

COMMENTARY

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Editorial

Athletes should be more than pawns in NCAA sports machine

Over the summer, a group that represents NCAA student athletes began calling for the establishment of a "Bill of Rights" for athletes, as a result of what they see as gross abuse of them by the NCAA and by coaches.

We agree with this drive to aid student athletes. The NCAA colleges, most particularly in football, act as a de facto minor league. Yet unlike any other sports league, there is almost no protection for the players against the whims of the administration.

We do admit that we had a twinge of heartburn with the assertion that there are special privileges and benefits to being a non-athlete that athletes are unable to possess. Many student athletes receive free-ride athletic scholarships, and often are given the best tutors and free class materials, special academic tracks, catered buffets and the like — whereas the rest of us do not.

But that twinge is tempered by our belief that student athletes are also the closest direct analogue to the old Roman gladiators — who, while pampered and the target of the adulation of the masses, had almost no say over their lot in life.

The typical student athlete is, sadly, recruited because of his or her athletic ability, thrown into college with a full scholarship and then not given the time or the incentive to earn good grades. They are subject to dual responsibilities: Athletics and academics. Yet to devote themselves fully to athletics means neglecting their grades, and conversely, substantive attention to academics risks their being dropped from the team.

Student athletes also have little opportunity to earn an outside income, and payment for their services on the gridiron, court or diamond is forbidden. This too is analogous to the gladiators, who would make a pittance — if anything at all — for the entertainment of the masses and the coffers of those who sponsored the fights.

While covered by NCAA insurance for injuries incurred during formally sanctioned practices and games, student athletes are not covered during so-called "captain's practices," which are informal and supposed to be optional. Those who appear, however, get to play in the games. Those who fail to show up can find themselves benched. Sports injuries, especially in football, can be devastating physically, emotionally and financially.

The ultimate sanction, which can be wielded by coaches almost at whim, is dropping a player from the team. This entails, as well, the immediate loss of all the privileges associated with athletics, most notably athletic scholarships and thus the opportunity to receive an education, in many cases. There is no opportunity for recourse or appeal for those who are dropped. There is, unlike any other league, no players' union whose role is to make sure that players "fired" are not "fired" arbitrarily.

It is for these reasons that we are wholeheartedly in favor of players being able to do what they love, and not be victimized in doing it. We believe that athletes should be able to make a living, should be insured for any injuries incurred from service on the team, no matter when, and should be allowed to have time to better their minds and not be dropped for arbitrary reasons. Otherwise, dissolve the NCAA, detach sports from the University and call it what it is — a minor league. At least then, the players could be paid for their troubles.

Editorial policy

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submission must include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.

Overheard, overused: Get over it

2002

A YEAR IN REVIEW

At the end of a year, there are always a bevy of "best of/worst of" lists flying around that try to sum up the happenings of the year before. Anna Nicole Smith made Mr. Blackwell's list of worst dressed. J.Lo — nom de reality Jennifer Lopez — garnered the Gallup poll's top honor of most admired woman.

And the American Dialect Society named the phrase "weapons of mass destruction" 2002's Word of the Year. Technically, "weapons of mass destruction" isn't really a word, but a phrase. And other phrases such as "axis of evil" and "material breach" probably gave the "weapons" phrase a run for its money.

So in the spirit of meaningless end-of-year lists, I have composed my own set of top phrases heard on or around the University in 2002, in no particular order:

- "Fife, you suck!" Was everybody saying it, or was I always standing by the same belligerent fraternity guy in Autzen Stadium all season? Either way, "Fife, you suck" became a mantra that stuck with poor Jason Fife all the way through the Seattle Bowl (and I know because my die-hard Husky relatives were chanting it non-stop, among other insults). Sigh.

- I'm no sports writer, but a 42-14 loss to Washington is hard to take, especially when inundated in Seattle with Duck jokes (my favorite is this: What do the Ducks and Billy Graham have in common? Both can make 60,000 people stand up and yell, "Jesus Christ!"). But honestly, we can't blame a single football player for the shortcomings of an entire team, can we?

Then again, "Ducks, you suck" doesn't have the same ring to it.

- "Sorry Timmy, I can't play ball tonight. I have to go to my 1,654,798th Programs Finance Committee budget recall hearing." Okay, I may be exaggerat-



Peter Utsey Emerald



Julie Lauderbaugh
 Judge Julie

ing a bit with the number of hearings. But after a \$536,000 "accounting error" at the ASUO office last year, it seemed every incidental-fee funded student group was forced to attend an armload of budget re-approval hearings by a group of students who could barely balance their check books.

Even the good ol' boys at the Oregon Commentator postponed their Magic: The Gathering game and got their bowels in an uproar over the verbiage of their mission statement. Ill will swelled all around, but with any luck, the budget allocations for next year with a new crew will be more organized.

- "Is that my phone?" Cell phones have infiltrated every corner of campus. Phones are ringing while people are riding their bikes, walking down the street, in the middle of class, during lunch, driving and yes, last week I heard a woman on her cell phone while in the bathroom stall.

A trend has occurred where the phone must ring at least three times (I've heard Michael Jackson, Beethoven and "Super

Mario Bros." jingles) before the owner is able to dig into the bottom of the bag to retrieve it and sheepishly turn it off.

Dear professors: If a phone rings in your classroom, make a policy that you will answer it. Embarrassment will ensue, and the problem will be solved.

- "And in Eugene tonight, there were more riots..." According to the rest of the free world, every person at the University is an angry rioter. Even CNN thinks so. There were a few out-of-control riots in Eugene last year, a pittance compared to the 360-plus days when there was peace. Not much can be done, however, to dissuade intoxicated block partiers from burning couches in roundabouts and blaming it all on the police.

Honorable mentions include: "dry frats," the great "Wind Storm of 2002" (as it was proclaimed by local television stations) and "shock jocks."

Contact the columnist at julielauderbaugh@dailyemerald.com. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Online poll

Each Monday, the Emerald publishes the previous week's poll results and the coming week's poll question. Visit www.dailyemerald.com to vote.

Last week: Unfortunately, a technical problem made last week's poll results unavailable.

This week: Should the NCAA adopt the "Student Athletes' Bill of Rights"?

Choices: Yes;

No — but something similar should be instituted;

No — things are fine as is;

No — college sports should be spun off as minor leagues;

Don't know;

Leave me alone!

Letter to the editor

Forgiveness won't end terror

I laughed after reading Randolph Sill's letter explaining that to win the war on terrorism, we just have to forgive the terrorists ("Forgiveness may prove more successful than war," ODE, Jan. 8). There you have it, folks; all we must say is, "We forgive you," and all the fanatics will give it a rest. I'm curious if Sill has shared his theory with any religious or political leaders from those countries that preach hate and murder against the United States on a daily basis. I think that Sill doesn't have an inkling about what forgiveness really entails.

If forgiveness is to be taken seriously, those forgiven must express remorse for their actions and change their behavior.

In this case, terrorists groups have not expressed remorse and are currently planning their next attack. Terrorists don't need our forgiveness, don't want our forgiveness and haven't asked for our forgiveness. They couldn't care less about Sill and his forgiveness. In their eyes, you have two options, Sill: Die, or convert to Islam.

Granting forgiveness to terrorists who haven't asked for it and don't want it is not an act of moral courage. Far from it: It is the act of a coward who does not respect himself and who does not care for his fellow citizens. I doubt that Sill will understand my point, but I hope others who read this letter will understand that unwarranted forgiveness will not stop terrorists from wanting to kill Americans.

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