

# NCAA greed and West Point football favoritism

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
NCAA greed and West Point football favoritism  
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When dealing with the NCAA you can be certain that there will never be a shortage of hypocrisy. As March Madness gives way to April Sadness two wonderful examples came flying out of the NCAA cupboard.

Over the years the NCAA has condemned the practice of scalping tickets at their events. Now all of that, or at least part of that, has changed. The folks at the NCAA have found that they too can be scalpers, while still pretending they are not in such an unsavory business. But make no mistake about it, there is no difference between scalping on-line and street hustling at the arena.

The NCAA has an exclusive agreement with RazorGator as its official "ticket reseller," to handle the on-line resale of its tickets to the high demand NCAA events. Final Four ticket strips with face value from \$140 to \$220 were going on-line for \$2500 and up. There is also an official NCAA travel agency which offered Final Four packages including game tickets for as much as \$4,495, according to the Los Angeles Times. Oh, those beautiful revenue streams!

The NCAA also has a long standing policy against the sale or advertising of alcoholic beverages at NCAA sponsored events. There is one loophole. It allows the advertising of alcoholic beverages of less than 6% by volume on telecasts of NCAA events. There is a time limit of 120 seconds per telecast for such commercials. That limit was exceeded by 150 seconds during the recent NCAA Men's Basketball Championship game. Drew Faust, President of Harvard, and 100 other university presidents signed a letter calling on the NCAA to revise its policies and initiate a ban on all advertising of alcoholic beverages. One report finds that beer companies rank second in advertising at the NCAA tournament.

None of this is particularly surprising, as we have come to expect these forms of avarice from the NCAA. What is surprising is a change that was made at West Point in 2005 in what has been described as a desperate attempt to resurrect its football program. The new "alternative service option" for cadets blessed with "unique talents and abilities," means that the five-year commitment that cadets make to the Army will no longer be

equally applied to all cadets. This long-standing policy at the service academies meant that such star athletes as Roger Staubach and David Robinson served for five years before joining the ranks of professional sports.

Now however the star athlete at West Point has a very different career path to follow. The first two years of the five-year obligation will now be spent recruiting and working in public affairs. The remaining three years will be in a reserve unit. While classmates go off to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan, star athletes will avoid the front lines and be able to take up their professional sports careers three years earlier than under the previous policy.

It is believed that this change will enhance the recruiting appeal of West Point for blue chip athletes and contribute to an upgrade of the football program. This is certainly a reassuring step by the powers that be at West Point, and bookends nicely with an admissions policy that has a special track for recruited athletes.

The power of intercollegiate athletics has become irresistible and the need to win on the athletic fields grows stronger with each passing day even at the service academies. In some ways it is reminiscent of the sports powerhouses that were created at Army and Navy bases during World War II.

David Zang in his brilliant analysis of Sport in the Sixties saw a link between the overemphasis on winning in sport and the growing awareness that the nation was not winning the war in Vietnam. It was Vince Lombardi who offered the antidote to the war protestors and the long hairs. It was the football team members on many campuses who were encouraged by their coaches to attack the war protestors who were their fellow students.

Could it be that we are faced with a similar situation as the nation stumbles on in the Iraq morass seemingly far from what anyone could call victory? Is the Army itself being seduced into the pursuit of victory on the gridiron, while being frustrated in the conduct of Bush's Folly?

Or is it a more simple matter than that? Could it be that the powers that be at West Point are still steeped in the traditions of the "Playing Fields of Eton," and Gen. Douglas MacArthur's faith in the lessons of football? The vocabulary of football might also suggest the persistence of such a linkage in the hearts and minds of those who train leaders at West Point. One

can only wonder how General MacArthur, who was so fond of the West Point Motto "Duty, Honor, Country," would feel about the new policy.

In a world in which athletes are routinely described as warriors, in which an athletic event becomes a war, where sides clash and teams do battle, and where "who's number one" is a national obsession, nothing should surprise anyone. Intercollegiate athletics is in danger of truly becoming a mirror of our world in which there seems to be no bottom.

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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