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College Football's Rap Sheet

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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All the color and pagentry of college football have returned. We've already experienced this year's first game of the century, and this year's first game of the decade. It's a wonderful time of year, when footballs fill the air and college athletes fill the courtrooms, police blotters, and the investigative time of the NCAA all across America.

About three weeks ago when Lawrence Phillips was sued by his ex-girl-friend-assault-victim, I decided to watch the news and sports wires and track criminal and NCAA violations by college athletes. The result has been mind-numbing.

A Clemson player was arrested for assault on another student, becoming the ninth Clemson player arrested since February. At Nebraska a defensive player and potential All-American was suspended for what looks like two games for drunken driving. At Mississippi State a basketball player was sentenced for probation violation after pistol-whipping another student on campus. The player had been placed on three years probation for cocaine possession and distribution charges in 1993.

At Texas Christian University a football player arrested for assault on a student was found to have put together a two year string of other assault and public-intoxication charges. Three other players participated in the most recent assault, while all four remain members of the TCU football team. The victim has withdrawn from Texas Christian with a swollen brain, fractured skull, and facial paralysis.

At Virginia Tech a track athlete charged that he had been beaten by fifteen to twenty football players. Seven Hokie players have been arrested since November on charges including shoplifting, public intoxication, and disorderly conduct. Two players are facing a civil suit by a woman claiming she was raped by them in a dorm room.

Meanwhile at Miami the charges just keep on coming as ten players have already been suspended by the football coach this season. Many of these cases involved alcohol and disorderly conduct, including assault on a police officer as well as a girl friend. At Montana six players were placed on probation and four others were reprimanded by the football coach for their roles in a brawl at a fraternity house.

In addition there is a long list of NCAA crime and punishment growing across the nation. At Southern Cal a running back was suspended from the team for lying to NCAA investigators who were interested in a course in which thirteen of fourteen athletes received an "A" last spring. Coach John Robinson said that the player had not been charged with anything, he had only failed the investigation. Huh!? The NCAA apparently disagreed and extended the one game suspension to three. Meanwhile a teammate is just completing a one year suspension for taking money from an agent.

At San Diego State three players, including a Heisman hopeful, were suspended for accepting extra benefits. At Colorado a wide-receiver was suspended for one game for violating team rules, and a cornerback was ruled ineligible by the NCAA.

The topper came last week when Michigan State was slapped with four years probation for transgressions involving recruiting, illegal payments, academic eligibility, and other routine violations. The Spartans' academic advisor was found guilty of procuring academic credit and having grades changed for three players, while boosters provided the ever popular illegal inducements and emoluments.

All this in three weeks.

So what is going on here? Tom Osborne says that when you consider the number of football players on campus, the rate of problems is not too bad. I doubt that. At Virginia Tech coach Frank Beamer wouldn't discuss the matter. Note that his team is winning. At Clemson, where college presidents have been dismissed for demanding too much of their coaches beyond winning, one hundred students met with Coach Tommy West to tell him they did not feel safe with his football players on campus. West's response was that he could not guarantee their safety because he couldn't be with his players twenty-four hours a day. It might be suggested to West that he try to find players he can control without being with them twenty-four hours a day, but then...

Is this a new problem? Are we looking at further evidence of the decline of college sport or American civilization? I don't think so. There have always been athletes on campus who didn't belong there, who weren't really students, who never saw the inside of a classroom. They garnered more than their share of violations and arrests, some for assault.

The reason is simple and reform is not possible. Institutions of higher education for over a century now have been willing to compromise their academic, social, and ethical standards for athletic victory. Winning is the only thing. It's as traditional as a fall football Saturday afternoon, or evening, or Thursday night, or...

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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