

Crunch n' Munch; Non-Analytical Positives; Stanley Cup Finals

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - Crunch n' Munch; Non-Analytical
Positives; Stanley Cup Finals
MAY 23, 2004

It's time to head to rewrite. The Yankees have sent Cracker Jack packing from the House that Ruth Built. "Crunch 'n Munch" will replace the traditional baseball snack because, says Yankee spokesperson Jason Zillo, it tastes better. Yankee Stadium's Director of Hospitality offered another more compelling reason for the move. Cracker Jack is eliminating the box in favor of a bag. Well, that certainly explains it. No one has mentioned what "Crunch 'n Munch" is paying the Yankees for their new status in the national pastime.

Songwriters get to work. Blend the line into the song: "Buy me some peanuts and Crunch 'n Munch, I don't care if I never get ??? How about lunch? Punch? Certainly the Yankees must be admired for their endless ability to create new revenue streams.

Equally absurd, but a more serious development, comes from the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency that banned Kelli White from competition for two years and stripped her of several titles including gold medals from last year's World Championships. White did not test positive for drug use, but she was banned for what the USADA called "a non-analytical positive."

In the world of "Ashcroft justice" a non-analytical positive is invoked when evidence from sources other than a drug test indicate drug use by an athlete. In White's case the evidence came from the BALCO raids, evidence that was given to Congressional investigators and then passed on to the USADA by Senator John McCain who has made this issue part of his political agenda.

The legitimacy of the BALCO records might be questioned and the passing of such records from one government agency to another and then on to a non-governmental agency would seem of questionable legal and ethical standards. What other sort of evidence and what standards will be used in determining the legitimacy of such evidence is more than a question of technicalities.

American sprinter Marion Jones has already indicated that if she is banned from participation in the Athens Olympics on the basis of BALCO records, the USADA will face a lawsuit. Kelli White,

when faced with BALCO documents, panicked and worked a plea bargain with the USADA.

``White has decided to accept responsibility for her mistakes and attempt to ensure that in the future other athletes do not feel the need to use these substances to be successful in sport," said her lawyer. This means she will testify against other athletes in future USADA proceedings and will no doubt be rewarded with a shortening of her ban on appeal.

So the anti-drug crusade goes on and on. It will continue as long as politicians think there are votes to be amassed in supporting it, and sporting bureaucrats think they need to protect themselves from collateral damage. This is not to say that many who opposed drug use in sport are not sincere, but it is to say that the current climate is politically driven above all else. And it is also to say that if this trampling of constitutional rights is acceptable in something as insignificant as drug use in sport, what might we anticipate for the future of the Constitution in something of real national concern?

Finally, on a more upbeat note, the Stanley Cup Playoffs now head into the final round and once again the competition is demonstrating why hockey is a great, if under-appreciated, sport. The speed and power of the skating alone is worth the price of admission. The fact that the finalists are from the low end of the payroll scale in the NHL is also worth a mention.

What is even better is the surprising match-up in the Finals. The Calgary Flames are the first Canadian based team to reach the finals in a decade. This may not seem important to those hockey fans in the United States, but for Canadians it carries great significance as is evidenced by the "Flame Fever" sweeping across the tundra. For comparison think about what would happen if only Canadian based teams were in the World Series for a decade.

Opposing them will be the Tampa Bay Lightning, the perennial doormat of the league. This is their first Cup Final in the twelve-year history of the franchise and only the second year in which the Bolts have even won a series in the playoffs. For nine seasons Tampa Bay failed to make the playoffs. This has been a very bad team over the years.

In the last few seasons new leadership at all levels has brought stability. With a determination to build rather than rotate a

roster, a group of young players has matured and a nice mix of veterans led by Captain Dave Andreychuk has provided just the right leadership. Game Seven against Philadelphia showed that the Lightning are a team that can learn from its mistakes, and showed why Game Seven in a Stanley Cup series is still the best show in all of sport. For many in Florida the hope is that the Lightning may duplicate the reversal of fortune achieved by the Tampa Bucs less than two years ago.

It should be a great series with young energized players on both teams bringing a high speed, high skills game, to the ice delighting those who love this game for its skating and stick handling rather than for its boxing prowess. Let's hope its wide-open end-to-end hockey for seven heart-stopping games.

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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