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Money and March Madness - Money and Bobby Knight

Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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The Big Dance. The Road to Charlotte. The Road to the Final Four. March Madness. All those colorful names created by the people at CBS, for what is in fact the Big Paycheck, the road to the bank, recruiting madness, and the road to the final corruption of college sport.

No matter what it is called it has become one of the major events in the American sports calendar. The NCAA Men's Basketball tournament is at once one of the most exciting of sporting events, and one of the major corrupting influences on the American college campus.

It is then with some trepidation that I offer congratulations to the basketball team at the University of Central Florida, which for the first time in its history has become one of the dancers, although its dance card may be a short one. UCF will realize, we are told, \$50,000 out of its check of \$200,000 for playing one game. The conference and its members will split the rest. UCF will also get a cut of the other \$200,000 coming into the TACC by virtue of the College of Charleston's tango into basketball's major event.

Think about it, two teams from the TACC playing two basketball games will bring \$400,000 to conference. Big money indeed, and if either team manages to win a game the money gets even bigger. For those who advance to the round of 32, then 16, 8, or the final four the money increases geometrically, as do the levels of tolerance for corruption and madness of another sort.

During this basketball season the levels of madness seem to have taken a sharp rise, and the levels of tolerance for coaching misbehavior have gone up with it. As usual Bobby Knight at Indiana leads the way in exemplifying the loss of control by university presidents over programs that bring in major dollars. It is inconceivable that anyone would tolerate the outrageous behavior of a Bobby Knight if he was not a cash cow. The result is that Knight has become a force unto himself, demonstrating that the most powerful person on a college campus is a winning coach, not some suit claiming to be president of the institution.

How else can Knight's survival at Indiana be explained. No one who is offering even the slightest pretense of being an educator would tolerate Knight's demented character and behavior. In

year's past it was throwing chairs, slamming telephones, punching Puerto Rican policemen, using obscenities on reporters, dabbling in racial stereotypes, and abusing officials. This year the Bobby Knight highlight film contains remarkable footage of him kicking his son, shouting at the crowd, head butting one of his players, and telling a parent's day crowd that he wants to be buried upside down so that his critics will be able to come to his grave and kiss his ass. The man is a poet and wit to boot.

Perhaps a chemistry or engineering researcher who brings a university \$15M a year in grant money could get away with this sort of thing, but I guarantee you that a faculty member or university president putting on this sort of public display would find nowhere to hide on campus. But Bobby Knight need not fear. The President of Indiana University dare not move against him, Bobby knows it, and this only increases his arrogance. As long as Knight keeps on winning it will not matter. But let him slide a bit, let him wear out his welcome in too many places like Woody Hayes did, and some day someone will be announcing Bobby Knight's retirement, and all those old video tapes will show up on SportsCenter, and people will wonder how such a despicable character managed to hang on so long, at what was allegedly an institution of higher learning in America.

And of course Bobby Knight isn't the only one of his kind out there. College basketball is crawling with the slick opportunists, shady operators, and the emotionally wounded on ego trips. Some are just beginning their careers and taking obscure teams to the Big Dance for the first or second time. They are not yet out of control, a force unto themselves, a power greater than the university president or the athletic director. But if things don't change they soon will be, first on a small scale, and then they will move on to bigger programs, with higher profiles, and greater opportunities for self-aggrandizement.

One thinks of John Cheyney who went from Cheyney State in the early 80's and a Division II National Championship, including a final four victory against UCF, to Temple University where he has taken his team to new levels and helped to tie Bill Cosby and his millions to the athletic program and the school; John Cheyney who a short time ago looked like a voice of reason for academic excellence and character building; the same John Cheyney who threatened to kill a fellow coach in a sport that he loves to say is only a game and must be kept in perspective. He too is a winner.

And don't forget the gamblers and point shavers. The Big Dance has reached a level of betting to rival the Super Bowl. Does anyone remember 1951, '61, and all those other smaller scandals?

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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