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## The XFL: Raslin come to Football - Drug Testing High School Athletes

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Just when you think you've had all the good news you can stand at any one time, Vince McMahon sees his shadow and promises at least six more weeks of football.

Are you ready to Rumble?!

Here comes the XFL, the Xtra Fun League, a zany alternative to the No Fun League. Vince promises to deliver Football with an Attitude. The XFL, a subsidiary of the WWF, will play a ten game season following the Super Bowl. They ought to consider beginning the season at halftime of the Super Bowl.

I thought we already had the WWF version of professional football in the form of the Arena League. Pinball football with video game accoutrements and a WWF atmosphere in the stands is apparently not good enough. I trust that Vince McMahon will bring the WWF schtick onto the field of play, which will be outdoors rather than indoors. What great news this is. Pete Rozelle is spinning in his grave and Paul Tagliabue has no doubt been distracted from Crime Watch.

Overdosing on faux sport and apparently loving it, the WWF has captured the imagination of a nation. This week's Newsweek cover story and the successful launching of an IPO by the WWF are proof enough that Raslin has captured more than the racing hormones of confused pre-teen boys. Whether the XFL will be able to build on the hot run of McMahon's Cable Colossus remains to be seen.

There are doubters. Merrill Lynch immediately downgraded the ratings on WWF stock no doubt looking at the money eating proclivities of previous attempts at alternative forms of football. McMahon's response to the Merrill Lynch announcement was to the point: "They can kiss my ass." (A technical investment phrase meaning "I beg to differ") The stock then closed down 4 3/16 points for the day, about a 25% drop.

Like all faux sports the financial success of the XFL will depend heavily on its ability to garner a television contract. Certainly there are possibilities in that area. The Turner Empire, now the AOL Time Warner Empire, has had more than a little success with its McMahon produced

programming. The WWF has been laying golden eggs by the dozen for the Cable Networks. NBC, like Turner another jilted consort of the NFL, will also find the XFL a delicious temptation, if only to make the image conscious NFL uncomfortable by supporting this caricature of professional football.

As for me I can't wait to see the cheerleaders, the press conferences, and the linebackers with chairs. And of course the violence and the mayhem, both real and imagined.

One day prior to this wonderful news from the WWF, a reporter called me to ask what I thought about the decision of one of the area school boards to require drug testing for its high school athletes.

Actually I had thought very little about it. I dismissed it in passing as an example of the kind of silliness that passes for thoughtful policy these days. I thought it likely that a school board member had experienced a vision. I am always amused at the ease with which the constitution is savaged by people responsible for the education of the next generation of leadership. It gives you the feeling that the Austrians might be the new trendsetters.

After talking with the reporter for several minutes, I found myself in a state of increased agitation. Why drug test high school athletes? What does this decision tell us? Are high school athletes such important figures in the community that they should be singled out in this way? I certainly hope this is not the case.

The killings at Columbine demonstrated, if nothing else, that the culture of the high school athlete needs to be de-emphasized rather than highlighted. High school athletes should not be regarded as special people, any more than honor students. They are all teenagers coping with the problems of adolescence and need not be given any extra baggage or any reason to exaggerate their own significance.

Singling out the athlete for drug testing makes another basic point. It says loudly and clearly, "We don't trust you." If drug testing is deemed necessary, why would athletes be tested, rather than all failing students or those with discipline or truancy problems?

If athletes must be certified drug free because they are role models, this society is in worse shape than I thought. The notion that an athlete or any high school student is a role model for anyone is both ludicrous and frightening. There ought to be every effort to dispel such an idea rather than perpetuate it. When I was in high school I had friends who were star athletes, good students, and goof-offs. I never thought of any of them as a potential role model and would have found such an idea laughable.

Role models were adults. Role models were parents. Role models were in positions of leadership in the society. Role models displayed character, rather than being characters. This is not to say that I didn't admire or like these people. I certainly did, but they were far from role model material.

The notion that that a high school athlete would be a role model, or that a society would act upon such a premise and thus encourage it, is just too much for me to grasp.

There is no indication that the proposed drug testing stems from concerns over performance enhancement or long term health issues. If that were the motive it would at least be understandable.

Role model purity is not. It makes less sense than the XFL.

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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