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## NBA Draft

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The NBA draft has come and gone, once again leaving in its wake any number of questions about the future of the NBA and about those whom entered the draft process. But those questions can wait. This night of less than scintillating television looked very much like a glorified meat market presenting itself as a magical dream machine.

The spectacle of rounding up the best basketball talent from around North America and putting it in a room to await a call forward to another room as a piece of property in an lottery-cum-auction, has a surreal and eerie quality. It does little to add to the dignity of a process that seems to be more than welcomed by the participants, and little to the dignity of the human beings whose names are called.

On the other hand this night of faux-suspense does result in the creation of a new set of instant millionaires. Although property, these young men will be well-compensated property, with the promise of being able to increase their value over time and their compensation geometrically.

In addition those chosen assure us repeatedly of their pleasure at being selected by whomever. They tell us over and over again that this moment is the culmination of their life. This is the fulfillment of their childhood dreams. We see members of the their families celebrating with them, and we hear parents tell us how all the sacrifices were worth it and how happy they are for their children.

It is an evening filled with paradox.

To add to the festivities the television people evaluate the talent, as it is chosen, and comment on the wisdom of the choices. Speculation about the market follows complete with analysis of whose stock has risen, whose has fallen, and why. It is not unlike listening to the business report on the futures market. The only thing missing is the wit and wisdom of Louis Rukeyser.

And yet the draft is presented as a fulfillment of the American dream. Formulas of success and morality over a century old are recapitulated for the audience. Horatio Alger and Miles L. Standish could not do this any better than the dream-trackers at

Turner Network Television. The tales of Mark the Matchboy and Frank Merriwell are repackaged for the late twentieth century.

Poor boy makes good, elevating himself from humble, yet never debilitating, poverty to financial success by virtue of his talents. Hard-working and virtuous young men are rewarded for their faithfulness to the Protestant virtues. All races, colors and creeds in the new diverse America of the late twentieth century share in the promise of success.

Richly symbolic the NBA Draft is presided over by a semi-monopolistic business cartel pushing the limits of anti-trust law. This indeed is the true meaning of life in America in the late twentieth century, different from, and yet somehow very much like, the America of the late nineteenth century.

Beyond this mythic function the draft seems to annually raise questions about the importance of a college education to these talented young men. Should these skilled players leave college before the completion of their eligibility? Should a high school student go to college if they are good enough to be drafted?

Each question raises others, but both are worth contemplation.

The first question about the completion of eligibility, or the completion of the senior year, which may in fact be a fifth year, is raised when players "leave early." It may be instructive that this question is almost never raised in a form that raises objections to a departure before the completion of an education or even the receipt of a degree.

If the purpose of the university is to train and develop athletic talent for our society then clearly the objections may have some legitimacy. If the purpose of the university is to educate young people or provide them with a degree, the objection is again legitimate.

The latter issues are irrelevant. A very low percentage of athletes who move through the universities of the United States ever earn a degree. Even fewer emerge from four years of athletic competition as an educated person. As to the first point I don't know of a single American university that has the "training and development of athletic talent" in its mission statement or strategic planning documents.

So what is the substance of the objection? It seems to be embodied in such phrases as "not being ready," or "need to

further develop their skills." Put another way these athletes might enhance their market value by playing college sports for another year or more.

There is even at times some discussion of "maturity" or "enjoying the college experience." These may be issues vaguely related to education, but are hardly compelling reasons to remain in college.

The fact that the athlete may have absolutely no interest in college or even hate college, seems never occur to anyone. Jason Williams, for example, could find no college basketball program to his liking because they all were located at a university.

High school basketball and football players who have no interest in or no capacity for a university ought not to be there. If they are not ready for the NBA or NFL there ought to be an alternative for them, as there is in professional baseball, and not an alternative which can inhibit their career. Juggling entrance requirements and programs of study to accommodate athletes who would be better served in other activities is an attack on the academic integrity of the university.

This has been going on for a century and needs to stop. The simple truth is that athletic apprenticeship should be done in an athletic and not an academic setting.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't need to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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