

Reflection

12-28-2011

Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Other History Commons](#), [Sports Management Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Reflection" (2011). *On Sport and Society*. 68.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/68>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Public History at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in On Sport and Society by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact lee.dotson@ucf.edu.

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE

December 28, 2011

As I prepare to leave England and return to Florida and as the end of the year approaches, I have thought about writing an end of the year summary piece. Thinking about that I decided that what I only would reflect upon the last six or seven weeks of this year, weeks that have turned out to be most remarkable in content and emblematic of the past year.

In a decade in which a major story has been the abuse of children by Catholic priests, it may not be a surprise that other authority figures have been abusing children in much the same way. The stories emanating from the sports machines at Penn State and Syracuse University, as well as from the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), although shocking in their details, should not have evoked great surprise.

Authority figures, be they parents, priests, teachers, bosses, political leaders, and coaches all have a history of abuse, not only of children but also of adults. Dominant power held by one person over another, or a group of others, has always had the potential to produce abuse. And it has. Covering up such abuses too has a long history as the guilty seek to escape detection, the victims seek to avoid public humiliation, and others seek to protect the reputations of institutions rather than to protect the abused.

Another ongoing story of the past few years has been the growing concern in sport over head injuries. Concussions have become a topic of discussion by athletes, their unions, their leagues, and coaches, and this has led to considerable research into the subject. The research has even come to include the brains of athletes who have donated that organ for research. The NFL has been adopting various policies to minimize head injuries, as has the National Hockey League. Despite these changes the number of concussions has not gone down and the number of players sent to the sidelines has increased.

Several recent developments in this area are troubling. The Commissioner of The National Hockey League, Gary Bettman, insisted that there is no proven connection between hockey fighting and head trauma. The evidence is still not massive, although three NHL enforcers died in a period of five months between April and September of 2011. They died at a relatively young age and brain trauma was detected in all three cases.

Rather than err on the side of caution and move to eliminate fighting, Bettman has chosen to allow fighting to flourish as part of the NHL entertainment package. The notion that the product and the entertainment of fans are more important than the high potential of brain damage to one human being, let alone many, is an attitude that places Mr. Bettman squarely in the camp of those Romans, who staged the gladiatorial spectacles for the amusement of the masses. Already this season 23 players have suffered concussions with several being season ending.

Meanwhile in the National Football League a recent report has revealed that players, more concerned about their immediate short-term goals, have found ways to mask their concussions and continue to play. Despite the efforts of doctors and trainers to monitor concussions and prevent further damage to players, the pressures to play continues to override long term medical concerns. The early onset of dementia and early deaths that are associated with multiple concussions are something the League must prevent through the combined efforts of league officials from top to bottom, from the Commissioner down to the assistant trainers and including everyone in between. The decision to add a sideline trainer to monitor concussions is a step in the right direction but probably not enough.

Moving to less life threatening issues the college football bowl season is, as the British say, hotting up. Once again this bowl season is populated by teams who had mediocre records. In one of the most bizarre bowl games, two teams that fired their coaches because of poor performance will meet. Illinois at 6-6 "earned" the right to play UCLA at 6-7 without their coaches, Ron Zook and Rick Neuheisel, in the Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl, which will do little to put food on the table at the Zook and Neuheisel households.

A quick check shows nine 6-6 teams in bowl games with at least four of them matched up against one another. In mediocrity's finest hour, there are also two 6-7 teams that are bowling. Another check shows that one of the 6-7 teams, Arizona State, was wiped out by 12-1 Boise State in the MAACO Bowl in Las Vegas 56-24. How could such a match be made for a bowl game? And more significantly how could Boise State at 12-1 not be in one of the big bowl games in January? The answer to both questions is the same; the BCS made them do it. Cartels have power and they control where the money goes. As a non-BCS member Boise is SOL.

Also in college sport greed took another form with extensive conference reorganization. "The Big East" is now "The Big Directional" having added Boise State in Idaho, San Diego State

in California, the University of Central Florida in Orlando, and Houston and SMU in Texas. Only UCF remotely qualifies as an eastern team. The Big East is now a coast to coast, region to region, four time zone conference, whose new theme song should be "This Land Is My Land," with team cheers resonating from California to the New York Island.

Why would such a thing be done? What possible reason could there be for college students to be subject to the resulting road trips. Conference Commissioner, John Marinatto, supplied the best answer when he proudly proclaimed: "We have five new marketplaces and will boost our television market up to six percent up to 28 million households," adding, "We'll have four different time zones. It's a powerful model unmatched by any other conference."

Indeed, and let's hope it remains unmatched. The most likely result is that "The Big Directional" while offering programming to the networks in four time zones, will then be ignored by television viewers in the same four time zones. It may even reach more time zones if the worldwide reach of ESPN sends this scintillating programing to regions where many of teams will be a completely unknown quantity. We can only hope.

These are just a few of the stories that have caught my eye in the past seven weeks. In fact there were many more although they may not have been as depressing or silly as these.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau wishing the best for the New Year and reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

Copyright 2011 by Richard C. Crepeau