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Sport and the Theater of the Absurd

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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There are times when I think that the entire world of sport was put on this earth to amuse me with unending scenes from the theater of the absurd. The last several days brought repeated waves of this feeling.

The best of course came with the selections made yesterday by the Bowl Championship Series, the BCS. On Saturday, as many were hoping, LSU beat Tennessee in the SEC championship game throwing the issue of a national championship under BCS sponsorship into chaos. On Sunday, as many were hoping, the BCS computers reported that Nebraska would now play Miami in the AT&T Rose Bowl for the BCS championship. It was now the BCS who took the "C" out of their own name.

The Rose Bowl will now be known as the "AT&T Sorry Wrong Number Bowl." The wrong number was .05; the margin of difference in the computer ranking averages cranked out by the BCS wizards. The right number should have been 26, Colorado's margin of victory over Nebraska in their 62-36 pounding of the Cornhuskers the day after Thanksgiving.

Oregon, which lost only one game by one point, also failed to beat out Nebraska for the right to play in the BCS championship game even though the Ducks were ranked number two in the AP and the Coaches poll. Oregon coach Mike Bellotti responded in the usual understated style of a football coach saying, "I liken the BCS to a bad disease, like cancer."

Who would have guessed that the outcome of a rather insignificant game between TCU and Southern Mississippi last Saturday would be critical in all of this? Because Nebraska beat TCU in August, the "strength of schedule factor" for Nebraska went up after TCU's 14-12 victory and this helped to move Nebraska .05 ahead of Colorado. No, I am not making this up.

When asked if this chaos was good for the image of the sport, the BCS coordinator said, "It depends on what you consider chaos."

Until something else arrives, this will do.

A few days earlier in the hearing rooms of the U.S. Congress the Comedy Central spotlight fell on the old reliable, Commissioner

of Baseball, Bud Selig. These days Bud need only open his mouth to provoke laughter.

The Commissioner came before the House Judiciary Committee to explain the horrible financial situation faced by major league baseball. Claiming that only five teams made money last season, Selig went on explain to an incredulous room of congressional representatives that baseball was facing overall losses of \$519M. He also claimed that contraction was necessary to save the game from destruction, that the teams to be contracted (Montreal and Minnesota) had not yet been determined, and that only you can prevent forest fires.

One of the best moments of the day came when Minnesota Governor Jessie Ventura called Selig a liar while characterizing the Commissioner's claim of massive losses as "asinine."

The topper came when Selig told the congressional committee that they had been given all the information they needed and that all the numbers were there in his report. On that note Representative Maxine Waters interrupted the Commissioner to, not so gently, remind him he was under oath. It was a priceless moment.

The real beauty of this sham is that it will work. Baseball owners will ultimately do whatever they want to do, Congress will wring its hands, but the anti-trust exemptions and tax breaks will not be touched. This will be so because major league baseball has invested wisely in the political system with major campaign contributions and with the largest lobbying contingent of any professional sports organization. The absolute arrogance of baseball's leadership has not changed in well over a century.

Finally comes this story from England. Having just avoided a player's strike, English soccer is now faced with the prospect of a mascot strike. The trouble it seems comes from a decision by English soccer authorities to issue guidelines governing behavior of sideline mascots.

Yorkie the Lion, York City's mascot, feels that mascots are not getting enough respect. "Some clubs you go to treat us like crap," says Yorkie. "At Darlington we even had to pay to get in." How refreshing!

Others would argue that the mascots get no respect because they have earned none. Mascot sideline behavior has been a major problem. Bury's mascot, Robbie the Bobbie, has been sent off

three times already this season, once for mooning the opposition fans. Swansea City's, Cyril the Swan, dropkicked the head of Millwall's mascot into the crowd. Oh, those staid English.

Where is the San Diego Chicken now that we need him?

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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