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games. I mean that's what they're supposed to do. The equivalent situation would be Woodward and Bernstein, who were a couple suburban reporters who broke the biggest political story in the history of the 20th century. None of the guys covering the White House did because they covered the White House. And so I'm not surprised that writers other than sports writers are breaking the biggest sports stories.

If you look at the New York Times, the guy who's been the most outspoken, by far, about the NCAA, which I consider a laughing stock, is a guy named Joe Nocera, who's an editorial columnist — he writes on the editorial page — and the New York Times surely has the largest sports staff of any paper in the country. None of its writers ever, as far as I know, dove into the NCAA.

Now that begs the question: Is that right? If you were assigned to cover UNC basketball, should you have paid attention, not only to what the statistics of the players were, and how they were doing, but what classes they were attending? It's easy to say, "Well these sports writers are narrow minded stats freaks," but the fact of the matter is that most of them have a full-time job giving the people what they want. But I do think, overall, most sports writers should have broken more stories. They should have been more attentive to what's going on off the field than they have been.

**E.G.:** *Given your opinion of the NCAA, what do you think about its decision to give the Big 5 Division I conferences more autonomy?*

**F.D.:** I am a complete radical when it comes to college athletics. Don't pay any attention to me ... I have believed for years that college athletes in the so-called revenue sports, which are football and men's basketball, should be paid and should be paid handsomely. The NCAA is far behind the curve and is, in effect, by allowing the Big 5 a certain latitude that wasn't there before, just throwing a bone to the athletes. They're going to give them a little tidbit in the hopes that they'll shush up and be good little boys, and I think the genie is out of the bottle. I think that we're headed for, and I may be prejudice because I am so radicalized, but I think that college athletics, 10 years from now, will be an entirely different enterprise than it is now. I think college athletes should make money. I think we're going to have to look into the whole idea of their academic requirements. Should they be forced to go to class at all. For example, is something I would suggest. It's going to be an entirely changed universe. Yes, I'm glad that the Big 5 will treat athletes a little more generously than they have, but I still think it's a sham that they're giving them just that little piece of cheese to keep them quite.

**E.G.:** *Do you think that the Big 5 having more autonomy will exaggerate the gap between the bigger, richer schools and the smaller...*

**F.D.:** It has to. Because I think part of the problem with the NCAA — and this goes back years and years — is this idea that one umbrella organization should rule over all of college athletics. It makes no sense for a huge state university to be under the same rubric as some little church school in the middle of Kansas. That's crazy! You wouldn't find that in any other institution. The first thing you should do is break the NCAA up. Obviously now that you have given certain rights to some schools, it's bound to create

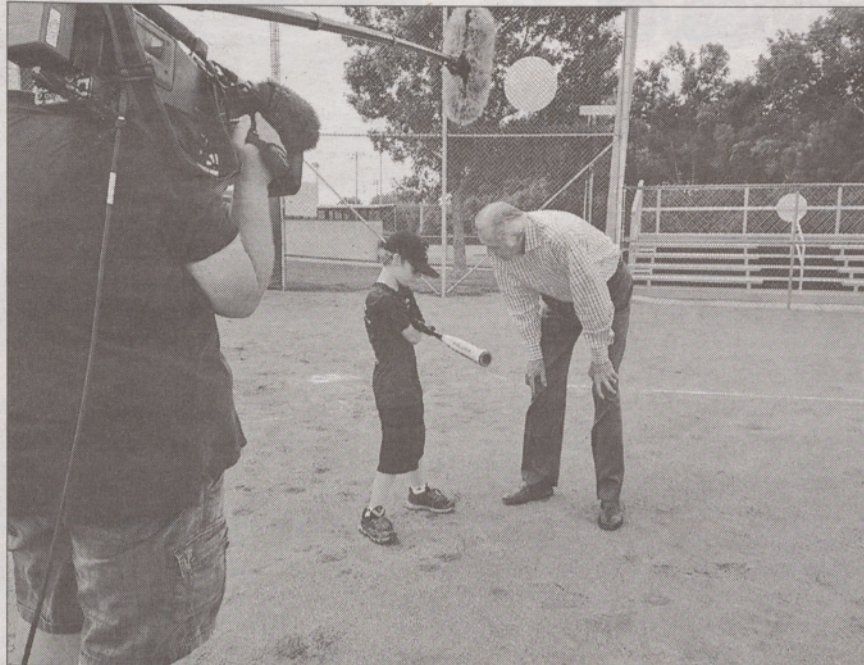


PHOTO COURTESY OF HBO  
*Frank Deford first reported on the Wounded Warriors amputee camps in 2011, and is seen here revisiting the program last year in Louisville, Ky. The Wounded Warrior Softball Team is comprised of wounded veterans adjusting to post-war life. The team hosts an annual softball camp where child amputees come together and learn how to play softball from adults who, in many ways, look just like them.*

a rift that will become a chasm before too long. I think that's just natural. That's why I say that 10 years from now — 6 years from now — I don't know how long, it's going to be an entirely different landscape and that, by the way, is all underscored by the whole business about football concussions. How much longer are lots of those schools going to continue to field football teams? And football being the most important, not only American sport, but the most important college sport. That casts a whole new shadow over the whole business. With Alabama-Birmingham dropping football, and they're doing it for financial reasons, I see that as the first leaf in autumn as far as that is concerned, but I also wonder whether schools, particularly the Ivy League — I'm an Ivy League graduate, I went to Princeton, I think it's nonsense that the Ivy League fields football games — ridiculous.

I think there are an awful lot of wonderfully good academic universities that are going to revisit the whole idea of football. Do we really want to have such a dangerous sport for our young minds? That's going to change things as well, there's no question in my mind about that. And that's going to work its way down into high schools too.

Football concussions, you can't separate them from the whole idea of changes in the NCAA.

**E.G.:** *So what do you think, why not go all the way and just abolish football all together?*

**F.D.:** I don't think you can do that. I'm not the king of the world, but you — you go down to Alabama and try to abolish football in Auburn and see what happens to you! I think that given its popularity, it would be impossible to rein it in at all, despite all the talk about concussions and the damage that football can do to you. It hasn't been hurt one iota, as far as I can tell, commercially. And because of the new college playoff, which is going to bring even more attention to football, it's probably going to be the most popular year in the entire history of football. So I think the abolition of football has to be done university by university, school by school, conference by conference. And I think that's what we'll see, that fewer

and fewer schools will field football teams.

**E.G.:** *Do you think there's a way to make the sport safer without it losing its draw?*

**F.D.:** I don't think so. I think the whole thrill of football is the danger. I mean, that's what makes it so exciting. And if that weren't the case, sure, we could have flag football games tomorrow, we could have a flag football Super Bowl in February, but it's the excitement of seeing a quarterback drop back and huge men rushing at him as he's trying to complete that pass in the instant before he's clobbered. That's the thrill of football.

I can't see any substantive changes in the sport or in its popularity — people love it. And a lot of people admit it: It brings out the worst in us. Absolutely the worst. We go to a basketball game or a baseball game we don't feel the same way that we do when we go to a football game.

**E.G.:** *Do you enjoy watching football?*

**F.D.:** I don't enjoy it as much as I used to. I'm not going to pretend to you that I don't watch football games. I'm not sitting up high and mighty and saying that it's beneath me, but I sometimes I caution myself to not like what I'm seeing in front of me — it's just too damn violent. The fact that we're the only country in the world that likes football — and we are really, that's kind of scary to me too; what it says about us. And I understand there are a lot of historic reasons about why we have our American football and everybody else adores soccer, so it isn't just that we are bloodthirsty Americans, there's a long, illustrious history. But not withstanding: It is rather interesting that other American sports, baseball and basketball and hockey, which is a North American sport, have all taken seed all around the world, but American football hasn't.

**E.G.:** *You've denounced the NCAA for exploiting student athletes in the name of saving them from exploitation. Some critics would say it doesn't start with the NCAA but with the Amateur Athletic Union. What do you think about that?*

**F.D.:** I don't think it's so much that it's just the NCAA that's the problem, but I also wouldn't suggest that it's the AAU, which is only a subsidiary problem. It goes back to high schools and even beyond to kiddie sports. It goes back to college scholarships, which is not the NCAA's fault, but the parents' fault. It's at 7 or 8 years old, taking a kid and having him concentrate on a sport so that maybe he'll get a college scholarship

12 years later. It's the whole machine of amateur athletics in this country, which the NCAA ends up on top of. But I don't think the AAU by itself is that prominent — just in basketball, and basketball coaches will say it's a scourge because kids don't learn the game. The stars just learn how to score points. If you saw the way they taught basketball in Europe, it's just an entirely different operation, which is why there are so many European players that make the NBA, because they are just so much better grounded in fundamentals.

**E.G.:** *What about all the accusations around domestic and sexual violence with players — is this something that's always happened and it's only that now it's getting more coverage?*

**F.D.:** Athletes have always been naughty boys, but I don't remember the violence component. That's one thing I do believe has changed. I've just been astonished by that ... it seems that the players in more violent sports tend to be more violent off the field. You don't hear a whole lot about swimmers and tennis players beating up their girlfriends. I mean I do think there is some obvious connection between the sports young men play and the violence that they exhibit and one can say, "Well the reason they pick the sport in the first place is because they are preternaturally violent ... I can't tell you why, but I believe it's a different world in that respect. Athletes were always sort of naughty. There was drinking and carousing, and God knows athletes, simply because they're sort of heroic in every society, always found it easier to attract women, right? So they were always very much involved with women, but I just don't recall what seems to be an epidemic of violence, mostly directed toward women. But you also see it with guns and fast cars, I don't know — it just seems to be much more extreme than it ever was before.

**E.G.:** *In light of some of things we've talked about today and the nature of the topics you cover, does all of it take any of the joy out of being a spectator for you? Or do you still truly enjoy sports the way you did when you first started out in your career?*

**F.D.:** I'll give you a personal example, and I'm probably reflective of all sorts of other people. I grew up in Baltimore, so I'm a Baltimore Orioles fan, right? And who's the star of the Baltimore Orioles this year? Nelson Cruz, who had been thrown out of baseball for steroid use the year before, but now all of a sudden, he's my Oriole, and this is the way I think most of us look at it — he's my guy — and what he did off the field and what he did not do in the classroom and so forth and so on, I think we have a tendency to say "everybody does it" and fact of the matter is in many regards, they do. So I turn something of a blind eye toward that as much as the next fellow does. It comes back to me, I mean I must say that every now and then when I'm watching a game and somebody who's been convicted of a crime appears, it pops into my mind and upsets me a little, but I'm pretty much like all the other Romans in the Colosseum.

**E.G.:** *There's something that's kind of comforting in knowing that.*

**F.D.:** Well yeah, I mean we're all human that way and you know, you spend your whole life: Should you listen to the dirty joke? Should you see a little pornography? Should you walk away from the bad things? And most of us aren't that strong, aren't that noble, and I include myself in that category. So Nelson Cruz is my guy! In a word, that's it. I wish he were a paradigm of virtue. I wish the guy hitting the home runs and throwing the touchdown passes was above reproach, but if he isn't, he's my guy. (Laughs) We love athletes, I suppose, like we love our children. We forgive them.