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Late-summer wackiness

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Late-summer wackiness
SEPTEMBER 16, 2007

After a break from writing this column for several weeks, I am at a loss as to where to begin. The last few weeks have been full of stories from the wacky world of sport, and with the beginning of college football, the number of stories of crime and corruption have increased geometrically, although in fairness, the colleges have no monopoly on these.

In a strange echo of the Michael Vick case, and in approximately the same time frame, a star Gaelic football player was arrested for gambling and dog fighting. He was a key figure in a dog-fighting ring, one of many in Northern Ireland, and owned several dogs. He has been banned from Gaelic football for five years and assessed court costs.

This week a player for Ireland's national team begged off of a European Cup game because his grandmother died. When I first saw this story, I was delighted to see that skills learned in college could be useful in the real world. Upon checking it turned out his grandmothers were still alive, and the real problem was that his girlfriend had a miscarriage. Odd, isn't it, that the death of a grandmother is deemed worthy of missing a game, while a miscarriage of your girlfriend is not?

In some ways stranger yet was the story that a Fatwa has been issued against the 20-year-old Indian female tennis star, Sania Mirza. Apparently, several Muslim clerics found her tennis dresses too revealing. In the face of these threats, she hired extra security when appearing at the Calcutta Open.

At the University of Florida, yet another source for the revenue stream has been found. It was recently announced that a booster who donates \$1M will lead the Gator football team out of the tunnel and onto the field. This idea is apparently not new, as Tennessee has been doing it for a several years. The Gators did, however, come up with another idea. For a donation of \$1M you can spend a day with Coach Urban Meyer and his staff on the practice field and then top it off with a meal with Pope Urban in his home in the Gainesville Vatican.

In its quest for revenue streams, Oklahoma State's innovation of getting people to die in support of the football program continues to spread across the nation in what might be called

"the Green Death." As you may recall, Oklahoma State's athletic department has devised a program to take out \$10M life insurance policies on willing boosters. The University is now expanding its efforts to sign up more willing alumni and boosters. I don't know if they throw in a casket in school colors, but of course these are readily available. OSU is hoping to net \$100M on this project, which should allow them to expand their minor sports, the intramural programs, and fund the library.

Also on the college scene, the crime reports continue to roll in. My institution, the University of Central Florida, opened its new on-campus football stadium against the Texas Longhorns. Texas came into Orlando having had five players arrested since June, the latest a drug bust of a star player this week. UCF has had no known arrests in the last year, and it seems logical then that Texas would be a heavy favorite to win this game. The line made Texas a seventeen-point favorite, which works out to 3.4 points an arrest, which seems about right. One other note: During the game, there was a 30-minute lightning delay. The fact that the game was stopped and people were directed to find shelter indicates to me that UCF has not yet developed "the Green Death" plan.

College sport continues to teach important lessons of sportsmanship. This past week, Rutgers University issued a formal apology to the U.S. Naval Academy for the "loutish" behavior of their students whose profanity was apparently excessive even by naval and/or college standards. After seeing the current hit movie "Super Bad" I find it difficult to imagine what would constitute excess.

On the always-busy drug front, prescription news seems to have taken center stage. Several baseball and football players have had their names surface for having their prescriptions for HGH and steroids filled at their favorite mail order pharmacy. The most bizarre of these cases did not involve a player, but rather an assistant coach with the Dallas Cowboys.

Dallas Quarterback Coach Wade Wilson said he was taking the drugs to treat impotence caused by his diabetic condition. How this will enhance the performance of the Dallas Cowboys is a mystery yet to be explained by Commissioner Goodell, who suspended Wilson for five games, and whom they may soon be calling the "Hanging Judge."

This penalty has been much discussed this week in the wake of the video taping incident involving the New England Patriots.

Bill Belichick's coaching staff was videotaping Jet coaches with the hope of stealing signs and identifying play calls. Videotaping is prohibited by the NFL. The Commissioner sent a memo to all the teams just before the season began to remind them that this was not acceptable behavior. The Patriots apparently took this to be a signal that they should start or continue taping. Belichick says that he interpreted the rules a bit differently than Goodell, which makes you wonder what part of "NO" Belichick doesn't understand. It has been said much too often in recent years that the New England Patriots operations were the definition of a "class" operation and a "model franchise." Now both the model and the class have been identified.

Over the past few days any number of people have asked if a coach getting HGH by prescription for personal use is worthy of a five game suspension, how many games should have been assessed for cheating that could help a team win a game? The Commissioner's office seems to think the answer to that question is "zero."

In the crime and punishment game, all of this seems small potatoes when compared with the recent scandal in Formula One racing.

To borrow a line from John Smoltz, it seems that all of this wackiness is just "tipping the iceberg."

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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