Commentary



## Tide Has Turned on College Cheating

We have just been through one of those weeks that will be understood better by history than in the immediate news accounts. The third week of June 1989 may turn out to mean to American game-playing what the first week of July 1863 meant to America.

Gettysburg and Vicksburg fell within hours of each other (our transplanted neighbors and my wife will prefer to say those battles "were won" - whatever, we all do agree it turned out for the best). I'm sure everyone reading the papers that week realized the news was big, but I doubt they realized how big.

The significance of the third week of June 1989 is that American sport has finally fallen fully into the proper hands — the hands of the law. History may look back and see that the most significant story of the week was given minor play at the time, compared to three "splash" stories which, down the decades, will turn out to be the supporting

Barry Switzer fell at Oklahoma, and that's big; Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom fell in Chicago, and that's huge; Pete Rose sought a temporary restraining order against the baseball commissioner, and that is far-reach-

But, pushed to the inside of the sports section by the splash stories was our Chris Mortensen's account of what will likely turn out to be the watershed, the milestone. Mortensen's first three paragraphs bear repeating here, just in case you missed the one-column headline on Page F6 last Tuesday:

CHICAGO — Blasting the hypocrisy and corruption in college athletics, the federal judge who sentenced sports agents Nor Walters and Lloyd Bloom Monday sent a warning to "boosters, coaches and administrators" who break NCAA rules.

"If Walters and Bloom are guilty of mail fraud, racketeering and conspiracy, so too may be alumni and other boosters who pass money or cars under the table and conspire with the athlete to lie about it ... so too may be the coach or administrator who acts in like fashion," U.S. District Judge George M. Marovich told a packed courtroom in a statement he later released to the media.

"I want to give fair warning to those who may violate [NCAA] rules, whatever they are: You may now be playing a different ballgame, and it might be called hardball. There is a previously unrecognized player on the field — the rule of law."

For as long as any of us have been alive, it has been little more than a snickering matter to give a kid a hundred-dollar handshake or "help him arrange financing" for a car, or worse. Well, it came to pass that such

weekend fun could land the old alma mater on probation, but still they wouldn't stop.

But let's see now whether they're willing to risk going to jail. Some will still dabble in shenanigans, but just wait till the first "outstanding citizen" or "legendary coach" walks up the courthouse steps with his jacket pulled over his face to hide from the mini-cams. Then the earth will shake.

The buying and selling and misleading of human beings in intercollegiate athletics has long seemed criminal in many minds. Henceforth, it is all criminal, if American courts follow the precedent set by Judge Marovich.

What he was saying, in essence, was there are a lot more bad guys than just agents. And those guys, if caught, aren't going to have it any better than agents.

The significance of the decline and fall of Barry Switzer at Oklahoma is this: That no longer can even the most charismatic coach, the most experienced in the land at smirking in the face of chronic and myriad allegations of corruption, keep shrugging it off.

He went out trying to make a martyr of himself over "rigid" NCAA rules. But pressure of the American sense of decency, a long-sleeping giant awakened to rage by the goings-on at Oklahoma, is what really finished him

Pete Rose's legal action now challenges the authority of the commissioner's office to take away a baseball man's right to make a living without due process of law.

The granite commissioner, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, banned Shoeless Joe Jackson and seven other Chicago White Sox from baseball for life, though a jury had found them innocent of fixing the 1919 World Series. That was wrong by the standards of American justice, but Landis put baseball above the law, and there it has essentially remained until the third week of June 1989.

I find the prospect of placing American sport in the hands of lawyers distasteful. But lawyers are the price we pay for justice. We can't subject the football cheaters to justice and not the baseball czars.

Besides, we should take some satisfaction from the prospect of lawyers devouring lawyers, for most of the agents who now come under the hand of the law are themselves lawyers.

The Walters and Bloom jail sentences were indeed bright landmarks in the history of American sport. But they would have been mere chips out of the mountain without Judge Marovich's accompanying warning to the other rule-breakers that they are now lawbreakers.

What a week.

## Readers Who Care Are 'Pretty Darn Good'

This Michael Jordan guy is pretty darn good. Such a sentence came from this typing machine last month, and soon enough Robert Stapleton, a distinguished reader of your favorite morning newspaper, shipped off a pretty

Dave Kindred

darn good letter in which he said. "Dear Dave: Research shows that the phrase 'pretty darn good' is used once every six seconds in the average American city. Of course, the percentage is much higher in Atlanta where sports franchises have struggled for years to

achieve the 'pretty darn good' status." Mr. Stapleton's greater point is that we live in an era of diminished expectations which has given us sleaze TV, sandwiches of pressedchicken parts and newspapers that seem to have been drawn, not written, by hyperkinetic children using the 64-crayon box.

Mr. Stapleton even enclosed a photo of legendary football coach Vince Lombardi with this comic paraphrase of Lombardi's speech on excellence:

"You can't just sorta get out there and barely try. You've got to get out there and actually try pretty much. A lotta people wanna be #1. So that spot is probably going to be taken. Second place ain't bad. Third's OK in a tough division. Some people like the Braves would be tickled silly to finish fourth.

"So it's all relative. The thing is, nobody likes last place, so you need to be pretty darn good to make sure you won't ever wind up there. I firmly believe that any man's finest hour is at the end of the season when he looks at the final standings and says, 'Whew ... sure am glad I'm not playing for the Cleveland

Newspaper columnists get mail from readers who care about quality. Christoper Golden of Marietta, for one, found no quality whatsoever in a column hailing Wilt Chamberlain as a better basketball player than Bill Russell.

"No player in NBA history understood the team concept better than Bill Russell," Mr. Golden wrote. "He is the smartest man ever to have played the game. ... Were he playing today, he would still dominate every game while Chamberlain, the consummate individualist, would be hard-pressed to outshine Akeem, Moses or Kareem."

Kenneth Barnwell of Decatur was less dyspeptic, though writing about a subject full of hateful possibilities: "I am a 25-year-old black male in Medical School at Emory University. I am 6-foot, 210 pounds, and my best game is



JOEY IVANSCO/Staff

One reader contends Arnold Palmer looks more like 37 than his real age, 59.

Ping-Pong. I can barely shoot a basketball and decently punt a football a few yards.

"When NBC News did its Tom Brokaw show on blacks' 'superiority' to whites in athletics, the show failed to significantly explore one aspect of the controversy. That is, the diverse socio-economic strata that pervade the face of this entire nation.

"Let us define 'white' sport, such as hockey, and 'black' sport, football. For hockey, any aspirant needs an ice rink and skates. For football, an aspirant needs only a ball and any open space.

"I ask you, 'Which of these is more accessible to a socio-economically deprived kid who is statistically most likely to be black?' The same thing with tennis, a 'white' sport, and 'basketball,' a black sport.

"A case in point: The Kenyans ran and ran, not because they are black, but because they had to get somewhere in a hurry, and they had no other means to get there but the utility of shank's mare."

Letters come from dear readers such as the assistant director of the American Atheist General Headquarters, Hal Armstrong of Aus-

tin, Texas, who complained about his lieutenant Robert Sherman being lumped in with the Ku Klux Klan.

"An atheist is simply what the word implies - one who lives 'free from theism,' "Armstrong wrote. "Rob Sherman is not an anti-theist, he is an atheist. ... You were not a reponsible reporter. Never once, for instance, did you provide your readers with the Klan's full name: The Christian Knights of the Ku Klux Klan."

Mike Bush of Athens wants Dominique Wilkins traded. Keith Watkins of Atlanta wants Dale Murphy traded. H.B. Braselton of Braselton, Ga., (which city is now the property of one Kim Basinger, a fate to be dreamed of) wants basketball to create more three-point shots, maybe even four-point shots, while giving only one point for dunks. Mr. Braselton said, "Dave, if you don't like the three-point shot, it leads me to believe you are 6-foot-9."

Christoper Bethune of Atlanta loved Sugar Ray Robinson as a childhood hero and didn't like being reminded that Robinson could be a hard, cold bully. "In these days of cocaine, steroid and growth-hormone abusing athletes, why must you question a man like Sugar Ray?'

Robert K. Brown of Atlanta: "I must tell you that the portrait you painted of Arnold Palmer is very inaccurate. [Arnie had been described as a graying, limping warhorse who'd missed his morning swig of Geritol.] I believe it is fair to say that at 37 you should look and act like he does at 59 going on 60 in September.'

Jean Gee of Dunwoody, blaming ye columnist for her dissolute behavior: "I see the beginnings of a pattern here. First, reading sports columns. Second, attending a live Hawks' game. What's next? Statistics? Am I in danger of becoming a sport fan?"

And then there was Julian Aiken of East Point, who noticed that ye columnist had become the grandfather of twin boys. Mr. Aiken sent along this piece of wisdom, entitled "According To":

According to my grandparents, I was According to my parents, I was almost

According to my brother, sister, aunts, uncles, I had a few faults

According to my beloved wife, faults begin and end with me

According to my children, I am almost perfect

According to my grandchildren, I am

This leads me to believe that grandparents and grandchildren are the smartest people on Earth, along with being perfect themselves.

Anyway, to all of you who cared enough to read this far and cared enough to write a note now and then, thank you.





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