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Crime and Punishment in Miami - Tax Evasion on the Autograph Circuit

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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Crime and Punishment is one of the great novels of Russian Literature, it is a subject currently in the news in Florida, and it is the theme that unites three stories out of sportsworld this week.

Last Friday the NCAA delivered its punishment for the crimes committed by the University of Miami over the past several years. There will be a one-year bowl ban which Miami will take this year, and a reduction of 24 scholarships over the next two years, or about half what is allowed. Although most of the crimes were in the football program there were violations in women's golf, men's tennis and baseball.

The most serious charges involved football including Pell Grant fraud involving 85 athletes between 1989 and '91. The fraud was traced to an assistant in the academic coordinator's office, who went undetected the entire time. For this high quality supervision the academic coordinator has been promoted to the position of assistant provost of the university. Miami officials and the NCAA are apparently in disagreement over whether or not the academic coordinator knew what the assistant was doing.

Dennis Erickson, Miami's former football coach, was cited for failing to report three of his players who had failed drug tests, and who were therefore not suspended from the team. This allowed an All-American Defensive lineman to play in the Orange Bowl contrary to school policy. Erickson was cited for ignorance rather than willful violation.

And finally all the money and perks being given out by Luther Campbell, leader of the rap group "Two Live Crew," was excused by the NCAA because Campbell was not a representative of the athletics department nor the university, neither a booster nor an alum.

One of the most serious violations seems to be that a women's booster group has donated \$200 in pencils, pens, and notepads to the academic center for nearly a decade now, and what is even worse, these dangerous materials fell into the hands of student athletes. Presumably had Luther Campbell passed these out it would not have been an NCAA violation.

So Miami gets off fairly easy for its transgressions and this will not sit well at the University of Alabama. One major difference is being overlooked, and that is that the University

of Miami was cooperative in the investigation, while the Crimson Tide stonewalled the NCAA.

At nearly the same time that this punishment was being meted out, Duke Snider was being sentenced to two years probation and fined \$5000 for tax evasion. Snider, the Baseball Hall of Fame centerfielder from the Brooklyn Dodgers, had failed to report income of some \$100,000 from memorabilia and autograph shows. In addition to his sentence Snider has agreed to pay \$30,000 in back taxes and \$27,000 in interest and penalties. Maximum sentence would have been six months in jail and \$250,000 in fines.

Snider is not the first nor the last of the star athletes who faced charges in connection with the autograph and memorabilia shows. Pete Rose and Darryl Strawberry have already been convicted, and Willie McCovey is awaiting sentencing following a guilty plea in connection with some of the same shows that profited Snider. Many others are under current investigation. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are available out there to current and former star athletes who are willing to go signing for dollars. And it is very hard indeed to find athletes who are unwilling.

This market has become an extremely important part of the income of those athletes who played in the days before mega-buck contracts. Many are making more money in a few weeks signing autographs than they made in entire seasons, or even careers, as players. And much of the payout is in cash. The temptation to leave cash payments off your tax return is well known to anyone who has ever been paid in cash for anything. Like so many millions of others across the nation these athletes succumbed, and now they are being punished.

All of this further points out the corruption of sport that has come from the autograph and memorabilia shows, where the once cherished autograph of a hero has become one more cash commodity in a world in which heroes are nearly as rare as Cap Anson's autograph or Ty Cobb's jersey.

Those arbiters of crime and punishment in the NBA have approved a new contract with the league, and the lockout of the referees has ended. Over the past few weeks the chorus of cries against the officiating has become deafening. It is true that there have been cases when the scabs have lost control of the game. It is also true they failed to achieve the studied incompetence of the regular NBA officials. I, for one, am yet to be convinced that

we will see any significant difference in the dismal quality of officiating that we have known and loved for decades in the NBA.

And finally Roy Tarpley has been suspended from the NBA for life-for the second time. No word yet on his previous existence.

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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