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The Good and the Ugly In Larges Doses in One Day in Sportsworld

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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When I opened my newspaper Tuesday morning I knew I was living in both the best and the worst of times in sportsworld. On the front page of the Orlando Sentinel was the picture of the Orlando Magic Mr. Nice Guy and all around great guy, Darrell Armstrong. The model of the community had been arrested at 2:30 a.m. outside an Orlando nightspot for battery on a police officer and resisting arrest.

The front page of the sports section was filled with stories and comment on Darrell's arrest and its possible implications. The only other prominent story on that page was the current legal problems facing Kobe Bryant of the Los Angeles Lakers who was arrested on suspicion of sexual assault in Vail, Colorado. Formal charges have not yet been made but the story has done enormous damage to the image of the bright young hero of Lakerdom.

On another page in a section called "Sports Buzz" the following stories came in this precise order:

- 1) New York Rangers forward Roman Lyassenko was found dead in an Istanbul hotel room of an apparent suicide.
- 2) Two Florida A&M football players were charged with delivery of crack cocaine, aggravated assault on a police officer, burglary, and reckless driving in a high speed chase.
- 3) Rick Neuheisel is still appealing his firing as head football coach at the University of Washington for his gambling and lying escapades.
- 4) An Auburn University linebacker was suspended from the team after being charged with driving under the influence, marijuana possession, and carrying a pistol without a permit.
- 5) A Missouri basketball player was ordered to serve jail time after violating terms of his work-release program that he was serving after his conviction on charges of domestic violence.

Finally on another page was a small item about the arrest of Damon Stoudamire of the Portland Trail Blazers for possession of marijuana. Not mentioned is the disappearance of a Baylor University basketball player and the strange stories circulating around that mysterious case.

All this in one day, in one paper, without even checking the Internet where indeed there are other unsavory headlines lingering at ESPN.com. All of this coming on the heels of Donna Shalala's doublespeak press conference, only to be followed by the bizarre press reaction to Dusty Baker's ill-informed comments on heat and color.

On Monday, one day before I faced this barrage over breakfast, I had been thinking about what a wonderful time it is for sport across the globe. One of the major events on the world stage ended Sunday while another was just underway. The fortnight at Wimbledon concluded with the Gentleman's Final on Sunday in which Roger Federer placed himself at the head of the post-Pete Sampras class at the greatest of tennis events. Although Federer dispatched Mark Phillippoussis in straight sets, it was three sets of marvelous tennis. The first set was nearly flawless on both sides of the net with Phillippoussis making one error that cost him the set. It has been a long time since the men's final has been more interesting than the women's final in a major tournament.

The Ladies Final was a disaster as Venus Williams was injured and Serena Williams didn't know what to do to win while avoiding humiliating her sister. It was a great study in human psychology and a dismal display of tennis. However the Ladies semi-finals as well as several other matches during the fortnight more than made up for Saturday's debacle. In the semi-finals Venus Williams' marvelous performance in pain to defeat Kim Clijsters was a match for the ages, and Serena's domination/revenge performance over Justine Henin-Hardenne was spectacular.

Meanwhile across the English Channel Lance Armstrong was beginning his quest for a fifth straight victory in the Tour de France. It is the 100th Anniversary of this event rich in tradition, an important stable of French culture, and arguably the most grueling of all sporting competitions. It would seem that only a crash or a crazed spectator will stop Armstrong in his quest for history. Given the recent anti-French nonsense in the U.S. we can only be grateful that this is not a Frenchman seeking immortality in an American event.

Back in the United States on Sunday and Monday the U.S. Women's Open was being contested in golf on the famed Pumpkin Ridge course in Oregon. The 72-hole event ended on

Sunday with a three-way tie and so Monday we were treated to what is now the rarest of events, a playoff that is not sudden death. Monday's 18-hole final saw a steady and gutsy performance by the winner Hilary Lunke, and a tremendous charge at the end by Angela Stanford who dropped in a 24-foot birdie putt from the fringe of the green on the final hole. Lunke responded with a 15-foot bending birdie putt for the win. It was great drama and had all the elements of what makes sport such a great part of the human story.

We can now look forward to the next great event of the summer, and again it is in golf. The Open at Royal St. George's is just ahead and it will end on Sunday the 20th. A week later on the 27th the 100th Tour de France will conclude in Paris. There could well be two more July Sundays of great drama ahead.

Despite all the swill it remains the best of times to be engaged with the international sporting scene.

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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