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T on Tom Penders; Daly shoots 69

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
T on Tom Penders; Daly shoots 69
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I think it was Wednesday. I was cruising the channels when suddenly I was brought to a complete stop by what I saw. There it was, live, football practice for the Senior Bowl. I have seen a lot of dreadful non-events on ESPN through the years, but this one represented a new low. Cheerleading competitions are considerably more interesting, and indeed more significant.

Every now and then with the ebb and flow of the calendar there seems to be a few weeks filled with an excess of madness, stupidity, or pure nonsense in sport. We seem to be passing through one of those now as Ron Artest has emerged as the poster boy of the current absurd moment, a nearly perfect successor to T.O.

Some will point to the "interception, that on further review was not an interception, but by Monday really was an interception" in the Pittsburgh-Indianapolis playoff game as one example of this phenomenon. Indeed everyone in the country, except possibly some stoned Colt fans, could make the call even before the review. Then, with the benefit of replay, even those impaired Colt fans could get the call right. Unfortunately, the replay officials could not get it right. Then, in the biggest surprise of all, the NFL admitted the mistake.

All of this raises an important philosophical point. Is it worse to make the wrong call in the first instance using human vision and judgement, or is it worse to make the wrong call after looking at a perfectly clear, conclusive, even self-evident, replay? You decide!

Moving on to college basketball, there was an even bigger blunder by officials when last Saturday Tom Penders, coach of Houston, was spotted on the court by game officials. They rung him up for a technical foul. Apparently the refs didn't notice that Penders was face down on the court, having collapsed due to a heart ailment. After Penders was removed from the floor on a stretcher, the referees refused to withdraw the technical. The incident occurred just before halftime and Penders returned to the bench for the second half.

So what was the thinking here? Well, of course, there is no evidence that there was any thinking at all. One can only wonder

how many times in their careers these referees have had coaches go face down on the floor to protest a call. Indeed, had they seen Penders pull this stunt before? I have witnessed coaches do a lot of bizarre things over bad calls, but never have I seen one fake a collapse and go face down on the hardwoods, not even Al McGuire.

Beyond that, didn't the officials think they might have erred when they saw Penders taken away on a stretcher? Or had they seen this stunt, complete with props, pulled before? In the understatement of the year thus far, Conference-USA officials on Monday issued a statement saying, in part, "it appears that the crew exercised poor judgment in sustaining the technical foul following the medical condition that arose for Coach Penders." This wasn't poor judgement. There was no judgement involved at all. It was just pure idiocy.

Also in the realm of the truly strange was this headline: "Daly Shoots 69 Day After Wife Goes to Jail." One can only wonder what the exact connection between these two events might be. It could lead to some interesting domestic situations for golfers desperate to win.

Early January often produces a number of gems out of the NCAA meetings and this year was no exception. NCAA President Myles Brand in his annual "State of the Association" address to the NCAA convention was in fine form. Noting that the NCAA is in its Centennial Year he sounded the theme, "Celebrate the Student-Athlete."

Brand opened by discussing the History of the NCAA, inaccurately characterizing the Football Crisis of 1905. He then went on to discuss the basic principles of the organization in 1906 claiming that they remain the basic principles of the NCAA 100 years later. First, the athletes must be students who attend the university and college. Second, the contests must be fair, conducted with integrity, and concerned with the safety and well-being of the participants. Third, the values of higher education are to be the values of college sport.

If this is not dubious enough in its relation to reality, then his subsequent comments became so. "The participants in intercollegiate athletics are students," said Brand. "They are not, in their roles as athletes, employees of the university. They are students who participate in athletics as part of their educational experience."

Brand's delirium continued: "Athletics, like the university as a whole, seeks to maximize revenues. In this respect, it has an obligation to conduct its revenue-generating activities in a productive and sound business-like manner. . . . The business of college sports is not a necessary evil; rather, it is a proper part of the overall enterprise." Furthermore, commercialism is not a bad thing, nor is it incompatible with the educational mission of the university.

Then, in a remarkable line of reasoning, Brand claimed that commercialism does not violate the amateur code of intercollegiate athletics because: "Amateur defines the participants, not the enterprise."

In my recollection, no leader in the intercollegiate athletic world has ever proclaimed this monumental hypocrisy more clearly.

All of this and so much more have kept the juices flowing as we head into Super Bowl week.

Are you ready for a Super XL headache?

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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