

5-1-2007

Insuring Mr. Booster

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Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Insuring Mr. Booster" (2007). *On Sport and Society*. 760.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/760>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Insuring Mr Booster
MAY 1, 2007

They call them revenue streams. You can fish in them but there are no fish to be caught, at least the kind that has gills and fins. Some athletic directors have nightmares in which the streams dry up. Others have dreams in which they discover new streams where no one has fished before. This is the Athletic Director's wet dream.

At forty athletic departments across the dubious world of major college sports a new revenue stream has been located. It was first discovered by Oklahoma State University and announced last March. The creative thinkers at OSU found a stream that will yield \$280M over the next few decades unless a major disaster moves the timeframe forward.

As with most brilliant creations, it is a very simple idea. Oklahoma State has taken out \$10M life insurance policies on each of twenty-eight of its boosters. If you do the math it comes to \$280M in death benefits for the hustlers at Oklahoma State. One can imagine the gold rush this set off across the world of intercollegiate athletics. One wonders how many boosters were trampled to death by athletic directors and insurance brokers.

So here is the opportunity to become the penultimate football booster at Enormous State University. When a team or athletic department gets into financial jeopardy the call will go out to the insured boosters. "It's time to make the ultimate sacrifice for the team." One can imagine the possibilities for epitaphs: "Bob so loved the university that he laid down his life for the football team."

If you can insure boosters, why not ensure others. How about students? Staff? Faculty? Alumni? The banks overflow when one contemplates this nearly endless supply of new revenue streams.

Lest you think this is a passing fancy, Collegiate Financial Services, which has contracts with many athletic departments across the country, reports that it has been exploring this insurance scheme with more than twenty institutions. CFS will offer a seminar on the subject at next month's meeting of the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics.

Also in the world of intercollegiate athletics, the NCAA last week approved the texting ban, although maybe not for long. There are suggestions that some texting may be approved in the future by the NCAA brain trust. I would love to hear the discussion of the fine line differences between approved and unapproved forms of texting. Call in the medieval theologians!

Perhaps it's time for a new updated edition of Thorstein Veblen's *The Higher Learning in America: A Study in Total Depravity*.

In other strange developments in the world of sport, at the Talladega Superspeedway on Sunday, Jeff Gordon's victory was greeted by a shower of beer cans directed at his car. Gordon's crime? He passed Dale Earnhardt on the all-time win list.

Clearly this spectacle demonstrates that Tony Stewart's charges that NASCAR has become a professional wrestling farce has credibility and NASCAR should rescind his fine. It also confirms that large numbers of Alabama sports fans do not have a life, something demonstrated a week earlier when over 90,000 Tide Rollers showed up at the Alabama spring football game.

This weekend was also the occasion for the biggest non-event in American sport, the NFL Draft. Since the inception of ESPN, the NFL Draft has developed into a vacuous spectacle of unimaginable proportions. ESPN's coverage, which has expanded into a year round phenomenon, began as a rather modest event. It has given us the gift of Mel Kiper for about 300 days a year. It has given Mel Kiper a career of sorts, and turned him into a sports culture icon. If you had a dollar for every comment made on Kiper's hair over the last decade you would be as rich as, well, Mel Kiper.

Two things in lethal combination created this monster. First, football fans never quit talking football and they are all experts on the most arcane details surrounding most subjects, especially player personnel. Second, the presence of television cameras attracts people to its gaze. Once ESPN began televising the draft, fans came dressed to attract the camera and ready to react to a draft pick with boundless joy or the deepest despair.

The draft is discussed on sports talk radio for months in advance, it is analyzed for weeks after, and at some point the subject of next year's draft begins. All of this is done with little or no empirical evidence. The only thing we do know is that the quality of a team's draft can only be accurately

assessed some three to five years down the road. This is why all of the analysis being done this week is of no use whatsoever, and why it will continue into oblivion.

As I occasionally allowed myself a brief look at the ESPN and NFL Network coverage of the draft two things struck me. First the two networks seemed to be working in unison, creating a new television form called "Synchronized Broadcasting," perhaps a new sport for the X Games. Second, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, a late round draft choice himself, never has so much been said, by so many, about so little.

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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