

The Year

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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As years go 2014 was an interesting one in sportsworld. Some might characterize it as depressing while others may look back on it as exhilarating. Whatever the case may be we know that at some point in the future we will look back on the year 2014 with nostalgia and/or perhaps a year of pivotal change. Maybe even historic, whatever that means.

Looking back on my year of commenting on sport it seems as if it was somewhat lean. Too much of this column was spent on crime, punishment, corruption and just plain stupidity. It was football, especially Roger Goodell, who occupied too much of my attention. Perhaps this is the result of having spent too much time over the past several years writing my history of the NFL. In fact I am beginning to worry that I am becoming obsessed by Roger Goodell and that he might begin to appear to me in my dreams, or worse just appear to me randomly.

It has been a difficult year for Mr. Goodell. Many of the proposals he made for change in the NFL have fallen by the wayside. His self-appointment as Tsar of Conduct has been particularly unfortunate. Seeking to "Defend the Shield" or "Protect the Shield" has turned into an unrewarding activity exposing him to public ridicule and private angst. His self-righteous posturing and wooden personality has not played well on "Sixty Minutes" or in public press conferences. But then defending the indefensible is usually a thankless task. Being the heavy in a public drama where the other principal actors are abusers must be confusing.

In addition to these fiascoes involving the Commissioner the NFL is still trying to wiggle out of the trap it set for itself by spending over twenty years denying any connection between football and concussions. It is not pretty and Goodell has been carrying that load.

All is not dark. The owners of the NFL have been, with the help of their hapless Commissioner, able to watch the popularity of the NFL soar to new heights. Television ratings are going into the stratosphere with even the NFL Network notching numbers putting it in the top cable shows in nearly every week this season. In fact NFL Football has topped the cable charts on a weekly basis, as well as the

over the air charts week after week with NBC's Sunday Night Football leading the way.

The owners have watched the value of their franchises shoot over the billion dollar mark. No other American sport has comparable values and they keep on going up. Revenue streams seem to be holding at flood stage. Even the franchise under siege in Washington whose owner throws money at coaches in huge bundles is riding high on the billion dollar wave while insisting he is simply honoring Native Americans.

If Goodell has emerged as a villain in sportsworld, the new Commissioner of the NBA Adam Silver has reaped the benefits of being gifted an owner crying out to be hammered. The Donald Sterling Affair captured public attention at the end of the 2013-14 NBA season as Sterling publicly exposed himself as a sleazy bigot. This gave Silver an opportunity to begin his tenure as NBA Commissioner with an action that drew massive public approval. By stripping Sterling of his ownership position in the Los Angeles Clippers, Silver was the recipient of high public praise.

Another Commissioner, Bud Selig, has reaped the benefits of a farewell tour as people have emphasized the positive, forgetting all the negatives he accumulated over several decades. Now the grand old man of baseball, Selig's role in canceling the World Series has slipped onto the back burner of the Hot Stove.

The year began as it has done for almost fifty years with another Super Bowl, our national mid-Winter carnival and holiday of consumption. It was as always a huge success even if no one can remember much about the game and only can recall the best and worst commercials. The only question that remains to be answered about the Super Bowl is if it will someday surpass Christmas as The National Consumption holiday.

College sport didn't have the greatest of years either. As usual the arrest record for petty and serious crime was ascending while student athletes diversified their activities. There was a rash of B-B gun incidents involving college athletes across the nation providing a new entry for rap sheets. What was not so usual was the fact that there was some actual concern over the worst of the activities.

Academic scandals also provided an opportunity contemplate the question of whether or not intercollegiate athletics is a corrupting force within the university. The answer may seem obvious from the outside, but there is less certainty on the inside where the cash and glory are up close and personal and universities such as Florida State and the University of North Carolina are dizzy with success.

Although the Winter Olympics were used primarily as an opportunity to do some Putin bashing in the American press, it still was an awesome spectacle and produced its usual quotient of athletic achievements. The same can be said of the World Cup where the most popular sport on the planet provided excitement and athletic skills that was able to attract the attention of even a significant number of Americans.

There was frenzied excitement at mid-year over one of the most neglected of sports, horse-racing. Large scale attention is given to the Sport of Kings in America only in the few weeks of the race for the Triple Crown. Once again this year it looked as if there might be a Triple Crown awarded. This time it was California Chrome, a horse of unimpressive blood lines bought at a bargain price by a group that named itself "Dumb Ass Partners." The excitement built over the first two legs of the Triple Crown and was overflowing at Belmont Park.

Once again it was not to be. The crowd at the track was disappointed, the millions watching on television were let down, and one of the owners expressed bitter disappointment in a spontaneous outburst of frustration within seconds of the end of the race. It was raw emotional reality television that is seldom seen these days, and for all the bad sportsmanship on display, it was oddly refreshing.

And finally let me mention one other set of wonderful sports moments at the Little League World Series. Sportsmanship was in abundance, the team from Chicago from the Jackie Robinson West Little League was nicely juxtaposed with the Michael Brown affair, and one of the most exciting sporting figures in some time captured the hearts of the nation. This week Mo'ne Davis was named Female Athlete of the Year by *Sports Illustrated* providing a very nice finish to what has not been an awe inspiring year in sportsworld.

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

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