

Exploiting the Game

Baseball, cheerleaders being misused

What better evidence of what baseball means to me can there be than that I've stayed loyal to — though frustrated by — my life-long Big Leagues team, the Chicago Cubs? I love the sport better than any other from my two decades of working in college athletics. But I reject the idea of bringing it back to the UO after 27 years because the premise is misguided and misdirected.



Reviving the sport has more to do with exploitation of the game and its student athletes than it does with any sudden appreciation for baseball. I trust the novice director of athletics, Pat Kilkenny, when he says some baseball alumni strongly support his proposal. But there is little to trust about his reason for allowing them to influence him.

College sport has become big business, and we can't expect it to be altruistic. His priority is to raise money for a new basketball arena whose projected cost has mushroomed to an amount that reflects unrealistic priorities — almost \$200 million, and counting. Reinstating baseball will earn Kilkenny access to some baseball boosters whose rich portfolios make them potential major donors. But it adds an estimated \$5 million for a college baseball stadium or its apparent alternative — improvements at Civic Stadium for a venue the Ducks would share with the minor league Ems.

Some have theorized that alumnus Phil Knight of Nike — a generous donor to the university and to athletics — might be inclined to give more with the return of baseball. Knight was a trackman at Oregon, but his wife supposedly is a baseball fan. That is stretching it more than a bit. If Knight is on the arena bandwagon, it's for his own reasons as it was with the massive gift he gave for expansion of Autzen Stadium.

The baseball boondoggle is compounded by responsibilities to Title IX, federal legislation intended to assure a proportional balance of participants for men and women. Baseball will extend the current disparity in favor of men because its commitment to player grants is greater than that for the sport it replaces, wrestling.

But wait. Kilkenny proposes increased involvement for women through the "sport" of cheerleading. Trouble is, that is not an authorized sport of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), nor do other schools in the Pac-10 Conference give it varsity sports identity. Women are exploited by the sexist character of cheerleading, where squads are predominantly female with occasional isolated males.

I've watched games and cheerleading in hundreds of stadia and gyms, and I've long known generating of spirit to be a secondary function of cheerleading. Primary is titillation for crowds of mainly male fans by scantily clad females. As for stirring crowds in other ways, the impact is on orchestrated cheering, not the genuine, spontaneous kind. Cheerleaders give as generously of their time and energy as varsity athletes. But to suggest they perform in a varsity sport is naive and self-serving.

Many alumni of gymnastics and swimming would like to see their sports reinstated. I was UO sports information director when those sports and baseball were dropped. Having to make those announcements was the most difficult task I had in college sport. No doubt wrestling alumni justifiably object to their sport being dropped in arbitrary fashion, especially after former coach Ron Finley cut corners and personally raised funds to sustain his sport.

Maybe there is a way to get these sports back, consistent with what I see as the Kilkenny philosophy of athletics. Identify some financially successful former swimmers, gymnasts and wrestlers. They could join the list of shortsighted underwriters for an unneeded new gym and bide their time (a long time) for the return of their sports.

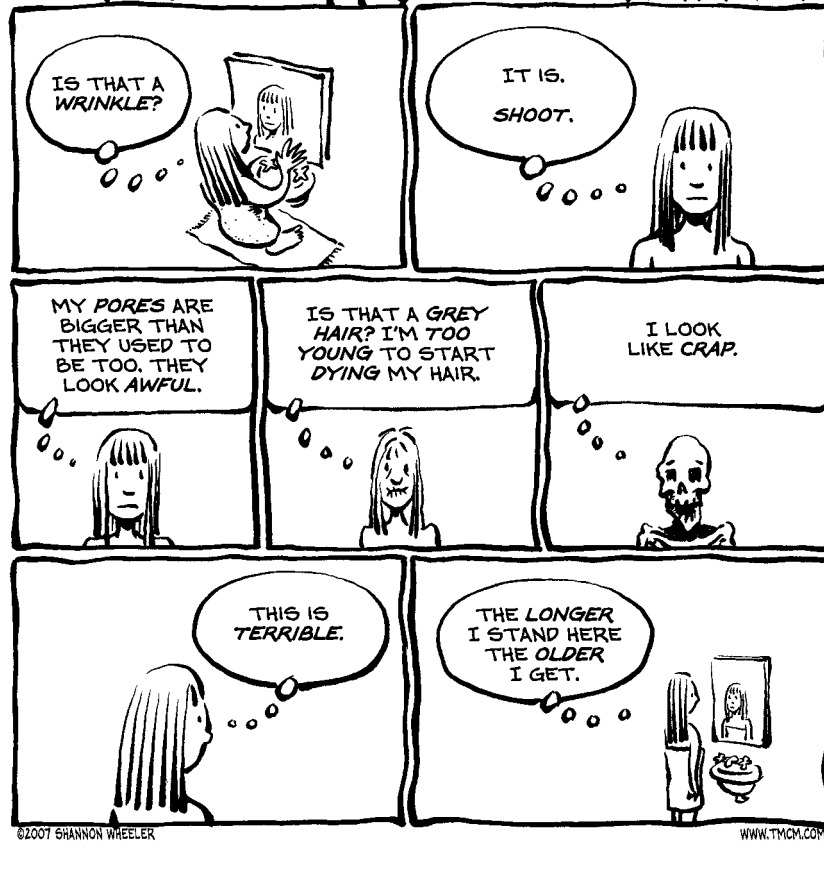
Forget replacing McArthur Court and funding a new baseball facility. Instead do what two courageous and outspoken faculty members, James Earl and Richard Sundt, have done publicly: Urge the misused largesse of sports donors be shifted, if they approve, to where it is most needed and best could be used — to bolster suffering academic programs which, unlike varsity sport, are fundamental to the UO's stated mission.

It's unfortunate it comes down to marketing a product. Sports have become proficient at that. Now it's time for the staff in University Relations to take their cue from sports promoters and convince major donors to sports to shift their giving to academia.

George Beres was sports information director at the UO from 1976-82 and before that at his alma mater, Northwestern University. He also broadcast Big Ten sports for eight years. His half-hour interview show, To Pursue the Truth, appears weekly on Community TV.

How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CATS AND BIRDS

Greg Norman's letter ("Killer Kitties," 6/28) states that the recent Audubon report (as editorialized in the *R-G*) identifies cats as the leading cause of decline in bird numbers. Yet the Audubon report Mr. Norman refers to as evidence did not mention cats! Here's the one sentence the *R-G* editors chose to insert "The [Audubon] report doesn't mention housecats, but these pets are efficient predators whose rise in number mirrors the decline in birds" (italics mine). That one sentence misled Mr. Norman into believing cats are the major cause of the decline in bird numbers.

The *R-G* correlation of rise in cats and decline of birds is called false causality statistics. While this correlation may on the face be true, the implication that cats are the major cause of declining bird numbers is not. It would have been more honest for the *R-G* to insert that the rise in human population mirrors the decline in birds, or the rise in number of new homes mirrors the decline in birds. Both of these correlations would have more accurately described what was actually in the Audubon report. I wrote the *R-G* in response to their editorial, but they appear to have chosen not to publish my letter.

I wonder if Mr. Norman read the Audubon report, which clearly states the reason common birds are declining are "urban sprawl," "industrial development" and intensification of farming." Cats are *not* mentioned in the Audubon report *at all*.

Sue Mandeville
Springfield

COUGAR HUNTING

Thanks, *EW*, for publishing "Cougar Kill," complete with OHA's amusing statement, "... cougars associate the fear of being

chased by baying hounds with humans and thus are more prone to avoiding human contact." Perhaps they ought to quit their day jobs and become cougar psychologists.

Credible scientists who have studied wild cougars reject the simple premise that cougars have lost their fear of humans (allegedly instilled in them by persecutory hunting a century ago) and need to be made fearful again, mainly because there is no evidence that cougars ever had a fear of us.

OHA's warped reasoning can only be labeled anthropomorphism (something animal protectionists are always accused of), since it reflects *how we would feel*, instead of any real behavior change.

Since there are no scientific measures that would paint a realistic picture of behavior change in the elusive cougar, ecologists look to accounts from outdoors people in the early 1900s who noted how cougars regularly followed hunters and fisherman. Back then, the cougar was regarded as acting normal. Today, when a cougar is spotted near a populated area, it is viewed as a risk and killed. Clearly we ought to be studying our own behavior change.

Recent studies in many Western states monitoring radio-tagged cougars near human-dominated areas show that cougars regularly *avoid* such terrain, exposing themselves much less often to humans than the contrary. So until there is non-anecdotal, sound evidence, the "teach them fear with hunting" argument is plainly ridiculous. What would be the point of creating fear in an animal if you are only going to blow it away? Besides, cougars are too intelligent for such nonsense.

It's amazing how few attacks there have been and continue to be by these adaptable felines — despite human encroachment on their habitat — but our looming population