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Cheerleading Cheating - Jesus and Baseball in Georgia - The U.S.Open Golf- Coin Flip at FIFA

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
June 13, 2002

Over the past several weeks a number of small stories have been floating in my head.

The most instructive involved cheerleading which some people are now claiming is a sport. If sport is defined as anything done in competition, something that colleges give scholarships for, and something that leads to cheating, then cheerleading qualifies.

Last week the cheerleading coach at Osceola High School in Kissimmee, Kerri Collins, resigned following revelations that the national championship won by the Kowboys cheerleading team had been won with an ineligible team member. Adrian Free (no relation to World B. Free), the star of the team, was a ringer. Free is an excellent tumbler and gymnast and was clearly a key to the Kowboys championship.

Free lives and is a cheerleader in Mississippi some 500 miles from the Osceola High district. He does not commute to class and is not bussed. He does not attend the school. Free's coach in Mississippi is the sister of Kerri Collins. Free was flown to Orlando for important practices and his ticket and expenses were paid by someone or some group with Kowboy connections.

There are now 3.8 million people involved in cheerleading in the United States and several national championships are held. Colleges recruit cheerleaders and offer scholarships or some form of financial assistance. Cheerleaders consider themselves athletes and train intensely. Much is at stake and not surprisingly the kind of corruption and corner cutting we see in interscholastic and intercollegiate athletics is now infecting cheerleading.

All of this brings to mind the infamous case of the Texas Cheerleading Murdering Mom, Wanda Holloway of Channelview, Texas, who in the early 90s hired a hit man to kill the mother of the girl who was likely to take her daughter's place on the high school cheerleading squad. If you haven't seen the film starring Holly Hunter you are missing one of the great portraits of an American life and an American institution.

In another cheering story the more creative fans at Georgia Tech were involved in a peculiar brand of cheering at the NCAA baseball regional on the Atlanta campus. Beyond the outfield fence Tech students set themselves up on a wall and mounted a loudspeaker system in an adjacent frat house to pipe in the favorite songs of players as they came to bat. This circumvented the NCAA rule that all admissions must be paid and that the stadium public address system must be used impartially.

The kicker in this came from Tech left fielder Matt Murton who supplied the student speaker custodians with a CD of "My Life Is In You Lord" which is his special Sunday song. Murton's song was played each time he came to the plate where he went 1 for 3, walked twice, scored a run and had one RBI. Thank you, Jesus!

The music came from the same balcony bearing a sign with the oddly religious message: "To Hell with Georgia." Tech won the regional and super regional and will move to Omaha where the Lord also is known to work overtime on intercollegiate athletics.

Another story floating about in my head involves competition and its peculiarities. At the World Cup in first round Group competition there is a tiebreaker scenario for advancement into the round of sixteen which calls for a coin-toss to determine which team will advance and which will go home. It's hard for me to believe that with all the hype about the World Cup being the most important international sports competition that the ruling body of football, FIFA, would lack the creativity to find a better tie-breaking formula than a coin toss. Supporters of soccer in America had better hope that such a scenario does not play out if they expect anyone here to take this game and this competition seriously.

Finally there seems to be way too much hype over the U.S. Open Golf Championship being played at a "public" course, the Black Course at Bethpage State Park in Farmingdale, New York. Certainly the use of a public course by the U.S. Golf Association is a rarity and a change that is welcome. The course was build as part of the New Deal Public Works program during the depression and the Black Course is available to the average player at \$31.

But why all the fuss? Well, first the tournament is in New York and therefore it will get a greater media rush than normal. Second, some very well connected people helped to secure this venue for the tournament.

I suspect however that so much is being made of the public aspect of the course because of the history of the U.S. Open and most of the majors. These tournaments have been played primarily on courses that only the very rich can afford, that exclude Blacks and Jews, that exclude or discriminate against women, and that do not welcome people whose family names end in a vowel.

If the U.S.G.A. thinks this "course of the people" nonsense will erase the historical memory of discrimination and arrogance they are wrong, even if the mainstream media is suckered in by all the PR hype.

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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