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Bizarre sport nuggets

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Bizarre sport nuggets
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I must admit that my head is still spinning. In the last few weeks one bizarre piece of news after another seems to be emanating from the bowels of Sportsworld, and no one with a plastic bag seems to be following along to clean up the unsightly nuggets left behind.

Where to begin?

For those who like financial news let's start with the complex story of the trade between the Dallas Mavericks and the New Jersey Nets of the NBA. It seems that Dallas was set on acquiring Jason Kidd from the Nets. A trade was hammered out between the two teams but one of the players from Dallas vetoed the transaction.

The trade talks were reopened and this time the NBA salary cap became a major obstacle in the trade. One of the rules is that the two teams making the trade must be trading equal salary dollars. Jason Kidd's large contract made that very difficult for Dallas. Keith Van Horn had retired from the Mavs two years ago, but he had never formally retired from the NBA. This allowed the Mavs to resign Van Horn to a contract at over four million dollars and then trade him to New Jersey.

There was still one catch. Van Horn had to agree to the contract and agree to go and sit on the Nets bench for the duration of the NBA season. All he had to do was park his posterior in the proper place and he would collect the \$4M. What is more amazing is that Van Horn had to think about it before accepting the deal. I think it fair to conclude that either Van Horn is very dense, or he is so rich that he can blithely toss off \$4M.

At a lesser rate of compensation, Kelvin Sampson, now the ex-basketball coach at Indiana University, will collect \$750,000 for doing nothing. Sampson violated NCAA rules and was therefore subject to dismissal by the university according to the terms of his contract. Indiana University chose to accept Sampson's resignation after he agreed not to sue the university.

There is one other footnote to the story. Of the \$750,000 going to Sampson, \$550,000 came from a generous donor to the university. In the world of college athletics, which seems

almost as awash in money as American politics, this is but chump change, and apparently Indiana has a chump willing to step forward in this hour of need.

Add to these two gems the long train of cheating scandals and drug issues as Baseball, Football, and NASCAR have all had their moments in the last few weeks. In one of the more bizarre scenes at the Yankee's spring training site Andy Pettitte called a press conference to repeatedly apologize for using HGH.

When Pettitte used HGH it was not against the rules of baseball, although he was in violation of the law. As such it was not a baseball issue, but rather a legal issue. He should have been at the drug enforcement agency turning himself in for breaking the law, not at spring training moaning on and on and invoking God as his witness.

No one would expect Roger Goodell to call a press conference at the NFL Combine to apologize for stonewalling the U.S. Senate. We will not see Bill Belichick using God as a cover for his cheating, and indeed he won't talk about it all. And don't expect to see Dale Earnhardt Jr. or any of the other six drivers and six crew chiefs apologizing to the little kiddies of America for violating NASCAR rules.

Thank goodness in the last week there was some relief as I had two very positive experiences as a sports fan. The first was watching the astounding performance by Tiger Woods winning the match play tournament in Tucson. The first day's play saw his comeback in the last five holes demonstrating why Tiger Woods is a cut above everyone else who plays the game. The Tucson tournament as a whole demonstrated the same qualities that took him through the first round. His ability to concentrate and to sustain a remarkable level of concentration shot after shot, hole after hole, and round after round is awe inspiring. Woods has the ability to sustain his concentration even in the face of a bad shot, or a misstep, and that may be the most remarkable thing of all.

Two comments from Tiger Woods were particularly striking. One concerned the nature of match play. He said that his father taught him that a round of match play was a series of eighteen separate battles and should be approached in that fashion. Also, in an interview Woods said that when a match was "all square" he felt he was in control.

The other event involved the baseball team here at the University of Central Florida. I am teaching a class in the History and Literature of Baseball with another faculty member. It is an honors seminar and has a twenty student enrollment. This gives us the ability to do some things that we could not do in a class of 50 or 100.

This week the class went to a baseball game on campus, and when it was over the students had a session with the coach, Jay Bergman. It had been a very exciting game with a come-from-behind win. In talking about the game Coach Bergman pointed out a number of things about the nature of baseball that distinguishes it from other sports that were illustrated within the game. He also discussed the nature of coaching and what he expects of his players and how he sees their role as both athlete and student.

This was followed by a session with four players who talked about why they came to college rather than turning pro, why they came to UCF, and what they liked and what they found difficult about the experience of being an athlete and a student. Their insight and maturity in dealing with their own circumstances was impressive.

It is easy to despair over the state of intercollegiate athletics when you read the sports pages. This experience offered more than a little relief from the daily dose of depressing news from Sportsworld.

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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