

London

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE

August 13, 2011

As some of you know I am now in London where I will spend the fall semester teaching at the Florida State University London Centre. I am not certain how this will affect my general view of the American sports scene, but I can tell you that the riots of this week have affected my ability to concentrate on sport and the issues that have arisen over the past two weeks.

The first direct impact of the riots across England was to raise questions about the opening of football season this weekend. Only one game, Tottenham v. Everton, scheduled for Tottenham has been cancelled. This was not a big surprise as Tottenham was the point of origin of the rioting and the club itself did experience some minor damage to its facilities.

The other immediate sports question was the potential impact these events might have on the Olympic Games scheduled to begin in London in about a year's time. Certainly the quick and easy answer to that is, as it always is with the Olympics whatever the tragic events, "the games must go on." Indeed that is the view here, where an enormous investment has been made in facilities and infrastructure, to mention only two items. Nothing short of war seems to affect the games, and I doubt even war would cause a cancellation of these Olympics.

While watching all of this unfold, I was distracted by the usual stories rumbling out of that font of purity in America, intercollegiate athletics. One major eyebrow raiser was the report that during his exemplary tenure at THE Ohio State University, the patron saint of vests, Jim Tressel, was able to collect a mere \$21.7M. About one-fourth of that pay, \$4.6M, came from monies redirected to Tressel from THE Ohio State University's exclusive deal with Nike. Last year Tressel was paid \$3.5M which was a bit over three times that paid to the university president. Numerous other perks for Tressel and his wife (cars, cell phones, and tickets to bowl games and basketball games) came in over the \$100,000 mark.

I invite you to parse the preceding paragraph for all the nice little nuances that display some of what ails intercollegiate athletics.

The purity of the intercollegiate athletic community was revealed on a much less grand scale a few weeks ago when it was

reported that enforcement of Title IX is virtually non-existent. This has led a number of universities to ignore the regulations or to submit cursory reports on their non-compliance showing that they are in compliance. Self-reporting and self-investigating has its advantages.

More intriguing is the practice of recruiting women for teams when it is clear they will not compete, and in some cases will not even practice with the intercollegiate squads. On at least one campus women were listed on team rosters without their knowledge. This allows athletic departments to appear to be complying with Title IX by offering more opportunities for women to compete, when in fact they are not doing so. Fraud is a nice word to describe this practice.

Having enumerated these minimal cases let me say, do not worry. The university presidents and the president of the NCAA are on the case. In this very week the university presidents have been meeting at the NCAA President's "retreat," a term that has slipped over from the religious world into the halls of academe. Indeed "retreats" are all over the administrative structure of college campuses, and no one seems to have noticed the irony.

This time, we are told, true reform will take place.

It is an old refrain and there seems to be no reason why reform will prevail this time around. So let the presidents talk about raising academic standards for athletes entering the institutions of higher learning, and let them institute new standards for graduation rates. I can already hear coaches, like Jim Boeheim, howling about the unfairness of it all. And who can blame them as they are evaluated for winning, not for graduating players or recruiting actual students.

If anyone thinks that this will change the patterns of corruption in intercollegiate athletics they simply haven't been paying attention over the past several decades. The actions of university presidents and the NCAA president simply do not matter. They are now essentially tangential to the process. It is the conference commissioners, the major sponsors such as the aforementioned Nike, and the television executives at ESPN and other lesser networks that dictate the conduct of intercollegiate athletics especially when it involves football or basketball.

Over the past year we have seen the application of double and triple standards for misconduct, as exceptions were made to accommodate those headed to bowl games with high end payouts. No one, neither a conference nor a university, is going to miss a

big payday to enforce standards. Nor is it likely that the major athletic powers will suffer severe penalties for their misconduct. Conference officials, bowl organizers, and television producers will make certain of that.

Accountability is a term that has little currency in the world of intercollegiate athletics, and that is not very likely to change. It is way too late to talk seriously of reform. The system may be corrupt, but it is operating precisely as it is designed to operate.

Perhaps another "retreat" really is the solution. But at the next one, the presidents might be better advised to make prayer the major activity. They might even invite Rick Perry to lead the congregation.

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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