

John Connor - 2014 winner of the Alfred E. Kahn  
Antitrust Achievement Award

Lifetime

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A few weeks before this Conference, as Indiana was beating Washington in the basketball playoffs, I heard from John Connor and couldn't help think that even though he was from Indiana, I'd try not to blame him for Washington's defeat. Especially because he called me from his summer home in Massachusetts. He's really from both states.

This prompted me to compare John to someone else from both states. Someone who played college ball in Indiana and was later Coach of the Year there, but who played his entire professional career in Massachusetts. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that John has much more in common than just geography with.... Larry Bird.

I. As basketball fans know, Larry Bird was one of the greatest college and professional players.

So too has John Connor been named one of the greatest agricultural economists and industrial organizational economists. I won't mention all the awards he's received in both these fields because ... I simply don't have time. The written material you've received contains a 1 page summary of his achievements.

But if you'd like the full list of awards, honors, and tributes he's received, and his speeches and other achievements, I'd have to read you his 70 page Vitae. But Bert would yank me off this stage before I read very much of it.

And as for his scholarly achievements! They are overwhelming, in both quality and quantity. Should I start by describing each of his 84 peer reviewed journal articles? Should I mention how, year after year, he is in the top 1% of economists in terms of downloads of his articles?

Should I tell you that if you include every one of his scholarly publications, from books to working papers and everything in between, the astonishing total would be 410? How far would I get in this list before Bert shot me?

II. Instead I'd like to tell you about just one of his scholarly achievements. One that's analogous to how Larry Bird achieved his greatness.

When we think of Larry Bird we of course remember the achievements he made during games - this is why he was a 12 time all star, received 3 consecutive MVP awards, etc. We also remember his many clutch performances that won a huge number of games.

This is similar to how we remember John Connor's achievements, except of course that we think of his amazing scholarship instead of basketball.

What do they have in common? In both cases it's easy to forget the building blocks that were necessary for their success. Because most of the hard work that led to their great achievements was behind the scenes activity that appears to be routine.

In Larry Bird's case, think of the endless drills, including him shooting untold thousands of practice shots. It's all absolutely necessary for basketball greatness, of course. We don't remember Larry Bird for his perfectionist preparation, even though without it he wouldn't have had success.

It's the same thing for much of John's scholarship. Years ago he decided to specialize in empirical research. First involving the agricultural sector, later focusing on cartels.

One of the unprecedented things John decided to do was to search for and analyze key information about individual cartels. He accumulated extensive data about almost 1000 cartels, including the 12,000 companies involved in them and the almost 1,000 executives sanctioned for them. For years he compiled all this information into a unique Data Base.

His overall decision to make the Data Base was brilliant, and his decisions as to what data to collect took astonishing foresight. And, of course, the analysis of this information required a master economist.

But just imagine the routine nature of much of John's data gathering activity, concerning cartel after cartel. The meticulous way John went about this task was the academic equivalent of Larry Bird's endless drills to perfect every facet of the game of basketball.

However, without the empirical data John couldn't have performed the sophisticated economic analysis he loves so much, and published the economic studies that have capped his career.

His combined empirical/theoretical work has justly earned him the title of the "King of Cartels" because, more than anyone else in the world, he successfully resolved many issues concerning cartels that are of the highest importance to antitrust policymakers.

"Cartel Hunter" Connor's research has challenged the conventional wisdom in a large number of areas and caused the antitrust community to re-evaluate many of its core beliefs about cartels. His work has been nothing short of revolutionary. He is without any doubt the leading cartel researcher and scholar the world has ever known.

III. Another commonality comes from the fact that Larry Bird was one of the NBA's all time leaders in assists. He was ridiculously unselfish and made every one of his teammates play much better.

He could see the big picture of what was occurring on the court and distinguish the important from the trivial. He was arguably the best passer and greatest on-court leader the game has ever known.

How does an academic do the equivalent of a basketball pass or assist?

By co-authoring with other academics, especially with younger colleagues and former students. By having the vision to see the big picture so he could lead others towards to the important issues. And being ridiculously generous in giving away the use of his Cartel Data Base crown jewel.

John has co-authored scholarly works with 52 different people! With many of them - including me - he's co-authored multiple articles. He's also given the free use of his Cartel Data Base to dozens of other scholars.

He's allowed them all to free ride off his meticulous empirical work because he wanted to guide and elevate the level of their scholarship.

When a man can co-author with 52 people, this indicates a lot about his personality. Especially considering that many of the 52 are high strung academics.

This indicates an amazing man who can work with almost anyone out of his desire to help them do their best. The intellectual benefits, the insights, and the inspiration all of these people received from working with John are a significant part of his legacy.

IV. A final similarity comes from Larry Bird playing - and later coaching - a team sport. Although his personal statistics were incredible, we most remember him as the Celtics team captain who lead his team to multiple championships, and how he was an integral part of the 1992 Olympic Dream Team.

John Connor similarly has been an essential member of the AAI team, playing crucial roles in AAI projects too numerous to mention, including his starring role in the AAI film, "Fair Fight In The Marketplace," our Transition Team Reports, and in speaking and organizing roles at numerous AAI Conferences.

V. There is, however, one respect in which the Larry Bird analogy breaks down. There was no public interest aspect to Bird's work. But John always brought to his work concern and compassion for the victims of cartels, for consumers, for the powerless.

Rather than put his mind and experience to work for the highest bidders - which would have been the cartels! - much of John's scholarship has documented just how terribly consumers have suffered at the hands of cartels. It also designs ways that society could use to better protect us all from cartels in the future.

For all these reasons it's my honor and privilege to introduce the winner of this year's Alfred E. Kahn Award for a lifetime of achievement, to the Larry Bird of Antitrust - John Connor.