

The Constant Crisis

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - THE CONSTANT CRISIS
AUGUST 26, 2018

Every year at this time, the time being the coming of the college football season, we are treated to a carnival of corruption. This is as natural as the coming of the season and nearly as old as the rhythms of nature itself. Given the fact that the seasons of sport blur one into the other, and none of them ever seems to end, the institutions of Higher Learning in America now offer corruption across the sports spectrum almost without regard to the calendar.

Nevertheless, the coming of football remains a very special time. With actual games not yet being played, and with only so much that can be said about the prospects of THE Enormous State University, journalistic eyes turn their focus on the corruption that seems to be everywhere. It is never hard to find because the hubris of university athletic personnel is a purveyor of gifts that keep on giving.

At the heart of the matter is the fundamental disjunction that exists between the educational objectives of higher education and those of the athletic departments. It is not fashionable among campus athletic administrators and coaches to present the raw, unvarnished truths of their enterprise. Instead, they speak of the lofty goals of education, the ideals of the institution, and their obligation to develop ideal citizens for the betterment of society.

In last three weeks, THE Ohio State University has been the focal point of the sports media, social media, and, increasingly, the national news media. If you have been out of touch, as I have been the last couple of weeks, you may have had difficulty keeping up with the scandal. The principle issues center on accusations of abuse by Zach Smith, an assistant football coach at THE Ohio State University, who played football for Meyer at Bowling Green State University and worked for Urban Meyer as a graduate assistant coach at the University of Florida. Courtney Smith, Zach Smith's wife, charged the coach with assault in 2015. This did not result in criminal charges, nor had similar charges in 2009. It also did not result in any actions from the university, although there are reports that the athletic director had advised Urban Meyer to fire Smith.

Instead, the incident led nowhere, as did any number of other highly questionable activities by Smith.

When the story of the 2015 incident reached the public press a few weeks ago, Meyer was asked about it at Big Ten Media Day. Meyer said he had learned about it only the night before. Soon it was clear that this was not the case, and Meyer had to backtrack at a second press conference saying he had failed to be "clear, compassionate and, most of all, completely accurate."

The university then appointed a panel to investigate the entire matter, and their findings rolled out this past week. The report, which is available for all to read, basically finds Meyer guilty of any number of transgressions and then absolves him of all of them. This is followed by an announcement that he is suspended from coaching, *sort of*, until the end of the third game of the season. The "sort of" stems from the fact that Meyer will be able to attend practices after the first game of the season. The Athletic Director was also suspended without pay for a similar period of time.

Another press conference followed, at which Meyer read a statement in which he failed to mention Courtney Smith or abuse. One observer, Paul Finebaum of the SEC Network, said the entire statement had the feel of someone being held hostage making a public statement with a gun at his back. Finebaum also found Meyer's demeanor shot through with arrogance, a trait seldom lacking in high profile and high paid college football coaches, and a trait that served him well at both the University of Florida and THE Ohio State University, where he has ruled as an independent agent.

Nor was this the end of it. When asked at this press conference if he had any words for Courtney Smith, he declined the opportunity to apologize to her. Again, he did not mention her by name, even though he had previously apologized to "Buckeye Nation" for his role in this entire affair. What he said instead was, "Well, I have a message for everyone involved in this: I'm sorry that we're in this situation." What warmth from this caring coach who is committed to the core values of THE Ohio State University.

Two days later, after more public criticism, Meyer issued a statement finally apologizing to Courtney Smith. "Let me say here and now what I should have said on Wednesday: I sincerely

apologize to Courtney Smith and her children for what they have gone through." Critics were pleased that this finally came, however late it was. Meyer again reiterated his views on "relationship violence" and his dedication to opposing it within the football program at THE Ohio State University and in his own home. His actions in the previous months cast a long shadow on this statement and his claim of dedication to oppose "relationship violence."

The beauty of this entire affair is that Meyer will sit out three games that Ohio State will win, and "Buckeye Nation" will offer their support to this great man. In a few months, the entire episode will be a footnote in the history of THE Ohio State University and the history of college football in America.

So don't wait, move on now; there are other scandals awaiting your indifference. Michigan State is still dealing with the fallout from the Larry Nasser affair. The University of Maryland is in the middle of a potentially major scandal. Texas A & M is facing a number of allegations. There is more trouble over shoe deals at the University of North Carolina.

If none of these cases interest you, don't worry, more will be coming down the road soon, and something more appealing to your tastes will certainly appear. Meanwhile, let's get ready for some football and put this nastiness behind us and deal with the more important issue of winning.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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