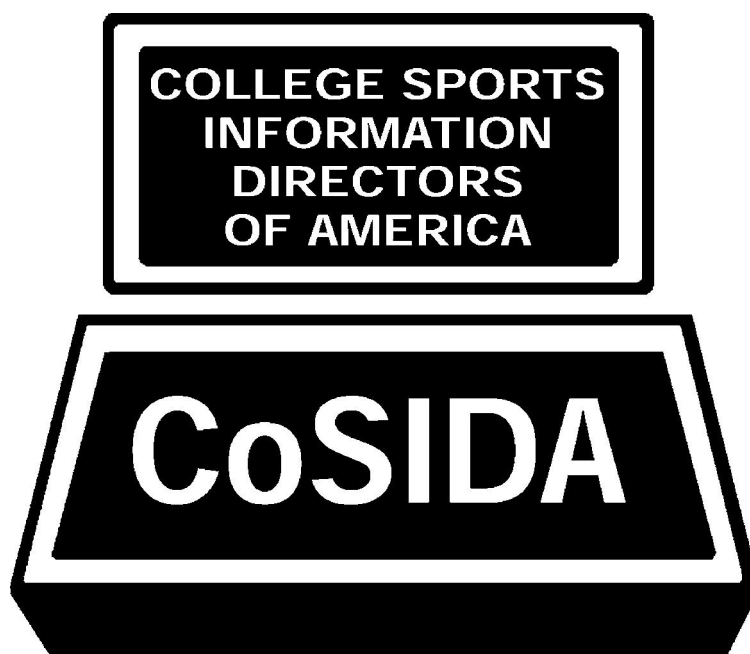


CoSIDA NEWS

Intercollegiate Athletics News from Around the Nation



March 5, 2007

The Anniston Star

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SPECIAL REPORT

Field Gold: When Florida football prospers, academic programs share the spotlight — and the money

By Steve Ivey
Star Staff Writer
02-26-2007

GAINESVILLE, Fla. —
Welcome back to the
top, Gators.

Your campus neighbors
wondered when you'd
rejoin them.

The 6,400 students and
288 faculty at the
University of Florida
College of Engineering
toil in the literal and
figurative shadows of
Ben Hill Griffin Stadium,
home to the 2006 BCS national football champions.



Photo: Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Instrument specialist Kerry Siebein examines rows of atoms at 1.7 angstroms — or 1.7 ten-millionths of a meter — in a specially configured room in the materials science department set to 66 degrees. Even the sound of her voice can disturb the images on the transmission electron microscope, one of a handful in the country.

"You do not want to be doing this on game days," she says.

Next door, junior Josh McNally perfects an open-wheel, open-cockpit racecar that goes from 0 to 60 mph in 3.8 seconds and corners at 2 G's of gravity. Members of Gator Motorsports, Florida's Society of Automotive Engineers team, hope to bring home another trophy at their next race in Detroit later this year.

Despite the headline-grabbing football team next door, the engineers found a tongue-in-cheek means to boast their own triumphs.

They produced blue and orange T-shirts that read, "Hey Florida football, welcome back to the spotlight" on the front, and the back boasts their 14 national and international engineering championships in the 10 years since the Gators won their last football title. And the Florida engineering motto: "More bite."

Despite the playful repartee, the school's academic and athletics representatives say they don't view each other as adversaries.

Rather, each finds means of cooperation to piggyback the success of the other. Indeed, the University of Florida's athletics department voluntarily donates more to academics than any other school in the Southeastern Conference, parlaying athletics opportunities — primarily football — to share

national notoriety.

Sometimes, they trek 4,100 miles to do it.

A research champ looms

In a September survey from the Milken Institute, the nonprofit economic think tank ranked Florida fifth nationally for technology transfer, or how schools turn research into commercial applications.

Florida trailed only the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of California system, the California Institute of Technology and Stanford.

Perhaps the most famous example gets broadcast on most football Saturdays across the country, as announcer Keith Jackson relays the story of Gatorade, developed at the campus here to hydrate athletes in the warm climate.

But Florida, more so than its competitors, found a unique way in January to showcase its work to a captive crowd of sports fans.

Faculty and students are developing a NaviGator for the Department of Defense. The unmanned dune buggy uses eight internal computers to maneuver a programmed route with set GPS points, and cameras in the front spot impenetrable obstacles. The technology could one day lead to military or civilian vehicles that enter battle or other hazardous situations without anyone behind the wheel.

Three engineering students recently loaded up their NaviGator, plastered with blue and orange decals, into a white trailer splashed with the UF logo and drove cross-country on Interstate 10 to Glendale, Ariz., site of the BCS national football title game.

The exhibition in the parking lot at University of Phoenix Stadium and displays at sports bars, pep rallies and hotels drew the attention of some of the 75,000 spectators in town to see the game.

"We know they were there for the football game, but if we did it right, maybe they could also get a glimpse of what our research is like," said Pramod Khargonekar, dean of the College of Engineering. "I think there is a lot of excitement, an aura of success around the university right now. We absolutely will try to take advantage of this in the future, showcasing our research at a major sports event. Every weekend 100,000 people come to campus, and we're right in front of them."

In Glendale, the displays garnered a couple notable visitors — Karen Holbrook, president of the Ohio State University and former Florida vice president for research, and an executive with Dell Inc.

Students are already at work on the NaviGator's next generation. They'll convert a Toyota Highlander with the technology, with more flexibility to travel the same roads as other manned vehicles.

"DOD wants to have 30 percent of their arsenal like this by 2015," said master's student Gregory Garcia. "We're proud to do this work."

Sports funding studies

In the weeks following the BCS title, the University of Florida Web site congratulated the Gators on the school's second national championship in nine months — men's basketball in March and football in January.

After about 15 seconds, another slide flashed in the page's dominant image, labeling quarterback Chris Leak as a recent graduate and a Draddy Trophy, or "Academic Heisman," finalist.

As soon as Leak enters the athletics administration offices inside the football stadium, the staff nearly in unison greets him like a regular at the bar on "Cheers."

"Hey, Chris."

Leak graduated with a sociology degree in December, 3_ years after he enrolled, and set Gator quarterback records for a true freshman.

"Ever since we won, the atmosphere has been real hype," he said. "That's why I came to Florida, to get the best of both worlds, athletics and academics."

With the University of Georgia, Florida shares the Southeastern Conference's most stringent requirements for its student-athletes. The Gators use a model developed by an economics professor to forecast whether a student is likely to maintain a "C" average in college. The scale examines all college-prep high school courses, usually 16 to 20; the league permits schools to include only the top 14.

Still, the school has won the SEC's all-sports title 16 of the past 19 seasons and finished in the top 10 nationally every year since 1984.

And Florida has the fourth-most academic All-Americans since 1992 among all Division I institutions with 63.

Athletics officials are quick to point out they have attained success without going on NCAA probation, as seven other SEC schools have since 2002.

In the men's locker room at the \$10 million basketball facility, you'll find the standard fare: championship logos, photos depicting team unity, team stats and league standings.

You'll also see a bulletin board covered not with next week's opponent dissing the Gators in the paper, but printed news stories from ESPN.com about suspensions and turmoil at other programs.

Above the practice court, coach Billy Donovan has hung a banner for every basketball player who has earned a degree in his 10-year tenure.

"If you aren't predicted to be a 'C' student, you really can't even be approved for a recruiting visit unless you sit down and mathematically prove you'll be in that range when you finish your senior year," said Keith Carodine, associate athletics director for academic affairs. "There are some folks we haven't been able to recruit. But it obviously hasn't hurt us."

To the contrary, the exposure from national championship teams has Florida ready to set a record for applicants this year, with more than 25,000 high school seniors petitioning to become part of the Gator Nation.

For 2006, Florida Gator license plates edged out the previous year's top seller in the state, "Protect the Panther." More than 90,000 Sunshine State drivers purchased the specialty tags for their cars.

"That national exposure absolutely has an impact," said Zina Evans, the school's admissions director. "Whether it's through the commercials, reading the newspaper or constantly having our name out there, it reminds students to take a look at us. College is going to be a well-rounded experience at Florida."

A campus partner

Like most big-time college athletic programs, Florida's is self-sustaining, covering all its expenses — and turning a profit — from ticket and apparel sales, broadcasting rights and fan donations.

But athletics officials insist they don't sit from on high, immune from the university and its academic mission.

Florida collects about \$2.4 million in student fees for athletic purposes. Those go largely to maintaining the school's athletic facilities, most of which are open to student use.

The Gator golf teams play on the campus course, which students can use at a reduced rate. The Stephen C. O'Connell Center is home to men's and women's basketball, volleyball, gymnastics, swimming and diving, but students can also use the pools and weight rooms anytime during the day when no teams are competing.

The filing cabinets in front of Greg McGarity's window support rows of blue and orange commemorative photos, pennants, caps, cereal boxes and liquor bottles. The view leads to a banner showing the celebration after the Gators' 1996 national football championship.

But the senior associate athletics director finds no reason to gloat.

"We are no better, no more important than any other division on campus," he said. "At the same time, we are a very visible department. There's a lot of attention paid to athletics. But we inject ourselves anywhere we can to express our desire to be a vibrant member of campus."

Every Monday morning, fundraising members of development staffs for both athletics and the university meet to discuss what projects they would like to advance, and whose deep pocket they might target.

A few years ago, one of the school's Bull Gators — those who donate at least \$12,000 each to athletics — wanted to endow a special fund for coaches' salaries in honor of his deceased father.

(Such generous gifts normally earn the right to purchase the newly renovated luxury boxes in the football stadium, complete with full kitchens, private baths and padded reclining seats.)

Doug Brown, director of the program, told him the athletics department didn't want donors giving specifically to meet payroll. Instead, he forwarded the donor to the College of Business, where his gift established the Center for Entrepreneurship.

"It's rare we ever get into a wrestling match over a prospect," Brown said. "If you want your money to go to cancer research, that's ultimately where it's going to go. You have to have the interest and the ability to give."

Paul Robell, vice president for development with the University of Florida Foundation, makes sure his staff pores over alumni rolls to find likely targets. A sign on the conference room table reads, "The bee that hangs around the hive doesn't get the honey."

"To be honest, there are some major donors who only want to give to football," he said. "The man whose name is on the stadium was that way. The university went to him and said we wouldn't have athletics without the university."

Half of the gift that named Ben Hill Griffin Stadium went to the school's academic fund.

To help a push to become a top-10 public university in the U.S. News and World Report rankings (Florida was No. 13 this year), the school will announce the public phase of a \$1.2 billion capital campaign in September.

"There's no way around the visibility and exposure you get from winning," Brown said. "Is it the difference between a million-dollar endowment from someone who wasn't going to give but now is? I doubt it. Will somebody be more willing to talk when the university calls soliciting for their annual fund? I really think so."

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One-on-One with Dick Vitale

Dick Vitale couldn't be happier. It's March Madness, his favorite time of year, and the ACC Tournament starts this week in Tampa, just up the Gulf from Vitale's Bradenton, Fla., home. College basketball's loudest, most famous guru broke from his brackets long enough to talk bobbleheads, Bobby Cremins, Maria Sharapova and Dicky V Turkey Burgers with The Post and Courier's Gene Sapakoff, who got a few questions in edgewise.

You always come to the ACC Tournament. How cool is it to have the ACC Tournament come to you?

"The people in the St. Pete and Tampa areas have really gone out of the way and are really excited. I think they're going to roll it out and make it as first class as possible."

Your constantly mentioning The Broken Egg has made those places (in Siesta Key and Lakewood Ranch) the most famous breakfast restaurants in Florida. Will ACC Tournament fans find you there next week?

"Probably so. I do all my radio interviews from there and interviews with writers. I hold court almost every morning. I love sitting outside for a couple of hours, sprawling out my newspapers and just talking to people. It's a blast."

Can you make a menu recommendation?

"I love the Siesta Key omelet, the Longboat Key omelet, the pancakes, the Dicky V Turkey Burger. So many things."

It looks like this sets up as a pretty crazy ACC Tournament. Do you ...

"I can't wait. It should be a hell of a tournament. I think the ACC's the best conference, I really do. I thought the SEC was the best at the beginning of the year but now, I mean, you look at Miami beating Virginia, Wake Forest beats Clemson ... You don't know what to expect each night."

Is North Carolina the favorite?

"Obviously, you probably give them the edge. However, you've seen with their losses that they're a beatable team. They're young and there are so many good young players in the league, trying to make a call is very difficult. And you can never count out Duke in an ACC Tournament."

Again this year you are on the short list of nominees for the Basketball Hall of Fame. How special is that and is this the year ...

"I tell you, I am just so thrilled. Never in my wildest dreams - the furthest thing from my mind - did I think I might get in the Hall of Fame. It wasn't until several years ago I even realized there was such a category as "Contributor." But I get goose bumps just thinking about this and

telling you that just yesterday I got a call from Bob Knight. He said, 'Dick, I want you to know that I have 31 letters in front of me from Hall of Famers - John Wooden, Mike Krzyzewski and others - who say that there is no way the Hall of Fame can have a Contributor category without you being in it.' And he was sending those to the Hall of Fame. I mean, I was just floored. That blew me away. It brings me to tears just telling you about it. I'm 67 and life's been good, man. I've been a lucky guy."

Current College of Charleston head coach Bobby Cremins and former College of Charleston head coach John Kresse are longtime friends of yours. Are they future Hall of Famers?

"I don't know what the criteria are. It's tough. I know there are coaches with 700 wins who are not in. But to me, I'd put both of those guys in."

Were you surprised Bobby jumped back into coaching at Charleston?

"Not really. I just felt every time I saw him he really wanted to get back and teach and Charleston is just an ideal place for what he wanted. It's just so beautiful there. I was there for the first time last July speaking to some Pepsi people at The Sanctuary out on Kiawah Island. We walked around town and got to see a lot of things. Oh, my God, my wife and I thought it was so beautiful. So we're coming back this summer for a wedding."

Where are you right now?

"Cleveland. I just spoke to 800 car dealers at an auto show."

How many speeches do you give a year?

"Oh, I can't even count them. And that doesn't include the ones I just do as favors for people. Like last week I spoke in spring training to the Cincinnati Reds and the Pittsburgh Pirates. I talked to them about how lucky they are to be playing a game so many people love, and about the importance of enthusiasm and of passion and of responsibility."

I see where it has been reported you make \$40,000 to \$50,000 per speech. Wow. Is that right?

"I am not allowed to say but it's just mind-boggling that people would have me in such demand. To think that I was teaching sixth grade in 1970 and making \$9,000 a year, or \$11,000 if you count coaching on the side. The key for me has been those four magic letters: ESPN. And right now, my biggest drive is giving back. We're trying to raise money for the V Foundation and the Boys and Girls Clubs and if people want to go to my Web site (dickvitaleonline.com), it tells how you can help."

There's a little bit of everything on your Web site. How are sales of the official Dick Vitale alarm clocks going?

"My daughters put all that together and it's really amazing with the hats, the T-shirts, the mini-basketballs, the bobbleheads. I would say the mini-basketballs are probably the most popular item. Let's put it this way, I sign more of those than anything else."

What about Clemson's ACC struggles after that 17-0 start?

"I could be wrong but I think it was just very tough psychologically and emotionally to come back from that loss to Virginia. They just looked worn down after that."

And Dave Odom's struggles at South Carolina?

"Just like Oliver Purnell, you're talking about such a quality guy. What he did for Wake Forest in the ACC winning two ACC titles was amazing. He lives, eats and loves the game. But it all comes down to recruiting and he's been unfortunate in not finding that one great player at South Carolina."

Is this the year Winthrop wins an NCAA Tournament game?

"I tell you what, if I'm looking at that bracket on Selection Sunday, even if I'm a Goliath, baby, I start to shake if I see Winthrop up there next to my school's name. They have a real chip on their shoulder, they shoot the 3, they play with such purpose. They're a very dangerous team."

Your three favorite college basketball game-night scenes?

"I love going to Duke, just incredibly intense. If it's Duke and if I'm there, you know it's a big-time game. I admit I'm a little biased toward the Triangle but I also love Chapel Hill. The tradition. All the jerseys hanging from the rafters. And I love Kentucky and the passion of those fans."

I know you're a big tennis fan and that you and Maria Sharapova both live in Bradenton. She's scheduled to play in our Family Circle Cup in April. Do you think she'll win?

"Let me tell you about Maria Sharapova, and it's something I just talked to the Cincinnati Reds about. Several years ago my buddy in Bradenton, Nick Bollettieri, calls me up and says, 'Dick, come on over. There's a player I want you to see.' And it's this young teenage girl hitting backhands and forehands, running left and right hooked up to some kind of harness on the court. The work ethic. The long hours of dedication and sweat. I saw it with my own eyes. That's what makes Maria Sharapova so special, not all the other stuff."

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Athletics

<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v53/i27/27a04302.htm>

From the issue dated March 9, 2007

SIDELINES

U.S. House Panel Questions Myles Brand and Others About Minority Hiring in College Sports

By SARA LIPKA

Two African-American coaches met in this year's Super Bowl — something that is unlikely to happen anytime soon in a college-football championship game. Some members of Congress are asking why.

Last week a subcommittee of the House of Representatives' Committee on Energy and Commerce held a hearing to discuss the absence of minority coaches in big-time college sports.

Just six of the 119 head coaches in Division I-A football programs are African-American, a fact that lawmakers found troubling.

"There is simply no good excuse for this lack of diversity," said Bobby L. Rush, Democrat of Illinois and chairman of the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection, which held the hearing.

Myles Brand, president of the NCAA, as well as several college-athletics officials and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, testified before 11 House members.

Mr. Jackson called fair hiring a civil-rights issue and said he believed that there were more qualified minority candidates than head coaches.

"We didn't learn to coach football last January," he said. "We're talking about barriers that lock people out."

Mr. Brand said the will to hire more black coaches was "just not there right now."

The NCAA runs coaching academies to develop the leadership skills of minority candidates, said Mr. Brand, but it "cannot make the hires."

Lawmakers said they would continue to examine the issue. "If it's not fixed," said Edolphus Towns, Democrat of New York, "there are a lot of legislative things that can be done to fix it."

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Athletics

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From the issue dated March 9, 2007

As Football Players Get Bigger, More of Them Risk a Dangerous Sleep Disorder

A Texas State U. researcher calls for mandatory testing of team members for sleep apnea

By JOSH KELLER

San Marcos, Tex.

Last spring, Gregg Marshall gathered 75 members of the Texas State University football team and asked how many of them had problems sleeping. A third of the players raised their hands.

Among them was Justin Boren, an offensive lineman who set four alarm clocks to get up in the morning. Donovan King, a defensive end, could not stay awake in classes and had trouble concentrating during team meetings. Wellington Deshield, a defensive tackle, said that every day at about noon, he felt like he hit a wall, even though he usually got eight hours of sleep.

Blake Miller, an assistant coach, raised his hand, too. His problems were already apparent: When the team stayed at hotels for away games, they could hear him at night, "snoring the paint off the walls," as one coach put it. Nobody would room with him, and the athletics department eventually got him his own hotel room.

Mr. Marshall, who chairs the respiratory-care department at Texas State and runs a sleep laboratory here on the 27,500-student campus, offered to test every member of the team for sleep apnea. He worried that many of the players showed signs of the condition, which occurs when the breathing passage temporarily closes up, causing the sleeper to intermittently stop breathing. The main indicators of the disorder are daytime sleepiness, and snoring.

Football players are known to be particularly vulnerable to sleep apnea because of their weight and large neck size. Tests of National Football League players have estimated that more than a third of the biggest players, offensive and defensive linemen, have the condition, which is a leading contributor to heart disease.

Many college athletics trainers, especially in big-time college programs, know of the problem and check chronically tired players. But few institutions regularly screen athletes for sleep apnea.

Mr. Marshall wants to change that. He would like to make sleep testing mandatory for all college football players as well as for large-framed athletes, men and women alike, in softball, basketball, and track and field.

"If you're not getting the right sleep, it's going to affect your brain, your heart, your lungs, your liver," he says. "If we don't help them, it is going to cut their life short."

The Bigger They Are ...

Mr. Marshall, who has been at Texas State for 27 years, is skinny, bright-eyed, and relentlessly excited — the opposite of many of the players he tests.

He learned of the link between football and sleep apnea in the same way many athletics trainers did: the death of Reggie White, an NFL Hall of Fame defensive lineman, who died in his sleep in 2004 at age 43. Mr. White had a severe and untreated case of sleep apnea, which an autopsy revealed may have contributed to his death.

A year earlier, five physicians — two of them former professional football players — undertook a major study of sleep disorders among NFL players. The results: An estimated 14 percent of the players, and 34 percent of the linemen, suffered from moderate to severe sleep apnea. (Among the total population, the rate is about 4 percent).

NFL teams that had ignored the issue for years started to encourage their players to get tested. The physicians who had led the study began to work with the Living Heart Foundation, which provides free sleep-apnea testing and other medical services for NFL players.

Colleges and universities have not done nearly as much to protect their players, says Mr. Marshall. When he contacted several college football programs in Texas last year, some trainers he talked to said they would help players who asked for advice on sleeping problems. Some programs, however, took no steps at all.

The few college teams that have done comprehensive screening have found that the rate of sleep apnea among their football players equals the estimated rate among professional players. In response to the NFL study, Ohio State University started screening some football players last year, says Christopher Kaeding, the team's head physician. Of the 33 athletes who were tested, nearly a third were diagnosed with sleep apnea.

The findings do not surprise Allan M. Levy, team physician of the New York Giants and a co-author of the NFL study. Although sleep disorders are often identified with elderly people, vulnerability to sleep apnea depends on weight more than age, he says, and many college players are just as big as the pros.

A Sleep 'Crusade'

Ridding the Texas State football team of sleep apnea has become "a crusade," Mr. Marshall says. To get the equipment needed for testing, he reached out to donors. He won a \$13,500 donation from a former football player who suffers from sleep apnea. When he discovered that several Texas State players lacked the health insurance needed to pay for treatment, he persuaded a respiratory-products company, Respironics Inc., to donate \$65,000 in equipment.

Mr. Marshall's influence can be seen in the two bedrooms that make up the university's sleep lab, where patients stay overnight to be monitored. It is always a challenge to persuade someone to spend two nights sleeping in a lab entangled in monitoring equipment, he says, so he went to considerable lengths: The bedrooms, hidden down a hallway in a drab campus office building, look like hotel suites, down to the fluffy duvets and faux Venetian frescoes — "the envy of visiting sleep researchers," he says. The rooms are furnished almost entirely with donations.

After asking the football players about their sleeping problems last spring, he encouraged some of them to visit him in the lab. Of the 15 players who have been tested, six have shown signs of the disorder. A few, including the former assistant coach, had such severe problems that during a typical eight hours of sleep, they would wake up gasping for air more than 500 times.

"These guys are dipping down into basically a suffocating level of oxygen every night for several hours," says Mr. Marshall. "It's horrifying when you think what this is doing to their bodies."

In the short term, he says, the players are prone to exhaustion, mood shifts, and slower reaction time. Years from now, depending on the severity of the problem, they could be at greater risk of heart attacks, hypertension, depression, and strokes.

The team's coaches, who were initially skeptical of Mr. Marshall's research, now say the testing seems to improve everything about the players who are treated: their personalities, their grades, and their performance on the field.

But even after amassing the equipment, convincing the coaches, lining up the tests, and making the beds himself, Mr. Marshall still has problems getting even those players most at risk to recognize the seriousness of the condition.

Many of the Texas State players who initially raised their hands in Mr. Marshall's meeting have not come in for testing. Of the six who have been diagnosed with possible sleep apnea, three have not returned for further testing and treatment, despite repeated follow-up calls from Mr. Marshall.

Diagnosing Problems

One Texas State player who did seek immediate treatment was Donovan King, a 250-pound defensive end who is in his second year. He says he has snored badly since he was 13.

"Me and my grandmother, we lived in opposite ends of the house," says Mr. King. "But she would wake me up in the middle of the night to tell me that I was snoring."

By the time he reached college, Mr. King says, he was having difficulty staying awake in nearly every class. In an American-literature course last semester, he says, the drowsiness was often so great that he would listen to his iPod, lean his head back, and give in. He tried not to snore.

According to sleep researchers, many cases of sleep apnea go undiagnosed because snoring is not recognized as a symptom. On Texas State's team, when players snore, teammates might throw pillows at them; they would never think to recommend a specialist.

To Mr. King, in fact, his incessant snoring was evidence that he had slept well.

Even team trainers who are on the lookout for symptoms, like fatigue, have trouble diagnosing sleep apnea.

Vyto Kab, a retired player and a co-author of the NFL sleep study, says trainers may get stuck on a basic question: "Was he out all night, or does he have a sleep problem?"

Even when players acknowledge the symptoms of sleep apnea, they often don't know what they mean. Mr. King remembers waking up in the middle of the night and thinking that "something is not right. I would just wake up and not really know what the hell happened."

After Mr. Marshall talked to the Texas State football players, Mr. King was the first to visit the university's sleep lab. Preliminary tests at home were followed by two nights in the lab, where he was hooked up to monitoring devices while he slept. There were two belts to measure his breathing; sensors for jaw and eye movements; a microphone to record his snoring; and electrodes to record his brain's electrical activity.

Tests showed that Mr. King's breathing had been repeatedly interrupted, momentarily waking him up more than 200 times per hour.

To correct his sleep apnea, he now wears a pressurized air mask, called a CPAP, which stands for continuous positive airway pressure, when he goes to sleep. It looks like a scuba mask, with a tube that forces air into his nose to keep his breathing clear. He no longer wakes up so often at night, and he feels more rested.

But wearing the mask scares off a lot of players. The device is not pretty, Mr. King acknowledges. And some players find it difficult to sleep with air forced up their noses.

Expanding Tests

Yet more players than ever need such a device, according to many sleep experts. In recent years, scores of college

Twenty years ago, only nine Texas State players weighed more than 250 pounds, and none was listed above 300. On this year's roster, 21 weigh more than 250 pounds, and seven weigh 300 or more. Players' weights are similar, or greater, in many Division I football programs.

Losing weight, which is a common prescription for sleep apnea, is not an option for football players. To the contrary, coaches might ask an underperforming lineman to gain 20 pounds.

Other than losing weight, says Mr. Marshall, the best thing players can do is be tested — and, if they have a problem, wear the sleep device to bed. He is trying to secure a donation to add the testing capacity for mandatory sleep-apnea screening for all Texas State football players.

And he plans to meet this month with Arthur J. Roberts, president of the Living Heart Foundation, to talk about expanding its program to colleges and universities.

"Someday testing will be such a standard," Mr. Marshall says, "that an athletic department that doesn't do it will seem negligent."

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sports

Wooden's wisdom

By John Henderson
 Denver Post Staff Writer
 Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 03/04/2007 12:19:34 AM MST

Encino, Calif. - He stands on his little balcony, his tiny body belying the powerful aura engulfing his two visitors below. One of them, a huge college basketball fan, immediately develops this eerie vision of the pope, looking down upon the pilgrims, the masses who worship him.

The only difference is John Wooden doesn't look down on anyone.

He still lives here in the same suburban apartment he moved into with his beloved wife, Nell, in 1973. The name "WOODEN" remains on the apartment directory.

His home is as ostentatious as a vinyl welcome mat. Right off Highway 101 as it snakes into San Fernando Valley, the four-room apartment is in a simple, beige, two-story apartment complex, the kind you see in a thousand middle-class suburbs. It's far from a Malibu castle befitting a man who won a record 10 NCAA titles for UCLA, built a record 88-game winning streak, revolutionized the game with his zone press and remains - possibly forever - the greatest coach the college game has known.

He has just returned from VIP's, the 1960s-style diner in nearby Tarzana where he still goes four to five mornings a week at 8:30 sharp. He moves slowly around his cozy apartment - the end result of an artificial hip and no cartilage left in his knees.

Then again, John Wooden is 96. What his legs have succumbed to, his mind has not.

He points to the NCAA President's Gerald R. Ford Award and the U.S. Medal of Freedom, the highest honor given to an American citizen, from President George W. Bush. He holds up his most prized possession, a bronze medal for academic and athletic achievement from his senior year at Purdue in 1932.

He then points to a painting of his most beloved memory. No, it's not one of his 10 national champions, pictures of which form a pyramid on a den wall. It's a painting of himself and Nell. He was 16; she was 15.

"She was the only girl I ever went with," he says proudly.

Nell, whom he met at a carnival when he was 14 growing up in Martinsville, Ind., died March 21, 1985. To this day, on the 21st of every month, he writes a note to her and places it under her pillow. He didn't attend a Final Four for 10 years after her death.

"It doesn't get any easier, does it?" he is asked.

Wooden shakes his head. During a 45-minute interview, it's the only question he doesn't answer with words.

However, he stays too active to dwell on the past, both good and bad. He speaks 30 times a year at the Arco Building in downtown Los Angeles for American Funds. He speaks at fundraisers for schools and churches, and attends nearly every UCLA home game, sitting in the same seat behind the bench where he patiently signs autographs before tipoff.

Basketball remains his passion and he remains as sharp - if not as agile - as the slender little man with the rolled-up program who made Hall of Famers from Lew Alcindor to Bill Walton jump at his calm commands.

Low-key excellence

Wearing a blue cardigan sweater over a blue denim shirt and gray slacks, John Wooden sits back and discusses the game and life he still loves. He says he attributes his longevity to only two meals a day - one at VIP's, of course - and a lifetime of abstaining from alcohol. He smoked only briefly in the Navy.

He also attributes an attitude he thinks more people, young and old, should have.

"I've always tried to teach and practice, 'Don't be affected by either the highs or lows,'" he says. "'Don't let either one bother you.' I've said the two

most important words - and they're in my bookcases - one is love and the other is balance. They are the two most important words in our language. Just keep things in perspective."

Maybe that was as big a key as Alcindor's hook, Walton's passing or that withering UCLA press. If any reader is old enough to remember Wooden's national titles in the 1960s and 1970s, do you recall Gail Goodrich or Sidney Wicks or Marques Johnson jumping up on a scorer's table with the net around his neck?

Didn't think so.

"I never wanted excessive celebrations at all for myself or my players," Wooden says. "On each of my 10 national championship teams, we had the game won before the last few seconds. I had a timeout. I'd tell my players, 'Now, I know you want to get the nets but let's don't make fools out of ourselves. Let the student body and alumni make fools of themselves.'"

Wooden always did, and always will, refer to himself more as a teacher than a coach. In an era when youth rebelled against authority, Wooden and the Bruins were in their prime. They won national championships with a backdrop of students raging against the Vietnam War.

Instead of sheltering his players from the real world, Wooden pushed them toward it. Walton marched against the war. Alcindor, later Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, spoke up for minority rights. The best college players in the land were also among the most engaging, free-spirited interviews.

"I wanted them that way," Wooden says. "I've said to young people, 'If you want to be heard you have to listen.'... It reminds me of a little verse I heard when I was in grade school in the 1920s. It said, 'A wise old owl sat in an oak. The more he heard, the less he spoke. The less he spoke, the more he heard. Now wasn't he a wise old bird?'"

Old-school philosophy

While Wooden let players be themselves off the court, they were all his on it. Talk about old school - Wooden is as traditional as a pair of 1965 Chuck Taylor high-top sneakers. He is asked which developments he dislikes about the current game.

If there was a spittoon nearby, his answer would've landed in it.

"I hate the dunk," he says. "I think it's showmanship and it hurts team play.... Magic Johnson was more of a showman. I'll take a John Stockton or an Oscar Robertson or a Jerry West."

Wooden's memory flashes back to 1967. The NCAA outlawed the dunk, and it devastated Alcindor. He thought the NCAA did it because of him. Wooden served on the NCAA rules committee and told Alcindor they did it because the Houston Cougars, with a Phi Slama Jama style without the moniker of their 1983 younger brothers, kept bending the rims during warm-ups.

"That was Lewis' sophomore year, but he didn't dunk that much," Wooden says. "I told him, 'Lewis, I'm glad it happened. It's going to make you a better player. You will work harder on your hook and your fadeaways. Lewis, you're not going to have any trouble dunking when you get in the pros.'"

He softens, however, when he discusses the shot clock and 3-point basket. He remembers 1967 when Oregon held the ball most of the game before losing to his team, 34-25, and how USC played keepaway and won, 46-44, in 1969. He also can't help wondering how many points Keith Wilkes or Goodrich would've scored with a 3-point line.

"The clock would've helped us in many ways," he says. "I always liked that. As for the 3-point goal, some years it would've helped us. Other years it wouldn't have, but I wouldn't have changed my game at all defensively because I never wanted to give up those shots.

"But I would've done more to set up my 3-point shooters."

Molder of great teams

If Wilkes and Goodrich would be worth more in today's game, good Lord, how much would Wooden be worth? It's believed Kentucky's Tubby Smith is the nation's highest-paid college basketball coach at \$1.9 million. He has won one national title. Wooden not only won 10, he won seven straight from 1967-73.

And he adapted his game to his players. He won his first championship in 1964 with a 6-foot-5 center, Fred Slaughter. He won with superstar centers such as Alcindor and Walton, and he won his last title in 1975 with one returning starter, versatile forward David Meyers.

In other words, Wooden listened.

Yet the highest salary Wooden reached was \$38,000. He has no regrets. He loves this home in Encino.

"I don't think any coach in college should make more than the chancellor or president of a university," he says. "I think it's ridiculous. I'm not sure they should make more than a head of a department."

He is told coaches are under more pressure than a university president.

"I don't buy that in any way," he snaps. "Is there any more pressure on them than the butcher? Or the baker? Or the candlestick maker? Whatever you do, you should put pressure on yourself to do a good job. If you're affected by outside pressure in any way as a coach with the alumni ... what the hell's the alumni? It's keeping things in perspective."

He believes money should be spread out. As an old Indiana high school star, Wooden would use that state's system and expand the NCAA Tournament to every school in the country. Each school would get at least one share of the TV pie. However, he doesn't think that wealth should spread to players who have been squawking about being poor pawns in a billion-dollar chess game.

"Absolutely not," he says. "They are getting paid. They're getting a free college education. ... Furthermore, let's say you do pay them. Are you going to pay your football players more than you pay the women's soccer players? You'd better not."

No secret to his success

Wooden still has an inner fire that rarely surfaced on the sideline. If you want to see it, suggest UCLA hasn't been the same without him, that it dipped to embarrassing depths such as Walt Hazzard's 16-14 season in 1988 or Steve Lavin's 10-19 pratfall in 2003.

"How far down did they go?" he says. "Two years after I left, the coaches won about 85 percent of their games. The fifth year after I retired, the team went to the championship game where they lost. I think if you look at the percentage of winning - knocking out one or two years - it's about as high as any team in the country, even though they've changed many coaches."

He does not meddle with the program. He speaks to a team or player only when asked. He won't prowl practices as coach Ben Howland prepares his second-ranked Bruins (26-4) for another title-game run. Wooden can't wait for March Madness and, as the visitor leaves, the old coach hands him a cardboard placard that helps explain why his Bruins did so well in March.

It's his "Pyramid of Success." He worked on it from 1934-48 while he taught and coached at Indiana State. Along the bottom lists industriousness, friendship, loyalty, cooperation, enthusiasm. At the point is competitive greatness.

It reads, "Be at your best when your best is needed. Enjoyment of a difficult challenge."

At 96, John Wooden is still the best. He is the best because the college basketball world can still enjoy him.

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Posted on Sat, Mar. 03, 2007

Root, root, root for underdogs of the madness

WENDELL BARNHOUSE
COLLEGE BASKETBALL INSIDER

No matter the emotion, no matter the excitement, there's a rule that sports writers are expected to follow: No cheering.

You, Cherished Reader, are not bound by any restrictions. If you don't cheer, we don't have a reason to exist.

So, while March Madness gains momentum as the annual closing chapter to the college basketball season, here are some suggestions on where to channel your rooting interests.

Root for Michigan State junior guard Drew Neitzel. Spartans coach Tom Izzo said Neitzel looks like his son, Steven. Steven is 6 years old. Neitzel is a former point guard who has become a combo scoring guard out of necessity. He is an outstanding college player who has made his team better.

Root for Army's women's team. Last year Army made the NCAA Tournament for the first time. Less than a month later, the team's first-year coach died from an arrhythmic episode of the heart. Maggie Dixon, younger sister of Pitt coach Jamie Dixon, was 28.

Root for Air Force to win at least one game in the NCAA Tournament. The Falcons play team ball and their old-fashioned style is a pleasure to watch. The academy has never won an NCAA Tournament game.

Root for Butler and guard A.J. Graves. The Bulldogs served notice they were dangerous by winning the NIT Season Tip-Off. Pound for pound, Graves (at a buck-55) might be the nation's toughest and best player.

Root for Virginia Tech. The Hokies are new kids on the block in the Atlantic Coast Conference, but they're a veteran team that has been through a lot of off-court personal tragedies.

Root for Jermareo Davidson. The Alabama senior lost his brother to a shooting and his girlfriend in a car accident (which also injured Davidson when they were in Atlanta visiting his wounded brother). A post player who averages 14.1 points and 8.5 rebounds a game, Davidson and his team deserve some good fortune.

Root for teams from the Missouri Valley Conference and the Colonial Athletic Association. Those conferences placed six teams in the field last year (CBS' Jim Nantz and Billy Packer are still wondering why) and this year those leagues have teams that again are capable of some bracket racket.

Root for Nick Fazekas. The 6-foot-11 senior considered entering the NBA Draft after his junior season but made a wise choice to return for his final collegiate season. Fazekas is averaging 20.9 points and 11.4 rebounds per game and he makes Nevada a team capable of making a Final Four run.

Root for Virginia Military Institute. The Keydets have as much basketball history as Lindsay Lohan has acting awards. Playing a frenetic fast-breaking style, VMI is the nation's top scoring team (101.6 per game). It faces top-seeded Winthrop in today's Big South Conference tournament final with an NCAA Tournament bid on the line. VMI trying to short-circuit scoreboards in an NCAA first-round game would be a hoot.

FAST BREAKS

Wanted: No. 1 seeds

Teams in contention for the No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament have stumbled the last two weeks.

As of now, UCLA and Ohio State would be the No. 1 and No. 2 overall seeds in the bracket. After that, the contenders have played like pretenders:

Florida, a potential No. 1 seed, has lost three of its last four.

North Carolina, a potential No. 1 seed, is 4-4 in its last eight games after winning 17 of 18.

Wisconsin, a No. 1 seed by default, has lost its last two Big Ten games.

Texas A&M could have elevated itself into No. 1 seed contention but lost in double overtime at Texas.

Georgetown, if it could have continued its winning streak, could have been a solid No. 2 and a borderline No. 1. The Hoyas, though, lost at Syracuse.

NIT picking

While the process of selecting and seeding the 65-team NCAA Tournament field is always challenging, the National Invitation Tournament has its own perplexities.

For the second season, the NCAA is running the NIT. And this year, the field has been whittled from 40 to 32 teams. Teams that win regular-season championships in their conferences automatically make the NIT field if they fail to earn an NCAA Tournament bid.

Factor in the reduced field with the regular-season champions rule and there will be some teams left out of the NIT that will be as disappointed as the final cuts in the NCAA selection process.

Dribbles

Oklahoma fans who study box scores had reason to gag on Wednesday's results. Texas freshman forward Damion James scored a career-high 22 against Texas A&M and Villanova freshman Scottie Reynolds lit up Connecticut for a career-high 40. Both players originally signed with the Sooners but were released from their commitments when Kelvin Sampson left for Indiana.

Six-foot-8 Massachusetts senior Stephane Lasme is the first NCAA Division I player from Gabon, a country in West Africa. Wednesday night against LaSalle, he had 17 points, 10 rebounds and 10 blocked shots to become the third D-I player with four triple-doubles in a season, joining Michael Anderson of Drexel in 1986 and Jason Kidd of Cal in 1994. Lasme is averaging 13.6 points, 9.4 rebounds and 5.2 blocks per game.

Marquette's home game with Pitt will be ESPN's featured Saturday night game of the week. The school will honor members of the 1977 national championship team coached by the late Al McGuire.

South Carolina's Tre' Kelley is the top scorer (21.5 points) in SEC games but he wasn't one of the 10 players named to the National Association of Basketball Coaches Division I All-District 5 team. "I think it's despicable," Gamecocks coach Dave Odom said. "I'm ashamed of the coaching profession for that kind of vote.... If that's the way that coaches are going to treat the voting, then we ought to do away with coaches' votes."

Trash talk

Georgia Tech junior Anthony Morrow on heaving the ball toward the ceiling to punctuate the Yellow Jackets' 84-77 defeat of North Carolina on Thursday:

"I hadn't really had the opportunity to do that, and they told me not to. But this is a good feeling to beat North Carolina, a great team. I went with my emotions, felt like I had to throw the ball in the air. It felt good."

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Article published Mar 4, 2007

Yow living one victory at a time

ADVERTISEMENT

"One day they take me out on a stretcher in an ambulance, and they just went right on practicing. I mean, they just went right on and practiced. I did what I had to do. They did what they had to do, and then we meet up again."

Kay Yow,

N.C. State coach

GREENSBORO -- Saturday was a good day for Kay Yow. Today, she hopes, will be even better. She's not looking beyond that, however.

Yow, the basketball coach at N.C. State, led her team into today's final of the ACC Women's Tournament with a shocking 70-65 victory over top-ranked Duke on a Saturday that no one who was there will ever forget. When it ended, the Gibsonville native slumped into her chair, leaned against an assistant coach and smiled.

Within seconds, Yow was back on her feet walking to shake hands with the opposing coach and then to midcourt, where she was given an award, and then to the other side of the Greensboro Coliseum floor for an interview on national television.

Today, her team will play North Carolina for the ACC championship, then await word from the NCAA for N.C. State's seeding in the national tournament. The improbable run of Sandra Kay Yow moves on.

"This is no time to stop," she said. "We've got to keep going."

Yow is suffering from cancer, going through cycles of chemotherapy and blood transfusions while coaching basketball at the highest level of the women's game. Her team's victory over previously unbeaten Duke was the 706th of her career. Almost as soon as the cheering stopped, she already was preparing for what she hopes will be the 707th.

She admits the emotion is what drives her, and her players suggest it's what drives them, too. After she missed two months of the season because of cancer treatments, Yow has guided her team to 10 victories in 11 games and to the verge of the school's first conference championship since 1991.

"You won't believe this, but the emotion lifts me up," she said. "I feel stronger with this."

She had sat slumped in a chair the day before and tried to recount the past few months that led to this weekend. It all started back in November as she prepared her team for a trip to Arizona near the beginning of a long basketball season. Yow, who had endured a second bout with breast cancer more than two years ago, had been feeling unusually tired. She had no idea how long the season would turn out to be.

"I mean, we were going along and we were fine, and then on a Tuesday before Thanksgiving they did a test that showed exactly what the problem was," she said. "They said, 'We're going to do chemo tomorrow.' We were leaving on a West Coast trip for Thanksgiving. That meant, like, 'You just have to not coach. Indefinitely.' It was just like it came out of nowhere. I mean, boom! This is it. It hit the staff. It hit the players. It hit me. They left and went west, and I went to chemo."

She dropped in on her team from time to time, just to let the players see her, just to let them know she was still there. They would always cry, promise to play harder and try to put the situation out of their minds.

Yow wouldn't let them. She persuaded her players to accept her fate and make it part of the team. As hard as that sounds, Yow thought it was therapeutic for everyone. After two months, she returned. Three weeks later, they watched her crumple in practice. The next thing they knew, she was rushed to the hospital.

"One day they take me out on a stretcher in an ambulance, and they just went right on practicing," she said. "I mean, they just went right on and practiced. I did what I had to do. They did what they had to do, and then we meet up again."

They met up again Saturday, Yow and her team. They defeated Duke in a wildly emotional setting, playing for a coach and a cause, hoping to extend the weekend one more day and extend the miracle run one more game.

At the end, as a celebration erupted in the middle of the court in front of her, Yow, less than two weeks from her 65th birthday, slumped in her chair and leaned hard against Stephanie Glance, the assistant who took over the team while Yow was away. Yow sat for only a second, smiled wanly and stood. Her day was far from over.

As the celebration continued, people began to congregate near midcourt. A table was brought in, and Virginia coach Debbie Ryan was suddenly at Yow's side. Herself a cancer survivor, Ryan walked with Yow to the middle of the court, where they were introduced together to the cheering crowd and given the conference's Spirit and Courage Award. All the other coaches in the league, including Duke's Gail Goestenkers, stood in a line and clapped.

Then they all hugged again, and Yow walked off the floor to meet with her team, to meet with the media, to prepare for another game, looking forward to today, praying for tomorrow.

"Tough times," she said this week. "But we just have to keep going."

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The Patriot-News

Coaching ranks have too few women

Sunday, March 04, 2007

BY CHUCK KENNEDY

The Florida Gators defeated the Ohio State Buckeyes in the BCS national championship game. However, neither team scored particularly well in the inaugural "Glass Ceiling Report Card."

The report card evaluates how Division 1-A colleges do in providing coaching opportunities for women. The Gators received a D grade and ranked 8th in the Southeastern Conference. Although the Buckeyes received a C, they ranked last in the Big Ten. The report card evaluated and ranked 113 colleges and the 11 conferences in Division 1-A according to the number of female head coaches and assistant coaches of women's teams, and the number of female head and assistant coaches of men's teams for the 2004-05 academic/sports year. A school's score is based on the total of the percentages in the four categories.

The Central Florida Golden Knights of Conference USA were the study's champions with a score of 187.62. The Ball State Cardinals (162.61) of the Mid-American Conference and the Northwestern Wildcats (150.0) of the Big Ten finished 2nd and 3rd. The other conference champs were: Miami (Atlantic Coast Conference), Iowa State (Big 12), Connecticut (Big East), Vanderbilt (SEC), California (PAC-10), Florida International (Sun Belt), Idaho (Western Athletic Conference) and UNLV (Mountain West).

The Big Ten was the top conference with an average score of 119.08 and a C+. The conference was paced by Northwestern with an A and four schools with B's: Penn State, Iowa, Illinois and Minnesota. The lowest conference was the Mountain West with an average score of 94.8. It was the only conference with an F.

Twenty-nine colleges cracked the 60 percent standard for female head coaches of women's teams and 35 cracked 60 percent for female assistant coaches of women's teams. The Big Ten set the pace with five schools achieving the standard for head female coaches and six schools for assistant coaches.

Fifteen schools received A's: Central Florida, Ball State, Northwestern, Memphis, Vanderbilt, Idaho, Buffalo, UAB, Miami (Fla.), Florida International, Connecticut, Tulsa, Clemson, Southern Mississippi and California. Eighteen received F's: Florida Atlantic, Marshall, SMU, Hawaii, New Mexico State, BYU, Toledo, Eastern Michigan, Missouri, Boise State, Georgia Tech, Baylor, Houston, Arizona, Colorado State, East Carolina, USC and Utah State.

The East Carolina Pirates, USC Trojans and Utah State Aggies had scores lower than 70.0. The Aggies ranked last with a score of 52.1.

Of the top 10 teams in the final college football polls for the 2006-07 season, six finished with a D or an F. Florida, LSU, Louisville and West Virginia had D's; USC and Boise State had F's. Four colleges finished last in their conferences: Ohio State, USC, Boise State and West Virginia. The Big Ten was distinguished by Michigan with a B and Wisconsin and Ohio State with C's. Auburn of the SEC also had a C.

Over three decades since the passage of Title IX in 1972, less than 50 percent of the head coaches of women's teams of Division 1-A colleges were women. Only 53.2 percent of assistant coaches of women's teams were women.

Sue Hutchins, softball coach of the Michigan Wolverines, once said, "I grew up wanting to be Bill Freehan, the catcher for the Detroit Tigers. Now my players are the role models." Don't these players deserve opportunities to become role models for future players, as their coaches?

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NCAA backtracks on rules

By Ryan Wood

Monday, March 5, 2007

The NCAA screwed up.

That's what Football Rules Committee chair Michael Clark bluntly admitted last month, when the committee went back to the drawing board and released new rules that likely will go into effect for this fall's college football season.

Looking for ways to speed up games a year ago, the NCAA implemented rules that influenced the start of the game clock. Game times went down, yes, but the number of plays drastically declined, too. Strategy had to be reformed, and many coaches weren't happy with the tinkering.

"The changes we made last year, overall, did not have a positive effect on college football at all levels," Clark confessed.

Rule 3-2-5 and 3-2-5-e have been converted back to 2005 form, meaning the game clock won't start until the ball is legally touched on kickoffs (as opposed to when the ball is kicked), and the game clock also won't go until the ball is snapped after a change of possession (rather than on the official's signal).

The NCAA, though, remains interested in cutting down game times.

"We're going to restore plays," Clark said, "but if we attack dead periods in the game, we might be able to get the same result."

That in mind, the Football Rules Committee recommended several rules designed to speed up the game, make the game more exciting and preserve both the number of plays and the traditional strategies that coaches have used for decades. The changes now must be considered by the Rules Oversight Panel before taking effect:

Among them:

- Charged team timeouts now will be 30 seconds shorter. In addition, the play clock will be only 15 seconds after a television timeout instead of the standard 25 seconds.
- Instant replay reviews will be limited to two minutes.
- The play clock will be used on kickoffs and will start when the official gives the football to the kicker. In the past, kickers had unlimited time to prepare for a kickoff.
- Kickoffs will originate at the 30-yard line instead of the 35.

The last rule is expected to decrease touchbacks, which stop play and prevent a potentially exciting return. The NCAA tried to help this a year ago when they chose to lower the kicking tee from two inches to one.

But that didn't prove to have much of an impact in Division I-A. Kansas University kicker Scott Webb, for example, actually got better despite the more challenging tee. In 2006, he booted touchbacks on 51 percent of his kickoffs (35 of

69). In 2005 with the higher tee, Webb had touchbacks on 47 percent of his kickoffs (28 of 60).

With five more yards to boot, Webb — and other kickers — can expect touchback totals to go down this year.

“Worst case scenario, it adds field position and scoring to the game,” said Clark, coach at Division-III Bridgewater (Va.) College. “Defensive coaches may not like it, but I think fans will.”

The Rules Oversight Panel will meet next week and choose to accept the new rules or send them back to the Rules Committee for reconsideration. They’re expected to pass, and that would accomplish what the Rules Committee aspired for this offseason — cutting down game time without cutting out the game itself.

“We’re trying to find the best of both worlds,” Clark said. “So let’s restore the plays, attack dead and down time and see if we can’t get the same 12 or 13 minutes off the game time.”

Posted on Sun, Mar. 04, 2007

Missouri Valley Conference celebrates 100 years of hoops

It's taken many forms through the years, but one thing has stayed consistent: excellence.

By RANDY COVITZ
The Kansas City Star

ST. LOUIS | Xavier McDaniel always wanted to be on the same team as Larry Bird. Now he is.

McDaniel, the former Wichita State star and consensus All-America in 1985, joined Bird on the Missouri Valley Conference's all-time team as the league celebrated its 100th year during this weekend's postseason tournament.

"If I was teammates with him while I was in the NBA, I would have me some championship rings," said McDaniel from his home in Columbia, S.C., where he owns a construction company, 34X-Man Housing and a transport company, 34X-Man Trucking.

Besides McDaniel and Bird, the other first-team selections were Oscar Robertson of Cincinnati, Hersey Hawkins of Bradley and Ed Macauley of Saint Louis. The coach is the late Henry Iba of Oklahoma A&M.

"I'd take that team," Bird joked by phone from Indianapolis, where he is president of basketball operations for the Indiana Pacers. "We've got shooters, we've got rebounders, we've got guys who can do about everything."

That two of the players and the coach are from schools no longer in the conference speaks to the resiliency of the Valley, which was founded at the Midland Hotel in Kansas City on Jan. 12, 1907. The charter members were Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska and Washington University of St. Louis. Two months later, Drake and Iowa State were admitted.

During the 100 years, the Valley has included 32 teams, ranging from Detroit to New Mexico State and even included Washburn of Topeka during 1934-41 before settling into the 10 teams that have comprised the conference since 1994.

But the league never lacked for talent. Four of the five members of the all-Valley first team were national players of the year, and Robertson won the honor three times. McDaniel was the first player in NCAA history to lead the nation in both scoring (27.2) and rebounding (14.8) in 1985.

And some of the players who did not make the first team but were included on the league's 50 greatest players — including Wes Unseld and Junior Bridgeman of Louisville, Antoine Carr and Warren Armstrong of Wichita State, Mike Glenn of Southern Illinois, Chet "The Jet" Walker of Bradley, Paul Hogue of Cincinnati and Bob Kurland of Oklahoma A&M — could easily substitute for any in the starting five.

"The Valley was a forwards' league ... a lot of players who were 6-7, 6-8, 6-9," said McDaniel, who played at 6-7, 205 pounds. "It was a league for two-guards (shooting guards) and three-men (small forwards). We didn't have the big 7-footers all the time, but the Missouri Valley was a very good conference. The mid-majors are getting their due now, but I didn't consider it a mid-major. I didn't know what a mid-major was until people started classifying things."

...

In its 100 years, the Missouri Valley Conference has won four NCAA basketball titles — back-to-back championships by Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State) in 1945-46 and Cincinnati in 1961-62 — and made 14 other Final Four appearances.

"I loved that league," said former Louisville coach Denny Crum, selected one of the conference's 10 greatest coaches. "A lot of the success of the league had to do with the rivalries. We had a great rivalry with Memphis and Cincinnati. I always felt every game you played, you had to play well to win, no matter where you went. Everybody was competitive."

In 1971-72, Crum's first year at Louisville, the Cardinals and Memphis State each went 12-2 in the Valley. Even though the Tigers won the two head-to-head meetings, there was no tie-breaker procedure, so the two teams met in a playoff game in Nashville, Tenn., to determine the conference's representative to the NCAA Tournament.

"They got half the arena, and we had the other half, and it was full," Crum recalled. "The noise was unbelievable."

Louisville won 83-72 and eventually advanced to the Final Four. The next year, Memphis State won the Valley — this was still when only

one team per conference qualified for the NCAA Tournament — and advanced to the Final Four, losing to UCLA in the title game.

The Valley's last Final Four appearance was in 1979, when Bird led little-known Indiana State to a 33-0 record before losing to Magic Johnson's Michigan State team in the championship game, still the highest-rated telecast in tournament history.

"As we went along that season, I don't think any of us thought we would go undefeated," Bird said. "We were a real team, everybody played together. I was scoring most of the points, but everybody knew their roles. Winning 33 in a row ... that was a lot of games."

...

Indiana State's Final Four appearance came just after an exodus by Cincinnati, Louisville, Memphis and North Texas. The Valley replaced those schools with Southern Illinois, Creighton and Illinois State, but it had lost some of its luster.

"The first 75-80 years of the league, we had something amounting to a revolving door for membership," said Doug Elgin, Valley commissioner for the last 19 years. "It was very transitional. There was a period from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, we were struggling."

The conference, with eight schools, added Missouri State in 1990 and Northern Iowa in 1991, lost Tulsa and replaced it with Evansville in 1994. Those schools, with anchor programs Southern Illinois, Illinois State, Wichita State, Bradley, Creighton and Drake, have ushered in the modern era of the Missouri Valley.

"What set the table for the modern era and recent resurgence was bringing our postseason tournament to St. Louis," Elgin said.

The tournament, dubbed Arch Madness, has been played in St. Louis since 1991, and attendance has grown every year, capped by an average of 12,747 for the five sessions last season, a total that is expected to be shattered this weekend.

The success in the stands has been mirrored on the court. In 1999, the Valley sent three teams to the NCAA Tournament for the first time, highlighted by Missouri State reaching the Sweet 16. In 2002, Southern Illinois reached the Sweet 16. Last year, the Valley received four bids, and both Bradley and Wichita State reached the Sweet 16.

"The Valley has always taken a lot of pride in its basketball," said Creighton coach Dana Altman, one of the 10 greatest coaches. "Because of that, some of the schools have a very good basketball tradition. The administrations at each of the universities have recognized the importance of basketball. Doug Elgin and his staff have created a great atmosphere in St. Louis, putting pressure on institutions to make a commitment to basketball."

"And we've got great cities. That's one of the things that has really been underestimated. Omaha is a wonderful city. Springfield, Mo. ... Peoria... these are basketball communities. Because we're not on TV all the time, people underestimate the tradition at these schools. Bradley's got outstanding tradition. We have pretty good tradition ... Wichita State ... you look through the years, they've been a basketball school for a long time."

During the past three years, the increased television exposure has skyrocketed, going from three games televised on ESPN's networks to more than 30 this season, in addition to its Fox regional package and today's championship game being shown by CBS for the second straight year.

"When you look at the Valley, I'm not sure it's not the best league of its kind in the country in terms of administration, what it does for its schools, the makeup of the schools and the success of the tournament," said Drake coach Tom Davis, who has coached in both the Big East and Big 10.

"Maybe there are more successful leagues like the Valley, but I think it ranks up there with any leagues of its kind."

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Sunday, March 4, 2007

ERIC CRAWFORD

RPI looks like a system stuck in the past

Imagine this scenario: The NCAA Tournament selection committee sits in its conference room, gathering data from its Commodore and Tandy computers.

Maybe the committee is thinking about mandating that the short shorts come back for this tournament or playing it without the three-point shot or shot clock.

Are those Members Only jackets they're wearing? Right. No way the committee would go retro. It's ludicrous.

So answer this: Why will the committee use a computer ranking that was devised in 1981, with only minor updates since?

This is the time of year when the letters RPI get more airtime than IRS. The Ratings Percentage Index will be the statistical flavor of the week.

Advertisement It's a strange place, RPI Land. In this numerical nirvana, the University of Kentucky (20-9) ranks higher (10th) than defending national champion Florida (25-5 and No. 11).

Here, Nevada Las Vegas is ranked higher than Kansas and Brigham Young is better than Georgetown. Here, Vanderbilt can beat UK twice and yet still rank 27 spots below the Wildcats.

Can we agree, whatever the "R" in RPI stands for, it isn't reality?

The RPI was designed to measure strength of schedule and performance against that schedule. The problem is, this time of year the numbers are repeated so much that they seem a part of a team's DNA.

We in the media like numbers. They're easy. They're quick. They can illustrate a great deal in a short time.

Unfortunately, they also can paint a picture that isn't quite accurate.

Scrap the RPI?

That's why I agreed when I heard ESPN's Jay Bilas say last week that it's time for the RPI to R.I.P.

"They should get rid of it," Bilas said on ESPN's "College GameNight." "The RPI has taken on a life of its own because it affects perception. ... We can do better than the RPI."

Bilas called for a "precision instrument" that would better measure the quality of wins when they happened. He argued, for instance, that UK's win over the University of Louisville looks good now because the Cardinals have climbed up the charts as the season has gone on. But at the time, U of L was struggling.

I wouldn't go that far. Neither would two big-time hoops number-crunchers: Jerry Palm of CollegeRPI.com and Ken Pomeroy of kenpom.com.

"I wouldn't make that a part of it," Pomeroy said yesterday. "But I don't understand why they haven't gone to a better system. I mean, you don't see people sitting around playing games on Atari systems anymore. Back in 1981, you didn't have all the TV coverage we have now, you didn't have the Internet."

The RPI worked great then. But now, we have so much data to figure out what the important factors are historically, last 10 games, and all the other things. Why not build a system that measures that?"

Forget the numbers

One legitimate fear is that the better the ranking, the more people will defer to it. The last thing basketball needs is a system like football, with the ranking the final word.

"This isn't the BCS, where the numbers are supposed to do the thinking, and furthermore, the committee doesn't want a set of numbers to do the work," Palm said. "The RPI is fine, given how it's used."

The RPI works for the committee because the committee knows what it is for and how to use it. That's not always the case in the media and public.

Because it is a number endorsed by the NCAA, the RPI is thrown around in a round-the-clock news, talk-radio and Internet cycle leading up to the tournament. That's the perception Bilas talked about.

And as long as all of us amateur bracketologists are going to play with it, we might as well have a ranking based in reality.

Reach Eric Crawford at (502) 582-4372 or ecrawford@courier-journal.com. Comment on this column, and read his blog and previous columns, at www.courier-journal.com/crawford.

STORYCHAT

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It's a record when a UK fan has three teeth in the same row.

UL-Teeth
UK-tooth

Posted: Sun Mar 04, 2007 11:20 am

Yes, those December championship banners litter the rafters of Rupp. I wonder if UofK will have to build an annex to Memorial Colliseum in anticipation of more Banjo Bowl trophies and December state championships?

UofL: NCAA

UofK: RIP

Posted: Sun Mar 04, 2007 11:17 am

Who cares about the RPI? The only numbers that matter is this one:

Kentucky 61
Louisville 49

3 in a row & counting!

Posted: Sun Mar 04, 2007 11:09 am

What's that noise? A low rumble.

StarTribune.com | MINNEAPOLIS - ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

Last update: March 03, 2007 – 9:32 PM

Diversity makes staff stand out

New Gophers coach Tim Brewster has six black coaches among his nine full-time, on-field assistants, tied with Miami for the most among BCS schools.

By [Chip Scoggins](#), Star Tribune

Curtis Thomas, a Gophers football recruit from Texas, welcomed a group of Minnesota coaches into his home for a visit less than a week before national signing day last month.

Head coach Tim Brewster and three assistants made their sales pitch and left that night with a verbal commitment from Thomas. The decision, he said, was based on several factors, mainly where he felt most comfortable. But he also took notice that the three assistants who visited were black.

"I was definitely aware of it," Thomas said.

In assembling his first coaching staff, Brewster hired a diverse staff that represents a marked departure inside an athletic department that has been criticized in the past for its lack of minorities in leadership positions.

Six of Brewster's nine full-time, on-field assistant coaches are black. That is tied with the University of Miami for the most black assistants among the 66 Bowl Championship Series schools.

By comparison, former Gophers coach Glen Mason had only two black assistants in 2006. As a department, Minnesota has no black head coaches and only three black assistant coaches total in the other 24 sports.

Brewster said his main objective in building a staff was to find quality coaches, regardless of race.

"To be completely honest, I didn't think about the number of black coaches I wanted on my staff," he said. "I went out and hired proven recruiters and proven coaches. In the end, somebody said to me, 'You know you have six black coaches on your staff.' I did not realize that. I'm thrilled with how the staff has evolved."

Floyd Keith, executive director of the Black Coaches Association, praised Brewster for his staff's diversity.

"Two-thirds of his staff being coaches of color and being capable coaches is a positive thing," Keith said. "I have to believe that he made the right choices for his staff and what he felt and that he's pretty confident that he's got the right people in place for him to be successful. I'm quite pleased to see the direction he is going."

Relationships critical

In a sport in which 46.1 percent of the participants are black, according to an NCAA study, the diversity of Brewster's staff could help open doors in recruiting, particularly as the Gophers attempt to make inroads on the national level.

"I'm sure for some kids it is a factor, but I don't know if it gives us that much of an advantage in recruiting," defensive coordinator Everett Withers said. "I think the first thing is you want to hire good football coaches. I don't see it as an issue of color. I think it's a matter of feeling comfortable with the guys you hire."

Minnesota athletic director Joel Maturi said he asked every candidate he interviewed for the head job how many minority assistant coaches he planned to hire. As a recruit, Thomas said the number of black assistant coaches was not a major factor in his choosing Minnesota but more of a piece to the puzzle.

"They showed me a lot of love and made me feel safe," he said. "They made me feel comfortable right away during my visit."

Those were qualities Brewster looked for when he hired his staff. He said he wanted strong mentors who could connect with the players. In many situations race plays a significant role in that process.

"I looked for guys who are going to be strong role models," he said. "Unfortunately in today's society so many kids grow up in single-parent homes. Many times they don't have a father figure. What we have to do in a lot of these instances is provide [that]. I feel like I'm the father of 125 sons. I want our coaches to feel the same way."

U responds to criticism

School officials say they believe those relationships should help once the athletes are on campus. The university has received criticism from black community leaders in the past because of the athletic department's lack of minorities in leadership positions. The school has no black head coaches, and until 2005 Maturi did not have a black person on his senior management team.

Maturi has taken steps to address the issue. He hired a consultant to help with diversity issues, created a task force to examine how the athletic department can be more connected to the black community and added former Vikings wide receiver Leo Lewis to his administrative staff as an associate athletic director.

"What we have found is a lot of student-athletes that leave here put as part of their experience was the lack of African-American role models in decision-making positions," Lewis said. "To a certain extent, it is an issue with some student-athletes when they are recruited to be able to see black coaches, to be able to see black staff members. It's important to their parents, as well as them, to develop a sense of belonging."

Maturi, who noted that both academic counselors for football are black, said he is sensitive to those needs.

"There are certain instances, whether it's gender, race or age, where a person is going to feel more comfortable in different situations," he said. "I'm a 62-year-old

white male. I don't expect an 18-year-old to share the same things with me as they would with someone they identify with more."

Brewster said he believes his staff will excel at connecting with players and building relationships with recruits.

"When I was putting together my staff, I wanted to totally eliminate the situational recruiter," he said. "I wanted guys who can go recruit any situation, anywhere, any time. That's why I feel so strongly about my staff."

Chip Scoggins • ascoggins@startribune.com

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March 4, 2007

Facing N.C.A.A., the Best Defense Is a Legal Team

By [JOE DRAPE](#)

The black binders contained more than 700 pages and documented the misdeeds of the [University of Kansas](#) men's and women's basketball and football programs. Among the findings were payments to athletes and academic fraud. The report suggested remedies like self-imposed probation and a reduction in scholarships.

The investigation and the sanctions did not come from the [National Collegiate Athletic Association](#). Instead, they were produced by a private law firm stocked with former N.C.A.A. investigators and hired by Lew Perkins a day after he became the Kansas athletic director in 2003.

Last October, the N.C.A.A. accepted most of the recommended sanctions and agreed not to impose a postseason ban on its teams. For two years of legal work, Kansas paid the law firm, Bond, Schoeneck & King, nearly \$480,000. It was nothing, however, compared with the \$23 million that the basketball and football programs generate annually.

When the N.C.A.A. men's basketball tournament field is announced next week — Kansas is among the favorites — the money will prove to be well spent.

Mr. Perkins hired Rick Evrard, who spent seven years as an N.C.A.A. investigator, to navigate the complex college athletics rulebook. Just like the lawyers who leave government agencies to work for companies they used to regulate, Mr. Evrard has walked through an increasingly lucrative revolving door in big-time college athletics.

To Kansas, Mr. Evrard represented a fresh start.

“I’d rather have him tell me our problems than someone from the N.C.A.A.,” Mr. Perkins said.

While in that role Mr. Evrard is an advocate for a university accused of wrongdoing, and he is also its chief investigator. Beyond experience and expertise, he said, his firm offers confidentiality. For many, however, this arrangement is too cozy and emerged out of the N.C.A.A.’s flawed system of enforcement.

“You’re talking about a big-time commercial entertainment business that generates millions upon millions of dollars for institutions,” said Gary Roberts, who directed the sports law program at Tulane Law School and was the university’s faculty representative to the N.C.A.A.

In fact, a total of \$132.6 million will be distributed through their conferences to the 65 teams that qualify for this year’s N.C.A.A. men’s basketball tournament. A major bowl game last season was worth \$14 million to \$17 million to each of the conferences of the participating teams.

“There are those who argue that the enforcement process is, in a large part, window dressing,” Mr. Roberts added, “that it is part of keeping the commercial enterprise viable. I don’t think they are crazy.”

Mr. Roberts, who will become the dean of the [Indiana University](#) School of Law in Indianapolis in July, said institutions that hired specialized law firms usually fared better than those that did not.

It used to be that the N.C.A.A. caught wind of a problem at a university, investigated and meted out punishment. Now, with a stretched staff and member institutions often feeling wary of the enforcement process, outside firms have become the nexus for law and order in college sports.

Bond, Schoeneck & King made a name for itself in the wake of an academic fraud scandal involving the [University of Minnesota](#)’s men’s basketball team in 1999. The firm’s services cost the university \$920,000.

Kansas paid the firm \$477,000 to ferret out infractions that occurred in the athletic department from 2000 to 2003. The university spent \$65,000 more than that to run its baseball team for one season.

Similarly, [Ohio State](#) paid the law firm nearly \$511,000 from 2003 to 2006 to investigate its men’s and women’s basketball teams and to examine accusations of academic misconduct by [Maurice Clarett](#), a former star running back for the Buckeyes. That, too, seems like a small investment to protect programs that generate more than \$73 million in revenue annually.

The N.C.A.A.’s Division I, the major athletics division where the bulk of serious recruiting and academic violations occur, has 325 institutions and 150,000 student-athletes. Yet the enforcement division for major violations has only 29 staff members, with each working on no more than three cases at a time.

Since 2003, the N.C.A.A. has ruled on 59 major infractions cases and investigated many more that resulted in no punishment. Bond, Schoeneck & King and other firms were involved in many of them. The penalties ranged from a ban on postseason competition and forfeited games to a reduction of scholarships or a limit on the number of campus visits recruits could make.

David Price, the N.C.A.A.’s vice president for enforcement services, acknowledged that many athletic programs continued to bend, if not outright break, the rules. And his staff, which has nearly doubled in the past few years, cannot hope to catch them all. The N.C.A.A. does not have subpoena power, and it must get all information on the record to build a case.

“We’re certainly very busy, but I also think the N.C.A.A. membership doesn’t want a police state,” he said.

That is why representatives from law firms like Bond, Schoeneck & King; Ice Miller in Indianapolis; and several others consistently attend the 15 to 20 hearings a year held by the N.C.A.A.’s Committee on Infractions. These law firms are the first places athletic directors turn to when confronted with allegations of wrongdoing by their teams.

Athletic directors say a thorough and quiet internal investigation provides an institution with a greater understanding of what went wrong and minimizes the risk of a public relations disaster. Because these lawyers were once a part of the N.C.A.A., they say they understand what punishment fits a particular offense, so they

recommend a course of corrective action for the university and penalties it can immediately impose.

Although the N.C.A.A.'s infractions committee sometimes adds further restrictions, it rarely rejects the recommended sentence.

Bond, Schoeneck & King leads this niche primarily because the founder of its Collegiate Sports Practice Group, Michael Glazier, is credited with creating this market in the mid-1980s with Mike Slive, the current commissioner of the Southeastern Conference. The firm represents more than 60 colleges and universities on matters like eligibility, compliance and major infractions investigations.

"Some institutions distrust the N.C.A.A. enforcement staff," Mr. Evrard said. "There is a feeling that the N.C.A.A. is not attuned to the sensitivities of the institution. And some of it is that the N.C.A.A. staff are often young professionals just out of law school, and they are running a case from beginning to end, which, if they were litigators at some firms, they may not be allowed to do for 10 or 12 years."

The [University of Oklahoma](#) hired Ice Miller when it faced investigations involving its basketball and football programs. The former men's basketball coach Kelvin Sampson made prohibited phone calls to prospects, and two football players were found to have received no-show jobs at a booster's car dealership.

Ice Miller's collegiate sports practice offers Robin Green Harris, who spent nine years at the N.C.A.A., including a five-year stint as the director of the infractions committee, and Mark Jones, who spent 18 years at the N.C.A.A., most recently as managing director of enforcement. Oklahoma's athletic director, Joe Castiglione, said the firm's credentials attracted the university, which has paid \$336,000 in legal fees since 2003.

Last May, the Oklahoma men's basketball program was placed on probation for two years and lost scholarships and some recruiting visits and calls. Now at Indiana, Sampson has been barred from calling and visiting potential recruits for a year.

On the advice of Ice Miller, Oklahoma disassociated from the booster, and reduced the number of football scholarships and limited the number of coaches allowed to recruit off campus. In April, the university will appear before the N.C.A.A. infractions committee, which will decide if these football penalties are sufficient.

David Ridpath, an assistant professor of sports administration at Ohio University, has testified before Congress about the N.C.A.A.'s lack of due process and excesses in rules enforcement.

In 2001, as the assistant athletic director for compliance and student services at [Marshall University](#), he took the brunt of the blame for its violations, which involved a pattern of easy, high-paying jobs offered to athletes by a prominent local booster. He said that the practice had begun long before he arrived and that he knew nothing about it.

Mr. Ridpath said the N.C.A.A. enforcement staff has used heavy-handed tactics to force cooperation. "I've seen them threaten people's careers, badger them to get the answers they want, belittle them and make people cry," he said.

He also said he saw how lawyers specializing in N.C.A.A. matters operated. Marshall hired an Ice Miller partner at the time, Richard R. Hilliard, who was once the N.C.A.A.'s director of enforcement.

"They are very adept at how to satisfy the committee to minimize the damage to their high-paying client," Mr. Ridpath said. "They have no problem advising their clients to sacrifice someone lower on the totem pole. You never see a high-profile coach or administrator losing their job."

At Marshall, Mr. Ridpath said, he was sacrificed instead. He has sued the university in federal court for \$1 million, an apology and the removal of negative comments from his file. Mr. Ridpath also sued Mr. Hilliard for malpractice; Mr. Hilliard settled the case in January and paid Mr. Ridpath an undisclosed sum.

"There's a lot of doubt about whose interests are actually being represented," Mr. Ridpath said. "Many of these lawyers have personal relationships with N.C.A.A. staffers and decision makers. They are lobbying and doing what they can to manipulate the system."

Mr. Hilliard, who is no longer with Ice Miller, could not be reached for comment. His lawyer, Stephen R. Crislip, declined to comment.

Ms. Green Harris of Ice Miller also refused to comment about Mr. Hilliard. But she rejected the notion that she and other lawyers with N.C.A.A. experience were trading on prior relationships on behalf of clients.

"I suppose some people feel that way," she said. "We are adversaries, though. We're going to challenge the N.C.A.A. staff, and they are going to challenge us. Each side values its credibility."

For Mr. Perkins, the Kansas athletic director, the law firm Bond, Schoeneck & King continues to earn its money.

"We get anonymous calls 10 or 15 times a year about one thing or another our kids are doing wrong," said Mr. Perkins, who assigns the law firm to check them out. "Ninety-nine percent of the time, it is inaccurate. But we follow it up and report it to the N.C.A.A."

Thayer Evans contributed reporting from Houston.

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MEDIA

THIS LEAGUE GOES IT ALONE

The Mountain West Conference didn't like ESPN's offer so it joined forces with CSTV for \$120 million.

Emily Badger
Sentinel Staff Writer

March 4, 2007

The Mountain West Conference had been playing football games on Friday nights, a controversial move that brought criticism from local high schools, college fans and proponents of tradition, all for the sake of a coveted slice of national TV exposure.

Then, in negotiations with ESPN for a new contract two years ago, the network requested a few Tuesday and Wednesday night games, too -- along with 10 p.m. local basketball tipoffs.

"And that's when our board said, 'We will not,' " MWC Commissioner Craig Thompson said. "We will create a new model, do something different, create our own network."

The experiment, in its first full academic year right now, is the first significant attempt of any conference to go it alone without ESPN -- and there were plenty of naysayers saying it wouldn't work.

The MWC paired with start-up CSTV, owned by CBS, and had 48 football games broadcast last fall on either CSTV, Versus (formerly the Outdoor Life Network) or the conference's new 24-hour channel, The Mtn. Fewer homes were reached, but more games were broadcast -- 17 nationally, compared with eight in past years on ESPN or ESPN2. Every school received exposure.

The 10-year, \$120 million deal with CSTV and Comcast was worth considerably more than the proposed ESPN package. And, most important, 49 of 56 games controlled by the conference were played on Saturday.

The flip side: There is a lack of exposure. The league needs to convince more cable and satellite providers to pick up the new channels, which aren't available in several MWC markets.

"It has not been without difficulty or disappointment," BYU President Cecil O. Samuelson wrote in an e-mail. "While many more of our games have been broadcast and additional fine MWC coverage has been aired as well, we still do not have the coverage that we hoped for and felt was promised."

He's confident that will change in time.

"When it does, it will clearly show to everyone that the MWC made the right decision," Samuelson wrote. "While our

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action was a leap of faith, we were and are sustained, because we felt then and feel now that the ESPN arrangement was no longer tolerable."

Friday night games elsewhere -- and games on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday -- haven't decreased as a result. Grant Teaff, the executive director of the American Football Coaches Association, lobbied ESPN to curtail the trend, but he knew there was no turning back.

"I understand marketplace values; I understand what drives everything," he said. "But you also have to remember it takes two to tango . . . Institutions and conferences want that national coverage and are just about willing to do anything. So you can't lay all of this at the feet of ESPN."

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Everything is within reach of ESPN, but is that good?

Emily Badger
Sentinel Staff Writer

March 4, 2007

When Vince Doria, ESPN's senior vice president and director of news, gets to his office Monday morning in Bristol, Conn., he'll get a packet with photocopies of all the trade magazines, newspaper articles and columns published this weekend that mentioned his network. There will be maybe 100 pages of gray matter.

The daily exercise is a curious picture of how the media consume themselves, and how the rest of the industry is wrestling with the behemoth in its midst -- arguably, at its center -- that is, all at once, doing journalism, selling entertainment and setting the sports agenda.

"What ESPN represents is, at the moment, the most successful part of the whole cable industry," said Keith Jackson, now retired after many years as the voice of college football for ABC, which is owned by Disney, which bought ESPN. "They are the 6-million-pound gorilla; nobody knows how to handle them, nobody knows where they're going.

"I'm not even sure they know where they're going."

ESPN has the power to cover the news as few news entities can but also to impact sports news and to shade the understanding of it in a way that's also attached to an entertainment-business agenda.

Oklahoma Coach Bob Stoops hinted at this power three years ago when he asked college football poll voters to take note of ESPN's contractual ties to the Southeastern Conference when considering Auburn and Oklahoma for the No. 2 ranking. Florida Coach Urban Meyer issued a similar warning in December after the Gators' SEC title-game victory set up a public relations showdown with Michigan for No. 2: "ESPN is a powerful, powerful organization," he said, "and I hope they list all the statistics."

ESPN, whether intentional or not, has the muscle to influence voters, expand fan bases, define sports (poker is one) and make us forget about others (sorry, hockey). It creates news, such as the X Games and "election-style" coverage of National Signing Day. It has the power to ignore news -- including, some critics say, news about itself.

If a popular analyst is fired or utters a politically incorrect gaffe on the radio, and ESPN doesn't talk about it, did it really happen? Is ESPN even obligated to report that it did?

If College GameDay visits a campus on Saturday, is it hyping the best game that weekend in college football or the best game ESPN -- or ABC -- happens to be televising?

The common theme is a sense that journalism's fair-practice rules are somehow off-balance. Is what ESPN does

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journalism, or is it entertainment?

Well, yes.

"We're basically covering an industry here that is an entertainment industry," said Doria, a 15-year ESPN veteran who formerly worked in newspapers. "If you're not careful and all you do is hard-core investigative, enterprising journalism on an entertainment industry, which people go to, to be entertained, you're probably giving them more journalism than they want.

"We also understand that the fan comes to sports to be entertained, comes originally to watch games, but also comes to get news, information, insight and analysis on those games. The line is gray without a doubt -- not the way we go out about journalism, that's not gray, but in terms of what we're delivering to the fans [news and entertainment]."

In 2005, former Washington Post sports editor George Solomon became ESPN's first ombudsman. He writes a monthly column for ESPN's Web site, picking at the same questions of objectivity and influence that have irked the network's critics.

"ESPN -- which is under the arm of Disney -- is a profit-making business, and I understand that," Solomon said. "I have expressed the concern that they have to go to great lengths to keep the business side apart from the news side, the entertainment side apart from the coverage side."

Today the network is wrapping up its "ESPN The Weekend" promotion at Disney, an event that benignly creeps toward the gray area.

"Do they need the 'ESPN The Weekend' in Orlando? Does it make them a better news organization?" Solomon asked. "The answer is 'probably not.' Does it make it a better business?"

Arguably, yes.

"But you've got to tell the viewers what you're doing," he went on. "If you're going to do a weekend at Disney, and celebrate ESPN at Disney, you have to continuously tell the viewer that ESPN is part of the Disney arm."

More troublesome to some -- as Stoops' comments suggest -- is not ESPN's relationship with its parent company, but with the conferences and leagues it covers and contractually televises.

Last year, ESPN bought a minority stake in the Arena Football League. That has made the AFL a more prominent TV sport than the NHL, currently struggling for a foothold on the newly renamed Versus network. It's the same with ESPN's recently ramped-up coverage of NASCAR, which this year begins the first of an eight-year deal with ESPN and ABC.

One league that no longer has ties to ESPN is the Mountain West Conference, and fans have complained that their league receives less coverage now that it has started its own channel -- The Mtn. -- with CSTV.

"I suppose that no school feels they get the recognition that they deserve from the 'unbiased' networks," BYU President Cecil O. Samuelson wrote in an e-mail while traveling abroad. Fans and officials at BYU, a member of the Mountain West, were offended that coverage of the Las Vegas Bowl last season was superseded in the broadcast booth by a lengthy interview with former UNLV basketball coach Jerry Tarkanian.

"I think even entertainers should be truthful in their representations," Samuelson wrote, "but I don't pay their advertising rates."

Game coverage is a gray area for any network. Noted New York Post columnist Phil Mushnick maintains sports can be entertaining, "but it's not per se entertainment. There's no script. To show a telecast of a live game, like it or not, you're

a journalist. You're providing news."

Doria acknowledges that ESPN has business relationships -- broadcast rights -- with most of the conferences and leagues it covers, but he said the network is careful to keep that separate from what it does as a news-gathering organization.

The NFL receives considerably more coverage than the NHL, but that is largely a result of viewer interest, Doria said. As for College GameDay, he said ESPN weighs the importance of the game, its geographic location and, yes, whether it is being broadcast on ESPN or ABC. On one occasion last fall, show host Chris Fowler disagreed with the chosen campus, and he was given a forum to write about what he thought was a business-minded decision on ESPN.com.

Sometimes the perception of what isn't covered fully on ESPN -- network analyst Harold Reynolds' firing, or former network analyst Michael Irvin's comments about NFL quarterback Tony Romo -- startles critics as much as what is. The day Reynolds disappeared from Baseball Tonight, his absence went unacknowledged on the show by his former on-air co-workers. Irvin's comments that Romo's athleticism must have descended from black heritage, made on an ESPN radio show, also drew scant attention.

As for who wrote about the incidents on ESPN.com . . . there was, primarily, Solomon.

All of this, though, is taken a little too seriously for Los Angeles Times columnist T.J. Simers, who points out he was fired by the network as a panelist on Around the Horn.

"If they were to come to me and tell me they were the great journalists of our time or the great storytellers of our time in terms of sports, then I would laugh," he said. "But I take it for what it is. I look at it as sports entertainment and take it no more seriously than that."

He acknowledges all of the objections -- some bigger, some petty, such as the claim that ESPN "confirms" news widely reported or broken by others. But he doesn't object to anything himself. Instead, he raises the suggestion that maybe the rest of us are refusing to admit the network is an entertainment-based business and should be judged as such.

So, how does ESPN define its mission?

"What's interesting about ESPN is that people tend to look at us as a very singular entity," Doria said. "For instance, if something happens on the Jay Leno show, people don't seem to blame NBC News for it."

"But at ESPN, it seems like people want to impose a journalistic standard on everything we do, and we have shows that are obviously platforms for journalism -- SportsCenter, Outside The Lines, Baseball Tonight. But we have other entertainment we put on, like the ESPYs, and sometimes people seem to think that goes outside our mission. Our basic overarching mission is to best serve the fan."

ESPN thinks the fan wants news and entertainment. And perhaps fans don't care quite as much as media insiders about a separation of the two.

Mushnick doesn't buy it.

"If you're an entertainment-based business, don't carry all the trappings of news-gathering and reporting," he said. "They want it every way. They want to be held accountable for nothing and have you see them as everything. They're rudderless."

Mushnick is, quite possibly, ESPN's loudest critic. On this point, though, he has company in the creator of deadspin.com, a blog that charts ESPN's foibles on a regular basis.

"I think ESPN would be a lot better off if they would just stop pretending they're about journalism at all," said Will

Leitch, a former magazine journalist. "They're a huge corporation, and there's nothing wrong with that; that's the American way. But the idea they try to pass themselves off as other things is what frustrates people."

Doria doesn't sound frustrated. His greatest challenge as ESPN grows, he said, is not keeping the network's "church" and "state" apart but keeping all its entities -- five domestic TV networks, a radio network, a magazine and a Web site - in sync.

If there is an identity crisis surrounding his network, it is found in that clip packet and not Doria's office.

One resolution -- "stop pretending you're about journalism" is not a realistic one, Leitch admits -- is also found outside Doria's office.

"It's our job to define to fans what's going on, and we haven't done that," Kansas City Star columnist Jason Whitlock said of other sports media.

"Their job is to brand themselves in whatever way is going to make them the most money."

There is too little critical analysis of ESPN elsewhere in the media, Whitlock said, in part because at the end of the day many people want to work there. He did, while also writing for the Star, but left last year for AOL.

ESPN's growing influence down the road won't be checked by an equal competitor; none exists. And so that places both a greater responsibility on ESPN and arguably the rest of the industry.

Mike Freeman, now a columnist with CBS SportsLine.com, recalls interviewing ESPN's earliest founders and employees for his book "ESPN: The Uncensored History." He said producers at the start-up in 1979 were offended by what they considered the self-interest and agenda-setting of major newspapers.

"It's funny how far we've come and what happens," Freeman said.

But not knowing where we go from here -- is that a bad thing?

"I don't know," Jackson said. "I don't think anybody knows. But I do know success breeds arrogance, and arrogance will eventually do you in. We'll have to see."

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Interview: Woody Paige

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PR Week USA Feb 19 2007 01:18

Woody Paige is one of those 21st century sportswriters who seem to be everywhere.

He can be read in *The Denver Post* almost daily and seen on ESPN's *Around The Horn* every weekday. He recently spoke to *PRWeek* (from Miami while covering Super Bowl XLI) about sportswriting in the modern age.

PRWeek: How long have you been a columnist at *The Denver Post*?

Woody Paige: I've been there since 1981, but I took off the last two-and-a-half years to be in New York City to be on "Cold Pizza," and I did that for two-and-a-half years. But I missed writing and I missed Colorado, and I'm old and I wanted to go back where it snows every day, and I brought all the trouble with me... Allen Iverson. I was a general columnist for a number of years. I tell people that Vincent Van Gogh, and I'm not comparing myself to Van Gogh, didn't care what the subject was as long as he could do his art. So he did fruit, flowers and himself for awhile. And the writing is what's most important to me. The subject matter is not as important.

PRWeek: What's your opinion on the state of sports journalism now?

Paige: It's not what I envisioned as a young man. I started back in the 1950s. Back then, you didn't write about bad things like Mickey Mantle and Billy Martin being drunk and walking along ledges to look in girls' bedrooms.

Maybe there were drugs, but nobody wrote or knew about it. Babe Ruth's famous stomachache was actually a case of a social disease, and yet the writers protected him on that.

PRWeek: What are some of the biggest changes you've seen in your field?

Paige: The biggest change is that, because of television, sports columnists have become personalities. I went to a party last night and there must have been 500 people who wanted to talk to me because they saw me on TV. I've become sort of the Soupy Sales character on TV, and people do not really know me as a writer.

Newspaper readership is hurting. People are turning to blogs and columns online, so the newspaper business has changed dramatically. It didn't change from the invention of movable type for about 400 years. Now, in the past 10 or 15 years, it's taken an incredible turn in another direction.

PRWeek: Are writers more concerned about becoming personalities than being good writers?

Paige: I hope not, and most of the guys who are friends of mine, that was not our intention.

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My goals as a kid were to write for *The Sporting News* and *Sport* magazine. And I did both of those. And I wasn't trying to become a national celebrity or personality. I just wanted a vehicle for my writing and make some money.

I think most guys were looking for ways outside of the newspaper business to increase their incomes. I believe, and I say this truthfully, the majority of the e-mails that I get in regard to "I want to be like you" -have sort of a warped sense. They ask how much money can I make and how soon can I be on *Around the Horn*.

When I went on "Around the Horn" I thought it would be for 13 weeks and I could pick up some money and maybe I could take a vacation. I know there's a lot of jealousy from those that don't do it, but I think those radio and TV stations come to you because they believe you're a unique voice.

I did "Cold Pizza" for two years, but I missed writing. And now I'm back at writing on a full-time basis. I love it, I love turning a phrase.

What I try to at the Super Bowl is not write the same old shit that everyone else is writing. Rick Reilly [of *Sports Illustrated*] came to me one year when the Super Bowl was in Tampa and asked me what I was going to do that day. And I said I was going to a nudist camp. He asked why. And I said "How do you know who's pulling for which team if someone's not wearing any clothes." He said, "Gee can I go with you?" So we went. And we had to talk to someone nude, who wasn't in a locker room, and ask why do you think Buffalo will win the game? It was different. I just try to write stuff that I'd want to read.

Everyone is writing about the two African American coaches and it's an incredible story and achievement. And we've never had a game with two quarterbacks with Man in their names, and I was trying to get out of that when I was putting together my column here, but I couldn't.

PRWeek: What's the best part of being a sports columnist?

Paige: Being able to travel. I grew up very poor and didn't go anywhere. I love going to San Antonio and seeing the Alamo. I've been to Norway and Athens for the Olympics.

Having a guy I idolized, Bob Cousy, and couldn't walk up to in all my years as a journalist and he actually came up to me in Portland and said he liked my writing. When you write something and people say "that was good." John Elway said to me when he retired: "You wrote good things about me, you wrote bad things about me, I always thought you wrote fair things about me."

I wasn't trying to be good, bad or indifferent with John, I was trying to be honest, and he recognized that. And he was not trying to kiss my butt and I wasn't trying to kiss his.

It's the one arena in journalism where you're allowed enough freedom that you can take a creative look at sports, because even with all of the problems that exist in sports it's still a diversion. It's what people consider a diversion and that's been necessary throughout history. Despite all its problems, people still hang on to the fact that it's their diversion, and I try to remember that.

PRWeek: What are your experiences with sports PR people?

Paige: I've had bad experiences with maybe three or four. In all of those cases, those were guys that used to be in journalism or media.

Having written general information over the years, I find that PR people who represent companies tend to be very negative toward those who cover that company and have an adversarial relationship with the media. I don't find that in sports.

PRWeek: What sport has the best PR people?

Paige: If Ford Motor Co. had the NFL's PR machine, it wouldn't be losing money. Former commissioner Pete Rozelle was a PR guy, and he got it.

At the Super Bowl, a media person never has to leave his room. They will give you every quote from every player that's been uttered - nothing's missing.

What they do at the Super Bowl is incredible. You could show up and say, "I don't know what to do." And they'll say: "Stand there, we'll give you this. Oh, you're looking for a story? Here's a story, here's another, here's 18 stories. You want a drink? Here's a drink. You want

a party, you want to go hang out with cheerleaders?" I hung out with team mascots last night. That shows you how bad my life is.

Boy, from a PR standpoint, anybody you talk to who is in a position like mine will tell you "boy, the NFL [is great]." Baseball takes you to cold weather cities, makes you fly back and forth and makes you sit outside and write your column. Forgive me-- and people are going to go "Oh poor baby,"-- [but] you sit out in the right field stands and try to write a column in darkness. I had to go get one of those lights you put on your books so you could see and put it on my computer. They have 5,000 guys trying to interview one player and you can't hear anything he says and it just sucks. And they play the games until 11 o'clock at night. That's baseball.

Football says, "well, OK, we're going to take you Florida, make it a nice week, and you don't have to worry about standing next to Peyton Manning because we have people that will stand right next to him and we'll give you the whole interview." They have thousands of people here doing this stuff. And you go, "gee, I'd like to play ping pong." And they have a room with a ping pong table. "Oh you don't have enough electrical outlets up in your room? We're going to send one of our PR guys up there and he's going to take care of that for you."

What would be your impression of that after you spent a week here? You'd go, "wow what a well-oiled machine."

They bring in every PR director from every team in the league and they put one of them in charge of the press center, one in charge of getting cars for media guys, and another is in charge of making sure that all the quotes come from the Chicago Bears are handed out to everybody. They do it correctly, and baseball does it so badly and it's no wonder that it's not the number one sport in this country anymore. They have no clue.

Each team has a PR director and two assistants with them, so there are almost 100 PR people from the teams here. The assistant PR guy from the Bears told me last night, "I don't have to do anything this week." You would think this would be the busiest week he'd ever had in his life. But no, they have an army of people doing this stuff for them.

There's PR guys from each league, they have assistants, then there's the PR guys from every team and their assistants, plus they hire people to help them with this. You have probably 200 people servicing thousands of media people. But they are providing every quote, statistic and running press conferences. The only thing the NFL has not set up is a mass interview with O.J. Simpson, who lives here. There are two people who are not welcome at the Super Bowl: one of them is hiding in a mountain in Afghanistan, and the other is hiding on a golf course looking for his wife's killer.

If I walked up to the media center right now and said, "I want to talk to three guys who played in the first Super Bowl," they'd probably have them there within the hour or get them on the phone.

There is nothing in the world that compares to this or matches what they do so you will never really see a negative story come out of the Super Bowl. They are incredible.

The worst would be in baseball. The athletes really don't like the media and I understand that. And the PR directors in baseball, generally, tend to take the players' side, and try to mask what's going on and hide injuries or treatment of people.

PRWeek: Any stories from 2006 you thought got too much coverage or were tired of hearing?

Paige: Not really. I used to say at "Cold Pizza" in our meetings every morning, [former Boston Celtics coach] Red Auerbach told me he always wanted three scorers on the court at the same time. I used to say, "we have to have three scorers on the show today." And what I meant by that was: T.O., Barry Bonds and LeBron James.

So are those stories overdone? No. The appetite for stories about T.O. is never ending.

Steroids are overdone because I generally believe that most people don't give a flying whatever. People go watch Barry Bonds and people with steroids, they don't understand it. We don't explain it well because we didn't know what was going on for years.

I watched guys sticking needles in their butts and I thought they were giving themselves B-12 shots.

I followed Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa around and thought, "Wow, this is incredible. He's not hitting home runs, he's hitting the ball out of the stadium." And I didn't have any clue. And McGwire was smart enough to put some supplement in his locker and people found it and they assumed that's what he was taking that made him [stronger]. So steroids is overblown,

because people don't really want to read about it but it's something they need to know about-- particularly in baseball-- because it's affecting time-honored statistics and young people.

If there was one story that went over the edge it was steroids. But it's one of those subjects that we just can't let go away.

PRWeek: What do you think will be the big stories of 2007?

Paige: Bonds and the home run chase. Because you have the ongoing grand jury, and a guy who is about to set the all-time home run record. The day he might be doing it, he might be called to testify before the grand jury. That's a story that's going to be with us all season.

PRWeek: How do you think Bud Selig and Major League Baseball are going to handle this?

Paige: I don't know if they're going to low profile it as much as possible. If it were anybody else there would be major sponsors involved. I'm not sure if Bud Selig will show up. The San Francisco Giants will put on a big ceremony.

PRWeek: Predictions for the Super Bowl?

Paige: Indianapolis Colts. The AFC is a lot stronger. I think it's going to be a very easy game, and not one that people will put on their list of greatest games played. I think the Bears cannot stop Indianapolis.

Sports is not innocent anymore, but it's the innocence of the country. People used to look forward to Sunday for church, and now they look forward to Sunday for football. It sort of cleanses them for the week. And the Super Bowl is the ultimate cleanser.

PRWeek: Does the NBA get a bad rap compared to other leagues?

Paige: The difference between the NBA and other leagues is that you're separated from the players, but basketball is played right up against the fans that are paying thousands of dollars for tickets, and the fights are spilling over into them.

It gets a bad rap, yeah.

PRWeek: Is Skip Bayless really that annoying, or is that more of an act on his part?

Paige: It's a combination. Skip really does skip to a beat of a different drummer. We had a good relationship. I understand Skip. He's not well-liked, but people just don't quite get him.

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NCAA boss hopes to track 'specials'

By Brent Schrotenboer
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

March 3, 2007

Having installed large-scale academic reforms in college sports since 2005, the NCAA expects to tackle another controversial element in that field in the next two years: special admits.

NCAA President Myles Brand said in an interview yesterday at *The San Diego Union-Tribune* that he favors requiring schools to track academic performance of special admits in athletics.

Special admits are students admitted despite not having met their school's regular admission requirements. Brand expects the issue to heat up soon.

"There are some issues we have not yet adequately addressed, and special admits would be one," Brand said.

In December, the *Union-Tribune* reported that many schools have a considerably higher percentage of athletes who are special admits than regular students who are special admits.

At UCLA, for example, 227 of 322 scholarship athletes (70.5 percent) admitted from 2003-06 were special admits. By comparison, only 2.8 percent of the UCLA student body were special admits. Of the disparity, UCLA Vice Chancellor Tom Lifka said, "We need those students if we're going to be competitive in certain sports."

Asked for records of the performance of those and previous special admits in athletics, a UCLA official said the school doesn't track such information.

Admission criteria and special admission policies vary by school, sometimes widely, based on each school's academic mission and number of applicants. Because of this, the NCAA is not likely to get involved in the admissions process beyond setting minimum standards for player eligibility.

But by requiring such data be kept, Brand said the NCAA could have a better idea of whether schools might be abusing such a policy at the expense of their academic mission. Last year an NCAA Presidential Task Force said the issue needed to be addressed "to alleviate suspicion that student-athlete admission is based more on the need to recruit winning teams than on academic integrity."

In the spring, the NCAA will announce its second year of penalties for teams that underperformed in its Academic Progress Rate (APR) program, which measures the retention and eligibility of athletes. San Diego State football was penalized with the loss of four scholarships last year because of a poor APR.

At SDSU, 64.5 percent of its scholarship athletes were "exceptional admits" from 2003-06, compared with 20 percent of its student body. An SDSU enrollment official said then she didn't have performance data on such athletes, but the school later indicated it could retrieve it.

"The next step is to see the percentage of them graduating," Brand said. "Is the graduation rate for special admits relatively similar to students as a whole, or are special admits just people who come in and play ball? You have to ask those questions. You can't either blame or praise until you get that data."

Brand said he was encouraged by a recent NCAA survey of about 8,000 Division I athletes in all sports who entered school
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in 1994 and were tracked for 10 years. He said 88 percent graduated, and 77 percent graduated in six years.

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LSU

Death of the dynasty

College baseball lacks dominant teams

March 3, 2007

By Jason Pugh
jpugh@gannett.com

When the LSU Tigers take their positions at Fair Grounds Field on Tuesday night against Centenary, don't expect to see visions of Todd Walker, Warren Morris or Blair Barbier.

Clearly, these aren't your older brother's Tigers and first-year coach Paul Mainieri knows that.

"Our goal is to return LSU baseball to where it was, and that was the very best baseball program in the entire country," Mainieri said before the season. "We are not going to rest until we accomplish that goal. I don't know how long it is going to take. I'm not in the prediction business."

Mainieri may not be in the prediction business, but it doesn't take a soothsayer to see what has become a dying breed in college baseball — a dynasty.

LSU is the author of the last great run of College World Series championships — winning five in 10 years from 1991-2000. And, for numerous reasons, those Tigers teams long may remain college baseball's last dynasty.

"You look at LSU and USC (five straight titles from 1970-74), those kind of runs are crazy," Georgia coach David Perno said.

"I don't think you'll ever see another run like that. There's so much parity right now. There are so many Division I baseball teams and the scholarships are so minimal. Most of the mid-major teams are fully funded now and I don't think that was the case when LSU and USC were on their runs."

LSU in the 1990s and USC in the 1970s are the greatest dynasties. USC won three titles in the 1960s, a feat matched that decade by Arizona State. In the 1980s, championships were spread throughout the nation as only Miami and Stanford won more than one title. The Hurricanes and Cardinal each won two in the '80s.

Then came Skip Bertman's Tigers, which redefined success and helped spread Bertman's gospel throughout the Southeast.

The result were the aforementioned five championships in 10 seasons and one large, looming image that greets visiting teams to Alex Box Stadium.

"The first thing I remember walking into the stadium was looking up in right field at the Intimidator and seeing four national championships at that time," LSU hitting coach Cliff Godwin, a former East Carolina player, said.

"I was like wow. That is pretty intimidating. Then we walked in as a coaching staff and I turned to coach Mainieri and I said



LSU celebrates its last College World Series championship in 2000. The title was the fifth in 10 seasons for LSU, which hasn't won a game at the College World Series since. (File/AP)

Dying breed

Dynasties by decade in college baseball used to be a given.

1960s: Arizona State
 Three national championships
 1970s: Southern California
 Six national championships
 1990s: LSU
 Five national championships

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'Dollars and cents'

As Mainieri said, LSU is in a bit of a rebuilding mode and several reasons have pushed it there. The biggest reason remains a single number — 11.7. Eleven point seven as in the number of scholarships for each Division I baseball team.

"That is the one big thing," Northwestern State head baseball coach Mitch Gaspard said. "Kids want to play. When they see an opportunity, and the scholarship is a satisfactory scholarship for them, that's appealing.

"The kid that was going to the big school for books, schools like ours can offer him a 60 or 70-percent scholarship. It's going to cost him a third to go to school. They're still getting a good experience in school and at baseball. It's dollars and cents."

Perno echoes those sentiments. Gaspard's Demons and other Southland schools aren't the only mid-major schools throwing scares into BCS conference squads.

Perno's Bulldogs have seen it in the form of teams like Georgia Southern and Georgia State in recent years.

Part of their rise, the Georgia coach said, is because of the major league draft, which can persuade college-bound teenagers to trade three years on a campus for a six- to seven-figure signing bonus.

"Us and our SEC brethren will go after the best players," Perno said. "And a lot of them don't get to school. The mid-major school will go after and get the second-best player, and they'll go to school.

"It's a tough scenario, but it's good for college baseball. I like the upsets. It's tough to win every night out. You're going to get challenged. You're going to get pushed."

Curse of Bertman?

LSU's five national titles in the 1990s allowed Bertman a chance to bring state and regional exposure to his sport, which he called "the poster child for Title IX," a sarcastic reference to the reduction in baseball scholarships to fall into compliance with Title IX.

The impact Bertman and the Tigers had on the school's bottom line were seen not only in Louisiana, but also in the surrounding states.

Now the SEC is among the top two or three baseball conferences on a yearly basis and continues to produce CWS-worthy teams.

Former Northwestern State head coach John Cohen can vouch for that after his Kentucky Wildcats, a perennial second-tier SEC team, stormed to the conference title a year ago.

"We have an athletic director (Mitch Barnhart) who cares and sees how important baseball is and he wants us to be good," Cohen said. "That comes from Skip Bertman. He was everywhere, speaking at every college he could, telling people how he did it."

Private schools make a stand

Mid-majors are now fully funded, scholarship-wise. The power conferences are getting deeper and deeper and somewhere in between lies the plight of the private school.

While states such as Louisiana and Georgia have lottery-funded scholarships to help keep talent in state, private schools have found other ways to get in the game and make an impact.

Schools like 2003 national champion Rice and perennial West Coast power Stanford have dedicated themselves to making their mark on the baseball field. In the last decade, Rick Jones has turned Tulane into a powerhouse program and has landed several recruits who have attained first-round draft pick status like former Southwood High star Michael Aubrey in 2003.

"You look at LSU and USC (five straight titles from 1970-74), those kind of runs are crazy," Georgia coach David Perno said.

"I don't think you'll ever see another run like that. There's so much parity right now. There are so many Division I baseball teams and the scholarships are so minimal. Most of the mid-major teams are fully funded now and I don't think that was the case when LSU and USC were on their runs."

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LSU's five national titles in the 1990s allowed Bertman a chance to bring state and regional exposure to his sport, which he called "the poster child for Title IX," a sarcastic reference to the reduction in baseball scholarships to fall into compliance with Title IX.

The impact Bertman and the Tigers had on the school's bottom line were seen not only in Louisiana, but also in the surrounding states.

Now the SEC is among the top two or three baseball conferences on a yearly basis and continues to produce CWS-worthy teams.

Former Northwestern State head coach John Cohen can vouch for that after his Kentucky Wildcats, a perennial second-tier SEC team, stormed to the conference title a year ago.

"It all started with (Mark) Marquess at Stanford and (Wayne) Graham going to Rice," Gaspard said. "They're in hotbed areas. They've identified the type of player they want in their program. They're going to recruit the strong academic kid to where the academic side is appealing to them."

"They'll keep that high draft pick because they can tell them, you come to Stanford or Vanderbilt, stay three years and then make your millions. And if baseball doesn't work out, you still have that degree."

"You see (high draft picks) at the private schools more and more because they're keeping those guys. Bigger schools are still signing those guys. They're just not able to keep them."

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March 3, 2007

"We have an athletic director (Mitch Barnhart) who cares and sees how important baseball is and he wants us to be good," Cohen said. "That comes from Skip Bertman. He was everywhere, speaking at every college he could, telling people how he did it."

Private schools make a stand

Mid-majors are now fully funded, scholarship-wise. The power conferences are getting deeper and deeper and somewhere in between lies the plight of the private school.

While states such as Louisiana and Georgia have lottery-funded scholarships to help keep talent in state, private schools have found other ways to get in the game and make an impact.

Schools like 2003 national champion Rice and perennial West Coast power Stanford have dedicated themselves to making their mark on the baseball field. In the last decade, Rick Jones has turned Tulane into a powerhouse program and has landed several recruits who have attained first-round draft pick status like former Southwood High star Michael Aubrey in 2003.

"It all started with (Mark) Marquess at Stanford and (Wayne) Graham going to Rice," Gaspard said. "They're in hotbed areas. They've identified the type of player they want in their program. They're going to recruit the strong academic kid to where the academic side is appealing to them."

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One year later, cheerleader taking fall for change

(<http://www.suntimes.com/sports/282063,CST-SPT-cheerplug04.article>)

March 4, 2007

BY JIM SUHR

CARBONDALE, Ill. -- Kristi Yamaoka still winces when she thinks about the cheerleading misstep that made her a media darling, and a villain, in one jarring instant.

As television cameras rolled during the Missouri Valley Conference tournament title game last March 5, the 4-9 Southern Illinois junior lost her balance and fell backward 15 feet off a human pyramid when she meant to roll forward into the arms of teammates.

Yamaoka's head smacked the floor of the Savvis Center in St. Louis with a sickening thud, stunning the crowd of 14,000.

As she was being wheeled off while strapped to a stretcher, the Saluki fight song began to play and Yamaoka suddenly began cheering with her arms -- the only parts of her body not immobilized -- in time with the band.

That sight, replayed repeatedly on ESPN and CNN, vaulted the former gymnast into the spotlight, landing her bookings on "Today," "Good Morning America" and "The Ellen DeGeneres Show." President Bush gave her a call.

"It was an amazing reaction," recalls the 19-year-old Yamaoka, now largely healed from a fractured neck, concussion and bruised lung, and back on the cheerleading squad.

There also was a swift reaction from a national cheerleading organization, and strong criticism of Yamaoka by cheerleaders from around the country.

In the wake of Yamaoka's nationally televised fall, the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators, which sets standards for cheerleading safety, recommended that college conferences bar cheerleaders from high pyramids and basket tosses -- throwing a cheerleader into the air -- without a mat.

"That could have been anyone," said Jim Lord, head of the national association. "Thank goodness, it wasn't something worse."

Statistics show that cheerleaders -- who today more closely resemble gymnasts than the pompom-waving, megaphone-sporting yell leaders of yesteryear -- suffer more serious injuries than any other female athletes.

In fact, cheerleaders account for more than half of the catastrophic injuries (head, neck and spinal cord damage) to female athletes, according to the National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research at the University of North Carolina.

In 1980, nearly 5,000 cheerleaders visited emergency rooms; by 2004, that number had spiked to more than 28,000. Between 1982 and 2005, at least five cheerleaders died, two from injuries that occurred when a multilevel routine went awry and three because of heart problems.

Lord said the hazards of high pyramids raised concerns years ago, and Yamaoka's accident "was maybe the last straw."

Yamaoka said she quickly became the scapegoat of angry cheerleaders across the country.

The changes meant cheerleaders no longer could perform some of their biggest stunts during timeouts -- only on the sidelines, during halftime or after a game -- because they would not have time to drag mats on and off the court without delaying the game.

Online cheerleader forums, Yamaoka said, talked "about how SIU screwed everyone over." Someone created an unflattering profile about Yamaoka on a popular Internet social-networking site.

"It compromised my character and turned me into something I wasn't," she said of the online portrayal. "There are people out there that hate me because of all the rules changes, and they despise my squad."

Yamaoka calls the rule changes "a humongous overreaction," noting that tackling isn't banned from football when a player gets a concussion.

"We're not allowed to do things more than what high school teams are allowed to do," she said.

Insurers, and universities, are beginning to take note.

Citing rising insurance costs, which now range from \$30,000 to \$75,000 a year, Florida Gulf Coast University in December told cheerleaders the school wouldn't pay those premiums for stunts or tumbling. Since then, the nearly two dozen cheerleaders have boycotted basketball games.

In January, 15-year-old junior varsity cheerleader Chelsea Kossiver of Satellite Beach, Fla., broke her neck while tumbling down a padded runway and flipping onto a cushioned landing. The freshman can walk, but has permanent titanium plates and screws along her spine and has been ordered by doctors to give up the sport she loves.

Yamaoka feels lucky to have escaped the same fate. She recalls her impact with the floor and urging no one to touch her, figuring something was broken.

"The only thing I could think of was the massive humiliation of falling on my head in front of so many people," she said.

A year later, Saluki cheerleading coach April Bittle said the squad has moved on, relying more on tumbling and the use of signs in place of pyramids or high-flying routines. The rules changes "makes teams go back to focusing on crowd involvement," Bittle said.

Yamaoka thinks she's mended nicely. Her bruised lung, which caused her to cough up blood for a couple of days, no longer is an issue. She still has occasional soreness in her lower back, but frequent massage therapy helps.

"I have some bad days," said Yamaoka, a psychology major hoping to become an occupational therapist. "I feel lucky to be here. I had some amazing experiences and talked to amazing people. Usually when you fall and break your neck, it doesn't end up this positive."

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ACC TOURNAMENT

That's The Ticket

By JOEY JOHNSTON The Tampa Tribune

Published: Mar 4, 2007

TAMPA - Mark Whitley, an avid Florida State University basketball fan for two decades, knew he simply couldn't miss the moment. The ACC Men's Basketball Tournament, long the symbol of ultimate hoops tradition, was coming to Tampa.

One ticket book of 11 tournament games, face value at any seat in the arena, was priced at \$363.

But what about the hidden cost? Whitley called Seminole Boosters, the athletic department's fundraising organization, and asked a direct question.

"I wanted four tickets for me and my family," said Whitley, a Tallahassee resident and partner in a private equity fund. "I wanted it broken down very specifically. What was it going to take?"

The short answer: Pay up.

Whitley was advised to significantly bump up his annual contribution. He became a Golden Chief (requiring a \$6,000 gift). His main perk was a guarantee of having the right to purchase four ACC Tournament tickets.

"It's worth it to me," Whitley said. "We may not have the basketball passion of North Carolina or Duke, so I know I'm not having to pay the price that some other fans are."

The ACC Tournament, which begins Thursday at the St. Pete Times Forum, hasn't held a public sale of tickets since 1966. Each ACC school gets an equal split (actually 11 schools had an allotment of approximately 1,700, while Boston College, the league newcomer, is phased in with a two-thirds share of 1,150 before becoming a full member next season).

Those tickets are then dangled as incentives for each school's high-end boosters. For ACC powerhouses, that generally means the range of a \$10,000 annual donation or \$50,000 in lifetime donations just to be considered.

"It's an incredible social event," said Clearwater businessman Gary Markel, a Virginia booster who will attend his 38th consecutive ACC Tournament. "You see the same people there every year. People will do what's necessary to keep going."

At North Carolina, for example, contributors to the athletic department's Rams Club are ranked by lifetime giving. ACC tickets are offered to top donors, working down the list, until the supply is exhausted.

The last UNC tickets, located in the nosebleed row of the Forum's upper-bowl 300 section, went to someone who has given more than \$90,000 to the Rams Club, someone who is accustomed to great seats at the Smith Center, UNC's home court.

"It's a strong demand every year," said Karlton Creech, Rams Club director of tickets. "You kind of learn the price of doing business."

But what about the common basketball fan?

Different Dynamics With Expansion

The calls have come, with increasing regularity, to local organizers. How can I get ACC tickets? Sometimes, they even add this rejoinder: **You know, I'd even be willing to pay for them.**

The callers are let down gently.

There are no tickets.

"Some people around here have been told 'no' for maybe the first time in their lives," said Rob Higgins, executive director of the Tampa Bay Sports Commission. "We're a big-event town, no question, and people are used to some tickets coming open.

"This event is a different animal."

ACC associate commissioner Fred Barakat, who joined the league in 1981 after coaching at Fairfield, remembers being puzzled when told about the tournament's ticket distribution process.

"I remember asking, 'If you don't hold a public sale of these tickets, how are you going to fill the building?'" Barakat said. "I guess I was a little naïve to the culture of this league.

"It has become an incredible fundraising device for our schools. I don't see it ever changing."

The system has evolved with ACC expansion.

In the old days, it was a tidy eight-way split. Then came FSU's arrival in 1991-92, cutting the pie into thinner slices and creating a Thursday night play-in game.

In a 12-team league - Miami, Virginia Tech and Boston College have been added in the past three seasons - that requires **two** noon-to-midnight basketball marathons (Thursday and Friday). In the big picture, it also means there are **nouveau riche** Miami supporters plucking tickets away from Tobacco Road bluebloods.

Longtime ACC fans have showered predictable disgust toward Miami, which was struggling just to fill its ticket allotment this season.

"We all know the ACC expanded primarily because of football," said Tampa resident Rob Wilde, who received his ACC Tournament tickets through Boston College, his alma mater. "If I'm a basketball junkie and I used to always get my ACC tickets - and now I'm having to scrounge around - I think it would get my nose a little bent out of shape."

The landscape will change again in 2008 when BC moves to a full ticket allotment and the ACC Tournament shifts to the new NBA arena in Charlotte, N.C., slightly smaller than the Forum.

"Next year will be brutal," Maryland senior associate athletic director Joe Hull said. "We'll be squeezed in every way imaginable."

"The tournament has always been kind of a closed show," said Wake Forest alumnus Guy Revell, a Tampa resident who will attend his 18th ACC Tournament. "If you're in the building, it's a big thing."

But there's also a sense of supply-and-demand uncertainty as the tournament comes to Florida.

Some Fans Take A Pass

Duke has won seven of the last eight ACC Tournaments. Last month, though, the Iron Dukes fundraising organization notified Duke's Florida alumni that tickets might be available. Several of its regular tournament customers had declined this time, so the minimum donation standard had been temporarily waived.

Officials at North Carolina, N.C. State, Wake Forest and Virginia also acknowledged they had gone deeper down the list of donors before filling their allotment.

Forty-five of the previous 53 ACC Tournaments were held in North Carolina (21 at Greensboro). Some fans drove home and slept in their own beds. Some showed up and cherry-picked seats from departing fans of eliminated teams.

Tampa requires a different commitment - a plane ticket and a four-night hotel stay. Few fans are going to drive home - or drive in late, hoping to secure weekend seats.

Tournament officials even instituted an unprecedented ticket redistribution plan, getting boosters to sell back unused first-day tickets so local fans could attend (and perhaps avoid some first-day empty seats).

If there are gaps, it appears they will be filled by a different range of school supporters, who are thrilled at their unexpected opportunity.

"This is a huge deal for anyone who has been around ACC basketball," said Tiffani Sherman, president of the Duke Club of Tampa Bay, who learned only last week that she had secured a ticket.

"It's an experience you'll never forget," said Tampa's Andrea Schuch, who works in the education department at Lowry Park Zoo. Schuch, who once camped out for six consecutive weeks in Duke's Krzyzewskiville tent city, got a ticket from her grandfather, an Iron Duke.

The unanswered question: What happens when the traditional ACC fans arrive, then their team loses? Do they unload their tickets and head to the beach or a spring training game? Or do they maintain the famous profile of an ACC Tournament fan (all basketball, all the time), even with warm weather beckoning outside?

"I've talked to a lot of people who are planning minivacations," said Dirk Katstra, executive director of the Virginia Athletics Foundation. "It is going to be a different ACC Tournament. But it's still going to be an extraordinarily hard ticket to get."

As always.

H.J. Barrett, a dentist and Virginia booster from Falls Church, Va., attended his first ACC Tournament in 1963. Stationed at Fort Bragg, he remembers getting a leave from duty and showing up at Reynolds Coliseum in Raleigh, N.C. He got his championship-game ticket - Duke vs. Wake Forest - from a scalper.

"Cost me 10 bucks. Outrageous!" said Barrett, who will make the pilgrimage to Tampa with Virginia friends.

"It's all relative, but I guess some parts of this tournament haven't changed."

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Find this article at:

<http://www.tbo.com/sports/MGB8IP51VYE.html>



Posted on Sun, Mar. 04, 2007

Down and out of Africa

Former USC player's long journey has led him away from the court and toward a degree

By RON MORRIS
rmorris@thestate.com

BY THE SUMMER of 2003 Ousmane Konate needed to see his family. He had just turned 18 and his life as a basketball nomad in France and the United States already had spanned three years. If being homesick means missing his brother and two sisters — and mostly his mother — then, yes, Konate was homesick.

Unfortunately, his much-anticipated return to Senegal was nothing like he expected.

"When he came back to New York he was even more distressed," said Justin Palmer, Konate's guardian the past six years.

Palmer had arranged for Konate's trip home, including doling out \$2,500 for the roundtrip airfare to Dakar, Senegal's capital and largest city. Konate found that not much had changed in his homeland. His widowed mother still struggled to support her immediate family with little or no income, relying almost exclusively on the \$200 a month Palmer supplied.

What had changed was the family's perception of Konate. One relative inquired as to when Konate was going to purchase a new home for his mother. The gathering of 100 or so in Konate's village who greeted him upon his return was stunned to learn he did not bear grandiose gifts.

Konate was not the family's savior, after all. He merely was a soon-to-be college freshman headed off to junior college to hone his basketball skills. He had not yet found the riches of professional basketball that his family expected. He somehow had transformed from being a stranger in a strange land to being a stranger in his own land.

"I can never go back again until I make it," Palmer recalls Konate telling him.

Four years later and Konate still has not made it. In fact, Konate has temporarily abandoned one of the two goals he set for himself upon leaving Senegal. He left the South Carolina basketball team on Jan. 26, in part as a way to relieve the pressure he was feeling from home. He remains on scholarship and in pursuit of a degree in sociology, a much more likely path to the fortune his family expects.

"It became obvious a good time back that the pot of gold was not going to be found for him in basketball," says USC coach Dave Odom. "Pulling him out (of basketball) relaxes him a bit. Obtaining two goals at one time was a bit much for him."

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Konate declined to be interviewed for this story. It has nothing to do with his English, now Konate's third language behind his native tongues, Wolof and French. Rather, it has to do with Konate not wanting to dwell on his past. He possesses, according to Palmer, an unwavering belief that his vision is face-forward at all times. He selected the jersey No. 24 at USC because of his dedication to working one day at a time, 24 hours a day.

"Oosse," as Palmer calls Konate, "has always been a survivor."

Palmer recognized that characteristic in Konate the moment he arrived in New York City, where, during that summer of 2000, he quickly learned to navigate the Canal Street markets on a \$9-a-day spending allowance without knowing English.

Other than the allowance, Palmer did not have much to offer Konate upon his arrival. Palmer slid the couches around his one-bedroom apartment in lower Manhattan so Konate could curl his 6-foot-11 frame on an air mattress. The two shared a bathroom.

The living conditions were not ideal, but they were a far cry from Konate's days growing up on the outskirts of Pikine, Senegal, where one day he played games with his friends in the school gymnasium and the next day swept those same gym floors as a way to support his family. By age 10, Konate had dropped out of school following his father's death, and home was a mattress in the back of that gym.

Soccer is the national game in Senegal, unless you grow to be nearly seven feet by the age of 16 as Konate did. Then you are directed to basketball, and Konate found himself playing in France for a Senegal national team. Professional teams waved money under Konate's nose

before longtime NBA scout and Senegal native Amadou Fall intervened.

Fall was somewhat of a pioneer in leaving Senegal to play basketball in the United States. He landed at the University of District Columbia where he played the game and earned a degree. Today, he is director of scouting for the NBA's Dallas Mavericks.

Not long after Konate left Senegal for France, Fall established the Sports and Education for Economic Development academy in his native country. Fall annually recruits 10-12 children to the school, located at an abandoned military base where students learn mathematics, English and basketball.

The most recent graduate of the SEED program to migrate to the NBA is 7-foot Seattle rookie center Mouhamed Sene. Other Senegal players on NBA rosters include DeSagana Diop of Dallas and Pape Sow of Toronto.

With regard to Konate, Fall knew of his background. He knew the value of an American education vs. the prospect of striking gold through basketball. He spoke to Konate with first-hand knowledge and advised the youngster to turn his back on pro basketball and remain in France to attend school.

"I've gone out of my way to downplay basketball to him," Fall says. "I've told him to get his degree."

Through a friendship with Palmer, Fall eventually found a home in New York City for Konate until he could locate a prep school to further his education. What began as a summer stay turned into a unique, although admittedly odd, friendship between the 32-year-old white Christian and the black Muslim 15 years his junior.

The two learned to communicate by playing high-level games of charades, whether in ordering food or figuring out the New York City subway system. Palmer, single with a girlfriend in Miami, soon found a best friend and in some ways the son maybe he longed to have.

"He was a bright kid with a big heart," Palmer says. "I had fallen in love with the kid."

Palmer has reservations in talking about his role in becoming Konate's guardian, although official paperwork has never been worked to make that title legal. He knows of black-market talk, where athletes from abroad are bought and sold for the prospect of a United States agent getting a cut of the ultimate prize money in pro basketball.

Palmer understands the suspicions, but dismisses them by talking of his deep-seeded caring for a young man he has supported financially while guiding him through one setback after another. Palmer, a James Madison University graduate who maintains a comfortable New York lifestyle that includes part ownership of a Manhattan restaurant, estimates he has spent in the neighborhood of \$30,000 in medical costs alone to cover Konate's myriad injuries.

Odom does not blink when quizzed about Palmer's motives.

"He has had ample opportunities to pull out," Odom says. "His intentions are pure."

So pure are those intentions that Palmer twice has visited Konate's family in Senegal, in part to see first-hand Fall's SEED academy and otherwise to somehow educate the Konates on the reality of Ousemane's situation.

"I tried to explain to them that I'm trying to help you so Ousemane has a better life and can eventually help you," Palmer says. "I told them that putting demands on him is not helping the situation."

"If I felt frustrated about any of that, I quickly realized: How could I be frustrated when they don't know any better?"

Palmer learned that any player from Senegal who takes his game to the United States is expected to be a star. The perception of the Konate family, and those from most parts of the poverty-stricken country, is that all streets in this country are paved with gold.

"I have to spend a lot of time explaining that this is a student who doesn't have a penny," Fall says. "Those are expectations that every kid from Senegal has to learn to manage."

Palmer's first Senegal visit in April of 2005 was an eye-opener. Some two hours by car from Dekar, paved roads turned to a dirt maze of meanderings. Farmer's stands where mangos and bananas were sold stood as landmarks. Kids everywhere played soccer in bare feet with trash cans or tires serving as goals.

The Konate family, excited by the visit of its primary provider, rolled out what for them was a red carpet. His meal was the national staple of fish and rice, and they ate while seated on plastic lawn chairs. Beyond that, the family offered a warmth and generosity that verified for Palmer the source of Ousemane's charming personality.

The two trips also confirmed for Palmer that his commitment to Konate was worthwhile. Given the trials of what Odom calls Konate's "seven-year odyssey," there were many times when Palmer had doubts.

The winding road that eventually led Konate to South Carolina is best navigated in capsule form and with the understanding that Palmer made decision after decision to place his friend in the best possible situations:

- He started at Maine Institute, but a hamstring injury kept him from playing basketball and the cold and dark northeastern winter left him depressed.
- He finished the 2002-03 school year at Laurinburg (N.C.) Institute where a foot injury limited his playing time. When he played, he averaged 15 points. Laurinburg's isolation had Konate believing he was back in Senegal.
- After verbally committing to play at Missouri, several gaps were found in Konate's academic transcript and Palmer placed him in a junior college. At Redlands (Okla.) College, Konate sat on the sideline for one season following foot surgery.
- Rusty from having not played a full season of basketball, Konate averaged 8 points and 8 rebounds during his second season at Redlands.

By then, a pending coaching change at Missouri opened the recruiting process for Konate. USC, Oregon and Florida State emerged as the front-runners for his services. The scouting report on Konate noted his good hands and feet and a jump hook that made him a threat as a scorer. Overriding those assets were his inability to make cuts and play a fast-paced game, as well as a slew of injuries that made him what most considered a project, or perhaps a sleeper.

Two things worked in USC's favor. First, Odom has a reputation for developing big men. Perhaps more importantly, Odom sees in just about every post player with basic skills a chance to land another Tim Duncan, the All-American he found in the Virgin Islands while coaching at Wake Forest.

It never quite worked for Konate at USC. A foot injury sidelined him midway through the 2005-06 season. Paperwork problems with the NCAA prevented Konate from playing in USC's opening two games this season. Despite the offseason loss of 23 pounds and a return to good health, the reality of Konate's situation set in. He simply was not a Southeastern Conference-caliber player.

As Konate's playing time decreased, his off-court conversations with both Odom and Palmer increased. The prospect of not being able to realize the dreams of his family slowly began to suffocate Konate's outlook on life in this country. Depression set in.

Finally, in late January, Konate, Odom and Palmer agreed it was time to give up basketball. Konate left the USC team, and with it, his quest to bring fame and fortune to his family and country.

Not all doors of opportunity were closed to Konate, though. He remains on scholarship and has concentrated his efforts solely on academics. He continues to have the support of his USC teammates and Odom.

"He's a great kid. He's a kid who's worthy of some love and some care," says Odom, who is working to land Konate at Shaw (N.C.) University next season where he can play his final year. More importantly, Konate is on course to graduate by the spring of 2008.

All parties involved say Konate is more at peace with himself these days. He extends a friendly smile to all when he strolls across campus. He also occasionally stops by Odom's office to talk. At the conclusion of every meeting, the massive Senegal native stops and swallows his coach in a bear hug.

He then leaves to continue his focus on the next 24 hours.

washingtonpost.com

The Army's Preemptive News Briefing

By Howard Kurtz
Washington Post Staff Writer
Saturday, February 24, 2007; C01

To the Army's public affairs chief, it was simply an effort to "get the facts out from our perspective."

To Dana Priest, who covers national security for The Washington Post, it was a case of Army officials "shooting themselves in the foot, because reporters are not going to trust them."

The Post last week gave the Army six days to respond to the paper's investigation into decaying, cockroach-infested facilities and an overwhelmed patient-care bureaucracy at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Northwest Washington. The Army's public affairs office used the time to summon journalists from other news organizations to a briefing at which Walter Reed's commander responded to the findings -- in an article that had not yet been published.

"It made us feel very uncomfortable that we were being set up to be the Army's public affairs arm," said Los Angeles Times correspondent Peter Spiegel, who attended the Pentagon session. "They were trying to brief us on a story when we didn't know what the story was about." Journalists from the Boston Globe, USA Today, the Associated Press and Fox News also attended the invitation-only briefing.

When journalists seek a response from a government agency on a pending story, there is generally an understanding that the information will not be shared with rival news outlets before publication. Such unspoken agreements, however, are hardly iron-clad. Treasury Department officials last year gave the Wall Street Journal declassified information about a secret program to track the banking records of terror suspects after failing to persuade the New York Times to kill a planned story on the subject.

Col. Dan Baggio, the Army's chief of media relations, said Walter Reed's commander had already been thinking of briefing reporters on conditions at the medical center. But Baggio acknowledged that the timing was dictated by the upcoming Post stories, which ran Sunday and Monday and detailed inadequate care for wounded veterans.

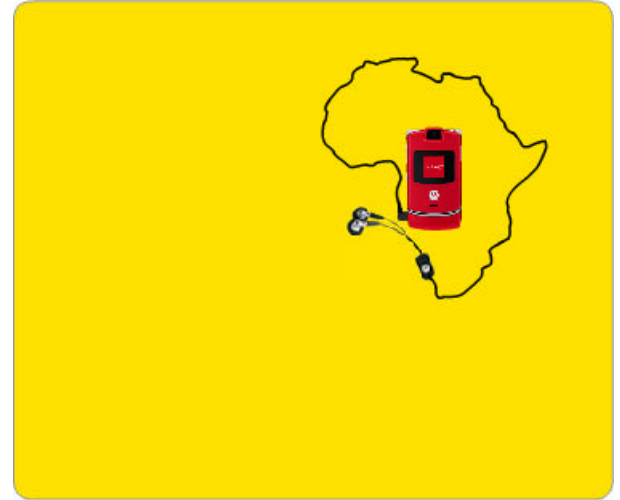
Priest, who reported the two-part series with Anne Hull, says she told an Army public affairs officer this week: "How do you think this is going to affect our relationship? Do you think I'm going to be willing next time to give you that much time to respond, if you're going to turn around and tell my competitors?"

But Maj. Gen. George Weightman, Walter Reed's commander, viewed the matter differently, Baggio said. "Because we had a long holiday weekend coming up and we knew the story was coming out about Walter Reed, he felt an obligation to make sure to get the facts out from our perspective," Baggio said. "We have a responsibility to communicate with the public about things going on at our command, regardless of who says they had the right of discovery."

Priest first contacted the Army on Monday, Feb. 12, and provided a list of 30 questions about conditions at Walter Reed. She said that Weightman was responsive during a two-hour interview Thursday, Feb. 15, but that she initially thought he was joking when he said that he would be briefing other news organizations on Walter Reed's problems the following day.

At the Friday briefing, reporters were told that Weightman's remarks were embargoed until late Saturday afternoon, around the time that The Post's story was expected to be posted online. That, said Baggio, was done as a "courtesy."

Advertisement



After an internal debate, said Spiegel of the Los Angeles Times, "it seemed to us pointless to try to cobble something together" without The Post's findings.

But the Army succeeded in putting its stamp on some stories. An AP report Saturday evening began: "The commander of the Army's leading medical facility acknowledges problems in outpatient treatment but said the hospital is working to address the concerns of patients and their families." Spiegel's Times piece Sunday said Weightman "has acknowledged that the staff responsible for tracking patients after they receive treatment was overwhelmed by the number of wounded when violence spiked in Iraq two years ago." Both reports said Weightman spoke in advance of The Post's stories.

Army officials are now questioning the paper's handling of the probe. In a letter to Walter Reed's staff this week, Weightman said that "information for this article was covertly obtained over more than two years by reporters who did not wish to bring their findings to the leadership for action."

Priest, saying that the inquiry lasted four months, not two years, declined to explain how she and Hull repeatedly signed into Walter Reed without the knowledge of the Army brass. Every patient or family member quoted by name, she said, had agreed to be on the record.

"We never lied to anyone about who we were," Priest said. "We just tried not to be in a position to identify ourselves to anyone who would report us to public affairs and have us kicked off the base."

As for Weightman's complaint that the paper should have notified the Army of its conclusions earlier in the process, Priest called that "ridiculous," saying: "You find wrongdoing and you don't report it to the public first? You report it to them first? That's not our role."

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