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Motivating Athletes: Tampons at Catholic University and Bull Castration at Mississippi St.

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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Probably the most famous halftime speech ever given was the Knute Rockne, "Win One for the Gipper" classic, which many of us have seen delivered by Pat O'Brien in "The Knute Rockne Story." It is remembered as well because the Gipper was played by the somnambulant President of the United States who incessantly evoked its memory for whatever feeble cause he was pushing. As motivational speeches go this one has no peer.

Over the years football coaches and other zanies have tried to come up with speeches or actions that could bring the same results that Rockne achieved with his Gipper gripper. I can recall coaches biting off the heads of chickens, eating worms, and devouring live frogs. All of this was designed to get the easily led high school or college football player to run through a wall, or as the statistically dubious saying goes, to give a 110%.

In one of the more tasteless episodes Bob Valvano of Catholic University threw tampons at his basketball team because he found their performance less than manly. Other coaches were legendary for their abilities to destroy a locker room while in a rage. Bo Schembechler and Woody Hayes, student and teacher, were among the best in this category. And mentioning these two brings to mind various forms of physical and verbal abuse of young men that added to their legend.

Jackie Sherrill is a name that has for some years been associated with the less than academically and ethically pure in college football. His days at Pittsburgh, Texas A&M, and now Mississippi State have been marked by great football success, the proper number of bowl games, and a rather loose approach to the rules. But he has produced winners, and that is the bottom line, and so he has been richly rewarded for his efforts.

A few weeks ago Coach Sherrill introduced the Mississippi State football team to what he called a new "motivational and educational" experience. I dare say I don't think it has been used before, but already it shows signs of being remembered as one of the most interesting motivational and educational techniques in the history of college sport.

In the week prior to Mississippi State's game with the Texas Longhorns, Jackie Sherrill invited Dud Hughes, a local booster, to perform a castration on a Bull out at the practice field.

Yes, you heard it right, a Bull was castrated at football practice. This motivational and educational experience must have been wonderful for the young men of Mississippi State. One wonders of course if the motivational lesson was to get the players to do to Texas what was done to the Bull, or whether the suggestion was that unless State came home a winner the team would face a fate like that which had befallen the Bull. Whichever the case Mississippi State beat Texas 28-10.

As to the educational part of the experience, one can only speculate. Perhaps it was educational because of an unusual number of veterinary medicine majors on the Mississippi State team. If so, let's hope that in the future mortuary science doesn't become a popular major anywhere that Sherrill is coaching. Certainly the hope is that these players do not go out for a night on the town and seek to apply the lessons learned from Coach Sherrill.

There have been suggestions that such an event was in bad taste. But Sherrill seemed less than embarrassed as he told reporters, "If this incident was in any way not perceived as proper by those who love Mississippi State, then I apologize." The President of the University issued a mild reprimand to Sherrill, and life went on. Ahead on the schedule, the Wildcats, Gators, Razorbacks, and Rebels, and three teams called the Tigers. The possibilities are intriguing.

Bill Conlon, the Philadelphia sportswriter, sees this whole episode as a sign of progress in Mississippi, where, he says, it used to be that they castrated people.

Maybe it's just the silly season.

Locally the Florida High School Athletic Association spent the end of last week adding to the silliness while debating the merits of allowing young women to run a three mile race. Florida is one of ten states that do not allow their young women to run more than two miles. Isn't it time to wake up and realize that we are at the end of the 20th Century?-- the century in which women have shown that athletically they are capable of any event that other humans can do. Have you heard the name Manon Rheume? The rule was waived for a single meet over last weekend at Lyman High. The sky did not fall.

Finally a note about the Little League World Champions from the Philippines who have been stripped of their title. Some may be dismayed by this, but if you look on the bright side this can be

viewed as a sign that the American colonial experience in the Philippines was not a total waste. The people of the Philippines have learned more than baseball from their colonial masters. After all how many Little League cases have you known about over the years where false addresses have been used to adjust team rosters? Although moving a player 700 miles is a bit more than a change of subdivision.

Say it isn't so, Imelda.

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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