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Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu



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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Forgiveness for Lou Holtz and George O'Leary
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Forgiveness is a wonderful thing. Many saintly people through the years have espoused its practice. In sport, if you know where to look, you will find that forgiveness is extensively practiced. It can also pay dividends and in the calculus of the modern world that is all that really counts.

The sports venue teeming with forgiveness is at the Total Sports Network. It is the place where Dick Vitale never met a coach who did anything wrong. It is where coaches who get fired or have a history of NCAA violations find refuge. It seems to be nearly impossible for a coach to have violated enough NCAA rules, or a former player to have violated enough laws, to be denied forgiveness at ESPN. One of the best examples of this unrelenting forgiveness this past football season appeared in the form of Lou Holtz facing the ESPN cameras.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association placed South Carolina on three years' probation. The ruling followed an investigation of the football program that uncovered ten violations involving recruiting and academic fraud during the tenure of Lou Holtz. South Carolina will lose twelve recruiting visits and four scholarships for football over the next two years. The investigation also uncovered other violations involving recruiting, eligibility, and the university's "lack of appropriate control and monitoring" of its football program.

For his part, Lou Holtz denied all knowledge of NCAA violations during his time as head football coach at South Carolina. He did say, "I am sorry that any rules were violated, and I apologize for any embarrassment in my six years at USC." This may be a step forward for Holtz who has left a trail of NCAA violations behind him at several institutions during his career and never admitted he had done anything wrong.

Earlier in his career Holtz left behind a record of winning football at Arkansas and Minnesota, but he also left both programs in a shambles. Holtz lost his credibility and violated his relationship with African-American athletes when he supported Sen. Jesse Helms for reelection. Holtz arrived in Minnesota and quickly wowed the gullible media and local boosters only to leave for the head job at Notre Dame. What he

left behind at the University of Minnesota was a corrupted program, a trip to NCAA probation, and a mess to be cleaned up by the AD.

At Notre Dame there were tales of out of control coaches, out of control players, and out of control cheerleaders revealed in the courtroom during the Moore Case. It is also clear that by the end of the Holtz regime many people had finally seen through his phony act as bumpkin-genius and standup comic. Near the end some of his assistant coaches were even questioning Lou's sanity, proving they were slow learners. As for Lou, he left while whining incessantly about the impossibility of winning at a university with high academic standards.

None of this apparently matters at ESPN where forgiveness is the watchword. The network that brings more college sport to America than any other doesn't hesitate to bring a disgraced coach in to provide his expertise on college football. Certainly Holtz has that expertise, both of the on-field and off-field variety. One presumes he also adds rating points.

Unfortunately ESPN, The Total Forgiveness Network, has not yet found the proper format to team Lou Holtz and Michael Irvin, but we can hope.

One of the best examples of the practice of forgiveness with a payoff can be found at my own institution, the University of Central Florida. Two years ago the President of UCF announced that as an act of forgiveness, inspired by a presidential reading of Bishop Desmond Tutu, the university was hiring George O'Leary as their new football coach. O'Leary was in need of forgiveness, as you may recall, for falsifying his resume, an act that cost him his dream job at Notre Dame.

The good news is that UCF has been rewarded for this inspired forgiveness. The football team has gone from a winless season to an 8-3 record this year, a division championship in Conference-USA, and a bowl game. Hiring an excellent but tainted coach on the cheap has paid off nicely.

Indeed there have been several other signs over the past few weeks which indicate that the UCF football program is on the verge of big time status. One of its players was arrested for sexual assault, another of its players has credits from the phony high school of correspondence in Miami, and most recently it was announced by the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at UCF, that UCF is the only bowl team from the state of

Florida that fails to meet the APR rating of the NCAA which will go into force next year. The APR is a measure of progress in the classroom and graduation rates.

The cost of all this forgiveness and progress is about to go up. Because the University of South Florida has just signed its football coach to a million dollar a year contract, UCF will find it necessary to do no less. The impact is likely to be a quarter million dollar salary increase for O'Leary. The bowl game will also be costly. With a payout of \$750,000 the Hawaii bowl will create a deficit in the bowl budget. UCF, as is the case with most teams going to one of these "under a million dollar" bowls, will lose money.

I guess we should simply be content with the fact that virtue will be its own reward and that all will be forgiven.

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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