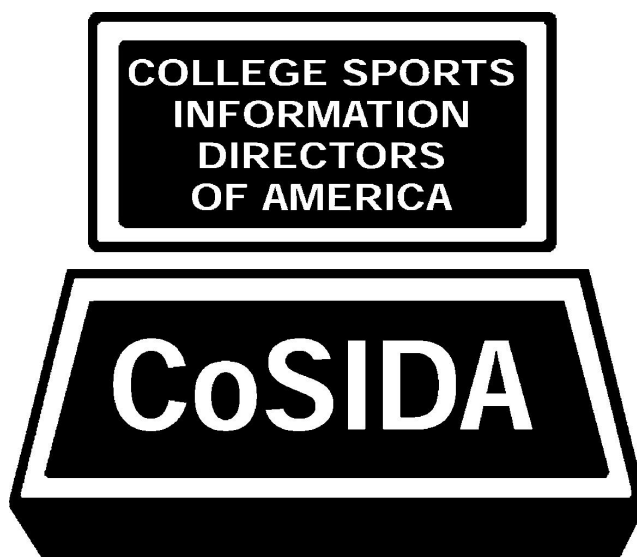


CoSIDA NEWS

Intercollegiate Athletics News and Issues from Around the Nation



AUGUST 7, 2006

Athletics

<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i48/48a03201.htm>

From the issue dated August 4, 2006

Morality Play**A U. of Idaho professor says college athletes are ethically impaired, but can be taught to think differently**

By BRAD WOLVERTON

Athens, Ga.

If sports are supposed to build character, recent evidence suggests that college athletics is falling down on the job. Consider this summer, during which at least 25 college athletes have made headlines for various off-field violations.

In June alone, Thomas Clayton, a Kansas State University running back, was convicted of misdemeanor battery after ramming his sports-utility vehicle into a university employee who was trying to place a wheel lock on the illegally parked car. The University of California quarterback Steve Levy reportedly threw a pint glass at a bouncer's face during a bar fight. Avery Atkins, a University of Florida cornerback, was arrested after police said he punched the mother of his child more than a dozen times. And Matthew Thomas, captain of Harvard University's football team, was arrested for allegedly breaking into his former girlfriend's dormitory room and assaulting her.

Together with highly publicized accounts of three Duke University men's lacrosse players arrested in March for allegedly raping a North Carolina Central University student paid to strip for their team, and allegations that dozens of college athletes posted sexually explicit hazing photos of themselves online, the incidents paint a fairly bleak picture of college sports.

In an effort to curb such reprehensible behavior, some athletics officials are intervening in unusual ways. A handful of top programs are spending tens of thousands of dollars a year trying to influence the way athletes make decisions. Some coaches argue that they have long been trying to impart moral values and teach young men and women the difference between right and wrong. If that is the case, why does it seem like so many athletes turn out badly?

Sharon K. Stoll believes she knows why — and she has developed a plan to tackle the problem. Ms. Stoll, a professor of physical education at the University of Idaho and the director of its Center for Ethical Theory and Honor in Competition and Sport, has been studying morality in sports since the 1980s.

During the past two decades, she has measured the moral-reasoning abilities of more than 70,000 college athletes, evaluating their written responses to various scenarios. Her research has found that, on the whole, athletes have significantly lower moral-reasoning skills than the general student population — and she says that is a direct result of the competitive sports environment.

"I always believed that, if athletics has a worth for education," she says, "then we should do something — an intervention — to help the moral reasoning of athletes."

Low Morals

<http://chronicle.com/cgi-bin/printable.cgi?article=http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i48/48a03201.htm> 8/4/2006

In recent years, Ms. Stoll says, her measurements have shown a sharp decline in athletes' moral reasoning. Team-sport athletes perform worse than any others, with lacrosse players scoring the lowest, followed by ice hockey and football players (see article on Page A34). Players of individual sports like golf and tennis fare better — but still lower than nonathletes. And although female athletes score higher than men, their moral-reasoning abilities have also dropped; Ms. Stoll believes they could fall as low as men's scores within five years.

Athletes are worse at moral thinking for several reasons, Ms. Stoll says. From an early age, many elite players are trained to view their opponents as obstacles to overcome rather than honorable individuals. They also frequently develop a sense of entitlement, are not encouraged to think for themselves, and rarely face consequences for acting irresponsibly. While they may know right from wrong, they often believe they can get away with anything.

When privileged athletes have to pay for their mistakes, as Garret Bushong did this year, they sometimes do not handle it well. Mr. Bushong, a third-string Purdue University football player, pleaded guilty in January to operating a vehicle while he was under the influence of alcohol. Days later he wrote a letter to the student newspaper, *The Exponent*.

"Yeah, I got an OWI, so what!" he wrote. "It's over, and everyone knows about it. It's not like 300 other students on this campus haven't gotten one. If I am not mistaken, you guys go to Purdue, too, and I thought you would have a little more respect for your fellow classmates and the people who bring millions of dollars into this university."

"We run this place and if anyone begs to differ, I'll say what my good buddy [quarterback] Brandon Kirsch once said: 'You know where to find me, locker number three, so come and say what you need to say to my face.'"

What is Character?

Ms. Stoll believes she can help athletes overcome such boorish, self-centered behavior. She has developed a curriculum to teach players how to improve their moral reasoning — and in turn, she hopes, make better decisions off the field.

In the past few years, football programs at six institutions — Arizona State University, Iowa State University, the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, the University of Georgia, the University of Maryland at College Park, and Virginia Tech — have bought her course, paying \$25,000 for a series of morality lessons.

Called "Winning with Character," the course is designed to help players reflect about who they are and think about the influences that people around them can have on their lives, and to provide a forum to discuss how they make — and should make — decisions.

A 59-year-old female professor who specializes in the philosophy of sport might seem completely out of place inside some of the biggest football programs in the country. But Ms. Stoll, a former athlete and high-school coach, knows the turf.

In June she stood before several dozen college and high-school football coaches in a lecture hall at the University of Georgia, training them on how to run her program.

She opened with a simple question — what is character? — and ultimately described it this way: having a strong knowledge and awareness of other people, and learning to value and respect them.

Athletes, she said, grow up being told that they are special, and they rarely think beyond themselves. "Dr. Phil likes to say that teenagers are just greedy," she told the coaches, referring to the celebrity psychologist. "Athlete populations are even greedier — they're all me-focused."

Over the next several hours, Ms. Stoll, a tall woman with an easy smile, commanded the room with her knowledge of sports and ethics. She discussed several core moral principles, including justice and fair play, and coaxed the burly coaches into discussing what behaviors were consistent with those principles. Then she probed to find out how they would respond to hypothetical situations.

A surprising number of coaches admitted that they frequently bent rules and pushed the limits of what was right, often because of the pressure to win games. Even one high-school football coach from Louisiana — whom Ms. Stoll had pegged as the group's moral conscience because of his idealistic responses to certain questions — came clean. He described how he had once sent a player across the field to borrow a tee from the other team, indicating that he planned to attempt a point-after, but instead ran a trick play to win the game.

Ms. Stoll used the story to illustrate that coaches play an important role in shaping athletes' moral choices. "Players are always looking to coaches to see how strongly they feel about the rules," she told the group. "You affect these kids with everything you do."

Providing a Forum

Ms. Stoll's curriculum requires athletics officials to discuss hypothetical dilemmas with their players. In most programs, coaches teach the lessons themselves, usually a 20- to 30-minute class once a week during the academic year.

The classes encourage players to discuss a range of topics — including guns, gangs, drugs, date rape, and how to become responsible citizens. Athletes are also confronted with hypothetical moral dilemmas, such as the following: Say a coach teaches players to hold an opponent — a maneuver that is against the rules — but to do so in a way that referees are not likely to notice. Players are then asked to describe how that situation makes them feel.

Some of the best lessons come when coaches and players describe their personal experiences. At the University of Maryland last year, a football player with two children spoke to teammates about the consequences of casual sex. "That woke some people up," says Kevin Glover, Maryland's director of character education, an athletics-department position that was added recently.

In some sessions, coaches reveal details about themselves to help players feel more comfortable around them.

"On the field, all coaches do is bark and scream," Ms. Stoll says. "Athletes rarely get to sit down with coaches and talk about these issues — life struggles, and what's right, and morality."

Athletes are not always eager to take part. When Danny Verdun Wheeler, a starting senior linebacker at the University of Georgia, heard that he had to attend character-education class when he arrived on campus as a freshman, he was skeptical.

"I thought, I'm not a rule breaker, I don't need this," he says. As a first-year student, he also felt overwhelmed by all the football and academic activities filling his schedule.

But a few weeks into the program, he changed his mind. During one class, a coach shared a story about his personal struggles with alcohol. The story had an immediate impact on the team.

"Once he told us about his problems, we kind of relaxed and felt like he's human too, he made mistakes," Mr. Verdun Wheeler says. "We knew if someone like coach and his status could get in trouble, we could, too."

The coach implored his players to curb their alcohol use, emphasizing that if they drove while under the influence of alcohol, or got arrested for underage drinking, they could be suspended for two to three games —

or worse.

The lesson resonated with Mr. Verdun Wheeler. "Our second game this year is South Carolina," he says, referring to one of the program's biggest rivals. "No one wants to miss that."

Because of the coach's talk, he says, several players have cut back on their alcohol use in recent years, and one or two guys have even stopped drinking.

Mr. Verdun Wheeler says the lessons have also encouraged his teammates to talk openly off the field, sometimes weighing ethical situations: "I've seen some guys actually think before doing things — not just, 'I'm an athlete, I'm a superstar, I'm gonna do what I want.'"

A Lapse in Judgment

At one point in her own career as a coach, Ms. Stoll struggled with an ethical dilemma that still lingers with her. She was coaching high-school gymnastics, in the early 1970s, and one of her gymnasts had just completed a routine.

Her student noticed that the next gymnast, an opponent from another school who was much shorter than she, had not moved the springboard to adjust for her height — creating the potential for a dangerous accident.

"Coach," Ms. Stoll's student asked her, "shouldn't we tell her to adjust the springboard?"

"Get ready for your next routine," Ms. Stoll ordered.

A moment later, the misplaced springboard caused the opposing team's gymnast to slam into a vault, knocking the wind out of her.

Ms. Stoll says she has never forgiven herself for that lapse in judgment and says the incident led her to leave coaching and, later, to pursue graduate work in the philosophy of sport. It also motivated her to do more than come up with theories.

Today she is one of about 120 members of an international group of philosophers of sport, a small but growing field of scientific inquiry. Her hands-on approach puts her at odds with some colleagues, who question how effective her curriculum is.

Some sport philosophers doubt that athletes can significantly improve their moral reasoning by thinking through hypothetical situations and applying ethical principles they have learned. Moral reasoning, they believe, is best instilled in children by adults who model and have them repeat proper behavior.

Ms. Stoll agrees that those conditions are ideal, but she has also seen college athletes' moral reasoning improve significantly when they are forced to think and talk about moral choices.

Athletics officials express few reservations about Ms. Stoll's work. A few complain that her program costs too much; Arizona State University dropped the curriculum last year in part because of its high price.

But officials there say they plan to bring it back. "It gives you a platform to discuss all kinds of important issues on a regular basis," says Jean Boyd, an associate athletics director at Arizona State. "It's much better than putting on a program one time."

Not every university sticks to the curriculum as strictly as Ms. Stoll would like. Some programs skip lessons or take weeks off when their teams need extra rest before big games.

And the lessons are not for everyone, Ms. Stoll says. "I believe in the essence of sport, that fair play exists, that there are certain standards you should strive for," she says. "Not everyone's going to buy into that. A lot of coaches believe they've got to do what they've got to do to win."

Not a Magic Bullet

At the University of Georgia, character training has provided numerous benefits, says head football coach Mark Richt. It helps coaches identify leaders early, unify classes, and pinpoint students who might need counseling or additional help to overcome problems.

Best of all, Mr. Richt says, the program allows athletes to voice their opinions, hear what their peers think, and talk through situations that might come up.

On paper, the curriculum seems to be working. The team just completed its fourth year in the program, and according to Ms. Stoll's measurements, players have made marked improvements in their moral reasoning over that time.

That is not to say that character education is a magic bullet. While Georgia's program is cleaner than many, three football players have been arrested in the past year on charges of driving under the influence, theft, and giving false information to police.

Still, Mr. Richt believes that the curriculum has helped right the path of many players. "Most of our guys are capable," he says. "It's just a matter of thinking right."

WHICH ATHLETES HAVE THE BEST — AND WORST — MORAL-REASONING SKILLS

In measurements of college athletes' moral reasoning, players of team sports — and in particular, team contact sports — fare significantly worse than those who play individual sports, according to Sharon K. Stoll, a sports ethicist from the University of Idaho.

She believes that is partly because team-sport athletes often do not make as many decisions during games. In basketball and football, for example, coaches call many of the plays from the sidelines.

Contrast that to, say, golf and tennis, where players are given greater responsibility. In golf, players must mark penalties on their scorecards for certain errors, and in tennis, athletes call their own lines.

When athletes are given more individual responsibility, Ms. Stoll says, they tend to have higher moral-reasoning ability and make better ethical decisions.

Athletes who play sports in which players are allowed to make contact have the lowest moral-reasoning skills, Ms. Stoll says. "When you're allowed to hit someone within the rules, you start to view your opponent as an object and not human," she says.

Contact sports also allow athletes more opportunities to break the rules, she says. For example, football players can hold an opponent's breastplate, or lacrosse players can jab a competitor with a stick.

Not surprisingly therefore, athletes who play lacrosse, ice hockey, and football score, on average, the lowest of all college athletes. Golfers and tennis players fare best.

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From the issue dated August 4, 2006

From Inside a Police Car, a New Perspective

By SARA LIPKA

When Brendan Watkins, a defensive lineman on the Davidson College football team, told his father he had been spending time with the campus police, the man thought his son was in trouble. In fact, Mr. Watkins was staying out of trouble.

Davidson's football players rode along with campus police officers last winter to learn to avoid off-field problems. The program shows one of the various ways that athletics departments are trying to influence athletes' behavior.

Davidson's football team did not have a bad reputation, but it was not squeaky clean. A couple of years ago, some of Mr. Watkins's teammates were arrested for tearing down light poles on the campus. Police officers remember more than one rowdy party.

When Tripp Merritt became the team's head coach last summer, he told players he expected them to become upstanding members of the community. They have since painted a Little League fence together and planned a "Family Fun Fest" for local children. After their season ended last year, the coach laid out a calendar and asked players to sign up for a Friday or Saturday night on police patrol.

The players did not know what to expect. "A few of the guys were really hoping to see us get into something," says Ronnie L. Hersey, one of the officers with whom players rode.

On one Friday night, Mr. Watkins followed an officer into a dormitory to investigate a noise complaint. "Everybody was wondering what I was doing there," he says with a laugh.

Players shadowed the officers as they broke up several loud campus parties. But some players got a taste of more than basic noise violations. One watched an officer confront a belligerent student who was attempting to steal a rake from the baseball field. Another had to be dropped off early to steer clear of a drug bust.

Team members say they came away with a better appreciation of what police deal with. And some say they have modified their own behavior after watching other people act up. A handful of players have also started advocating for good conduct among their peers. At a spring party, some students were getting rowdy, pushing each other back and forth. Derrick Thompson, an offensive lineman, stepped in to prevent the incident from escalating.

"Me and one of my teammates said, 'Hey, y'all, just chill out,'" he says. "'We don't need to get into that kind of situation tonight.'"

Several players asked to ride around with police again this spring, and the coach plans to require the team to go out again next year.

The experience gave players a new outlook on campus safety, says Fountain L. Walker, Davidson's director of public safety.

"You're always going to have issues," he says. But now players have "a different mind-set in dealing with a situation where the police are involved."

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Today's News

Friday, August 4, 2006

NCAA Officials Establish New Penalties for Teams With Consistently Poor Academic Performance

By [SARA LIPKA](#)

College teams whose players struggle academically year after year will soon be subject to more-severe penalties from the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

On Thursday the NCAA's Division I Board of Directors announced a new structure for "historical" penalties, which are imposed if a team's academic performance lags consistently over a four-year period. Performance is measured by an "academic-progress rate," scored on a scale of 1 to 1,000, and based on whether athletes stay enrolled and make adequate progress toward their degrees.

Teams that have had academic-progress rates below 900 -- the score that corresponds to about a 50-percent graduation rate -- for the past four years would receive a public warning the next spring and be subject to penalties, beginning in the 2007-8 academic year. Among possible penalties would be further reducing scholarships and recruiting privileges, or, in extreme cases, banning postseason play and revoking NCAA membership.

"These are the most severe penalties that institutions and teams can incur. These are penalties for the worst of the worst," Walter Harrison, president of the University of Hartford and chairman of the NCAA's Committee on Academic Progress, said during a news conference on Thursday.

The first four-year period measured would be from 2003-4 to 2006-7, and NCAA officials estimate that approximately 300 teams could be in the danger zone.

Currently, in what the NCAA calls "contemporaneous" penalties, teams with academic progress rates below 925 in any one year can lose up to 10 percent of the scholarships they are normally allowed to award.

"As with each stage of our academic reforms -- from enhanced eligibility standards to sharper measurements of progress toward degree -- the goal is to help teams and student athletes improve, not to penalize," Myles Brand, president of the NCAA, said in a written statement. "The historically based phase of reform ... accurately identifies those teams that are consistently underperforming and prompts them to attain a higher level of academic achievement."

A team subject to "historical" penalties may escape them if its academic-progress rate seems to be improving, if its academic performance compares favorably with that of other students at the same institution, or if its institution's per-capita educational expenses are significantly lower than those of other institutions in Division I.

The NCAA made a few other announcements on Thursday, after meetings of its presidential and executive committees. They include the following:

- The association's Executive Committee has denied the appeals of both the College of William and Mary and McMurtry University to continue using American Indian symbols in athletics competition. Teams from those institutions "will only be invited to participate in NCAA championships if they elect to do so

without Native American references on their uniforms," said Mr. Harrison, who added that the symbols "could lead to hostile or abusive environments." (William and Mary's nickname is the Tribe and McMurry's is the Lady Indians.)

- Two proposals for Division I are subject to overrides by member institutions in the coming months. One is a new rule that would permit a graduate of one institution who had remaining athletics eligibility to play for another institution as a graduate student. Another measure subject to override is the defeat of a proposal to allow 12-game football seasons for teams in Division I-AA.
- Division II has signed a three-year agreement with College Sports Television, or CSTV, its first network contract for the broadcast of regular-season games. Division II also proposed creating two separate football championships for teams offering varying numbers of athletics scholarships. That championship structure, if approved, would take effect in the 2009 season.
- The Division III Presidents Council has recommended that the division continue its current membership moratorium until January 2008. The council is now weighing various proposals on the issue of capping membership, and those proposals will be up for a vote at the NCAA Convention in January. Division III also plans to begin a two-year pilot program for drug education and testing in 2007.

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Information Technology

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From the issue dated August 4, 2006

ROUND TABLE

Facebook and Other Social-Networking Sites Raise Questions for Administrators

By BROCK READ AND JEFFREY R. YOUNG

Campus officials can be forgiven for being a bit weary of Facebook: The social-networking Web site, beloved by students, keeps managing to bring attention — often unwanted — to its collegiate clientele.

In May, for example, officials of Northwestern University advised student athletes to stay off the site in the wake of a hazing scandal that erupted after a student posted incriminating photos online.

Facebook has also piqued the interest of lawmakers, many of whom have fretted that such social-networking sites pose a danger to children because of predators who misuse the personal information there. Twice this summer, Facebook's chief security officer has appeared on Capitol Hill to defend the site's policies on privacy and security.

The attention that Facebook has generated has given college administrators plenty of incentive to consider whether their institutions should issue warnings about the site. *The Chronicle* recently discussed Facebook with a panel of officials who have wrestled with the issue. The group comprised:

- Joseph Howard, assistant director of residence life at Mercyhurst College, in Erie, Pa. Mercyhurst has encouraged faculty and staff members to post their own Facebook profiles, and has created a brochure that teaches students about Facebook safety and "cybercivility."
- Laing Kennedy, athletics director at Kent State University, which made news recently when it told student athletes not to post on Facebook. (More recently, the university has decided simply to ask its athletes to keep their Facebook profiles private.)
- Pablo Malavenda, associate dean of students at Purdue University at West Lafayette. In response to fears about harassment and cyberstalking, Purdue has trained police officers to handle incidents of harassment and cyberstalking on Facebook.
- Tracy Mitrano, director of information-technology policy at Cornell University. She has helped create a Web site that contains a message to students warning them (among other things) that comments and photos posted to Facebook may end up in Google's online cache even after the material is deleted.

Excerpts from the conversation:

Have you noticed potential employers peeking at students' profiles? Students harassing each other?

Mr. Malavenda: I can give you many examples of employers using Facebook. One of my students worked as a summer intern, and her job was to check out Facebook profiles of potential employees and rank them from 1 to 10.

Mr. Howard: At the American Society of Journalists and Authors conference, one attendee noted that a bunch of employers at their institution's job fair paid a student to print profiles of all interviewees.

Mr. Kennedy: At Kent State, we are concerned with sports agents accessing unintended personal information about prospective professional athletes.

Mr. Malavenda: One athletics director shared with me that a woman committed [to the college's program], went on Facebook to check out her teammates, and then decided to go to another university.

Mr. Howard: We've seen similar things with roommates — freshmen looking up their assigned roommate before arriving and calling to get a new roommate before they've moved in.

Which aspects of social networking strike you as the most worrisome or pressing?

Ms. Mitrano: None of them strike me as worrisome or pressing, but new technologies do create new cautions that it behooves us as campus administrators to share. ... Personal safety in tools such as Facebook or even IM is an obvious example. Getting students to think a little bit about the perception of others toward their particular forms of expression or self-"branding" is another.

Mr. Malavenda: My concern is that students ... do not seem to be concerned about their image or about creating a positive image of themselves.

Mr. Howard: Students tend to exaggerate or embellish aspects of themselves that they believe enhance their image among their peers. We've long seen students dramatically exaggerate their alcohol use.

Ms. Mitrano: I think that what this technology does is freeze in space and time a branded moment for someone who might just be trying an identity on, like clothes, for a moment. ... Technology can freeze these moments when, in the spirit of the person, they are fleeting, not self-identifying.

Facebook officials are quick to point out that the site has privacy settings that let students restrict who sees their profiles. Do students seem to be aware of those settings? If so, do they use them?

Mr. Howard: Sure they do. But there are any number of ways that someone's profile can be exposed even with restricted privacy settings.

Mr. Malavenda: Students are aware of the privacy settings. But what is the point of being on Facebook if you restrict your profile? The conveniences that Facebook offers outweigh, in their minds, any threat or danger.

Do faculty and staff members at your institutions have a presence on Facebook?

Mr. Howard: We strongly encouraged faculty and staff to join Facebook to move away from the notion of Facebook as a "no holds barred" student forum. The goal was to exert some "norming" influence online.

Mr. Malavenda: There is at least one institution in Indiana that prohibits their staff and faculty from joining for liability reasons.

Ms. Mitrano: I can't remember how many thousand "friends" former President Lehman had at Cornell, but it was many. Same with other administrators.

For those of you who have made a point of putting professors on Facebook, or restricting students' use of the site, what has student response been like?

Mr. Kennedy: We have started putting together some focus groups with our student athletes to share information. ... I think students in general are becoming more selective in terms of whom they are communicating with on Facebook.

Mr. Howard: Some students objected initially. I remember one student saying that the site was like her "online journal."

Mr. Malavenda: I was told by a student after a presentation on Facebook that I am "ruining Facebook." He also commented that we should not be on Facebook — it's not intended for us.

Ms. Mitrano: Anyone have a parent or older sibling who read their diary without permission? I get the distinction in the magnitude and quality of the viewers, but there's something age-old about teenagers wanting to have a world secluded from adults.

Do universities have an obligation to educate students about social-networking issues? If so, what can colleges do to provide that instruction?

Ms. Mitrano: We have an obligation to inform them about all the laws, policies, and social norms that attach to new technologies.

Mr. Howard: This is an issue where IT and student-affairs personnel can have an impact and encourage students to make solid choices.

Mr. Malavenda: It's natural to do Facebook workshops during orientation.

Ms. Mitrano: The site I created, at the request of our registrar, has had many thousands of hits. ... So somebody is interested in the message. What I don't know is whether it is just the administrators who are interested or really the students themselves.

Minor controversies have erupted at several colleges after campus police used Facebook in investigations. Do administrators owe it to students to make clear policy statements on what police officers can and cannot do on the site?

Ms. Mitrano: At Cornell we have not found it necessary to demarcate which university officials can and can't view Facebook.

Mr. Malavenda: Most campus police strive to be helpful and proactive, so it doesn't fit the campus-police model to find criminals on Facebook, or to harass students.

Mr. Howard: I agree. I think "policing Facebook" is taking an institution into uncharted territory.

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Athletics

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From the issue dated July 7, 2006

A Classroom Comeback

Hundreds of former college athletes have returned for their degrees, helped in part by a new NCAA incentive

By EUGENE MCCORMACK

When C.J. Masters dropped out of Kansas State University in March 1993, he was just six classes shy of a degree in criminology. The starting safety on the 20th-ranked football team wanted to devote all of his energy to the forthcoming National Football League draft.

For months Mr. Masters flew from city to city, trying out for teams in three professional leagues. When no one offered him a contract, he moved to Kansas City, where, over the next few years, he held several low-paying jobs, including organizing schedules and appointments at a group home for troubled adolescents.

During the late 1990s, he tried his hand at sales, but never felt fulfilled. Then, in 2002, he learned about a job helping children with developmental disabilities, and was hired as a case manager.

He loved working with kids. But over the next few years, he was passed over for several higher-paying jobs because he didn't have a college degree. In late 2004, he called Kansas State's athletics officials to see what they could do to help him earn his diploma.

What Mr. Masters and hundreds of former college athletes have discovered in recent years is that many institutions — including Marshall University, the University of Kentucky, and the University of Nebraska at Lincoln — are making it easier for college athletes to complete the degrees that eluded them during their playing days.

Although thousands of athletes who left college early have returned during the past two decades, the numbers have recently spiked. Athletics officials attribute some of the growth to a new incentive from the National Collegiate Athletic Association that rewards teams when former athletes come back.

Under the NCAA's Academic Progress Rate formula, which measures how well teams are performing in the classroom, teams with low scores can lose scholarships. But when former players return to complete their degrees, teams earn bonus points that can help them avoid such penalties.

The incentive has spurred some colleges to reach out to former athletes as never before, offering free tuition, housing, and other assistance — often in exchange for part-time work in the athletics department.

Academic officials' mixed view

Academic officials are happy to see former athletes return, as many show a newfound focus on their studies. But some critics say the change in attitude only proves that colleges put big-time athletes under too much physical and emotional strain to concentrate on their class work.

"Athletes returning to school is a positive step because the discipline that they learned in sports, they finally can apply to their course work," says Murray Sperber, professor emeritus of English and American studies at Indiana University at Bloomington and author of several books on college sports. "But the fact that athletes usually perform better academically when their eligibility is over shows the huge flaw in the current system."

Under NCAA rules, students may receive athletics aid for no more than five years in a six-year period, and many players in the NCAA's top division do not finish in that time. But students who come back for their degrees may qualify for NCAA grants or tuition assistance.

Many colleges that provide financial help to returning athletes are members of the National Consortium for Academics and Sports. Started in 1985, the program has helped thousands of former players finish their degrees at no cost to themselves, though they must participate in community-service projects for 10 hours a week. Colleges pay a small fee to join the consortium and cover the cost of the returning students' tuition.

Athletics officials credit the consortium with helping them bring back the majority of former athletes who have completed their degrees in recent years. But some colleges say the NCAA's new academic incentive has led them to redouble their efforts, or start new programs, to bring players back.

From 2003-4 to 2004-5 — the first two years that the NCAA has kept track of returning athletes — there was a 23-percent increase in the number of students who came back, with a total of 849 former players in the top division re-enrolling in those two years to finish their degrees.

More than half — 58 percent — of those students played baseball, football, or men's basketball in college. That is no surprise, several experts say, as graduation rates in those sports are usually among the lowest.

Football players have returned in droves. In fact, 38 percent of all NCAA Division I football programs have had at least one player come back to finish his degree in the two most recent academic years.

As athletes have returned, some have helped their alma maters avoid NCAA penalties. This spring was the first time the association stripped scholarships from teams that underperformed academically. According to the NCAA, 265 teams were at risk of being penalized.

Fifty of those teams avoided punishment with a combination of retention adjustments and graduation bonus points they received from returning athletes' finishing their degrees. One-third to one-half of those 50 teams, the NCAA estimates, got around penalties solely through graduation bonuses.

Searching Databases

Several universities say they are motivated to bring former athletes back because the students made many sacrifices for their institutions. Officials at the University of Texas at Austin, where 30 to 40 players have returned in the past five years, and at the University of Maryland at College Park, which has brought back about 25 former players in the same period, say that helping athletes is simply the right thing to do.

"These individuals have spent four to five years at our university and have given us a lot," says Anton E. Goff, an assistant athletics director for academic support at Maryland. "We know the importance of getting an education, and if we can help them get one, we will."

But some institutions, including Marshall University, say they developed a plan to bring back former athletes primarily to boost their teams' academic-progress rates.

Last year Marshall officials started searching their database for athletes who had left campus within the past 10 years but needed less than one year of credits to graduate. The university found that about a dozen former

students, some of whom now play professional sports, were already eligible for diplomas — sometimes in different majors than they had signed up for. One former student who plays in the NFL got his degree simply by paying \$100 in campus parking tickets.

To help students with 12 or fewer credit hours left to complete, the university has set up a program allowing students to work 20 hours a week in the athletics department to cover their tuition and living expenses. Two athletes have graduated under the plan, which began in August.

Marshall officials are not sure how much their returning students will help them avoid possible NCAA penalties once the returning graduates are factored into their scores.

Marshall's success in finding athletes close to earning their degrees has persuaded the university to start looking back 20 years to see if more players might need only a few classes to graduate.

Other universities have already helped students come back after an absence of more than 20 years. Clifford Moller, a former basketball player at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, left the Cornhuskers program after his junior year, in 1970, and returned to New York City, where for five years he drove a cab and installed telephone lines. Then, over the next 20 years, he worked in the real-estate business, eventually overseeing a 13-acre redevelopment project in Manhattan.

The project made him want to learn more about economic development, but he realized he needed a college degree to work in that field. He planned to go back to college in New York, but when he called Nebraska for his transcript, an academic adviser told him about a university program that helped former athletes. Mr. Moller learned that the university, a member of the National Consortium for Academics and Sports, would waive the cost of his tuition, fees, and books if he worked 12 hours a week as a study-hall counselor for athletes.

Mr. Moller says the offer was too good to pass up, and he returned to Lincoln in 1997, at age 47. Over the next three years, he sat through athletes' study halls four nights a week, telling students that they should focus on their studies to avoid ending up like him. "I would point to all the gray hairs on my head and say they don't want to be doing this when they're my age," he says.

Without basketball to distract him, Mr. Moller says, he dedicated himself to academics like never before, raising his grade-point average from 1.3 to 2.9 and finishing his undergraduate degree in communications in three years.

He went on to complete a master's degree in community and regional planning in 2003 and is now executive director of an economic-development association in Alexandria, La.

Paying for Scholarships

But many colleges do not have the money to help former athletes finish their academic work. Southern Utah University, for example, is more focused on securing a fifth year of aid for scholarship players than on trying to bring back athletes who did not graduate, says Myndee Larsen, an assistant athletics director.

"We're not even close to having the ability to look beyond that right now," she says.

As Mr. Masters, the former Kansas State football player, discovered when he called the university in the spring of 2005, even some big-time athletics programs do not offer financial incentives for returning athletes. But university officials helped him secure a \$2,000 NCAA grant. Athletics officials also told him about the department's Second Wind program for comeback players.

The program provides former athletes assistance in scheduling classes and finding housing. If students don't

want to move back to Kansas, the program allows them to take classes online or at other colleges and have the credits count toward their degree at Kansas State.

Mr. Masters was living in Phoenix and didn't want to move. Last summer he returned to Kansas to take one class, and over the past year he completed three courses online and two at Scottsdale Community College, near his home. He finished his criminology degree in May.

This fall or next spring, Mr. Masters plans to enroll in a Kansas State master's program in youth and development administration. He still wants to work with children, but he would like to find a position in a public parks-and-recreation department, setting up and running an after-school program or creating better designs for parks.

Athletic departments that help pay for returning athletes do so with revenue from ticket sales, donations, and other sources. Athletics officials at Northeastern University say they receive about \$100,000 a year from the university's student-financial-services budget to bring back about 10 former players. Other institutions have set up endowments to offset scholarships and other expenses.

The University of Kentucky has established a fund in honor of Cawood Ledford, a former men's basketball announcer who died in 2001, to provide scholarship assistance to athletes who want to complete their degrees. To qualify for aid, players must work 20 hours a week in the athletics department and perform community-service work.

Since the fund was started, in 1992, it has helped more than 40 students, including the basketball star Allen Edwards, finish their educations. Mr. Edwards helped Kentucky win two national championships in the late 1990s, then left to play professionally for several years. He returned with financial assistance from the fund and finished his undergraduate work in sociology in 2002 with an eye toward becoming a college basketball coach. Now he is an assistant men's coach at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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COMMENTARY : Changes have BCS officials wringing hands

BY BRIAN DAVIS THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Posted on Friday, August 4, 2006

URL: <http://www.nwanews.com/adg/Sports/162506/>

The Bowl Championship Series gets yet another face-lift this season with the creation of a fifth game, the implementation of the so-called “double-hosting model” and a new television network.

Count the number of times the formula has been massaged, tweaked or outright overhauled, and you’ll run out of appendages.

There are big changes ahead again this season, including the creation of a true national championship game. But BCS officials are understandably worried.

Fans might not grasp the format, and officials aren’t sure how Fox will present its multimillion-dollar product.

Big 12 Conference Commissioner Kevin Weiberg spent the past two years as the BCS coordinator, a role he was relieved to relinquish. Last week, he agreed that Joe Fan might not know the new BCS national title game is Jan. 8, after the four other BCS games have been played.

Here’s how it works. The top two teams in the BCS standings on Dec. 3 will meet in the national title game in Glendale, Ariz., home of the Arizona Cardinals’ new stadium. Eight more teams will be selected to play in the Fiesta, Sugar, Orange and Rose bowls.

Once the bowl lineup is set, that’s it. The winners of any of the other BCS games do not advance to the championship game.

The title game will still rotate among the four BCS sites. The Tostitos Fiesta Bowl was first in the rotation. So Fiesta Bowl organizers will host their game Jan. 1, then turn around seven days later and host this new game — thus, the “double-hosting” moniker.

Fiesta Bowl President John Junker and his organization annually host a parade and a massive block party while also spending lavishly on other bowl functions. He wants the Fiesta Bowl to be as big as ever, even though a bigger, more important game will follow.

“The reward aspect of what a bowl experience is supposed to be is a big deal to players,” he said. “We want it to remain a reward.”

Fortunately for Junker, BCS officials are handling a lot of the details for the second game. But how big and lavish will that game be ?

New BCS administrator Bill Hancock is an Oklahoma graduate who spent years as the director of the NCAA Tournament. Although the tournament is a big deal, the on-site

event is rather low-key. Most arena signage is covered, no loud music blares on the speakers and teams have specific rules about what they can and can't do. Between games, it's kind of dull.

With Hancock at the helm, the title game might have the same feel.

"I don't think it will have a Super Bowl-type of atmosphere," Hancock said. "There will be more emphasis on the game itself."

Still, Fox might turn it into a spectacle. The network that broadcasts few college football games is responsible for the biggest game of all. Hancock said Fox officials are "passionate" about the BCS.

"But they haven't asked for a pylon cam," he said.

Fox already made one change. The network will unveil the weekly BCS standings during its Sunday NFL programming instead of Monday, as in previous years. That sounds good, but what happens on a big news day in the NFL ? Will the BCS standings get short shrift ?

Said Hancock: "What they have told us is they are committed to this."

We'll see. Everyone else seems to be committed to this new BCS format, too. This year, anyway.

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college football

Fox contract: No cure for BCS blues

The network will let college football officials run the show, including a fifth BCS game.

By John Henderson
Denver Post Staff Writer
DenverPost.com

Los Angeles - Fox Studios sit in the middle of Century City, Calif., not far from the movie set depicting a New York City street. Fox is where fantasy becomes reality, whether it's apes taking over planet Earth or a short-order cook appearing on "American Idol."

But if 20th Century Fox can get Predator to face Alien on the big screen, can Fox Sports insure No. 1 will face No. 2 in college football? Don't get too excited, college football critics. The company that takes over broadcast rights of the Bowl Championship Series for the next four years has "Great Expectations" in video but not in the boardroom.

"First off, I do not believe we have a lot of influence," said Ed Goren, president and executive producer of Fox Sports. "When we negotiated this deal we were very specific: It's your event. It's your sport. If you want suggestions along the way, we certainly have opinions. But we don't run it. And we're happy with the way it is right now."

Goren, 62, is sitting in his office surrounded by pictures of him as a child with various Brooklyn Dodgers. The son of a former New York sportswriter, Goren has been a sports fan all his life. He understands the beef of the college football fan.

In four of the past six years, the championship game for which the BCS was designed to create has had a controversy. However, Fox begins its contract one season after arguably the greatest title game in college football history. After No. 2 Texas defeated No. 1 Southern California in the last 18 seconds, 41-38, in a game between the nation's lone unbeaten teams, the college game suddenly looks pretty good.

"We've done a four-year deal, and if tomorrow we can turn it into an eight-year deal we'd probably take a very serious look at doing just that," Goren said. "The acceptance and enthusiasm before we've even done one game from Madison Avenue is significant."

In other words, what you've seen is what you're going to get. Well, there is one tweak this season. Say hello to the double-hosting system in which a fifth lucrative BCS game will be added.

The four BCS bowls - Fiesta, Rose, Orange and Sugar - will remain, but the two top-ranked teams will play Jan. 8 in Glendale, Ariz., one week after the Fiesta Bowl in the same new Cardinals Stadium.

Double hosting's biggest appeal is it gives teams from the five smaller non-BCS conferences easier entry into the BCS riches. But it doesn't prevent the season ending with a team such as Oklahoma playing for the national title after getting blown out of the Big 12 Championship, as it did in 2003, or Nebraska doing the same after getting throttled by Colorado in the 2001 regular-season finale.

If anyone thinks a creative TV network that has millions watching hack amateur singers also can produce a better scenario for a title game, think again.

"We're not that smart," Goren said.

There is one playoff system that gained steam until it fell under the radar when USC played Texas in that classic showdown. A "Plus-One" system would return the teams playing in the four major bowls to their original conference ties. After the four BCS games, the top two ranked teams in a new ranking would then play again the following week for the title.

In the spring of 2004, ABC enthusiastically approached the conference commissioners about using Plus-One. ABC was just as enthusiastically rebuffed.

"We simply don't want to extend the season," Pacific 10 commissioner Tom Hansen said. "We thought it was the first step toward a playoff. We much prefer the bowl system. It's my feeling, and shared by many, that if you had a playoff, say eight teams, most of the bowls would go away because they'd be pretty much inconsequential."

Oregon athletic director Bill Moos doesn't think so. The architect behind Plus-One has said it's only two teams playing one more game and

TV's payout would be off the charts.

However, Goren isn't convinced.

"It depends on your definition of 'off the charts,'" he said. "It would be more. But there's just so much television sports advertising money in the marketplace."

Goren thinks money from a Plus-One title game would take money away from the other four BCS bowl games. So if Fox doesn't think it would work, is Plus-One dead? Are we doomed to the quirky nature of the BCS rankings until the contract runs out before the 2010 season?

Moos said, "I don't think it's dead." He keeps hearing of more support from the coaching ranks.

The bottom line is if change comes, it must come from the school presidents and conference commissioners. Fox Sports will remain on the sideline. It will run into the huddle only if called upon.

"Nothing happens quickly in college sports," Goren said. "At some point it's not unrealistic to think that there will be a modification in the form of a Plus-One. But it just takes time."

In this case, at least four more years.

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Article published Aug 3, 2006

Aug 3, 2006

NCAA ready to make schools pay for academic failures

The Associated Press

The NCAA might reinforce this tough message on academics this week: If teams consistently fail to make the grade, they may not get paid. Or they could be barred from postseason play.

Those are two of the proposals the NCAA's board of directors is considering.

How to penalize schools with poor academic performance was the biggest issue before the board at its meetings Wednesday and Thursday. The proposal includes restrictions on recruiting, scholarships and playing seasons, tournament bans and a prohibition of NCAA tournament money shares.

"We're hoping the board acts on it," vice president Kevin Lennon told The Associated Press.

Lennon's group spent months debating the sanctions before finally settling on a four-tiered system that increases the penalty for repeat offenders.

He said the intention is to promote improved academic achievement - not penalize.

For the past two years, the NCAA has collected data about each team's graduation rate and academic eligibility. Players can accrue up to four points - one for each semester athletes remain in school and one for each semester they remain academically eligible.

The NCAA then calculates a team's total score and divides the number by the most possible points to produce a percentage. A perfect score would translate to 1,000 points.

Under the short-term penalties being implemented, any team scoring lower than 925 could lose scholarships in that sport.

Now the NCAA might implement penalties that refer to a team's average over several years. Under the proposal, any team with an average score lower than the proposed 900 over a rolling four-year period would face the harshest sanctions.

Lennon said a score of 900 correlates with about a 50 percent graduation rate under the NCAA's new system and 33 percent under the previous federal guidelines.

"The historical penalties are intended to find the worst of the worst, if you will, the real underachievers," Lennon said in explaining the different scores. "The ... penalties were meant to get the school's attention and get them to make improvements. So the goals are different, and I think the committee felt it needed to differentiate that."

Teams with three-year averages of less than 900 will receive warning letters this fall and those whose scores do not improve next year face potential scholarship, recruiting and playing season reductions in 2007-08 - if the recommendations are approved.

Lennon said the severity of the penalty will correlate with how poor the marks are. If scores do not improve the next year, teams would face a postseason tournament ban and another infraction would cost schools their conference's share of NCAA tournament money.

"I think folks realize the need for it to be a phased-in approach so you have good numbers and one or two years just isn't enough," Lennon said. "I think after three years, you're starting to get a pretty good glimpse and you can start to see trends."

It's a formula NCAA president Myles Brand has consistently supported since becoming NCAA president in 2003.

"This is the most important part of the academic reform effort," Brand said in an interview two years ago.

The proposal also calls for waivers, or reduced penalties, for some schools that drop below 900.

Among the considerations in granting a waiver would be whether a team's graduation rate is higher than that of the overall student body and how well the team's academic performance is doing in relation to the resources provided on campus. If a school does not demonstrate improvement, however, it would not be eligible for a waiver.

"I think people realize we've made reasonable adjustments, and I think some folks have a certain level of confidence in the committee," Lennon said. "We'll see how the whole board reacts."

The myspace Dilemma

- Social networking Web sites scrutinized by school officials

By Ian R. Rapoport
irapopor@clarionledger.com

If you want to delve deep into the social lives of visible college football players, it takes less than five clicks of your mouse.

Wondering what they did Saturday night? What they were drinking? What they wore? Merely click on the link that offers photos.

Want to know who has a girlfriend? That's listed. Or who is a member of the group "Lovers of Mary Jane" or "Do You Have A Problem With Groupies, Too?" Yup, those are on the front page, too.

This is reality for all students now who have signed up for personal Web pages on popular social networking Internet sites such as MySpace.com and Facebook.com.

But few students are as closely tied to the image of a university as the athletes. They are the ones on national TV, and their off-the-field shenanigans can make national headlines.

Now, thanks to the Web sites, the curtain that shields their backstage from the general public is often lifted for all to see.

"It's scary," Kentucky receiver Keenan Burton said. "Your social life is gone. If I have anything negative happen, it's going to be all over the South. Athletes are not just college students."

This realization is not new. But the popularity of MySpace.com and Facebook.com have insured it never changes. That's why Southeastern Conference Commissioner Mike Slive said the subject will be discussed when conference athletic directors meet on Aug. 17.

Here is how it works:

Facebook.com is meant to imitate the student I.D. books college students receive upon enrollment. You need a college email address to create a page. On MySpace.com, it takes four minutes to register for a free account and a page.

On your own page, you can tell every detail about yourself, post pictures, collect official friends, or write a public diary of what's going on in your life. You can even update your mood. Example: Joey is feeling grumpy today :(because it's raining.

The possible problems abound. On Facebook, profiles are organized by school, so one needs to be designated as your "friend" or classmate to view your site. MySpace.com isn't nearly as private. On Facebook, any time a picture of you is posted, it is linked to your site.

All of this has athletic departments advising their players to be careful.

"We're constantly trying to educate our players to, No. 1, respect themselves," Mississippi State coach Sylvester Croom said. "But they also represent the university and their families."

The goal, Ole Miss coach Ed Orgeron said, is to make the players understand from the outset what each post can mean.

"We tell them to make sure it's the right information," Orgeron said. "Guys know what's right or wrong. We tell them to be careful, do what's right, use common sense. That way things become a mindset."

The fishbowl web world doesn't seem to be changing. As Internet use grows, an athlete's privacy shrinks. Coaches stare blankly when asked to explain the allure of such sites.

"I don't see the attraction of wanting to put yourself out there for the whole world to see and possibly take advantage of," Vanderbilt coach Bobby Johnson said. "No telling who's looking at that stuff, doing what with it."

While stating how thin a line they are walking, some players view the main theory behind it as a positive.

"I like the fact that (fans) can look and get pictures of me doing certain things or pictures of me from a game," Alabama cornerback Ramzee Robinson said.

Said Jackson State quarterback Kethonne McLaurin: "You just can't be stupid about what you put on there."

MySpace is the most popular site in America, according to Wikipedia.com, and boasts more than 98 million members. Facebook reports on its Web site that it has more than eight million users and is the seventh-most trafficked site in America. Both sites are less than three years old.

"This whole Internet thing," Florida coach Urban Meyer said, "it just horrifies me."

There have been issues.

Kentucky self-reported a secondary NCAA violation this summer, because fans posted between 20 and 25 messages on the MySpace pages of recruits, urging them to become Wildcats, according to The Courier-Journal of Louisville, Ky. That technically makes them boosters, and boosters are not allowed by NCAA rules to contact recruits - even through cyberspace.

During the MSU baseball season, fans in right field utilized the power of Facebook against Tennessee outfielder Brian Van Kirk. They found a picture of his ex-girlfriend on the site and printed out a poster-sized picture of her. Every time he trotted out to his position, they chanted her name.

When the son of Colts coach Tony Dungy committed suicide, his MySpace page was e-mailed around to blogs and message boards. It contained "racy images and profanity," Tampa Bay Online reported.

At Southern Miss, coaches found information from practice hitting the Internet, which led to a team-wide discussion.

"A guy might say something in all innocence to someone, and all of a sudden, it winds up on the Internet what we were doing in practice," USM associate athletic director/football operations John Miller said. "It's not just players. We had to educate the trainers and managers, too."

Many institutions say they are policing the sites. For the most part, players understand their public role. They are ambassadors for a sport and a university, so everything they do is for public consumption.

"That's what our guys sign on for," Alabama coach Mike Shula said.

Added Tennessee tackle Justin Harrell: "As long as you're not doing anything you're not supposed to do, you don't have anything to worry about."

Still, the threat always exists. A picture is just a picture. But take it down the slippery slope. If an athlete wearing his team's apparel poses for a picture with a fan in a restaurant, and there are alcoholic beverages in sight, the school suddenly has an image problem.

That's what programs like Kentucky stressed when athletic director Mitch Barnhart met with all of the athletes to address the sites.

"We monitor those sites, because we want to see how they're representing us," said Kentucky spokesman Scott Stricklin, a Jackson native. "Just like we monitor curfew, just like we drug-test. Even though you're just putting something on the Internet, you're still held to the same standard. We let them know of that expectation."

With the players, especially high-profile ones, Stricklin wanted to stress that there are no secrets.

"If someone sees something, they are going to write about it on a message board, and newspapers are going to find out about it and start asking questions," he said. "You got to understand people are watching you. People are going to form judgments about you and the university by watching you behave."

Players are young. Administrators are older. There will always be a generation gap. Pictures a player may not flinch at, or poses a player might not see as negative, can make some university officials cringe.

"We don't necessarily look at all that as being bad," UK linebacker Wesley Woodyard said. "But to our elders, it's disrespectful of the way we should carry ourselves. They wanted to straighten that up."

SEC schools are monitoring the sites because, among other reasons, cyberspace does not go away. If you type a name into Google.com, you're just as liable to find a page about a star player's junior high exploits as you are to find recent news.

Future employers might log onto Facebook or MySpace to see what kind of a college social life an athlete had.

"What a great opportunity college football is for these players to market themselves for future jobs," Croom said. "If you put something stupid on a place like MySpace.com, don't think an employer is not going to find it in 10 years."

Croom and his staff have taken action. They have not banned players from creating pages for themselves.

"But we've taken it a step further in our academic center (and players lounge), blocking MySpace and Facebook," said Brad Pendergrass, Croom's assistant. "They need to do that on their personal time, not on their academic time or their football time."

Pendergrass, who monitors the sites along with MSU's compliance staff, said he has called players into his office to make sure their sites "are where they should be." He said the reaction he receives is positive. While six months ago, there might have been pictures involving alcohol or objectionable images, those are gone now.

"Players understand, Coach Croom and our staff, we're going to be involved in every aspect of what they're doing socially," he said. "So we don't get caught by surprise. If certain kids need help or some guidance, we're there."

Meanwhile, the SEC is deciding whether it wants to be there. Slive said the subject of possible conference-wide legislation will come up on Aug. 17. He's not sure if the conference should legislate over an institution, but he wants to hear the debate.

"The main issue is, we want to make sure these young people don't do things they don't intend to hurt themselves in the long run," Slive said. "In this information society, there is still an amount of privacy that should be maintained."

"Even if the kids become public figures because of their athletic prowess," Slive continued, "they're still students, and they're still young. We have to help and guide them."

Q&A with Ole Miss AD Pete Boone

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Daily Journal

BY PARRISH ALFORD
Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal

OXFORD - Ole Miss athletics director Pete Boone has overseen a time of increase in coaches' salaries and facilities in his department.

With football coach Ed Orgeron beginning his second season and men's basketball coach Andy Kennedy soon to begin his first, Boone believes two of his most high-profile programs are making progress.

Recently, Boone sat down with the Daily Journal and discussed the highs and lows of the past year and the future of the athletics department.

Daily Journal: What would you consider to be the greatest asset in the athletic department?

Pete Boone: I think probably the overall attitude of our fans, which would be donors and ticket buyers. It's very positive, the atmosphere. It's one of anticipation, one in which they believe we're going to have successes in our sports.

DJ: What is your opinion of the state of the football program?

PB: I think the status is one where we have the players and coaches in place to start moving forward. In my opinion, we are set to make continuous, steady progress. We have had some coaches and players come and go. Even Coach O's (Ed Orgeron) initial signing class ... no matter who you are, when you are trying to sign folks in 30 days, it's hard to get it all right. I think the chemistry is in place now to move forward at a steady pace.

I don't know if all the numbers are right, but I think we will have 72 or 73 scholarship athletes out of a possible 85, and about a third of that will be freshmen. That shows it's still a young program.

DJ: How are season ticket sales for football going?

PB: They are a little softer than last year. They have picked up in the last two weeks. We were behind probably a thousand tickets, plus or minus, from last year. Ironically, a lot of those, we've had people who have held on to tickets even though they've bought suites or club seats. What we're seeing now is our more experienced fans are giving up some of those. It's good that now

we have some better location tickets available for new donors.

DJ: As an administrator in a personnel evaluation, how do you balance the public's desire for quick success with the coach's position that building a program takes time?

PB: Any new coach who is here because of lack of success by the previous coach needs four or five years to get their own folks established, their own players in and get their system operating smoothly. That would be a standard time frame for everybody.

College athletics is a very public job, but I would find it hard to believe that any administrator would allow the emotions that fans have to dictate how things needed to get done. This is a business. It's got to be operated as a business with a protocol of procedures on how you go about developing a successful business.

That's what we're doing here, and we have to stay true to that. There has to be consistency and continuity. Really, the fans expect that. They don't want knee-jerk reactions, and coaches have to have a feeling that the philosophy Ole Miss had two years ago is the same one they have now and the same one they'll have two years from now.

Any time there is a question about any sport of whether the head coach ought to remain, there are multiple factors. Certainly trends may develop in the purchase of season tickets, but that is one trend. That in and of itself should never dictate the final decision on anything.

DJ: What do you believe will be the biggest headline for the athletic department in the coming year?

PB: I think there will be a couple, and hopefully we will be able to announce the building of the new practice arena for basketball. That is going to be a 3-5 million dollar arena, and hopefully we will be able to do that.

DJ: What does the 12th regular season football game mean to the operating budget?

PB: It certainly will mean more income. With our season ticket sales down a little bit, it's not going to mean as much extra income for our overall athletics program as we had hoped. Year in and year out, as we build out ticket sales back will add substantially to our overall revenue.

What we'd like to be able to do ... last year we had three home games in a row. You would never want more than two in a row. It's very taxing to the university and to a certain extent taxing on our fans. Having that seventh date is really a big benefit, and it allows the university to spread out its functions. So many things happen on home football games with alumni events from different schools and fundraisers. It's good to be able to spread that out some.

DJ: You had said before that you did not want to get in a bidding war to keep Mike Bianco. You moved quickly and made him the highest-paid baseball coach in the SEC. Can you talk about that decision?

PB: I don't like to be emotional about those things. I start thinking about compensation before the end of the season. I also look at revenue. That has to be a factor in everything you do.

Our revenue has increased in baseball to where the program is close to paying for itself. Two or three years ago, we've probably doubled in revenue from that time, if not more. He and his coaches are the catalysts for that.

We've increased our assistant coaches pay significantly also. We want to do that on any programs that have had success and brought attention and have brought such a positive financial reward for all of our athletic programs.

DJ: Where do you stand on plans for baseball stadium expansion?

PB: They should begin work on our outfield any day now. They have started on our coaches' offices. We are interviewing architects this week to decide on the architect for stadium expansion and start putting together the final look for it within the next few weeks.

Our deadline for getting this thing out, bid and started is as soon as our last home game is over next spring. We don't want to let it delay. We want to make sure we're on top of it.

All we were going to do is club seats. I feel like from the cost standpoint of suites that can hold X number of people, it's cheaper to do club seats and on the per seat basis it's about the same amount of revenue coming in. We have changed in the sense that now we're trying to put our club seats behind home plate from first base to third base, as opposed to in the new section.

In the new section, we'll have more individual reserved grandstand seats. We'll have modern concession areas, much like some minor league teams you see in their new stadiums. I think it will be very attractive and very user friendly and hopefully, we'll be able to get out of this thing a total capacity of about 6,500 seats plus the capacity we have in our outfield.

DJ: Are there future expansion plans for Vaught-Hemingway Stadium?

PB: Only in late-night dreams. We have some other needs that we have. Right now, we don't have the need for it. If our ticket base was continuing to increase like it was a few years ago, certainly you'd have to be looking at that and preparing for the future. Right now, we're sort of in a holding pattern until it's evident our football program is going to be as successful as we think it will be. We have time on that.

Our other priorities take precedence. Basketball, the biggest priority we have there is a practice arena. I've talked with the chancellor, with Carol Ross and Andy (Kennedy). We've already talked to our university architect. We'll probably put a request for qualifications of architects out within the next three or four weeks and get some people to come in, then choose an architect and start the process.

DJ: Was filling the men's basketball coaching vacancy easier than filling the football vacancy?

PB: It was much easier. I will say hiring a search firm made it such. We were able through them to identify the right fit. Ole Miss has a fit. Notre Dame has a fit. There are certain things about your university that you need to make sure the philosophy, the personal characteristics of a person fits that ... the knowledge of your school, knowledge of recruiting, geographic information.

If you have a search firm that knows tons of coaches and knows them personally, you can eliminate a lot of what ifs. We get a lot of advice through the Internet and through our own boosters. Right or wrong, there's a certain underground system that works with coaches. I don't believe the search firms in football are as strong and mature as the ones in basketball.

This was very efficient. It was easy to do. I was able to communicate better with the media, give them updates on where we were, I was confident in where we were and who the players were. I think it just worked out a lot better.

DJ: In hindsight would you have done anything differently in the handling of the Colonel Reb mascot issue?

PB: Any time there is change, there is going to be disagreement with it. I don't know of any time I've been in any situation where there was debate and different opinions that I can't go back at night and look and say I wish I'd have handled that a little differently.

I think that's one of those things, no question I could have done better, but that will be the case in any other hotly debated issue two, three or five years from now. I don't think it's a dead issue.

I think, depending on the last couple of years, there's been talk about getting a representative group of students to do something, but I haven't heard a lot about that.

DJ: You guys have had one of the best men's tennis programs in the SEC for the last several years. What does that bring to your department?

PB: Having consistent success like Billy Chadwick has had is so positive. Every business entity wants to be known for continuity of success, that year in and year out you can count on them to be successful.

In our case, we have 15 or 16 sports (and) not every one of them will have that. When you have that, and people come to matches expecting to win, that's the kind of attitude would love to have in our major sports too, the ones that generate income. That generates ticket sales, donor base and all.

We probably have some of the best crowds for tennis in the country. It shows what can be done. Another example is Steve Holeman in soccer. Steve has done a super job and built that program from scratch. Our expectations are to win. It's a very positive image to high school students if they are interested in those sports, so it's generating students for our university. It's a great example of what can be done with the resources that are there.

DJ: Do you like what you seen in Andy Kennedy in his first months on the job as basketball coach?

PB: He has a great attitude. He's a people person. I've watched him at baseball games. He'll sit with me for a while, then I'll seem him moving around and talking with someone in the aisles.

He likes to be around people and generates enthusiasm, because he's so positive. The other thing I really like is the street smarts. He's really savvy about recruiting in understanding how things work there, his knowledge of people and his contacts, how to find out about talented kids and who the supporting cast for those kids is. He knows how to get in the hunt with them.

He likes to recruit. He likes the competition of it, getting out and getting after it and being a player.

August 7, 2006

Stern Is Pushing New School of Thought: Basketball Academy

By [PETE THAMEL](#)

LAS VEGAS — With United States teams recently humbled in international basketball tournaments, some of the nation's top professional players have converged here this summer to set about making things right. Mike Krzyzewski, the coach of the Olympic team, is attempting to recapture the glory by instilling a disciplined approach, even reminding his star players to tuck in their jerseys.

By contrast, in dozens of gyms around the city, three sneaker companies ran tournaments in late July featuring the showboating that is common in elite youth basketball. Players trying to impress coaches in the stands flipped behind-the-back passes (sometimes into the bleachers) and celebrated dunks as if they had won Olympic gold.

The contrasting scenes help explain why [David Stern](#), the commissioner of the N.B.A., says the system for developing young players in the United States is severely flawed. He says it exploits promising athletes and has fallen behind some European systems of developing players. Stern says he wants the N.B.A. to begin a youth academy to help nurture athletes on the court and in the classroom. His concept would borrow elements of what works in Europe.

"I think we could do a better job of rounding and grounding those kids so the adjustment to a professional life is a happy one," Stern said in a recent interview, his first extensive public discussion of the topic. "I'm serious about attempting to improve the overall situation."

Under the current system, top athletes of high school age play for traveling teams sponsored by sneaker companies or, in some cases, for high schools that emphasize basketball over academics. Because of rules governing high school and college athletics, many coaches cannot talk or work with athletes during long stretches of the year. The result at the high school level is reliance on the sponsored traveling teams, which can result in a star system that produces players with flashy individual talent on the court and a sense of entitlement off it.

"College coaches can't talk to kids, but street runners can or shoe representatives can?" Stern said. "What has happened here is that the system has a lot of parties, including the N.B.A., all going the wrong way."

Part of Stern's call for change came after he read articles in The New York Times starting in February that explained how top prospects were padding their grades at fraudulent high schools to earn college scholarships.

"I was breathless," Stern said. "It just struck me that these schools were in plain sight. How they could go on for so long? Kids were getting scholarships from schools that barely existed."

The so-called diploma mills are only one troubling part of youth basketball. Stern cited stories of sneaker companies trying to lure junior high school players to their teams and of overseas agents peddling foreign players to the United States for personal profit. Stern called it “global exploitation” and “a disgrace.”

On the campus of Nevada-Las Vegas, Krzyzewski has worked to develop a national team that can shake the legacy of its underachieving predecessors. Previous teams endured embarrassing performances at the 2002 World Championships (sixth place) and the 2004 Athens Olympics (third). [Under Krzyzewski, the United States got off to a strong start with a 114-69 victory against Puerto Rico on Aug. 3 in Las Vegas.]

Stern said he was open to the possibility of running an academy with USA Basketball, which runs the national team program. Ultimately, the N.B.A. academy would more closely resemble European systems. There, talented teenagers attend a school and a basketball academy wrapped into one. They attend classes like those in a typical school but also spend hours working with coaches on fundamental skills.

“I can’t stress enough how much our skill development is lacking just in the programs in the United States,” said Spencer Hawes, a top prospect at center who will be a freshman at the [University of Washington](#) this fall. “In a lot of places, it’s nonexistent. You’ve got guys with all the talent in the world. They just don’t have the skill set to bring it together.”

Stern said he hoped to work with the [N.C.A.A.](#) but was not sure if the complicated rules governing college athletics would allow players to remain eligible for their universities if they were to go through an N.B.A.-sponsored program.

Brad Hostetter, the director for membership services for the N.C.A.A., said the organization would be willing to work with the N.B.A. to ensure that an academy abided by amateur standards.

Representatives from the high school and college levels, traveling teams and the N.B.A. are expected to meet this fall to discuss reform. They held a similar summit last fall in Chicago to discuss the state of basketball.

Many college coaches say that sneaker-funded traveling basketball teams are responsible for the lack of fundamentals in youth basketball. Many teams play numerous games against good competition but offer little skill development.

While watching the tournaments here last month, coaches chuckled at scenes like one in which Rafer Alston, a former Queens playground legend and a coach for the New York Panthers, chastised a player for dribbling too much.

Traveling teams indulge their top players with gear, hotel rooms and plane tickets, fostering a sense of entitlement well before they reach college. Players can accept gear and travel expenses, but to maintain their eligibility, they cannot accept money beyond general expenses.

The top traveling teams are funded mainly by Nike, Adidas and Reebok, which invest millions of dollars a year to compete with one another to secure the best youth talent. Many college coaches no longer focus on recruiting through the traditional avenue of the high school coach, despite rules changes instituted by the N.C.A.A. to try to reduce the power of traveling-team coaches.

As a result, considerable influence is left to the coaches of teams funded by the sneaker companies, who also have multimillion-dollar contracts with colleges and individual college coaches.

"I would say that precollegiate basketball issues are the most challenging and damaging of any of the issues that we're dealing with," Myles Brand, the president of the N.C.A.A., said in a telephone interview.

When [Michael Jordan](#) became the Nike marketing phenomenon known as Air Jordan, sneaker companies discovered the power of having a defining pitchman.

That is why they spend millions in search of the next Jordan. [LeBron James](#), who skipped college and has quickly emerged as an N.B.A. star, was showered with so much gear in high school that he gave it away during lunchtime trivia contests. Adidas bought billboards and bus signs around his hometown, Akron, Ohio, pleading for him to sign with them. James eventually signed a seven-year deal with Nike worth nearly \$100 million.

The latest prodigy, a senior named O. J. Mayo, plays for the high school that his adviser picked for him, North College Hill in suburban Cincinnati. But he has struggled socially and athletically at times. He has been suspended three times, reportedly for fighting and missing class, and some college coaches say that his game has not fully developed. He is expected to sign with Southern California or Kansas State to fill the year before he is eligible for the N.B.A. draft. Under the N.B.A.'s new collective-bargaining agreement, players must be at least 19 and one year removed from their high school class's graduation to play in the league.

"There's no platform for O. J. to get better," said Sonny Vaccaro of Reebok, who advises Mayo. "Who's going to make him better in North College Hill when he's playing against whoever it is?"

Sneaker company scouts have already identified a successor to Mayo. He is Renardo Sidney, a 6-foot-9 16-year-old whose potential was recognized before he reached high school. Sidney is a sophomore, and his family moved to California from Mississippi to improve his competition and exposure. He attended Reebok's summer showcase camp in New Jersey this year and plays for a Reebok-sponsored traveling team.

Vaccaro said in a telephone interview that Reebok paid Sidney's father, Renardo Sr., \$20,000 a year as a consultant, with the money earmarked for youth programs. Renardo Sr. would not say where his son would attend high school next season, but he said an elite academy would be an appealing option.

"It would definitely enhance his skills to get him ready for the N.B.A.; a lot of kids need a little more advancement than A.A.U.," he said, referring to the Amateur Athletic Union, which oversees some traveling teams. "I think it would be a great thing if it could happen."

Not everyone thinks so. Players and coaches who would be affected by the changes are wary of the selection process for elite players. If the academy were sponsored by Adidas, for example, would it be biased in favor of players on Adidas traveling teams?

“On the surface, it’s intriguing, but I’d want to know a lot more,” said George Raveling, Nike’s director of global basketball. “Basically, what is it that we’re trying to achieve with the academy? Is it trying to fix something that’s not broke? I don’t know.”

For now, Sidney will continue to play for his Reebok-sponsored team in California. He has even considered not playing high school basketball, an option that would be virtually unprecedented for an elite prospect.

His ambivalence toward high school basketball underscores the shift in power from high school coaches to the traveling-team coaches that the N.C.A.A. has unsuccessfully fought. One reason for that shift is access to players: Many state federations do not allow high school coaches to work with their players over the summer, although there are no such limits for traveling-team coaches.

The N.C.A.A. also prohibits college coaches from working with their players for about four months. The rules were written to give students a break from their sports, but because many college basketball players attend summer classes, coaches say they should have a chance to develop them to the fullest extent. They argue that if a chemistry professor can work with a star student or a music professor can train a top pianist anytime, a coach should not be restricted.

“In swimming, they go on club teams and swim all summer,” said Bruce Weber, the men’s basketball coach at Illinois. “In baseball, they go to play in Alaska. In basketball, and we are on national TV and make all the money, we can’t go near our kids. It makes no sense.”

The notion of an academy makes sense to people at all levels of basketball. The timing does too, with the United States having been knocked from its pedestal atop the basketball world. But with so many competing interests involved, a consensus could prove elusive.

As Krzyzewski tries to orchestrate an American basketball renaissance at the top, he acknowledged that changes must be made at the bottom.

“There has to be a way that we allow basketball players in our country, whether it be at the high school or collegiate level, to work on their game year round,” he said. “Now whether that’s a basketball academy, I don’t know.”

Thayer Evans contributed reporting from San Diego for this article.

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August 6, 2006

Superdome Stars: Everyday People Confronted Chaos

By [LEE JENKINS](#)

NEW ORLEANS — On a Monday night in September, the Superdome will be a football stadium again.

Fans will rise from black leather seats in the club level as the [New Orleans Saints](#) and their prize rookie, Reggie Bush, run onto the fresh artificial turf.

Another team, substantially less celebrated, will be scattered around the stadium.

They are Superdome workers — a few managers, a couple of security guards, a housekeeper, an engineer and a secretary — who helped hold the place together after Hurricane Katrina last August. The roof ripped, water seeped in, lights flickered, toilets quit and about 25,000 frightened and frustrated people walked through the doors looking for shelter.

But from Aug. 29 to Sept. 1, this team of everyday men and women kept the power on, cleaned the bathrooms and tried to calm the crowd. The last time they saw football in the Superdome, children displaced by the storm were doing touchdown dances in end zones fouled by human waste.

MIKE FOSTER was standing in the top deck early last Aug. 29, a Monday, when he heard what he thought was a bomb exploding overhead.

Foster looked down: People were scrambling out of their seats. He looked up: The roof's rubber membrane was tearing away and water was pouring in.

Part of the metal deck supporting the roof, 50 feet long and 10 feet wide, peeled back like the top of a sardine can. The wind made it sound as if a train were roaring into the stadium.

Foster, 49, is a security guard with three passions: bowling, following the Saints and volunteering during hurricanes. He and the other workers are employed by SMG, the company that operates the Superdome. Foster learned last Aug. 28 that the stadium was being opened as a shelter, and he vowed to be there in a half-hour.

When the roof tore the next day, about 12,000 people were in the Superdome. Foster and the SMG workers, along with the National Guard, swept the crowd from the stands into the covered concourses. Foster remembers children grabbing at his legs, adults ripping at his uniform shirt, the only shirt he had with him.

When Foster turned back toward the field, he saw a beam of sunlight shining on the artificial turf. Only after the sun went

down did he walk outside. His black braids and gray mustache were slicked with sweat.

Looking around downtown New Orleans that night, he tried to survey the damage.

“It was the darkest I’ve ever seen darkness,” he said.

THE SUPERDOME, looking like a spaceship downtown, was supposed to be a fortress. Opened in 1975, it had 72,000 seats under a 9.7-acre roof.

But that Monday, as the people displaced by the hurricane tried to sleep, floodwaters from Lake Pontchartrain breached the 17th Street Canal and started lapping at the Superdome walls.

Glenn Menard, who had been general manager of the stadium for only five months, spent the night in a suite with his wife, Jill. They awoke at 5 a.m. Tuesday with six inches of water on the floor.

Menard, 58, had dreamed of running the Superdome since it was built. Even when he became a public-address announcer at racetracks around the country, introducing drivers in his deep Cajun accent, he yearned to be back at the Dome.

His wife heard a broadcaster on WWL-AM, the Saints’ flagship station, say that the city was flooded. The only way out was the Crescent City Connection, a bridge about a quarter-mile away.

“I know you work here,” she told him, “but I am not going to die in the Superdome.”

The Menards packed two bags. They were going to drive their Jeep Liberty over the bridge and out of town.

The moment they got outside, they saw a black sport utility vehicle floating upside down. No one was driving anywhere.

DOUG THORNTON, SMG’s regional vice president and the leader of the Superdome team, woke up in his office at 5:30 a.m. Tuesday and heard National Guardsmen talking about rising water. Thornton rushed to the engineering room, where Nolan LeDoux was working around the clock.

LeDoux, a 54-year-old engineer, is known around the Dome for his vast coin collection, his oversize belt buckles and his calm. But he allowed himself to ponder what would happen if water overtook the engineering room and flooded the generator, the only source of energy for the building.

“Complete chaos,” he said.

Splashing through a room filled with tanks and pipes, LeDoux helped National Guardsmen surround the generator with sandbags. They hooked up two gas pumps and two diesel pumps to remove water. When LeDoux’s boots became wet, he went barefoot.

“We were like captains of a ship,” LeDoux said. “We couldn’t leave.”

The generator could power only a small fraction of the lights. But the stadium never went dark.

Compared with the rest of New Orleans, conditions inside the Superdome were fair. The flood had forced many of the city's residents to their attics and rooftops.

Late Tuesday afternoon, Edwin P. Compass III, then the New Orleans police superintendent, met with Thornton in the Superdome offices. Thornton, 48, was wearing a tan fishing shirt. He had last showered 24 hours earlier, by flashlight in the Saints' locker room.

"There is nothing more you can do here," Thornton said Compass told him. "Try to get out."

To emphasize his point, Compass hugged him.

But no one left. They found strength in each other. Team members came together Tuesday night and curled up with their families on the floor of the Superdome offices, alongside members of the National Guard. The air-conditioning was out. The only working phone was Jill Menard's bulky old Nokia.

"The corporate culture probably would have been inclined to see those employees evacuate," said Tim Coulon, chairman of the Louisiana Stadium and Exposition District, who kept in phone contact with Thornton. "But they wanted to stay."

Superdome workers munched on potato chips and M&M's. They listened to Chinook and Black Hawk helicopters land on the parking garage outside, nicknamed Eagle Base. The base was lighted by the eerie glow of police lights. The air smelled of jet fuel.

ON WEDNESDAY MORNING, Donna Pierre discovered there was no running water in the stadium, including the bathrooms.

Pierre had started as a Superdome housekeeper 15 years earlier, at a New Kids on the Block concert, and she tried to tell herself this was no different.

She continued to do her job with dignity, wading through sewage in the dark bathrooms. She sprayed working toilets with disinfectant and covered the others with trash bags. Eventually, the evacuees were forced to relieve themselves in garbage cans.

Pierre recruited volunteers from the crowd, handing them mops and brooms. When the trash bins and compactors were full, Pierre helped form an open dump in the northeast garage, where the bags were piled more than two stories high.

Pierre had 15 relatives with her in the Superdome, but she barely saw them. She was too busy traversing the Dome's 13 acres and 27 stories, looking for garbage. By the end of the ordeal, Pierre said that she had lost 30 pounds and 6 dress sizes. "I had it to lose," she said.

On one of Pierre's laps around the concourse, she saw a group of evacuees singing gospel. Then she saw another group

rapping. She marveled at the different messages in their lyrics.

About 25,000 people had crammed into the Dome by the third day, and Pierre remembered two distinct crowds: those caring for relatives and praying, and those tearing apart concession stands for food and ransacking suites for liquor.

In 72 hours, the Superdome had become a small city. The stench of garbage, sewage and mold hung in the stifling heat and humidity.

BENNY VANDERKLIS started working at the Superdome mainly because he loved being around sports. Vanderklis, a 40-year-old security manager, moved to the United States from the Netherlands in 1989. He became so enamored with American football that he began collecting helmets.

At 2:30 a.m. Thursday, Vanderklis stood next to Doug Thornton outside Gate B, talking with the military police. A Guardsman ran toward them, shouting: "We've got a man down! We've got a man down in the locker room! Everybody up! Lock and load!"

Thornton and Vanderklis followed the Guard back into the Superdome. When Thornton and Vanderklis got to the mezzanine, they saw an injured Guardsman sitting in a chair, his leg wrapped in a rag, blood dripping on the floor.

Thornton and Vanderklis met several Guardsmen inside a locker room. The Guardsmen had their guns trained on a man who was holding a metal rod from a cot.

The crowd in the stands, with a view through the tunnel, watched as the man staggered out of the locker room and surrendered.

AS WEDNESDAY NIGHT became Thursday morning, only Thornton and the core of his team remained in the Superdome offices.

Guardsmen had been protecting the offices and using the boardroom as a command post. But with tensions rising inside the Dome, the Guard pulled back to the lobbies.

Fights broke out. Used syringes were found on the ground. Talk of numerous rapes spread, though no reports were ever confirmed.

The Superdome's makeshift jail, used during Saints games, was filling up. A man accused of molesting children was sent there. So was the man accused of shooting the Guardsman, although it was later discovered that the Guardsman had either shot himself in a scrum or been shot accidentally by a fellow officer.

"We never had a riot," Maj. David Baldwin of the National Guard said. "But it was getting close."

Thornton and others heard evacuees trying to open the doors, shouting, "Let us in!" and "Let us out!"

Farrow Bouton sat at an oval table in the office, pondering his next career. In high school, Bouton was an usher at the Superdome, then a ticket taker. He moved up to director of event services and wore stylish silk ties. During the hurricane, he operated forklifts and set up barricades.

“The Dome is no more,” he said. “It’s over.”

Bouton, 37, was sitting across from Glenn Menard, who was icing his swollen feet in a cooler. They were surrounded by photos of better times: Sugar Bowls, Super Bowls, a political convention, a papal visit — events that made the Superdome a landmark.

About 6 a.m. Thursday, Menard’s phone rang. Vanderklis was calling. “Get out! Get out now!” Menard heard him yell. “The Superdome is on fire!”

MENARD AND BOUTON met Foster at Eagle Base, where a helicopter was waiting for them.

Nolan LeDoux charged out of the engineering room, still wearing his badge and clutching his keys. He remembers someone telling him, “You won’t need those keys anymore.”

The fires could not spread in the damp stadium, and Thornton and Vanderklis refused to get on the helicopter. They were concerned about another group of Superdome workers who were waiting for buses across the street at the Hyatt hotel. The buses were late.

Celeste Saltalamachia, 40, a human resources manager recognized for her colorful jewelry, had led workers and their families from the Superdome to the New Orleans Center mall next door, then to the hotel lobby. The group, numbering several hundred, had passed signs in a Superdome hallway that read “Have Fun” and “Be Positive.” Saltalamachia tried to ignore the throbbing in her knee, which she had bloodied by running into a Guardsman’s rifle the day before.

Among those in the boarded-up hotel lobby was Cathy Allen, 56, a Superdome executive assistant. She was thinking about her ailing father, Henry Rodriguez, whom she had left with the Red Cross.

Rodriguez, 78, used to play drums in a Dixieland band called the Musical Moods. Allen had left him with a strip of tape across his chest, his name and birth date scrawled in ink. She wondered if she would ever see him again.

Saltalamachia asked everyone in the lobby to hold hands. Marty Robinson, her colleague from human resources, said The Lord’s Prayer. Ten minutes later, the group heard banging on the plywood covering the hotel door. Saltalamachia yelled: “It’s us! It’s Superdome! Who are you?”

There was no answer. Saltalamachia concluded that looters were outside. “Get back,” she said to the crowd in her loudest whisper. “Get back.” She tried pushing everyone behind a bank of escalators. Security guards drew their guns and aimed at the door.

But Allen did not move. She held her mother’s hand. “Mama, we can’t make it,” she said. “We’re going to go first. I want

you to go to your grave knowing that I love you.”

The banging grew louder. The plywood cracked, then fell. Allen turned away. Raymond Griffin, a Superdome security guard with his gun raised, kept his eyes on the door. He saw a leg in camouflage pants, then another. Saltalamachia yelled: “It’s the Army! It’s the Army!”

Lt. Col. Doug Mouton, who had worked side by side with many of the Superdome team that week, walked through the door and saw Allen quivering. He kissed her gently on the forehead.

“The buses are coming,” he said. “You’re safe now.”

DOUG THORNTON was the last of the Superdome team to leave. As he walked to the helipad at 11 a.m. Thursday, SWAT crews were landing. The evacuation was under way.

As the helicopter rose above the city, Thornton asked the pilot to fly over the 17th Street Canal. He saw his two-story brick house with columns in the front. Water was up to the top of the door, seven feet high.

Thornton looked back toward downtown. From the ruins of his house all the way to the Superdome, he could see the sun reflecting off the water.

“You see your home and your dome, both destroyed,” Thornton said. “It’s more than a man can take in one day. I just sat there and had a good cry.”

THE NATIONAL GUARD reported six deaths in the Superdome, four by natural causes, one by drug overdose and one an apparent suicide. Four other bodies were found in the street outside the Dome.

Cathy Allen eventually tracked down her father in a Texas hospital. Sitting by his bedside, she sang Dixieland songs, and he tapped his foot to the rhythm. He died in November.

The Superdome laid off 153 workers after the storm, but Allen is still answering phones. Celeste Saltalamachia, after two knee operations, has turned down several offers to keep working at the Superdome. Nolan LeDoux is working nights in the engineering room.

Mike Foster spent two weeks at the shelter in the Baton Rouge River Center, but he returned to his job as a Superdome security guard. Donna Pierre also went to the River Center, but she did not come back. The center hired her as housekeeping manager.

THE SUPERDOME now smells of paint. A \$185 million construction project continues, and stainless steel countertops illuminate the concession stands. The largest reroofing job in American history is complete. [Paul Tagliabue](#), the retiring N.F.L. commissioner, said he would start an exhibit at the Pro Football Hall of Fame to honor the new Superdome.

On Sept. 25, the Saints are scheduled to play the Atlanta Falcons on national television. Farrow Bouton, the director of

event services, said he plans to call his staff together before the game and say, "A lot went on in here, and you have the chance to erase some of it."

Benny Vanderklis, the security manager, said he will stand on the Saints' sideline for the national anthem. Glenn Menard, the general manager, said he will watch from a corner of the field. And Doug Thornton, the SMG executive, said he will pause at the kickoff to reflect on the two houses he helped rebuild in the past year.

One is for his family. The other is for New Orleans.

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Polls: No say, a lot of interest

By [Alan Tays](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Saturday, August 05, 2006

College football polls.

The first one was released Friday. USA Today's poll of 63 college football coaches ranks Ohio State first, Texas second and Notre Dame and Southern California tied for third. Florida is eighth, Florida State 10th and Miami 11th.



USA Today Top 25

The top 25 teams in the pre-season USA Today college football coaches' poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, 2005 records, points (based on 25 points for a first-place vote through one point for a 25th-place vote) and final ranking:

Record Pts Pvs

1. Ohio State (28) 10-2 1,487 4
2. Texas (11) 13-0 1,378 1
3. Notre Dame (9) 9-3 1,348 11
- tie. USC (1) 12-1 1,348 2
5. Oklahoma (13) 8-4 1,320 22
6. Auburn (1) 9-3 1,206 14
7. West Virginia 11-1 1,202 6
8. Florida 9-3 1,054 16
9. LSU 11-2 1,037 5
10. Florida State 8-5 874 23

11. Miami (Fla.) 9-3 839 18
12. California 8-4 798 25
13. Louisville 9-3 785 20
14. Georgia 10-3 784 10
15. Michigan 7-5 778 NR
16. Virginia Tech 11-2 591 7
17. Iowa 7-5 519 NR
18. Clemson 8-4 493 21
19. Penn State 11-1 406 3
20. Oregon 10-2 373 12
21. TCU 11-1 270 9
22. Nebraska 8-4 261 24
23. Tennessee 5-6 216 NR
24. Alabama 10-2 210 8
25. Texas Tech 9-3 198 19

Others receiving votes: Arizona State 182, Boston College 87, Utah 84, Arkansas 64, South Carolina 55, Boise State 46, Wisconsin 37, UCLA 29, Georgia Tech 28, Fresno State 14, Tulsa 11, Iowa State 9, Minnesota 9, Maryland 8, Purdue 7, Texas A&M 6, Memphis 5, Nevada 3, Texas-El Paso 3, Arizona 2, Brigham Young 2, Northern Illinois 2, Northwestern 2, Oregon State 2, Rutgers 2, Colorado 1, Duke 1

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focus on another "i" word: integrity.

In December 2004, The Associated Press told Bowl Championship Series officials to stop using its poll in determining rankings. The AP poll had counted for 33 percent of teams' BCS scores.

In a cease-and-desist letter, The AP said it never authorized the BCS to use The AP poll, and such use "conveys that AP condones or otherwise participates in the BCS system."

The AP's decision came at a time when many news organizations were deciding or had decided that their reporters making news by voting in polls or for awards. Among those that no longer allow the practice are The Palm Beach Post, Florida Sun-Sentinel, Los Angeles Times, The Sun (Baltimore), New York Times and Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

The BCS replaced The AP poll with a new one conducted by Harris Interactive, the organization famous for its polls. Harris had a few glitches, however, in assembling its first roster of voters; one participant's only apparent connection was being the son-in-law of a coach. Others worked for ESPN and weren't allowed to participate.

"I was asked to be one of those," said Bill Curry, a former coach who's now an ESPN college football analyst. "I don't work for ESPN, my employers - and I think quite correctly - said no, can't do that. So all the ESPN broadcasters

said, 'It sounds more like a political campaign than it does talking about a bunch of kids running around smashing into each other.'"

Curry also says the intensity of fan interest in polls has "gone absolutely off the charts in terms of its absurdity." The AP's year's decision to reveal the final regular-season ballots of individual coaches. "If they reveal what they think, so they're going to walk up and threaten the guy's life or his wife in the supermarket."

The coaches poll has long faced charges that some coaches have their sports information directors vote for them. Curry says he casts his own votes, but also takes input from his staff.

"You have a lot of assistant coaches that express opinions," Schnellenberger said. "I'm a football fan so I read newspaper cover (other) teams."

<http://palmbeachpost.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=Polls%3A+No+say%2C+a...> 8/6/2006

No matter what criticisms they face, polls aren't likely to go away anytime soon.

"It's the same thing as the Heisman Trophy winner," Schnellenberger said. "All that stuff adds its little bit to the charisma of college football.

"You writers have created a monster. Don't try to kill it now." Curry has no problem with ESPN's decision, but he laments "a sad reality that we're into conflict of interest" that doesn't allow voting by people who actually watch a lot of games.

The top 11

The top 11 teams in the pre-season *USA Today* college football coaches' poll, with first-place votes in parentheses:

Team Pts

1. Ohio State (28) 1,487

2. Texas (11) 1,378

3. Notre Dame (9) 1,348

tie USC (1) 1,348

5. Oklahoma (13) 1,320

6. Auburn (1) 1,206

7. West Virginia 1,202

8. Florida 1,054

9. LSU 1,037

10. Florida State 874

11. Miami (Fla.) 839

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Glendale fired up for first game

The Arizona Republic
Aug. 6, 2006 12:00 AM

Finally, game day.

Glendale becomes a bona fide National Football League city on Saturday when the Pittsburgh Steelers come to town for the Arizona Cardinals' first game in their new \$455 million stadium. And people in Glendale and neighboring West Valley cities are ready to play.

Fans are stocking up for tailgating parties. Souvenir shops are tidying stacks of Cardinals T-shirts, hats and red foam hands. Bars and restaurants are advertising deals on beer and hot dogs, hoping to snag some of the 63,000 ticket-holders before or after the game.

Take that, Tempe. No more cross-town treks for games in the broiling sun. No more mingling with crowds of college kids on Mill Avenue.

Green Bay. Tampa. New York. Glendale.

Behind the scenes, Glendale is preparing for all that traffic like a football coach draws up X's and O's on a chalkboard.

Plans. Maps. Radio networks. Signs. Bright signs. Blinking signs. More signs. There will even be people stationed at the entrances of nearby neighborhoods to politely keep fans along the highways and off the winding city streets.

Inside the stadium, noise meters at the south end of the field are expected to wear out from measuring the elation.

The preparation for Saturday's game began years ago when the city landed the Valley's newest stadium. And planning and preparation continues all this week among city staff, residents and Glendale businesses.

Traffic plan? Check. New grill for tailgating? Check. Stuff to wear in red? Check.

All but one game is already sold out this season. That means at least nine huge NFL weekends for Glendale. Too early to hope for the playoffs?

On game day, it will be Cardinals coach Dennis Green's job to inaugurate the pride of Glendale with a win.

Glendale's mayor will be in the stands for a ceremonial passing of the football. Police officers will man all the corners around the stadium.

And while all these people are working, the people of Glendale can finally party, celebrate, pound their chest and pump a fist or two as they soak up the long-awaited vibe of being an NFL city.

Monday Night Football comes to town Oct. 16. The Fiesta Bowl is here on Jan. 1, 2007, followed by the Bowl Championship Series title game one week later. The Super Bowl will be played here Feb. 3, 2008.

The football spotlight is on Glendale. Finally.

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NEW: Get Movie Showtimes in Entertainment



Smoking gun points to lots of schools

BOB LIPPER

TIMES-DISPATCH COLUMNIST

Saturday, August 5, 2006

The big news from last week's ACC football media op and shindig wasn't that the league now has so many bowl tie-ins, Duke might even make the cut or that Frank Beamer is worried because Virginia Tech only has eight home games.

It's that Larry Coker said he really, really wishes his players didn't, you know, pack heat.

This concern struck most listeners as somewhat extreme, seeing as how Miami's Hurricanes fired more assistant coaches than six-shooters during the offseason.

On the other hand, it's not every head coach who has to fret whether his players' idea of a Saturday night special is losing to Georgia Tech at home or fondling ordnance in the wee, small hours of the morning.

Some coaches, in fact, fret whether their players are whooping it up with AK-47s or playing "CSI: Knoxville" on apartment-complex balconies.

The gun-totin' issue surfaced again when 'Canes backup safety Willie Cooper was shot in the buttocks by an unknown assailant who fled after Cooper's teammate/roommate Brandon Meriweather returned fire with his pistol. Meriweather, a starting safety, has a permit for the gun, and police said he used the weapon legally.

Permissibility notwithstanding, Coker - when asked about the shoot-'em-up at the ACC's gathering in Florida - said he'd prefer his players not audition for the roles of Crockett and Tubbs in "Miami Vice II."

"I really don't want our players to have firearms," Coker told the reporters. "I'd rather they would dial 911 to come and handle those type of problems."

It's tough being a college football coach these days. Besides teaching lunkheads to remember the snap count, he has to wonder whether they're behaving off-hours like disreputable frat boys (the preferred alternative in this case) or an installment of "Grand Theft Auto."

You know times have changed when a coach feels the need to tell the squad, "Don't forget to get taped. And leave your piece at the door."

Precisely why football players find it necessary to carry weaponry is a trend social scientists haven't yet explored. Maybe the big lugs feel vulnerable without their helmets and shoulder pads. Perhaps the idea popped into their heads when their position coach screamed, "Get the lead out!" while they were running gassers. Whatever the case, it's becoming a combat zone out there.

Alabama linebacker Juwan Simpson, for instance, recently pleaded guilty to possessing a handgun without a license (Mike Shula hasn't announced whether Simpson will be disciplined or promoted to hall monitor in the athletic dorm). Three Florida football players were rounded up for firing an assault weapon into an unoccupied apartment. A Tennessee safety was arrested for shooting a gun into the air from the balcony

of another player's apartment.

Trying to play catch-up to the SEC, the ACC can count on its Sunshine State residents. At Florida State, the players' guns are stacked in the football office.

"We keep 'em," Bobby Bowden said. "If they go hunting, they check their guns out. Does that slip by sometimes? I don't know. I don't keep up with it that much."

Larry Coker now aims to try - although he acknowledged the problem in trying to enforce a no-gun rule if the weapon is legal and kept off-campus. Besides, Coker is busy enough watching his own back since some boosters are, umm, up in arms over the program's slippage the past two years.

"I really haven't thought about whether I'm on the firing line or not on the firing line," Coker said.

His players could tell him the difference.

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