

# College Football

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## SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE

August 31, 2011

Staged events are seldom convincing and often offensive. About two weeks ago the President of THE Ohio State University, Gordon Gee decided to stage a public apology for his comments several weeks earlier in which he used the Little Sisters of the Poor as a punch line for criticism of scheduling by lesser football teams than his group of tainted national champions.

So Gee with press in tow went off to visit the Little Sisters of the Poor. His "apology" included a claim that he had made the Sisters famous. I would guess that the Sisters were as surprised as I was, to hear this. I have known about the Little Sisters of the poor since my childhood which was more than a few decades ago. The fact that I am a Catholic may help to explain that, although I suspect they have been well known beyond the Catholic community for a long time, likely even longer than Gordon Gee has been putting his foot in his mouth.

Having added this bit of false bravado to his own list of gaffs, and after Sister Cecilia Mary Satorius gave him a hug and whispered in his ear, Gee then announced to the gathered assembly that the Sisters had forgiven him. He then signed autographs, shook hands with those in wheelchairs, and performed other acts of mercy worthy of a fifth rate politician.

University presidents are often not the most graceful of public figures, but Gee, even by his own low standards, has performed well below public expectations for a highly educated public figure and alleged leader in higher education. Perhaps THE Ohio State University should consider giving Gee his outright release for the second time in his dubious public career.

All of this provides an appropriate preface to the beginning of the College Football season. It is a time of hope and optimism and considerable bragging about the prospects for the "home team." At this point in the season no one has lost a game. Preseason polls, the national football magazines, the television pundits, and anyone with a football pulse has been "analyzing" the upcoming season and proclaiming their choice for "Number One." There may be no other venue in which "numberoneism" is so universally practiced as in the rarified atmosphere of college football.

As we await the first kickoff, the press should be concentrating on the games ahead and the stars should be preparing for the first action on the gridiron. Instead we have the now all too

familiar scenario playing itself out. Players are facing suspensions and dismissal from their teams for a variety of the usual reason.

The first big game of the season between LSU and Oregon will no longer be the first great test between two of the nation's powerhouse preseason top ten teams. LSU players are facing criminal charges resulting from a barroom brawl, while one of Oregon's star defensive players has been suspended after being arrested for driving a rental car with a suspended license at 118 mph. Both teams are also under NCAA investigation for questionable recruiting practices. This may take a bit of the luster off the big opener in the Jerry Dome in Texas.

In South Florida the University of Miami has even bigger problems as they temporarily suspended a number of players, which may be as many as fifteen, from the football team. This follows revelations by former Hurricane Booster and Ponzi scheme veteran, Nevin Shapiro, that he provided benefits to 72 former and current athletes at Miami. The suspended players learned from the NCAA today that although all will play again, eight will miss at least one game and must pay restitution for the gifts they took from Shapiro. Two others will receive longer suspensions. Some will compare these NCAA suspensions to last year's bowl game passes for players from Alabama and THE Ohio State University. One can argue that the situations and details were different, and certainly to expect consistency from the NCAA is not something likely to be seen in this millennium.

Several other programs are under scrutiny for NCAA violations and will take whatever that burden might be into the new season. Whatever ultimately happens at Miami, LSU, and Oregon, or at some other version of Enormous State University, once again this year the college football will open under a cloud.

Although many of us who are inside these institutions of higher learning are dismayed by these continuing issues, it is clear that the NCAA will be unable to change the course of over a hundred years of intercollegiate athletic corruption. When some speculated that Miami might face the "death penalty" for its violation, or that they might be banned from television appearances, a former chairman of the NCAA Committee on infractions was quoted as saying that this will not happen. Why, because the death penalty "destroys a program," and because a television ban would not only punish the offending institution, but their conferences and their member institutions. The power of the conferences is such that they will prevent these more severe penalties, and the television networks too will do what

they can to keep all teams and their stars on the field and on the tube.

So the NCAA will continue to issue the lesser penalties that although inconvenient for football programs, will have no major impact on the overall corruption of the system. Individual schools will suspend players and sometimes fire coaches or athletic directors, and university presidents will continue to call for reform.

In the end little will change, because in the end there are few outside the academic community, and indeed few inside the academic community, who really care about institutional integrity. It's about the money and the fame. College football is firmly embedded in the entertainment business, and no longer a part of the educational process.

As for the public, their only concern is wins and losses on the field and who turns out to be number one.

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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