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Football Begins Its Longest Season Ever - Signs of Opening Football Season

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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The first football game of the college season took place on Thursday night and there are a number of other games this weekend. Many colleges and universities are not yet in session and some players will play as many as four or five games before they see the inside of a college classroom. Yes, these are the student athletes of NCAA legend.

Well before the first game of this the longest football season in history, some 134 days in length, there were other signs in the air that college football was about to commence. There were of course the deaths at the University of Florida and Northwestern University, which true supporters of college football will see as unfortunate collateral damage.

There were other more traditional signs. The magazines and newspapers were busy crowning the number one preseason team, always an interesting concept. How a team could be number-one in the nation before ever playing a game remains one of those occult mysteries of intercollegiate athletics.

Then there were the police reports. The Associated Press reported on August 18 that University of Minnesota officials were investigating an assault charge brought by a woman against two Gopher football players. The woman also claimed that she wrote and typed a paper on the death penalty for one of the players for an English class; an odd way of saying, thank you.

On August 19, The Associated Press reported that two Nebraska football players were arrested for disturbing the peace-one inside and one outside a Lincoln bar. This of course is more in the traditional college student mode and perhaps should be viewed as an encouraging sign that at Nebraska the student-athlete has an authentic student life experience and is not isolated from normal college activity.

The list of these sorts of incidents is endless and there is no need to continue in this vein. Just check the morning paper each day to see who is making the latest contribution to the police blotters.

On August 23, the NCAA put the University of Southern California on probation for recruiting violations in basketball and because two football players and one woman diver had papers written for them by tutors. The school will lose two football scholarships for next year and one-half of diving scholarship. This is good news as it shows that the women's program at a major university is just as capable of NCAA violations as a men's program. Equity, Equity, Equity.

At a higher administrative level the University of Oregon is in the process of putting new meaning into Heisman Hype, that mental madness that strikes sports information departments and alumni when they think that one of their football players has a chance of winning the Heisman Trophy. No one is willing to leave the determination of the Heisman winner to chance or to the vicissitudes of actual play on the field.

Oregon is promoting quarterback Joey Harrington with a \$250,000 Harrington mural across from Madison Square Garden in New York City. The full Heisman promotional campaign could cost \$500,000, says Dave Williford, assistant athletic director for media services at the university. Oregon will not be spending a similar amount to promote their top student in computer science, or even in math.

Other universities have more modest, although not any less intense campaigns. Clemson will make an initial expenditure estimated at \$5,000 for brochures promoting quarterback Woody Dantzler via a mass mailing. Indiana University, where the insanity of Bobby Knight no longer holds sway, is spending \$40,000 on notebooks, CD-Rom's, and a website to promote their Heisman candidate, Antwaan Randle El. Indiana's expenditures represent a cut of the original planned budget of \$100,000. The Clemson sports information director said, "We're not going to spend a ridiculous amount of money" on this sort of promotion. One can only wonder at what point the dollar figure becomes ridiculous.

Coincidentally the man who orchestrated the first Heisman Hype Campaign, Budd Thalman, retired from Penn State this week. The campaign was conducted in 1963 on behalf of Roger Staubach, quarterback for the Naval Academy. Thalman spent about \$500 on that one. While at Penn State he did not run a Heisman Hype campaign as Joe Paterno didn't believe in

it. Dismayed by the monster he created, Thalman hopes that none of these big campaigns will work.

It seems to me that Budd Thalman has it all wrong. He should be proud of his creation and the tremendous stimulus it is to college sport publicity, to the creative juices of public relations firms, and to the general advertising economy. After all isn't it these things that are being referenced when they say that college athletics teaches the student-athletes about life?

So bring out the marching bands, the cheerleaders, the public relations firms, and the police. It is time for all the color and pageantry of college football.

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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