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March Madness Final in New Orleans - UNLV and Academic Corruption

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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College Basketball has ended another long and lucrative season with the Final Four in New Orleans. March madness has finally ended in April. For the second time Dean Smith's North Carolina team has won a national championship in the Superdome.

In a game in which Michigan was outplayed, outhustled, outcoached, and outrefereed, the story was the bizarre ending. Chris Weber, the heart and soul of the Michigan team, called a time-out with ten seconds remaining and North Carolina leading by two points. The only problem was that Michigan had used all its time-outs. The result was a technical foul, two free throws by North Carolina, who then got the ball out of bounds.

It was deja vu. In 1982 when Dean Smith's team won the national championship in New Orleans, Georgetown had the ball trailing by two points. Freddy Brown turned and threw a pass to James Worthy of Carolina who was trailing the play, and he proceeded to stroll in for an easy basket. There must be something about the Superdome that leads to these freak plays for Dean Smith.

The other thing about Dean Smith teams is that they have developed a reputation among the referees as a team that does not foul. Therefore the referees do not call many fouls on them, no small advantage considering the fact that this game was extremely physical.

And speaking of officiating, in the Kentucky-Michigan game one of the refs admitted that he would not make a call in the last minute of play, although it was apparent that Jalen Rose was mugged on two different occasions. This would likely have led to a Michigan win in regulation time. The ref said that referees do not want to determine the outcome of a game in the last minute. Doesn't this deep thinker understand that a "no call" also determines the outcome of a game? This is the kind of thinking that made NBA and NHL officials what they are today-- incompetent, inconsistent, and a major irritant.

And so March madness ends, the big dance is over, Dick Vitale's voice is put on mute for another season, and the NCAA and the major basketball powers of America take away millions of dollars, while some players head off to collect millions from the NBA. As they do there are echoes through the halls of corruption.

At UNLV, four letters now synonymous with exploitation and corruption in intercollegiate athletics, they are still trying to get a body count on the scandal that broke just before March madness began. The continuity in the UNLV program from Jerry Tarkanian to Rollie Massimino has now been established, even though Rollie was brought in to turn the program around, saying at the time of his appointment, "No player will embarrass this university. Ever."

A Las Vegas newspaper published three hand-written assignments from a summer correspondence course being taken by superstar J.R. Rider, obviously written in two different handwritings. Rider's tutor later admitted that he had written parts of the term papers but only with dictation from Rider. Rider said that the tutor was expressing his verbal thoughts.

Does all this belie Rollie Massimino's pledge. Well maybe not. Maybe it is the administrators who are embarrassing the University, along with the new basketball coach.

Consider this. Rider had problems of an academic and personal nature which prevented him from graduating from high school. On the advice of a Big Eight coach he went to two community colleges where he got an equivalency diploma. He entered UNLV, already in trouble academically, because the courses from the Community Colleges were activity classes with no academic orientation. He was in no way ready for college. In the fall semester of 1991 J.R. Rider passed only one course. By the end of his first year at UNLV he had completed only nine hours. He needed 24 more hours of credit to maintain eligibility.

To get those credits Rider needed to take 15 hours in the summer session, a nearly impossible load even for a scholar. He needed administrative approval before being allowed to take this large number of hours. AD Jim Weaver, Coach Massimino, and Associate Dean for Student Affairs James R. Kitchen met to make this determination. Where were the academic people in this decision? Nowhere. It was an eligibility decision, a business decision, not an academic decision. And so Rider was given permission to take the 15 hours of credit.

It was in a freshman English course that the controversy developed. The instructor said that she was put under great pressure by the university to pass Rider, which she did. By the way Rider passed all his courses, one of which was understanding PMS, got his 15 hours, and played this season until the story broke just prior to the NIT tournament.

Massimino continues to insist that he did nothing wrong, and was only trying to help Rider stay eligible, which of course is exactly what he did wrong. Rider says that he feels the university has hung him out to dry, and has ducked its responsibilities. The university president says that he is concerned about the academic integrity of the university, and claims that the real problem is that Tarkanian's people are out to get him. This must be what is meant by the Big Dance.

March Madness hasn't ended afterall.

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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