

# FSU and Bobby Bowden are mildly slapped

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
FSU and Bobby Bowden are mildly slapped  
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Over the past several months Florida State University has been preparing to face the music in its latest athletic scandal. Now that the NCAA has made its ruling, FSU officials don't seem to appreciate the tune that the NCAA is playing. However, there is little doubt that many FSU athletes, with the proper academic counseling, could name that tune, although it might take more than three notes.

In late March of 2007 the story of academic fraud involving athletes and the Department of Athletic Academic Support Services at FSU began to surface. The initial alarm came when a student athlete came forward and admitted that at the direction of a Learning Specialist in AASS, he took an online quiz for another athlete, and the Learning Specialist provided the answers to the quiz.

From here the information on academic fraud moved up the chain of command on the academic side of the university, over to the athletic side of the university, up to the Athletic Director, and finally to the President's office. As FSU's internal investigation proceeded it became apparent that this was not an isolated case and that many athletes had been provided answers to quizzes and some had papers written for them in the online course, "Music of World Cultures."

By mid-summer it was found that 23 athletes with eligibility remaining had been involved in the fraud, and it was determined that each of them should lose thirty percent of their remaining athletic eligibility. At the end of 2007 the Athletic Director's contract was not renewed and three of his assistants had resigned. Several tutors and employees of AASS were also gone.

In February of 2008 FSU sent their investigative report to the NCAA noting that FSU had taken putative actions on the case, placed the athletic department on two years probation, and reduced some scholarships in several sports. At this point the NCAA took up the investigation and two weeks ago the results of that investigation were announced.

The NCAA found that an Academic Advisor, a Learning Specialist, and a Tutor had over the course of three years advised 61 athletes, 25 of them football players, to cheat in an online

course. FSU will lose six scholarships in football over a three-year period, and the athletic program has been put on four years probation. The university must now determine how many of the offending athletes in several sports participated in competition. When that is determined any victories won will be vacated.

When you look at these penalties they are remarkably mild. There is no loss of TV revenue, no loss of post-season competition, and the loss of scholarships is minimal. This is a case that the NCAA termed "egregious," "extremely serious," and "intentional." The violations were characterized as "widespread academic fraud perpetuated purposefully" by three members of the AASS staff.

If an ineligible player is used in an athletic competition what is the standard penalty? In all cases I can think of, any win is changed and becomes a loss. The "vacating" of the wins at FSU affects football, track, and other sports. This could impact FSU's national championships in track in 2006 and 2007. It could also involve as many as fourteen wins by the FSU football team.

So what would you expect is the most talked about aspect of this entire affair? Are people at FSU, in Tallahassee, in Florida outraged by this massive case of fraud? Have educational and political leaders in the State of Florida denounced the outrageous behavior that went on at FSU? The answer of course is a simple, but very loud, "NO."

What people are outraged about here in the Sunshine State is the fact that the FSU football coach, Bobby Bowden, Saint Bobby, may lose as many as fourteen wins. This means that Bowden's quest to become the winningest coach in college football will go down the drain. At present Saint Bobby is one game behind Saint Joseph, the Penn State octogenarian football coach, as the two of them seem to be in some sort of death march to determine the winner. Over the past few years it appeared that the one who lived longest would win this contest with Bowden holding an actuarial edge. The NCAA has changed all that.

So the cry goes forth across Florida: "How could the NCAA do this to Bobby Bowden?" Of course, the NCAA is not doing this to Bobby Bowden, they are doing it to Florida State University, and there is not doubt FSU deserves what it is getting, and then some.

But Bobby didn't know what was going on, the apologists say. Head coaches often don't know and that deniability is usually by

design. In Bowden's case he probably didn't know, as he seems to have become disconnected from the day to day football operations at FSU. His major functions seem to be appearing at alumni and booster golf tournaments, while giving interviews filled with folksy sound bites.

Two decades or so ago FSU football was quite competitive nationally and could be found in the top twenty and even the top ten rankings, but not quite at the top. At some point FSU made the jump to the next level and consistently was found among the top five teams in the nation. One of the changes associated with that jump was a lowering of admissions obstacles for very talented football students.

Unfortunately when academically marginal students are admitted to a university it becomes necessary to find courses they can pass. In addition, they must be provided with considerable academic support. The pressures in these high-powered programs are felt in the athletic department, but also throughout the university and especially in the academic support systems whose major task is to keep the athletes eligible.

FSU is not the first big time program to fall in front of this pressure, nor will it be the last. As long as the university is an appendage of the athletic/entertainment sector on campus, this will be case.

When caught, they must face the music, no matter whose ambitions are derailed.

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.\*\*

\*\*Lest anyone think these remarks come from someone at the University of Florida, let me point out that I am an alumnus of Florida State University and a card-carrying Gator Hater.

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