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OUR VIEW

Be careful what you wish for, college football fans

Despite the disappointing thumping of the Ducks, college football's first playoffs were an unmitigated success.

Television ratings were through the roof for ESPN, which spent \$7.3 billion to buy the 12-year rights

to broadcast the playoffs. Roughly 30 seconds of ad space during the championship telecast sold for more than \$1 million, and the two semifinal games (the Rose Bowl and Sugar Bowl) were the highest-rated shows in cable TV history. You can bet that once official viewership is recorded for Monday night's game, it will quickly take over the top spot.

The five "major" conferences also were winners, coming out of the playoff system infused with cash. They received more than \$50 million each — money cobbled from the TV deal, ticket sales, official gear, advertisers and other revenue.

The championship game coaches, who each make more than \$2 million per year, also did tremendously well. Urban Meyer (Ohio) and Mark Helfrich (Oregon) are among the most highest-paid public employees in their respective states.

The National Football League gets a complex, competitive minor league system where superstars are created — and they don't have to pay a dime for it.

It seems like everyone is making a buck off the playoff system except the football players themselves.

And though it's hard to find anything Americans hold more sacred than their college football, the villainy of this exploited labor will soon reach a breaking point. And the playoff system will only increase the speed at which college football as we know it will crumble.

We don't think the NCAA, the hypocritical and outmoded bastion of college athletics, will still be around in a decade. We don't think college football teams will be either — at least not how they we know them today.

We think the NCAA will be forced — finally — to give up the ghost of amateurism and allow

Division I schools to pay their players. How could they not, when they are making \$7 billion to put on three playoff games a year?

The demise of the NCAA would turn college football squads into semi-pro, minor league teams that put very little (if any) importance on academics, and players may not even be required to be enrolled at the school.

Whether the fans will stick around for that kind of show is anyone's guess. But as long as it says Oregon or Oregon State on the laundry, we think there will be plenty of supporters.

After all, college football is no longer an amateur endeavor.

The Ducks played 14 games this year, just 2 less than most professional football teams. They played before crowds that wouldn't fit into many NFL stadiums, and Marcus Mariota became a household name from coast to coast. Players took severely reduced class schedules during the season. And how could they not, with all the practice and the weightlifting and the travel?

The bowl system, with its obvious flaws, was an unprofessional and rather random way to decide a national champion. Yet in some ways it was that unprofessionalism that allowed the NCAA to remain in charge and rendered the college football system sustainable.

Now the floodgates have opened and revenue is coming in hand over fist. It will become increasingly difficult to keep funneling that gargantuan river of money away from the players, who are rightfully entitled to much of it. Was Marcus Mariota worth \$1 million to the University of Oregon this year? You betcha — no one would argue that. The real number is probably closer to \$10 million or more. And why shouldn't people get paid what they are worth? This is America after all, where cashing in on the skills that set you apart is a big piece of our national dream.

What a fun and sporting first year of the college football playoffs. But it signifies the beginning of the end for amateur college football.

College football is no longer an amateur endeavor. Players should receive a piece of the billion dollar pie they have created.

OTHER VIEWS

Be slow and sure on GMO rule-making

The Bend Bulletin

Late in 2013, Gov. John Kitzhaber promised that in 2015 he would propose a bill regulating genetically engineered crops in the state. Now, he's getting ready to fulfill that promise, though exactly what he'll propose remains unclear.

Among the issues: whether or not the state should be able to establish "control" areas over genetically engineered crops even if they've been deregulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. If the Oregon Department of Agriculture is given that power, it will be able to create what are known as "isolation distances" between engineered and other crops. Isolation distances aim to prevent cross pollination.

Cross contamination is a big deal to wheat farmers and others, as the discovery of genetically engineered wheat plants in a conventional field in Eastern Oregon demonstrated a couple of years ago. Oregon's wheat crop is worth about \$500 million annually, and most of it is sold in Asia. Asians do not

want genetically engineered foods, and when the wayward plant was discovered both Japan and South Korea delayed purchases until purity could be proved.

It makes sense to do what's reasonable to separate the crops, though deciding just what is reasonable may be difficult. If isolation distances are too great, that can create real problems; if they're too short, that doesn't solve the contamination problem.

There's also concern about who, if anyone, should compensate a farmer if a crop is contaminated by genetically engineered plants. That shouldn't be the state's business, it seems to us. The state does not compensate a farmer if the neighbor's cows damage a crop; it shouldn't do so in this case, either.

Coming up with a bill that is acceptable to all the segments of the state's agriculture industry won't be easy, and lawmakers are sure to want to put their own spin on whatever the governor proposes. But both the governor and lawmakers should be more concerned about getting the new rules right than getting them quickly.



OTHER VIEWS

The child in the basement

Maybe you're familiar with Ursula Le Guin's short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." It's about a sweet and peaceful city with lovely parks and delightful music.

The people in the city are genuinely happy. They enjoy their handsome buildings and a "magnificent" farmers' market.

Le Guin describes a festival day with delicious beer and horse races: "An old woman, small, fat, and laughing, is passing out flowers from a basket, and tall young men wear her flowers in their shining hair. A child of nine or ten sits at the edge of the crowd, alone, playing on a wooden flute."

It is an idyllic, magical place.

But then Le Guin describes one more feature of Omelas. In the basement of one of the buildings, there is a small broom-closet-sized room with a locked door and no windows. A small child is locked inside the room. It looks about 6, but, actually, the child is nearly 10. "It is feeble-minded. Perhaps it was born defective, or perhaps it has become imbecile through fear, malnutrition and neglect."

Occasionally, the door opens and people look in. The child used to cry out, "Please let me out. I will be good!" But the people never answered and now the child just whimpers. It is terribly thin, lives on a half-bowl of conmeal a day and must sit in its own excrement.

"They all know it is there, all the people of Omelas," Le Guin writes. "Some of them have come to see it; others are content merely to know it is there. They all know it has to be there. Some of them understand why, and some do not, but they all understand that their happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children ... depend wholly on this child's abominable misery."

That is the social contract in Omelas. One child suffers horribly so that the rest can be happy. If the child were let free or comforted, Omelas would be destroyed. Most people feel horrible for the child, and some parents hold their kids tighter, and then they return to their happiness.

But some go to see the child in the room and then keep walking. They don't want to be part of that social contract. "They leave Omelas; they walk ahead into the darkness and they do not come back."

In one reading this is a parable about exploitation. According to this reading, many of us live in societies whose prosperity depends

on some faraway child in the basement. When we buy a cellphone or a piece of cheap clothing, there is some exploited worker — a child in the basement. We tolerate exploitation, telling each other that their misery is necessary for overall affluence, though maybe it's not.

In another reading, the story is a challenge to the utilitarian mindset so prevalent today.

In theory, most of us subscribe to a set of values based on the idea that a human being is an end not a means. You can't justifiably use a human being as an object. It is wrong to enslave a person, even if that slavery might produce a large good. It is wrong to kill a person for his organs, even if many lives might be saved.

And yet we don't actually live according to that moral imperative. Life is filled with tragic trade-offs. In many different venues, the suffering of the few is justified by those trying to deliver the greatest good for the greatest number.

Companies succeed because they fire people, even if a whole family depends on them. Schools become prestigious because they reject people — even if they put a lifetime of work into their application. Leaders fighting a war on terror accidentally kill innocents. These are children in the basement of our survival and happiness.

The story compels readers to ask if they are willing to live according to those contracts. Some are not. They walk away from prosperity, and they make some radical commitment. They would rather work toward some inner purity.

The rest of us live with the trade-offs. The story reminds us of the inner numbing this creates. The people who stay in Omelas aren't bad; they just find it easier and easier to live with the misery they depend upon. I've found that this story rivets people because it confronts them with all the tragic compromises built into modern life — all the children in the basements — and, at the same time, it elicits some desire to struggle against bland acceptance of it all.

In another reading, the whole city of Omelas is just different pieces of one person's psychology, a person living in the busy modern world, and that person's idealism and moral sensitivity is the shriveling child locked in the basement.

David Brooks became a *New York Times* Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.

Ursula Le Guin is a recent participant of the Eastern Oregon Word Round-Up in Mission and the Pendleton Center for the Arts First Draft Writers' Series. She lives in Portland.



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

Ursula Le Guin writes of a perfect city that enslaves a feeble child. Is that a social contract we can live with?

YOUR VIEWS

Pendleton city leaders inept, transparency will show it

Last week's newspaper published this incredulous statement, "Communication between the city and public wasn't always strong in 2014." Our mayor now wants Pendleton to be known as a "transparent city." Keep in mind that "transparent" means to see through.

There was a plea for community involvement in the decision-making process for the necessity of constructing a new firehouse despite the fact that, according to the *EO*, the city has "a \$75,902 contract with the design firm Mackenzie to perform a needs analysis on the city's fire station." This design company will go through the motions of determining the need for a new firehouse and will then be given a contract to design it.

Speaking of fire houses, the city council wants to invest in infrastructure for its 40-acre Industrial Park that cost \$12,500 an acre (\$500,000) well above the market price for undeveloped land. There is already an unused fire station located at the airport.

The ineptitude of our leaders is mind-boggling. The city missed the deadline to put the \$10 million bond on the November ballot and the mistake was blamed on inexperienced

staff. That same excuse was used when they made proposals for capital projects such as the Convention Center expansion and miscalculated the cost by almost \$300,000.

To prove that they are going to be "transparent" in 2015, they should publish their debt total including loans from Banner Bank, interagency loans and the \$2 million airport debt.

Here is an example of Houk's transparency: He recently mentioned that the Convention Center Advisory Board will be disbanded for lack of participation by its members. He failed to mention the reason for this.

According to the *EO*, Commission Chairwoman Mary Alice Ridgeway, "the commission used to have good attendance and make frequent recommendations, but meetings in recent years now boil down to reports from staff and votes on issues already decided by the council."

A city council member recently stated that "2015 will be a great year of progress." That is setting the bar low. One of the city council's major accomplishments in 2014 was to change a traffic sign on N.W. Despain and N.W. 4th.

Quit complaining. Time for a recall election.

Jerry Cronin
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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