

EDITORIAL

Nike makes move into the courtroom

After Nike took a significant financial loss this past year, and after Jordan deflated the air in the Air Jordans, it looks like Nike has done a little repositioning — from sports courts to the courtroom.

Beaverton-based Nike Inc. pledged \$25,000 to defray any legal cost that may arise if the U.S. Olympic Team decides to drop Tonya Harding. Harding, a key figure in the Nancy Kerrigan assault case, was still on the list of athletes that the U.S. Olympic Committee certified and sent to the Lillehammer Olympic Organizing Committee early this week. However, the U.S. Committee has made it clear that it is allowed to make substitutions until Feb. 21.

With Nike acting as a key sponsor for Harding, it could make for quite a spectacular courtroom event. The possibilities are endless.

With Nike acting as a key sponsor for Harding, it could make for quite a spectacular courtroom event. The possibilities are endless. Harding's lawyer may have to turn in his brief case for a Nike duffel bag. A conservatively striped tie could be conservatively swooshed instead. And as for those tasseled loafers, they could be replaced with a nice pair of air-somethings. As for the courtroom itself, it could be lavishly decorated with Nike banners and pictures of the company's latest apparel.

However, Phil Knight, chairman and chief executive officer of Nike Inc., says there was no underlying motive whatsoever for the contribution — just the spirit of competition and the desire for justice to be served.

"Nike does not sponsor Tonya Harding. We have nothing to gain from her appearance in Lillehammer. In our opinion she has no endorsement value to us, now or in the future," said Knight, a former University student. "What I do know is that the United States Olympic Committee may try to circumvent the finest system in the world and rush to judgment before that system has a chance to work. That would be wrong."

Nike does seem to be sincere in its efforts to support a situation that is potentially devastating to Harding. Although the U.S. Olympic Committee presumes to maintain a higher degree of responsibility than the legal system, it would be a tragedy for Harding to be pulled from the team if she is found not guilty after the games are over.

Harding has earned an Olympic berth, and so be it. If pulled from the team and a lawsuit were to arise, certainly it would not be difficult for Harding to maintain her defense. The price tag of the case, if it ever goes to court, would be high, but so would the rewarded punitive damages that Harding would be entitled to if she is found innocent. Harding's legal fees would easily consume a healthy chunk of that, making Nike's \$25,000 look like pocket change. But thanks anyway, Nike.



OPINION

Hidden truth: crime is down



MARIUS MELAND

If you watch the evening news these days, you'd think there's a war going on right outside of your living room. Look out of your window, and you'd expect to see gang members shooting at each other as they drive by, drug dealers selling their deadly doses to young kids on the street corner, and prostitutes offering their services under the dim light of street lamps.

But Patterson Street doesn't look like that. And the rest of Eugene looks fairly peaceful, too. Why, even Portland, despite all the news stories about violent crimes and social unrest, seems to be a reasonably quiet place.

But the television reports tell us there's a crime wave out there, and politicians are pushing stricter punishments for the criminals, most recently through the federal "three-strikes-and-you're-out" bill.

So where's all the crime? As Westerners, we're tempted to say: in the East. As Oregonians, we'd like to say: in California.

But the truth is: There is no crime wave. As a matter of fact, the crime rate in the U.S. has consistently gone down since the early 1980s.

If you don't believe this, it may be because the media has told you otherwise over and over again. The crime wave in the United States has become one of those established truths that nobody dares to challenge.

Yet, the statistics tell us that fewer crimes are committed today than in a decade. Consider this: The homicide rate reached its peak in 1980. Last year *The New York Times* reported that fewer people had been killed in the United States than the year before.

And this may surprise you: The likelihood that your home will be burglarized today is only

half of what it was 20 years ago.

In 1991, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics counted 34.3 million crimes, compared to 41.2 million 10 years earlier. That figure is the third lowest in the last two decades.

So why is the myth of the crime wave continuously being perpetuated? Like so much else in life, it comes down to two things: money and power.

For the television networks and their affiliates, crime pays. Ratings experts have found out that more viewers are likely to watch a story about a violent crime than a story about a budgetary crisis or problems in the GATT negotiations.

Flashing police lights, chalk outlines and people being carried out on stretchers are more visually exciting than talking heads. Nobody wants to watch a group of experts discuss serious and complicated problems that have no apparent solutions. Nobody, that is, except the significant part of the population that - to the bafflement of the network executives - stays up until midnight to watch Ted Koppel's *Nightline*.

Furthermore, crime stories are easy to tell: They're usually simple, with a clear conflict between a violator and a victim. Compared to the Menendez murders and the Bobbitt case, the Whitewater story, although much more significant, is so complicated and entangled that none of the networks gives it the attention it deserves. The sound bites would be too long, and the story wouldn't fit into the standard two-minute format that most network newscasts have adopted.

That's why CBS is cashing in on "infotainment" programs such as *Rescue 911*. That's why Fox's *America's Most Wanted* is one of the network's highest-rated shows. And that's why NBC is running a series called "America the Violent" on its evening newscast these days.

But there's another group of people who stands to gain from playing on people's fear of crime and violence. In fact, they're so eager to talk about crime that they often forget about other, equally important issues. They are, of course, the politicians.

There is no crime wave. As a matter of fact, the crime rate in the U.S. has consistently gone down since the early 1980s.

While promoting his crime bill, President Clinton last year said that an epidemic of violent crime is "siphoning away our humanity." Following up in his State of the Union speech last week, he said that the fight against crime would be one of his top priorities in the year to come.

In the opposition's response, Bob Dole rehashed the old Republican message of stricter law enforcement and more severe punishments.

Don't get me wrong: I'm not saying that crime isn't a problem. But politicians would like to turn it into even more of a problem than it is. They know that the "tough-on-crime" image is going to help them win votes. History has proven that many times, most recently in the gubernatorial elections on the East Coast.

No wonder then, that you hear so many politicians talk about the blind violence that is threatening us and the way they're going to save us from it.

Crime is a grave problem in this nation, and there's no doubt that the crime rate in some areas, particularly in inner cities, has increased in the past few years. Moreover, it's true that crime in some areas has become much more vicious and violent, hurting arbitrarily and even killing children.

Crime shouldn't be trivialized.

But there's no reason for us to become hysterical either. So the next time you see a report about the crime wave on television, remember that they may just be trying to sell you washing detergents and potato chips. And the next time you hear Bill Clinton talk about the rising violence in this country, he may just be trying to buy your vote.

Oregon Daily Emerald

P.O. BOX 3159, EUGENE, OREGON 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union and is a member of the Associated Press.

The Emerald is private property. The unlawful removal or use of papers is prosecutable by law.

Editor-in-Chief: Jake Berg
Managing Editor: Calley Anderson
Editorial Editor: David Thorn
Graphics Editor: Jeff Paslay
Freelance Editor: Jeff Winters
Sports Editor: Steve Mims
Editorial Editor: Jeff Pickhardt
Photo Editor: Anthony Forney
Supplements Editor: Katy Soto
Night Editor: Rebecca Merritt

Associate Editors: Edward Klopfenstein, Student Government/Activities; Rebecca Merritt, Community; Julie Swensen, Higher Education/Administration

News Staff: Mandy Baucum, Wilson Chan, Dave Charbonneau, Jim Davis, Meg Dedolph, Amy Devenport, Cara Echevarria, Malia Fields, Martin Fisher, Sarah Henderson, Heatherie Hines, Yin Leng Leong, Marius Meland, Trista Noel, Elisabeth Reenstjerna, Robbie Reeves, Lia Saliccia, Michael Shindler, Scott Simonson, Stephanie Sisson, Susanne Steffens, Julie Swensen, Michele Thompson-Aguilar, Kevin Tripp, Amy Van Tuyt, Daniel West

General Manager: Judy Riedl

Advertising Director: Mark Walter
Production Manager: Michele Ross

Advertising: Subir Dutta, Nicole Herzmark, Teresa Isabelle, Jeff Marion, Jeremy Mason, Michael Millette, Van V. O'Bryan II, Rachael Trull, Kelsey Weikel, Angie Windheim

Classified: Becky Merchant, Manager; Victor Mejia, Sim Tze Teck

Distribution: Andy Harvey, John Long, Graham Simpson

Business: Kathy Carbone, Supervisor; Judy Connolly

Production: Dee McCobb, Production Coordinator; Shawna Abele, Greg Desmond, Tara Gaultney, Brad Joss, Stacy Mitchell, Jennifer Roland, Natt Thangvijit, Clayton Yee

Newsroom: 346-5511
Display Advertising: 346-3712

Business Office: 346-5512
Classified Advertising: 346-4343