

john healy

# Sports is not important?

Maybe every athletic department in the country ought to have a copy of our state political editor, William Kogut, airmailed to them. You see, Bill is not what one would call a "sports freak."

Give Bill a newspaper and he would rather turn to the latest primary results than check whether or not Darryl Dawkins is currently in his Chocolate Thunder or Slumber stage. Bill's the type who saves his "I-can't-hold-it-any-longer" break until the sports report when he watches the evening news.

In Bill's defense, he does know does know that Kareem Abdul-Jabbar isn't the name of a Middle Eastern revolutionary leader, and if given the opportunity, he can probably tell you how the Knicks are doing.

Bill is part of that "minority" of Americans who don't turn to the sports page as soon as they open their newspaper. While most of male — and a large part of female — America hangs on the outcome of this year's Superbowl or National Basketball Association finals, Bill goes on with daily life.

Or as he says, "Sports is not important."

Take that statement at its face value, and you're left wondering how *anyone* could spout such a blasphemous line. Gosh, sports isn't important? How can anyone be so narrow-minded?

I don't agree with that statement, but contained within it is an idea that needs to be brought to the attention of everyone — fans, coaches and athletes.

The idea that the world can go on functioning without a single athletic contest being contested *anywhere* in the world. Think about that for a minute. Roll that idea around in your mind, along with the winner of this year's NBA finals and the series MVP.

Admit it — the world wouldn't stop if every professional franchise folded, if every college and high school dropped its athletic program. Yes, there would be a lot of boring weekends and a few thousand athletes in the unemployment line. Yes, perhaps the "school spirit" at a lot of high schools and colleges would take a rapid turn for the worse.

But there wouldn't be mass starvation, nor would anyone have problems going to work after their morning cup of coffee. War wouldn't break out, the divorce rate wouldn't go up (it might actually go down) and the networks wouldn't go broke.

Which brings me to the current financial problems of the University's athletic program. Most everyone knows about the current financial problems facing the University's Athletic Department and the recent vote on the proposed \$20 per term athletic fee.

Now the Athletic Department has deemed it necessary to cut the women's field hockey program following the end of next year. Of course, the players feel short-changed and their coach, Nancy Plantz, feels a bit betrayed. Which they have a right to feel, since it's not a great deal of fun to have the proverbial run pulled out from under you.

They, along with just about every other athlete on campus, backed the recent ASUO vote on the proposed athletic fee. After all, none of the athletes wanted to see their respective sports sliced from the University's roll-call.

I sympathize with their feelings, being a former high school athlete, but I think they are missing the boat by voting to institute a mandatory athletic fee. What they are saying, in effect, is that their sport is more important than the personal preferences — the freedom of choice — of students who do not want to support the University's athletic program.

The notion that one group of students is more important than another doesn't sit well with me. Neither does the idea that our University's athletic program is the "lifeblood" of this University.

If you're not interested in football, you generally don't go to Oregon's home games at Autzen Stadium and you don't join the Oregon boosters club. If you do like the Ducks, then you set aside every other Saturday during the fall to watch Reggie Ogburn and Co. in action. But *you* decide — not someone else.

And you recognize that not *everyone* thinks like you do. Not everyone believes that sports is the most important single thing in the entire universe. Your sun may rise and

set with the Los Angeles Dodgers, but not everyone else follows the Dodgers — or even cares about baseball or sports.

It's a hard pill to swallow — the taste was incredibly bitter for me — but its medicine that any sports enthusiast must take.

With that in mind, I think it follows logically that if the University's athletic program can't support itself, then either people who support the program had better start making larger donations and attending more games or the program has to be cut somewhere.

If the Athletic Department has a \$400,000 deficit, then its quite obvious that the people of Eugene and the students at the University are unable or unwilling to provide monetary support worth \$400,000.

To try to artificially generate that support — through any means — leaves a foul taste in my mouth.

And if the spectator and booster support isn't there, then across-the-board cuts are in order, in my estimation.

Let's face it, something must be done to shave the University Athletic Departments' \$400,000 deficit. I think the best solution would call for the reduction of women's field hockey and softball down to the club sport level (still being funded by the Athletic Department, but on a limited basis); moving the men's baseball team to Division II status or limiting it to a regional level; dropping the men's wrestling and gymnastics programs to Division II status; and reducing the funds available to the women's cross country team.

If you don't like those options, then you can always try the other method — attend Oregon's home games and contribute to the Ducks' booster fund.

But please, don't shove your likes down someone else's throat.

Because your likes may be their dislikes.

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