

3-29-1995

CBS and the NCAA Lovefest

Richard C. Crepeau
University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Other History Commons](#), [Sports Management Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)
Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety>
University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Public History at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in On Sport and Society by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "CBS and the NCAA Lovefest" (1995). *On Sport and Society*. 401.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/401>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
March 29, 1995

This year it's the Road to Seattle. And as usual the Road goes through CBS television in New York because in 1989 CBS paid the NCAA \$1B (or \$143M per year) to guarantee their right to televise all-rounds of the NCAA tournament to the entire nation for seven years. That translated almost immediately into an increase of \$30M in annual revenues for CBS, a bonanza of profits for the NCAA, and in 1990 \$1.37M for each of the final four teams. Basketball's Final Four is the biggest money machine owned by the NCAA.

Is it no wonder then that March Madness is sold to the public by CBS television as a quasi-religious event. The NCAA is spoken of in reverential tones, coaches are treated like international heads-of-state, and the players are turned into overnight superstars and heroes for public consumption.

The CBS coverage has turned into a welfare state for out of work coaches and television sports broadcasters. These guys are all over the place. This past weekend each game had a play-by-play man, a color analyst (usually an ex-player or coach, some of whom even had something worth saying), and a third character who appeared on the sidelines for post-game interviews.

Meanwhile back in the studio there were no fewer than three more analysts, two coaches and an ex-player, with a broadcaster host. There was George Raveling who sounded like an analyst at a brain surgery, Rick Majerus who was so jolly that he sounded like he had just come in from playing Santa Claus, and Clark Kellogg who often sounded as if he had not been getting sufficient bran in his diet. The basic job of these characters seemed to be to praise their fellow coaches, all of whom were described as brilliant tacticians, fine gentlemen, model citizens, and approaching canonization. How any one of them could ever get a school on probation seemed way beyond credulity..

It seemed like there was a job for everyone, and enough money to spread far and wide, except of course for the players whom the NCAA insists must remain amateurs and not so much as look at an agent.

Not only were coaches working for CBS but they were starring in the commercials as well. One set of coaches showed up under pressure in the final four to demonstrate the excellent

qualities of a deodorant. A second set were reaching out and touching someone for AT&T.

Sponsors showed their colors wherever possible. Most coaches were wearing lapel pins featuring a basketball net and the Nike logo. An oil company was repeatedly introduced by an announcer with a sentorian voice as "A Corporate Partner of the NCAA." It was never clear what exactly that phrase meant, but you can bet the oil people paid the NCAA big dollars for such a designation after their corporate name.

One of the more interesting commercial tie-ins came in form of something called the "Ban Naismith Show." At first I thought someone had been confused, as the correct name of the show had to be the "James Naismith Show." Or perhaps it should have been Ban Johnson what with baseball so much in the news. What was happening of course was that a deodorant company was sponsoring a show that was going to reveal an all-star team of college players, all of whom would be guaranteed dry underarms for the remainder of their natural life.

There are times when it is all mind numbing, and then just when you think you have seen and heard it all something new comes down the line. And so comes word that the NCAA has trademarked the term "Final Four," and anyone using it will have to pay a rights fee. In an interesting turn of justice the Illinois High School basketball tournament is going after the NCAA for using the term, "March Maddness." In 1939 the Illinois authorities trademarked the term, and the NCAA has never paid a penny for its use. If you're thinking about getting a trademark on anything like this, be forewarned, the City of Louisville already owns "Sweet Sixteen."

I once thought that none of this had anything to do with the education of students. But on Sunday I opened the paper to the sportspage and learned how wrong I could be. The University of Kentucky's Roderick Rhodes was interviewed about his experiences in college basketball, and at one point in the interview was asked "What's the best thing about athletics?" His answer demonstrated not only that he had learned something in college, but it offered a level of wisdom seldom found in sportsworld. He said, "If you work hard enough, at the end there will be money."

Roderick Rhodes has learned the meaning of athletics, the meaning of the Final Four, the essence of the NCAA, and the meaning of life in the late 20th century.

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.

Copyright 1995 by Richard C. Crepeau