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Florida Sports

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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I am not sure if it's the travel I've been doing with its cumulative jet lag, some new peculiar alignment of the planets associated with the recent departure from San Diego, or just a simple coincidence, but this past couple of weeks in sports world has left my head spinning. Not surprising is the fact that many of these developments have come out of Florida, a state that seems to be rivaling California these days as the off-center of the universe. One theory has it that it's all related to Disney or the rockets fired from Cape Canaveral.

Out of Boca Raton last week, or should I say out of the mouth of the rat last week, came the story that a 12-year-old named Melissa had been sent to the pines by the Boca Youth Baseball League for refusing to wear a boy's protective cup. Now, I don't want to stretch this too far but would this not be like a mixed basketball league banning a boy for refusing to wear a bra designed for women?

This is but the beginning of the story. The Little League at the National level does not require cups for female catchers, but the Boca league is under the supervision of national Babe Ruth League which requires a cup for everyone, with no exception for women. One wonders what Babe Ruth would have said about all this. Good taste compels me not to speculate.

Melissa, herownself, took matters into her own hands, when she reported to the playing field for the next game wearing the cup on her ankle. After an inning she was ordered to the outfield. I assume that Melissa's actions set off a flurry of impromptu meetings among earnest league officials who finally made the decision that a cup on the ankle was not adequate. Melissa got through the inning without injury to her cup less body, her ankle, or anyone else in the ball park, except those who suffered groin pulls from uncontrollable fits of laughter.

Meanwhile this little melodrama united the political right and the political left, in Rush Limbaugh and the National Organization for Women, both of whom agreed that the officials of the Boca Raton Little League didn't know a thing about anatomy, women's rights, or Babe Ruth.

The national press cooperated by making this headline stuff and seeking out their usual cadre of experts for comment. Doctors

knowingly told unsuspecting TV news audiences that girls didn't need as much groin protection as boys, while from beyond the grave Babe Ruth uttered an "amen." Several female cup manufacturers rushed forward to save the day providing Melissa with a cup she didn't have to wear on her ankle.

Meanwhile just up the road in Palm Bay the Florida heat and humidity was affecting another group of enlightened community leaders. The Police Athletic League of Palm Bay, which runs a midnight basketball program which Rush Limbaugh has never endorsed, told the top player from Palm Bay High's junior varsity team, Nicole Smith, that she could not play in their League.

Marshall Jones, no relation to Paula, said that boys were just too rough for Nicole Smith. "Boys are more competitive and girls do it more for recreation." Welcome to the WNBA Mr. Jones. And welcome to the late 20th century several decades from Title IX. I'd like you to meet Rebecca Lobo and the U.S. Olympic basketball team--in the paint.

If all of this isn't enough then contemplate the headlines made by two of the sports media's biggest names. Marv Albert last week was arraigned on charges of assault for biting a woman's back, and for forced sodomy. It might have been more serious except she was a friend of the rug-draped NBC star. Monday Night Football's Frank Gifford meanwhile qualified for an appearance on America's Funniest Home Videos.

It has been interesting to watch the media react when two of their own made headlines for sexual misconduct. Gifford's tabloid seduction was dismissed as an act of a dim witted ex-football player, while Albert's colleagues jumped to his defense reminding everyone of the protections of due process which should be afforded to anyone accused of a crime. These are the same people who for the past several years have tried and convicted O.J. Simpson several times over despite the outcome of the legal process, and who routinely demand the suspension of any and all athletes accused by anyone for anything that looks like a sex related crime.

One can only imagine the outcry if Marv Albert played football at Nebraska.

The only understandable and normal thing that happened this week in the continuing parade of sports world is that several team owners, including most notably those in Minneapolis and

Indianapolis, continued playing the extortion game with state and local government officials threatening to move their properties unless new stadiums were built for them.

Maybe they'd like to move to Florida.

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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