



Weird About Sports

Football's lessons contradict higher education

BY JIM EARL

Im a more or less typical English professor, a bookish egghead not much addicted to sports. I'd rather spend Saturday afternoons in the fall reading *War and Peace* than watching the Ducks. That's the dirty little secret I've kept to myself during the years I've worked on sports reform at the UO. Not really a big fan. Big surprise.

People always accuse me of not liking sports, and I always say, oh no, I ran track in high school. I know how pitiful that sounds, but for some reason I've always been embarrassed to confess my real thoughts about sports. Now that I'm about to retire, however, I'd like to come clean. So I'll tell you about my most embarrassing moment as a spokesman for athletic reform at Oregon.

It was four or five years ago, at a meeting of a Presidential Task Force on Intercollegiate Athletics. This task force would end up concluding that the biggest problem with intercollegiate athletics is that faculty don't understand it. Yes indeed, it turns out that the faculty have uncritically accepted a number of "myths" about athletics.

Well, that's embarrassing enough, but it's not my most embarrassing moment. Here it comes. At one of those meetings I found myself at the huge conference table in Johnson Hall with just Dave Frohnmayer and Bill Moos; and to those two, and to those two alone, I said something that I immediately

regretted. Actually, it was one of those gaffes that take about 15 seconds to register, which is even worse.

I'm not sure what prompted it. Maybe I was trying to explain why faculty attitudes about football tend to be a little ... negative. *Do they really need to have this explained to them?* If the president and the AD don't know that professors are almost naturally alienated from the spectacle that football has become, they don't know too many faculty, do they?

Some faculty are fans, of course, and some are even big fans, and that's great, but it's not the faculty norm. The professorial stereotype is pretty sturdy: Most intellectuals have relatively highbrow tastes. They wouldn't make a great booster club. They don't especially like crowds, they don't like uniforms, they don't like to paint their faces or do the wave. Most professors don't look very good on a dance floor. As a group, we're pretty repressed.

It's one of our shortcomings. We live in a culture where it's a little embarrassing already just to admit you're an intellectual. I comfort myself by thinking, if you wanted to hire a professor, wouldn't you look for an intellectual, someone who spends Saturday afternoon reading, or working on a book? I don't know of any department that recruits "well-rounded" professors. ("Let's hire this guy: He really likes to drink, and he'd be fun at the department tailgater.")