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Odds and Odds

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - ODDS AND ODDS
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As 2018 gave way to 2019, Sportsworld passed through a deluge of meaningless bowl games, a scattering of interesting bowl games, and this season's push toward the Super Bowl. The highlights of these days and weeks are now part of the record. As significant as these events are for some sports fans, there were other less significant and insignificant developments that may have been overlooked.

-Local sports governing bodies seem to have a special talent when it comes to turning minor regulations and legitimate errors into major injustices. This time it was the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA) that misused its regulations and power to deliver a blow for injustice. It was a classic case of myopic bureaucrats run amok.

Maori Davenport, a star high school basketball player in Troy Alabama, played for Team USA in an under 18 International Basketball Federation (FIBA) Tournament. As with other players, she was given a stipend for her participation. That stipend turned out to be more than the amount allowed by the AHSAA, although it was identical to the amount given to all the other players. Davenport did not ask for the payment, but it was sent to her by Team USA due to a clerical error. On being notified of the error, the money was returned immediately.

In its gross obtuseness, the AHSAA ruled Ms. Davenport ineligible for her senior season. At this point, a court has ruled that Davenport could return to competition pending a hearing. So far, so good, in correcting the not so good.

-Obtuseness knows no boundary. In New Jersey, a high school wrestler was forced to either cut his hair or forfeit his match. His hair was too long to meet the rules set by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association. Andrew Johnson had just won his match and had 90 seconds to make his decision. This case was further complicated by the fact that Johnson had

dreadlocks, and the referee was white. African American hair styles have long been seen as unacceptable in the white world of sport.

In point of fact, Hair, in general, has been a major issue in this society and in sport for a long time. What is it about hair? And what is it particularly about long hair. One suspects that the hair issue is related to definitions of masculinity. The controversies of the 1960s, and after, were loaded with language indicative of this.

Coaches and commentators made "hair" a major issue insisting that it was a sign of effeminacy. Coaches complained that they couldn't tell the boys from the girls. Really? In the macho world of sport were these coaches and other critics so insecure in their masculinity that long hair was a threat? How pathetic.

There is also the facial hair taboo which a few sports teams continue to cling to long after it has ceased to make any sense. The New York Yankees persist in their policy prohibiting beards and long hair. Does this increase batting averages or just satisfy some need for power?

-An interesting item in "The Undefeated" showed a list of 85 quarterbacks that have been signed by NFL teams since Colin Kaepernick opted out of his contract in March of 2017. None of them were superstars and few could match the skill set of Kaepernick. Does anyone find this odd? Or perhaps evidence of collusion? Or just a fluke of nature? A reporter for the Miami Herald recently wrote on Twitter that he would rather have "Satan" as the new Dolphin quarterback, rather than Kaepernick. Some might think this a bit extreme.

-Rick Nash, at age 34, has retired from hockey. His agent, Joe Resnick, said "Under the advice of his medical team, the risk of further brain injury is far too great if Rick returns to play," Nash suffered several concussions since he was the number one draft pick of the Columbus Blue Jackets in 2002. He has now decided he would not risk the consequences of another blow to the head.

Nash would not have retired if consulted NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman rather than following medical advice. The Commissioner would have reassured Nash that there is no proven connection between hockey and brain damage. Unfortunately, hockey has lost a great player because Nash listened to the wrong people.

-On another front, if you have dreamed of becoming a sports owner and you want to do it up big, word is circulating that the PAC-12 conference may be for sale. Imagine yourself the owner of an entire sports conference, not a mere single franchise. Actually, you could be a minority owner, if you are able to pony up some \$500M for a ten-percent share of the conference. This is a great opportunity for anyone seeking to burn their excess wealth and enhance their sports profile.

-The Larry Nasser case seems to renew itself every few days. This time John Engler, the Interim President of Michigan State University (MSU), where the serial sex abuser was employed, said in an interview that he thinks that some of Nasser's accusers are enjoying their time in the spotlight. The reaction to these comments has been swift and strong. Perhaps Engler should return to his previous position as ex-Governor of the state of Michigan. The MSU Trustees may be about to hasten his departure from campus.

-Also, this morning out of Michigan comes a report from ESPN that Jim Harbaugh, the University of Michigan football coach, has offered a football scholarship to a seventh-grader. Two things could be deduced from this story: Harbaugh plans on remaining the coach at Michigan for several years to come; and/or Harbaugh has become desperate over his failure to defeat Ohio State.

So, these are a few bits and pieces of news from the unhinged world of sport as we head into the final year of the second decade of the twenty-first century, a century that is beginning to look a lot like an elaboration on its predecessor.

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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