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Indy 500 - Lyle Alzado and Ed Gantner- FSU and UF Bowl Money

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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Over the past few weeks a number of small items have caught my eye. They are not large enough issues and topics to occupy the entire commentary, so I have been saving them for a chance to dump them all together.

But first, there is something of immediate concern. The Indianapolis 500 will be run on Sunday. Is this a sport? Well I suppose the answer to that question depends on how you define sport. It also depends on how important you think the human element must be in sport. Is auto racing a competition of technologies, or is the driver a significant enough factor in the race to play a determining role in the outcome?

The other question I have about the Indy 500 is, does anyone watch this race, or for that matter any auto race, for anything other than the thrill of the kill? Is it the prospect of the mangling of metal, and the constant shadow of death hanging over the event, that is the main draw for the spectators?

The other item of immediate concern is the Orlando Magic and their landing of the number one draft pick. Local basketball fans will watch this very closely to see if the O'Neal Deal is handled properly, and if Pat Williams can navigate his way through these treacherous waters. It won't be a smooth sail.

I also want to mention Lyle Alzado who at the age of 43 died of brain cancer last week. Alzado, whose glory years were with the Denver Broncos Orange Crush Defense and later the Al Davis Raiders, has been criss-crossing the nation over the last year or so warning of the dangers of steroid use, as well as the use of human growth hormones. Alzado used steroids during his college and professional careers to inflate himself to the 260 pounds he carried as an All-Pro defensive end. He became addicted to steroids, and he and his doctors believe that they were ultimately the cause of his death.

Alzado's story had a echo here in Central Florida. Some of you will remember Ed Gantner who played football at Edgewater High and the University of Central Florida and used steroids to inflate his small body into that of a fierce defensive football player. His addiction ultimately led to the decimation of his body, the destruction of his personal life, and finally suicide.

The stories of both men are similar and should be ample warning to those young men who dream of athletic prowess so intensely that they will do anything to their bodies to achieve it. It should also serve as an indictment of an athletic ethos that leads to self-abuse, and then fails to curb it when it becomes obvious. If friends, family, and teammates, all knew what was going on, and there is ample evidence that they did, then surely coaches and athletic officials had some idea of what Alzado, Gantner, and so many others were doing to themselves. Yet they were allowed to keep on playing as long as they contributed to winning.

Then there is the story out of Florida State University that the Seminoles spent \$717,550.20 to play in Dallas in the Cotton Bowl last January 1. I know this sounds incredible but consider the fact that the cost included travel and lodging for 276 people who were not team members or coaches. Who were they? Well there were the 16 members of the Bowden family, and seven members of the family of FSU President Dale Lick. The other 253 came from the ranks of the Alumni Association, the Seminole Boosters, and wives and friends. Despite this feeding frenzy the 'Noles arrived home with \$625,000 in profit.

A similar tale can be told of the Gator trip to the Sugar Bowl. The university picked up the expenses of a number of the members of the State Board of Regents and the State Legislature.

It is good to know that this sort of money can be tossed off by these Universities in the middle of one of the worst budget crises in the history of the State of Florida.

At almost the same time the University of Florida withdrew the athletic scholarship of fifth year player Brian Fox, who had been a backup to Gator quarterback Shane Mathews. Fox was dismayed by his situation. Unfortunately it is an all too frequent situation. Athletic grants-in-aid are guaranteed only on a year to year basis, and with a limited number of grants to give, marginal players are often dropped along the way. This practice has become more common as the number of grants allowed under NCAA rules has decreased.

There was a time under NCAA rules when it was very difficult for a coach to drop a scholarship athlete. But oddly as the revenues have skyrocketed, the security of the athlete has dropped. To be recruited by a school is no longer any guarantee that you will be on scholarship for four or five years. This is one more indication that intercollegiate athletics is big business, and

that the student-athlete is of marginal concern. Steve Spurrier says that he must do what's best for the football program and the University. He also must do what's best for Steve Spurrier. But who will do what's best for the student-athlete?

Maybe it's time for those who spend three-quarters of a million dollars on non-athletes at bowl games to answer that question.

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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