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Maurice Clarett and the OSU scandals

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Maurice Clarett and the OSU scandals
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It has been an amazing fall season, not only for the Red Sox saga but also considering the eerie quiet on the college football scene. The usual run of assaults, petty thefts, sexual misconduct cases, drug charges, and weapons possession cases have been as rare as football victories for the University of Central Florida.

It has been a season in which all the color and pageantry of college football has taken center stage and pushed court dockets to the side. I have in fact been surprised, indeed edified, by this apparent redemption of intercollegiate athletics. Do you believe in miracles!?

Inevitably the euphoria would end, and this week it finally did. Maurice Clarett has stepped forward once again to end the calm. In a story by Tom Friend for ESPN The Magazine Clarett has told lurid tales of the Buckeye kind in which car dealers, coaches, Ohio fat cats, and many others who cast their votes for family values, are accused of violating almost every NCAA rule governing compensation for the student athlete. Indeed Clarett tells us that the student part of this oxymoronic phrase was built on a foundation of fraud aided and abetted by members of the Ohio State athletic family. Tales of bloated transcripts and work done by others on the OSU payroll have flowed freely from former players over the last few days.

I must tell you I am shocked by these many revelations about a city and a university of such virginal purity as The Ohio State University in America's heartland capital of Columbus, Ohio. You could have knocked me over with a "Script Ohio" on a balmy October Saturday afternoon. What is this world coming to if we can't count on the integrity of officialdom at the center of higher learning in the Buckeye State?

Several former Buckeye players have come forward to corroborate Clarett's story. We know of course that the NCAA has already conducted a thorough investigation into the academic fraud charges so clearly there is nothing to any of this. As to the notion that cars would be given to players for their use, or that boosters would slip them cash, or that they might be employed in jobs requiring no work or even any actually physical

presence at the job site is so novel that they have been the subject of film and literature for nearly a century. These are among the oldest and most honored ways of giving monetary compensation to the worthy stars of intercollegiate athletics. Indeed this sort of thing should be encouraged.

If the free market is allowed to function in this fashion student athletes are likely to stay on campus for their full span of eligibility. This will make the coaches and athletic directors happy, give the boosters a sense of having contributed to a successful program, and allow for graduation rates to rise an additional one or two percentage points. This will make everyone feel good while contributing to the wellbeing of the athletic coffers at our biggest and best athletic conglomerates. It will also allow the NCAA to showcase the achievements of "student athletes."

As for Ohio State they should be looking on the bright side of these revelations. It would appear that in Jim Tressel they found a coach who could replicate in Columbus in nearly identical fashion the architecture of the championship football that he built so meticulously at Youngstown State. It was there that Tressel became the master builder of a national championship at the I-AA level. He is a man who had the moral values and public relations savvy to found a branch of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes at Youngstown State and require his players to wear coat and tie on road trips.

Tom Farrey of ESPN.com, one of the best investigative reporters working on sport, reveals what is an even more eerie set of similarities between what is now charged at Ohio State and what happened at Youngstown State between 1988 and 1991. Roy Isaac, Youngstown and Tressel's quarterback, received some \$10,000 in payments of cash and had free access to any number of automobiles. Isaac led the 1991 team to a national championship and his testimony led to an NCAA investigation of the program. Now Tressel's star running back that led Ohio State to a national championship comes forward to reveal an experience that replicates that of Isaac at Youngstown.

The big difference in the Ohio State case is that Clarett has fingered Jim Tressel, while Isaac says that Tressel knew nothing of the benefits he received from a major booster. Tressel of course denies, as do other officials at Ohio State, having any knowledge of these payments and practices. As Tom Farrey notes the real question is not what did they know, but what did they not want to know? Is deniability the watchword at the top as it

is in so many other corrupt structures both in and out of college athletics?

One assumes that the NCAA will be forced into investigating Ohio State, and indeed Buckeye officials have already invited the NCAA to campus. What will be found of course is not known. What we do know is that the NCAA is a hamstrung organization lacking subpoena powers and with a limited investigative staff.

What we also know is that Clarett and others this week gave us another look behind the curtain of a multimillion dollar entertainment business, which hypocritically insists that college sport is about students, education, and graduation rates. It is just one more sign of the corruption that stalks the halls of academe masquerading as an enterprise in service to the youth of America.

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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