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College Sport Just Keeps Getting More Bizarre in its Excesses

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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In the past two months I have come to an entirely new appreciation of intercollegiate athletics. I now see how it serves the aims of higher education and builds character. It is clear that it is not about the money and that coaches are true educators guiding young men and women to a life of the highest ethical and moral standards. I have been wrong and I am willing to stand tall and admit it. This is clearly an institution within the institution of higher learning that is worth protecting, preserving, and cherishing.

I offer the following six items which lead me to my new point of view:

- 1) Last week the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) announced that it would seek to expand to twelve teams by enticing Miami, Syracuse, and Boston College away from the Big East Conference. This would severely cripple the Big East and drastically cut their revenues and profit margins. This loss of revenue and membership might even put the Big East out of business. Those seeking to clean up the Big East would thus achieve their goals. The conference will have much less reason to corrupt itself for commercial purposes. Even better it might just vanish and therefore not be able to corrupt anyone.

- 2) The remaining members of the Big East Conference have brought a lawsuit against Miami and Boston College to prevent them from leaving the Big East and joining the ACC. This will accomplish two important objectives for college athletics. First, it will prevent the ACC from dividing into two divisions, creating a conference championship game, which they will then sell to television networks for obscene amounts of money that they will divide among themselves. This would be another great victory in the fight against commercialism in intercollegiate athletics. Second, if successful and if damages are awarded, this lawsuit could drive the athletic departments at Miami and Boston College into bankruptcy and thus save them from further corrupting themselves and their educational institutions. This will leave only Syracuse to suffer the moral and ethical perils of enhanced revenues.

- 3) One college football coach and one college basketball coach were found doing fieldwork to better prepare themselves as leaders of men. The Alabama coach, who will now never lead the football players of Alabama in a pre-game prayer, was found to be enjoying the good life in Florida with some ladies of the evening who in turn made rather liberal use of his credit card. Somehow the University of Alabama got wind of this and fired the coach. At Iowa State the basketball coach was doing fieldwork among undergraduate co-eds in fraternity and sorority houses while on road trips. He too lost his job. These are encouraging developments as both coaches made serious mistakes in these matters. It is unthinkable that they would engage in such activities without their players, and it is good to know that once this sort of activity reached the newspapers the universities were more or less quick to respond.
- 4) It was touching to see Coach Bowden appearing in court to clarify the fact that once the troubles of his quarterback became public knowledge Florida State University was willing to dump that quarterback. It is reassuring to know that an athletic department is still capable of conducting a thorough and complete internal investigation of itself and not turn up anything damaging regardless of the evidence. These are kinds of skills and lessons those heading out into the real world of Enron and American politics need to take with them.
- 5) It is edifying to see a football coach at a major university who has not lost contact with his roots, who has not forgotten the people from his neighborhood. Why would anyone object to putting \$5000 into an NCAA Tournament pool just because the NCAA rule book bans gambling by its coaches and players? And isn't \$5,000 just chump change for some making in the neighborhood of \$1.5M a year? This is the kind of educator we all aspire to be.
- 6) No one, not a single player, has corked a bat in college baseball in years.

If this isn't enough to convince you that college athletics is in fine shape, then I don't know what else I can say except to point out that the Southeastern Conference has announced that it has some \$100M in revenues to disperse to its members schools. This should more than offset whatever

damage has been done by the various NCAA investigations and penalties that have been visited upon ten or its twelve member institutions of higher learning over the previous year.

In addition on a recent tour of the athletic facilities at Ohio State University I learned that OSU has the largest athletic budget of any university in the nation, some \$74M this fiscal year. This has allowed the Buckeyes to build some of the finest athletic facilities in the nation, plan to build more such facilities, field a football team that can claim to be a national champion, and continue to spend money hand over fist on athletics without blinking an eye. Currently OSU is building a football practice facility indoors that will be able to simulate all weather conditions that would normally be encountered outdoors such as wind, rain, sleet and snow. Brilliant.

It is clear that we have our priorities straight in higher education. I therefore withdraw all my previous doubts about the state of intercollegiate athletics and the significant role it plays in the education of the next generation of American leadership.

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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