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Dying for football

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Dying for football
OCTOBER 17, 2007

Over the last several months, the newest revenue stream in college athletics appeared in the form of a life insurance scheme. Oklahoma State led the way with this idea which involved taking out \$100,000 life insurance policies on major boosters. The idea was to generate a new source of revenue from those boosters dying to help produce winning athletic teams. Other institutions of higher athletics have rushed to put such a program in place on their campuses.

We know that in addition to this rather strange bit of financing, it is possible to generate revenues through the sale of coffins, coffin liners, and various items of clothing and icons in university colors and logos to be taken into the eternal stadium, site licenses not required. Maybe they should be? I wondered at the time of the insurance policy ploy what the next step might be. We now know, although it has yet to hit the desk of athletic directors across America. But it will, and indeed it must.

Hamburg SV has announced that its faithful fans will soon be getting a cemetery all their own. Football's first cemetery will be located some 50 meters from the stadium. According to the BBC the entrance will look like a goal. Stone-mason Uli Beppler says you will proceed through the goal to a green area in the center where graves will be "arranged on three levels like the stands of a sports stadium, and in a semi-circle to resemble a football pitch." Gravestones will be in the team colors of blue and white with matching floral arrangements.

When asked about the need for a cemetery next to the stadium, Mr. Beppler provides the obvious, yet wise, answer. "If you think about people supporting a club for 30, 40, 50 years, it's part of their life," he explains. "So why shouldn't it be part of their death?"

It's self-evident. Once the idea is laid out on the table, it is so sensible that it is startling. How many alumni and boosters would pay a pretty penny to be buried overlooking the football stadium where they have spent so many Saturdays? How much of their bodily waste is already part of the landscape? I won't even try to speculate.

What we do know is that anyone willing to buy a casket in team colors, be buried in team merchandise, or sign up for a life insurance policy on themselves for the greater good of Enormous State University, certainly would stake a claim for an eternal seat at the big game. Price would not be an issue. AD's here it comes, the latest revenue stream just in from HSV.

Here is a suggestion for one possible arrangement:

As with other stadium seating, this special cemetery seating will be arranged by donor level. A "Levels of Heaven" arrangement will be created to accommodate the generous eternal contributors. The "Silver-Lining Level," is for the lowest contributions, the "Perpetually Golden Cloud Level" is the next step. For top donors the "Eternal Life Private Boxes" will offer a special exalted place for these perpetual boosters. The "Eternal Life Boxes" will be painted in school colors, have non-funereal floral arrangements in school colors, and come equipped with a bar fully stocked with the eternal booster's favorite beverages. Donors will bequeath their fortunes to the football program through their last will and testament, and they will be honored before their death with a membership in the Eternal Touchdown Club.

And speaking of revenue streams, the Texas A&M football coach, Dennis Franchione, has found what can only be termed a "revenue crick." Franchione writes an insider's newsletter, the VIP Connection, which is available by subscription to the top donors to A&M football for \$1,200 a year. It may seem surprising that the Coach would violate NCAA regulations for such a small sum of money, but the watchword here is clearly, "no dollar left behind." Franchione has not only violated NCAA rules and put A&M in jeopardy, but it could be the straw that breaks the camel's back. Already in some difficulty for not winning, there have been calls for his \$2M a year job. The upside is that Franchione could be the first to report on his own firing through the VIP Connection.

Meanwhile at Nebraska Father Flanagan, a.k.a. Tom Osborne, has been brought back as interim Athletic Director after the firing of A.D. Steve Pederson. It will cost the University some \$2.2M to buy out Pederson's contract which had just been renewed for five years a mere three months ago.

One of the key issues in the firing has been the continuing decline of Nebraska's football program this season. In early September Pederson signed head football coach Bill Callahan to a

new five year contract, which superseded the three years remaining on his old contract. Osborne or a new permanent A.D., it is said, will make the decision on the firing of Callahan, which is very much on the table. This could cost the university another \$3M.

A university spokesperson said that the \$3M buyout would not be an issue. Stunning, really! Over \$5M worth of buyouts could be paid by Nebraska over the next few months without so much as the batting of an eye or the raising of an eyebrow. In the rarified air of big time college football \$5M is apparently nothing more than chump change.

Perhaps there is something wrong with this picture.

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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