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## College Athletes and Payoff's

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As the station went off the air to increase power one of the biggest stories in college sport was coming out of Tallahassee by way of Sports Illustrated. It was not the swimsuit issue, but Florida State University must have felt nearly naked as the story of players taking payoffs from agents became public.

The ugly details of the story are more or less familiar by now. Anywhere from seven players upwards went to the Footlocker store in Governor's Square Mall and took part in what SI called "a midseason, two-handed, shelf-clearing 90-minute shopping spree." Some \$6,000 worth of merchandise was carried away in large cartons paid for on the credit card of a Las Vegas businessman in partnership with an agent. It is clear there were also cash payments and other entertainment costs bringing the total cost of this operation to \$60,000. Those who provided this merchandise received complementary tickets to the Florida-Florida State game from the players.

The magazine also charges that FSU coaches knew about this activity and did not report it. Coaches deny this, including the sainted Bobby Bowden. Coaches, especially head coaches, always maintain deniability.

There is nothing about this story that should surprise anyone, and plenty to disgust everyone. Those passing out the largesse have perhaps the clearest motive, profit. There is big money floating out there in the world of intercollegiate athletics, and big money to be made by all sorts of people besides the athletes themselves.

The players were taking advantage of yet another opportunity to get something for nothing in the corrupt world of intercollegiate athletics. This is a world in which at least since junior high many of these players have been treated as part of an elite. Some were recruited to play in high school. Some had jobs given to parents and relatives to place them in the proper school district. Some had been given grades without the need for academic performance. In Tallahassee some were routinely given free meals, free movie tickets, and access to privilege because they were FSU football players. They were made to feel that they were above the normal rules of human behavior. Some were also guided to the right classes and the right major so they could continue to pursue the NFL dream with minimal attention to classes. Not all. But some.

There is a culture of exceptionalism that is very much a part of the star athlete's world in American life. They are the cream of a certain crop whose skills are highly valued as they will bring cash and glory to universities and coaches. These athletes are a valuable commodity, and they know it. Some cynically exploit that knowledge, as they in turn are cynically exploited by institutions of higher learning, college presidents, athletic directors, and coaches.

In such an atmosphere it should surprise no one that some athletes apparently have no qualms about violating the rules. It was inevitable that something like this would happen at FSU, just as it has happened at universities around the state and nation. It has been happening for over one hundred years of intercollegiate athletics.

As to reform, does anyone really believe that some sort of monthly payment to players would alleviate this problem? What if players received a \$300 monthly allowance? Would that satisfy those who made the Footlocker trip? When is the last time that you heard anyone say "I have enough" in this culture in which the operative word is "more"?

And what of the coaches? Bobby Bowden and his staff deny knowledge, and beg the issue of responsibility. On the one hand these coaches love to talk about the educational value of sport. About how sport prepares you for life. About how sport builds character. On the other hand when something like this happens all we hear is how coaches cannot be responsible for everything their players do. How they cannot watch them twenty-four hours a day. But of course if sport builds character then the players should not have to be watched, as they will have learned to do the right thing. In addition reports out of Tallahassee over the past few years indicate that Bowden has lost interest in day to day operations and perhaps has lost control of his program.

When FSU moved to the upper echelon of football schools, the perennial top five or ten, they did so following a lowering of their admissions standards in order to get the best possible players regardless of academic qualifications. I remember when it happened, and how FSU made the final jump to the top over the next couple of seasons. When you sacrifice standards at one end, the loss of them at the other end should not be surprising.

In the wake of the SI story three cases involving sexual misconduct by FSU football players have become public, and now

more charges of corruption are being made by others. When it rains, it pours.

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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