07 billion, more than double the pre-penalty total.

Academic improvements help attract donations and out-of-state tuition. SMU's recent fundraising campaign almost doubled its original goal by raising \$542 million from 1997-2002, the school said, providing 80 endowments for academic programs.

The NCAA's investigation centers on claims made by former booster Nevin Shapiro, who said he provided 72 athletes with improper benefits over an eight-year period. In a statement Monday, Miami president Donna Shalala said the school is running a joint investigation alongside the NCAA. She said the eligibility of 15 current athletes is currently in question.

While it seems unimaginable that Miami could eliminate a program that has won five national titles and is arguably the reason most people have heard of the school, it's not entirely clear that the school's survival depends on it.

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