MarchMad

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For the past six weeks if you were around anything even vaguely connected with college sport, you were subjected to repeated references to "March Madness." The only phrase that even remotely approaches "March Madness" in frequency of use is "student athlete." If you prefer hyperbole over hypocrisy then, no doubt, you prefer "March Madness" over "student athlete."

I haven't heard of any cases this March in which some small-town retailer or charity group is being sued by the NCAA for misappropriating the term "March Madness." No doubt so many groups, associations, and individuals have been visited by NCAA lawyers with cease and desist orders over the years, that now everyone knows that "March Madness" belongs exclusively to the NCAA.

I had hoped that someone else might get a trademark or copyright on the term "student athlete" and prohibit its use by the NCAA. Should that ever happen the NCAA could use the term "scholar jock," although "professional amateur" might be a more meaningful alternative.

There are many other forms of March Madness. My students described for me the blood sport in the new box office hit "The Hunger Games." Teen age boys and girls are offered up by their parents to fight to the death for life sustaining rewards. Now that's really "March Madness."

This past week the University of Alabama gave their football coach Nick Saban a new contract that will raise his salary to $5.32M this year. With a series of annual increases guaranteed Saban will make $5.97M in 2019, unless of course the University of Alabama tears up his contract two or three more times before 2019. Over the next eight years Saban will carry off $45M in base salary and "talent fees." This may or may not make him the highest paid college football coach in America, but it certainly qualifies as "March Madness."

It is edifying to see the Kentucky Wildcats and the Louisville Cardinals meeting each other in the Final Four. CBS is calling it a case of "David and Goliath" although "Sodom and Gomorrah" might be more appropriate. This is the kind of match-up made in heaven for those who like to

see the hypocrisy of the NCAA displayed in full view on national television.

On the one hand there is Louisville, led by one of the slickest characters in college athletics. Rick Pitino has all the charm of a leader of "student athletes" who, as they say, leads by example. Wouldn't you want your son following someone who had sex with a young woman not his wife on a table top after hours in an Italian restaurant? Now that's "March Madness."

On the other hand Kentucky brings into focus the dedication to the "collegiate model" and the "student athlete," embodied in a basketball team that will in all likelihood not be in college next year. The "One and Done" phenomenon has been turned into a marketing and recruiting tool by John Calipari, an expert in manipulating NCAA rules. For the past couple of years Calipari has exploited the age requirement of the NBA that young men must be nineteen years old before entering the NBA draft.

In the year between high school and that special birthday of million dollar rewards, Calipari has offered the best young high school basketball players a home where they can develop their skills, mature a bit more physically, while enjoying the life of a college freshman, For those with no interest in anything associated with a college education it is an ideal situation. Because these freshmen have no intention of staying on campus beyond one year, they only have to pass a few classes during the fall term. They have no requirement to do anything associated with the university in the spring term other than register for classes and play basketball for the entertainment of boosters, alumni, and a national television audience. Passing classes is optional. Indeed going to class is optional.

The NCAA apparently has no interest in bringing the term "student athlete" into reality by forcing the "One and Done" basketball player to actually be a student or perform some reasonably convincing impersonation of a student. The NCAA President blames the NBA for the "One and Done" phenomenon. In point of fact the NBA does not require anyone to go to college. Basketball players under the age of nineteen can do whatever they want following high school. NCAA members entice these young men to campus for a year promising a chance to enhance their value in the NBA

market, while having a good time on campus. Few have followed the example of Brandon Jennings and gone to Europe, a route that is apparently too formidable for most pampered of American adolescent heroes.

Oddly enough Calipari's teams of "One and Done" personnel have yet to win an NCAA championship, although this year most think that will change. Kentucky is a heavy favorite to win it all, and I for one am hoping they do. Nothing could say "student athlete" in a louder or more mocking way than a group of "One and Done" Wildcats cutting down the nets come Monday night and John Calipari heading off on Tuesday morning to begin hustling a new group of one year professional amateurs to join him in Kentucky.

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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