

# □ SIDELINES

## Television revenue increasing corruption in sports

So pro football players are on strike. So what's new? In only a few decades, sports at all levels have become increasingly glamorous, lucrative, and therefore, corrupt.

The high salary a pro football or baseball player makes today allows him to drive around in a Mercedes. When a star quarterback ends his NFL career, he often can go on to an even higher celebrity plane when he makes movies and does play-by-play announcing. Meanwhile, the seamier side of the world of sports is becoming increasingly exposed: drugs, gambling, crime.

Commentary by  
D.M. Holiman

Here's a brief listing of the more celebrated cases of the last few years:

•Several members of the Minnesota basketball team are accused of raping a female guest while playing on the road in Wisconsin. The coach resigns in disgrace. The Gopher basketball team limps through the rest of the season.

•Southern Methodist University is severely penalized by the NCAA for recruiting violations and other forms of cheating. The team's schedule is erased for one year. The next year they are allowed only seven games, all away, which forces the university to cancel the 1988 season as well.

Meanwhile, the football players transfer to other universities. Those players with enough years of eligibility left will probably be able to acquire a college degree, if they want to, but those transfer players who are juniors and

seniors will in all probability not. Another example of athletics coming before academics.

•Len Bias, the Maryland basketball star, dies of cocaine poisoning just days after he was made the number-one draft pick of the NBA champion Boston Celtics. His friends and family maintain that Bias never before indulged in drugs.

•Basketball players for Tulane University are investigated for participating in a gambling scheme in which they affected the outcome of games so insiders could benefit from pre-game oddsmaking. The players deliberately altered their play in order for Tulane to win or lose outside the margin of odds, thus enabling the insiders to safely make money off their bets. The players were paid off for their services.

There are many less celebrated cases too, ranging from the discovery of athletes using steroids and other illegal drugs to rather "commonplace" recruiting violations. Just this fall, several players, including Chris Carter, the Ohio State All-American wide receiver, were denied college eligibility because of illegal contact with professional sports agents and the passing of money. Carter, by the way, was allowed to enter the NFL supplemental draft. He was selected by the Philadelphia Eagles and negotiated a relatively lucrative contract.

So what's going on? Are the scandals, crime, and corruption new to the world of sports? Of course not. They've always been around. Even big money has been around for a long time. Babe Ruth made

much more money than the president of the United States (Coolidge) back in the '20s. And the Bambino didn't have to pay any income taxes either. And there have always been scandals. Remember the Chicago "Black" Sox? What about Denny McLain and his gambling shenanigans? So, no, the headlines aren't new. But what is new is the scope and magnitude of the wealth, fame, and corruption, and we can thank television for that.

Television, by the very fact that millions of people can witness the spectacle of sport, providing for bountiful advertising revenue, has magnified the arena of athletics. People can become famous "overnight." And wealthy. Consider Len Bias. Here was a young man, 21 years old, a university student (of sorts). At the time of his death, Bias wasn't enrolled in the university. At least he wasn't taking any classes. Yet he was still rooming in the athletic dorm. Bias, if he had lived, would have made perhaps \$1 million a year playing for the Celtics.

Or take Brian Bosworth, the former Oklahoma All-American and now Seattle Seahawk linebacker. Bosworth, known for his rather outrageous antics, signed an \$11-million contract.

Welcome to the wacky world of sports, where excess and obsession is becoming the name of the game.

And why? Because it pays. Why else would otherwise healthy, normal, young women train eight hours a day for seven years just to win an Olympic medal? But this is what the American women's volleyball team did.

Of course, a female volleyball player is not likely to acquire a lucrative advertising contract with Pepsi or Wheaties or anything, but there are smaller, still handsome contracts to be had with smaller companies where the athlete-celebrity, even a relatively obscure one like an Olympic volleyball player, can push some product in a specialty magazine.

And, of course, other opportunities appear as well, such as coaching, giving lectures and sponsoring workshops.

This is not to say that these athletes, especially the Olympic athletes, aren't impressive in their dedication to their sport, in their diligence, in their talent. They are. But there is something disproportionate, and curious, about people spending most of their lives immersed in a game. Because, after all, that is all sports essentially are: games.

And there is another concern about our society's obsession with sport: people who become so expert at their sport, who spend 12 hours of the day in the pursuit of excellence, who train so rigorously, who regulate every aspect of their lives from diet to sleep habits to sexual practice, so as to "optimize" their performance are, ironically, making themselves into freaks and thus lessening the impact of their athletic feats.

So we have sports evolving into some weird wonderland where the participants are freaks, not only by virtue of their height and girth, but because of their earning power, their celebrity status, their narrow specialization.

## Graduate Teaching Fellow Federation

# MEETING TOMORROW



Thursday, 5 pm, Room 106C, EMU



TO DISCUSS THE UNIVERSITY'S LATEST  
OFFER WITH THE GTFF BARGAINING TEAM

**NO MOVEMENT ON:**

**HEALTH CARE**-The University has refused to implement a GTFF proposal to deduct the cost of ASUO insurance from GTF's paychecks.

**EVALUATION**-Currently GTF's may be dismissed as a result of student evaluations. The University has refused to provide evaluation criteria in the contract.

**NEWSLETTER CENSORSHIP**-The University wants to have prior censorship over the union newsletter.

**APPOINTMENT-REAPPOINTMENT**-The University refuses to provide information to GTF's who are denied reappointment.

**"In Unity There Is Strength"**

GTFF

870 E. 13th Upstairs

344-0832