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Super Madness

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE - SUPER MADNESS

April 27, 2021

A little over a month ago, the rocket scientists at the NCAA once again showed just how dense they can be. During the event known as March Madness, the NCAA, as it is prone to do, produced some madness of their own.

From the early success of women's intercollegiate sports, the NCAA has been determined to stunt the growth of women's sport and keep it in the shadow of men's sport. Once the NCAA seized control of women's sport, it was in a position to achieve its aims. All the while the NCAA preached the virtues of women's sport and gave lip service to equality and Title IX. Hypocrisy is a specialty of NCAA leadership.

This could not last as women's sport grew along with public support for it. As the second and third generation of the beneficiaries of Title IX produced an alumni, and as women's sport grew at the youth and interscholastic level, the pressures for equity and equality increased, and the awareness of the inequities became widespread.

The NCAA pledged to support change and promote equality. This year March Madness was conducted under unique circumstances with all of the men's tournament taking place in Indianapolis and all of the women's tournament in San Antonio. The NCAA handled all the arrangements at the two venues. These circumstances and the ubiquitous character of the cellphone with video capability, produced a perfect storm in the public arena over the issue of gender equity in sport.

Shortly after the men and women convened in their venues, the women produced videos to show the inadequacy of their training facilities. Soon videos of the men's facilities revealed something far from equality between the men and women. This produced an outcry from women, then from the press, then from the public, from the Congress, as well as, many men. The NCAA's faux commitment to equality was exposed as a failure, yet again.

As expected, NCAA President Mark Emmert expressed disappointment and some sense of wonder as to how this difference could happen. As usual, he sounded like the piano player downstairs who had no idea of what was going on upstairs.

Emmert called for an investigation. Muffet McGraw, the former women's basketball coach at Notre Dame, said that no investigation was needed. It would be enough for Emmert to look in a mirror.

What followed was a tsunami of examples of inequality from women's coaches, players, and former players. The list was long, covering the areas of transportation, housing and food, training facilities, venues for tournaments, publicity, and on and on. Even the corona virus testing protocols reflected the inequities.

Then the budgets for the two tournaments came under public scrutiny. It was revealed the budgets for the 2019 tournaments were at a two-to-one ratio in favor of the men. There was a \$13.5M dollar gap between the men's and women's event budget.

Some women wondered why the term "March Madness" was applied only to the men's tournament and the not women's tournament. When asked, Emmert said that he wondered that too, or so he said.

So it goes. A number of women involved in women's basketball said that none of this came as a surprise, but it still was discouraging. For all the NCAA propaganda, there had been little substantive change in the realities of policy.

For his part, Mark Emmert and his assistant apologized to the women. That, of course, achieves nothing. What is needed is for the NCAA to act, or simply get out of the business of college sports.

In the past week on the other side of the Atlantic, another colossal example of ineptitude unfolded.

I am not a big fan of "The Beautiful Game," as most of the known world likes to call it. I have seen a few Premier League games in England and some matches during the Olympics, but generally I do not watch much football. The exception is when the U.S. Women's team is playing. So, when the announcement came of the formation of a European Super League of Football, I was not particularly excited. For me, it was basically another money

grab in which the rich were intent on getting richer. Enough is never enough.

When in a matter of a few days, the entire project of the Super League had collapsed, that did attract my interest. The Super League had done a Super Collapse showing that a Super Miscalculation had been achieved by some Super Egos.

What had gone wrong? Well, nearly everything, one would guess. The fans, yes the fans, said no to the big money, and that ended the money grab. Before it was over, the owners and clubs were apologizing to their fans. Even the financiers of this fiasco at J.P. Morgan apologized.

I remember several years ago when Americans began to buy into the English Premier League: The Glazers at Manchester United; John Henry at Liverpool; and Stan Kroenke at Arsenal. When this happened, I was surprised how harshly fans responded. Didn't they appreciate the infusion of much needed cash into their football clubs?

No, they didn't, and the key to understanding why not lay in those three words, "their football club." One of my British colleagues, who at one time was in charge of delivering these columns to Sport Literature Association members, kindly shined some light on my ignorance.

British football teams, he explained, are creatures of the local club. These clubs come out of towns and the neighborhoods of cities, and fans who support them generally do so from birth. These lifelong supporters feel they have a proprietary interest in the club.

Manchester United is more than a football team; it is a visible representative of the local community, and members of the community are part of the club. The loyalties are intense and run deep. The view was that an outsider, particularly a money grubber from America who has no grasp of the meaning of the club nor loyalty, should not be allowed near the owner's box. The great fear, I was told, was that the Americans were coming to drain the teams of money, sell off the assets of the club, and then jump back across the Atlantic clutching their wallets. Given the history of the NFL, these fears were well-founded.

The Super League proposal, at least to English fans, had all the earmarks of invading looters. The fans would have none of it and

hit the streets to protest. Once they heard from the fans, the English clubs made a hasty retreat.

It is difficult to imagine something like this happening in the United States where owners regard their teams as personal property to be disposed of in any way they choose, and banks never apologize to anyone except their investors.

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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