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## The Cesspool of Intercollegiate Athletics

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Should it now be a requirement that anyone using the term "Intercollegiate Athletics" precede it with the words, "In the cesspool that is . . .?" The events of the past few weeks would indicate so.

In the cesspool that is intercollegiate athletics Baylor University is the current pacesetter. The murder of one its basketball players, Patrick Dennehy, has tumbled downward into the most disgusting set of developments in college basketball since Jim Valvano ran amok at North Carolina State, Jerry Tarkanian haunted the halls of Long Beach State, UNLV, and Fresno State, and Bobby Knight reigned supreme at Indiana University.

Beginning with the murder itself Baylor University's basketball program and head coach Dave Bliss have come under the microscope. What has been revealed is fairly ugly but not all that surprising given the low level of expectations for integrity in our corrupt times. Bliss and one of his assistant coaches made illegal payments to Dennehy to cover the cost of tuition and living expenses. An assistant coach and Bliss gave money to Dennehy to finance his SUV (one of the current vehicles of choice among well paid student athletes). These emoluments are said to have been a quid pro quo for Dennehy's transfer to Baylor. In addition a number of basketball players had inexplicably passed urine tests following drug use.

In his resignation statement Coach Bliss said: "I came to Baylor four years ago to fulfill a challenge of competing in the tremendously competitive Big 12. But I also came because of my faith -- Baptist and Christian. . . I love to share the occasion to do what I love - coach basketball and share my faith and my belief in God." He went on to say that he had just become aware that rules were broken and that his program had been clean for 28 years. He did not comment on which SUV Jesus drives.

Over the next few days following Dennehy's funeral, which Bliss dutifully attended to express his sorrow to the Dennehy family, the story took an uglier turn, as Bliss' display of Christian faith in action became public knowledge. Assistant coach Abar Rouse revealed that Bliss not only had full knowledge of all the illegal activity that had taken place, but that Bliss was fully orchestrating a cover-up of the scandal as he had tape recordings of Bliss in action.

In conversations with coaches and players Bliss is heard developing an elaborate plan for players to make false statements implying that Dennehy got his money for tuition and the SUV by dealing drugs. Several different times in the course of the taped conversations Bliss points out that they can say anything about Dennehy without fear of contradiction. He told one player that there was no need to mention Dotson, Dennehy's former roommate and accused murderer, "because he's still alive." As for Dennehy, " . . . now he's dead, so he isn't going to argue with me at all."

Bliss had conversations with players in which he repeatedly suggests to them a scene in which Dennehy had a roll of bills which he flashed, and that Dennehy at one point brought a plate full of pills out for a drug party in his apartment. Bliss told the players to be sure to mention this to investigators and that it would be most effective if it came at the end of their sessions with investigators.

Abar Rouse said that he began secretly taping these conversations after Bliss threatened him with the loss of his job if he didn't cooperate in the cover-up. Rouse had been at Baylor for a short time as director of basketball operations and had recently been appointed assistant coach.

If you read the entirety of the tapes the cumulative effect is stunning and disgusting. Here is a self-proclaimed teacher of Christian values manipulating the players under his leadership in a scheme to cover-up his own transgressions and to tarnish the reputation of a dead player in order to save himself, cynically telling the players there is nothing to worry about precisely because Dennehy is dead. He also repeatedly claims that it is Baylor that must be saved not him.

As to Bliss' claim that for 28 years he had run clean and honest programs, this too is in doubt. There are now reports that while at SMU Bliss' basketball program was found in a number of major violations including payments to a star player of several thousands of dollars. The NCAA chose not to pursue these violations at SMU because that school had just been put under the so-called "death penalty" for massive corruption in its football program.

And finally a word about the reaction to Abar Rouse's taping of the conversations with Bliss, which he then turned over to Baylor investigators. Many of Rouse's friends and several

coaches around the country point out that within the culture of the cesspool that is intercollegiate athletics such actions as those by Rouse are considered a major betrayal. It is likely that Rouse will find it very difficult to find a job in any other basketball program.

Loyalty to the head coach and willingness to go down the drain for that coach and/or to save the program is considered an unwritten rule of the coaching profession. Assistant Coaches who cover for the head coach are much admired, especially if they lose their own job while saving that of the head coach. Assistant coaches who turn on the head coaches or the program become pariahs in the profession.

This is apparently true even among those leaders of young men who are Christian, even Baptists. It is true also at schools of a similar religious bent. And it is true at private and state schools of a non-religious character. The cesspool that is intercollegiate athletics makes no distinctions on who can swim in the pool.

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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