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Looking back on Bobby Knight

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Looking back on Bobby Knight
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The resignation of Robert Montgomery Knight, The General, The Jerk, The Psychopath, is a troublesome development. The coaching profession is one of those socially useful categories in which a society can place a dysfunctional and dangerous sociopath and give them the appearance of filling a socially useful or semi-harmless role.

For years now Bobby Knight has been able to express his abusive and hostile personality traits in essentially harmless ways. The great risk facing society now is how this personality may express itself outside of the coaching culture. All that hostility and anti-social behavior will no longer have a safe outlet. In other words, is it safe to release Bobby Knight into society?

The record is not encouraging. Some of you will remember the remarkable video collection from Big Ten Productions offered for public sale shortly after Bobby Knight's dismissal from Indiana University.

Here is the advertising copy for that collection:

In the first video of this one-of-a-kind collection you will see Professor Robert Montgomery Knight diagram his latest encounter with IU student Kent Harvey, who transgressed all IU standards of etiquette by greeting Professor Knight with the vulgar "Hey, Knight. What's up?"

See Professor Knight reenact the encounter on the IU campus with assistant coach Mike Davis playing the part of the ill-mannered student. See Professor Knight gently explaining to this unpolished freshman the acceptable forms of greeting on the campus. Share in this valuable lesson imparted with such skill by one of the best teachers in the history of Indiana University. All in the comfort of your own home.

In subsequent video lessons learn other significant points of proper manners and behavior.

See Professor Knight demonstrate the proper techniques of dealing with Puerto Rican security guards. Hear how word choice

and physical contact can combine to make your point with greatest emphasis.

See Professor Knight demonstrate the proper technique of chair tossing in a public place. Note the wrist action, his ability to maximize distance, and how to choose the most dramatic moment for such action. See Professor Knight's consummate use of body language to convey his message.

Hear Professor Knight's touching explanation of how he would like to be remembered by posterity, complete with full instructions on burial position. Hear why the Professor prefers to spend eternity standing on his head, leaving his posterior available for expressions of homage.

See Professor Knight demonstrate the proper techniques of objecting to the errors of officials. This will include acceptable terms to be used in describing the officials and their transgressions, as well as the always-important proper form of exit from a basketball arena while preserving dignity and making your point.

See Professor Knight's multifaceted abilities to pound his fist on a desk both during games and at press conferences. Hear him explain how to get maximum elevation of a telephone off a desk with minimum exertion.

And in the weeks and months ahead see Professor Knight demonstrate:

- the proper technique for stuffing of a fan into a trash can
- the proper manner for insulting underlings at NCAA events
- the office plant-toss designed to underline your point without physical injury to your secretarial pool but with full emotional impact
- the use of a bull whip to provide full historical context to lessons in motivational technique
- the ability to appear to choke someone without actually doing so, as a cultured teaching technique
- the acceptable methodologies for awareness and sensitivity training for the philistines of the fifth estate
- the ability to humiliate the son of an old friend during an interview with same on ESPN

Yes, all of this and more, drawn from the extensive and comprehensive files of world-renowned Professor Robert Knight, self-acknowledged expert on manners.

Since arriving at Texas Tech the Knight record has some notable additions. In December of 2003 The General delivered a profanity-filled tirade during an interview with ESPN's Fran Fraschilla about his relationship with Steve Alford, who himself was at the interview.

A few months later, while at a salad bar in a local Lubbock grocery store, Knight got into a verbal confrontation with Texas Tech Chancellor David Smith. Some reports say the tiff was carried into the parking lot and down the road, with Knight still trading barbs with Smith at a traffic light. Fans at the next Tech home game gave Knight a standing ovation, which should have been a reminder to the Chancellor as to who was the more important person on campus.

Beyond that there were only a few of the usual Coach Knight bulling and rude exchanges with the press. So perhaps the General has been rehabilitated in the last few years. Perhaps he has mellowed. Let us hope so, because a person of such temperament as this classic bully with a short fuse could be dangerous to himself and others in the everyday world of social interaction.

The real shame is that his controversial and boorish behavior is likely to be remembered long after Bobby Knight's commitment to the education of his athletes has been forgotten. That is the real tragedy of his brilliant, but flawed, career.

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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