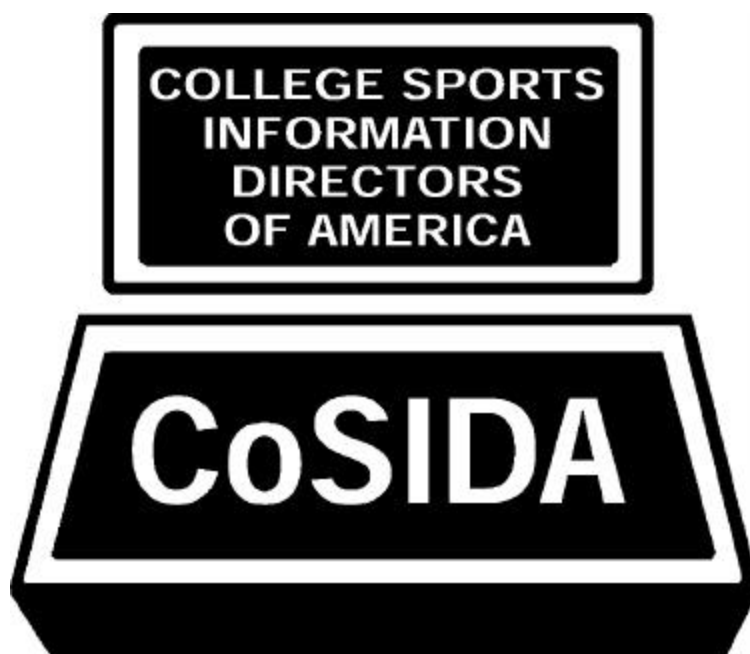


CoSIDA NEWS

Intercollegiate Athletics News from Around the Nation



June 11, 2007



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Coaches won't stop cashing in

Published: Sunday, 06/10/07

Have soapbox, will speak.

Gordon Gee, Vanderbilt's chancellor, recently entertained a group of reporters at the SEC's spring meeting with a brief lesson in economics.

"I'm the highest paid university president in the country," Gee said. "If I were a football coach in the Southeastern Conference, I'd be the lowest paid.

"I think the value system is all out of whack."

He's exaggerating about the salary structure — but only slightly. According to figures published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Gee's total compensation package last year was \$1.2 million.

Meanwhile, seven SEC football coaches make more than Gee — and some of them significantly more.

"I think what we've engaged in is an arms race that has gotten out of hand," Gee said.

Guilty as charged.

But what are you going to do about it?

Nothing.

This runaway train has long since left the station. Market principles govern coaching salaries ... and chancellors' salaries, come to think of it.

Rhetorical question: Would 100,000 people buy tickets and a nationwide TV audience tune in to see a university CEO conduct daily business?

And then there are the external pressures. I haven't seen a firegordongee.com Web site lately.

Price of success

This is not to single out Gee. He is merely stating what many believe. Coaching salaries are out of control.

Consider what's going on at Florida. On Friday, basketball Coach Billy Donovan and football Coach Urban Meyer broke the bank.

Both signed six-year deals, with Donovan getting \$3.5 million per year while Meyer has to scrape by on \$3.25 million.

Florida Athletics Director Jeremy Foley called those contracts "significant," but said it is the cost of "having highly successful coaches."

While Donovan's new contract raises the bar for basketball coaches, it still doesn't match the money Alabama gave Nick Saban to rescue its football program. Saban is pocketing \$4 million a year.

South Carolina Coach Steve Spurrier said Alabama "paid pro money" to lure Saban, who previously coached the NFL's Miami Dolphins.

Spurrier should know something about big money. He got the financial ball rolling for his SEC coaching brethren when he was dominating the league at Florida in the '90s and became the league's first \$2 million coach.

Since then, four others have followed suit — Saban, Meyer, Tommy Tuberville and Phillip Fulmer.

"I guess I got all this started," Spurrier said with a shrug.

When will it stop?

It won't.

Published: Sunday, 06/10/07



June 11, 2007

Press Boxes Become an Afterthought, After the Thought of Luxury Seats

By [RICHARD SANDOMIR](#)

CHICAGO, June 6 — The original press box at the 16-year-old U.S. Cellular Field was a fine place to cover a [White Sox](#) game. From their nest behind home plate, reporters could easily discern the spin of a curveball or hear the thwack of bat on ball.

But this year, the White Sox gutted it and remade it into the Jim Beam Club, with 200 theater seats and barstools that cost \$260 to \$315 each; when sold out, the club could generate \$4 million or more in revenue.

“We were giving the press the best real estate in the building, slightly elevated behind home plate, which they don’t need,” said Jerry Reinsdorf, the real estate investor who is chairman of the White Sox.

When asked why he moved the press to a much worse vista two levels up and along the first-base and right-field line, Reinsdorf unhesitatingly said, “Financial.”

Reinsdorf is far from unique among team owners looking at the extra money that can be made in arranging, or rearranging, their home facilities to accommodate more luxury suites or club seats.

At the same time, baseball reporters (usually print and radio) have been shifted to higher spots, as in PNC Park in Pittsburgh, or inferior aeries like the one at the year-old Busch Stadium in St. Louis. The Cardinals improved the habitability of the press box before this season as part of renovations needed to play host to the 2009 All-Star Game; the press box is higher than it was in the old Busch Stadium, a design that gives preference to luxury boxes.

“Last year, it was a gulag,” said Joe Strauss of The St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

After years of resisting his owners’ cries to expand their inventory of courtside seating, N.B.A. Commissioner [David Stern](#) relented this season, permitting teams to move reporters into the lower bowl of arenas.

N.F.L. reporters are used to inconvenient press boxes. They have been relocated to the corners of, or behind, end zones — as they are in the renovated Soldier Field in Chicago, [FedEx](#) Field in Landover, Md., and Gillette Stadium in Foxboro, Mass. Or to higher altitudes, as they are in Giants Stadium. John Mara, a co-owner of the [Giants](#), said the press box problem would be rectified in the stadium to be built with [the Jets](#).

“Pampering the press used to be more important than taking care of your highest-paid customers,” said Marc Ganis, a sports consultant. “Now it comes down to the old real estate maxim: location, location, location.”

In the Jim Beam Club during the [Yankees](#)-White Sox game Wednesday night, the privileged packed the tables in the club’s indoor restaurant to dine on smoked turkey with apricot and pineapple chutney, and bay scallops with orzo.

Pres Harris sat with his two sons in the front row outside, marveling at his good fortune because someone had given him three tickets to the club while he was standing in line at the ballpark to buy reserved seats.

“It’s fantastic,” he said of the view from the front row, which last year was the domain of reporters.

Becky Roppolo, who works for a local steel company, came dressed in a Paul Konerko replica jersey, and was elated that her boss had given her his tickets for the second time. The sweet seat, she said, “kind of spoils you.”

Joe Varan, a real estate investor from Hinsdale, Ill., was in one of the four front-row, center-of-the-club seats that he splits with a friend.

“There’s nothing like this,” said Varan, who then compared the club to the “scout seats” on the field level behind home plate; they cost \$220 to \$285 each. “You can call the balls and strikes and see the outfield plays develop.”

None of the fans said they much cared that they had displaced reporters who now depend more on TV monitors than they once did. It is a sentiment they share with Reinsdorf.

“It doesn’t matter if Dave van Dyck can see how much the ball breaks,” he said, referring to The Chicago Tribune’s national baseball writer.

Van Dyck said his former view mattered greatly; now he cannot see plays developing or the “full scan of the field.”

“It’s like watching TV from the side,” he added, still irate that the team did not consult reporters about the change.

Joe Cowley, who covers the White Sox for The Chicago Sun-Times, said he did not mind the view, and he was not surprised about the White Sox’ move. “They sold out the start time to 7-Eleven,” he said, referring to a sponsorship deal with the chain of convenience stores to shift the starting time of night games to 7:11.

In N.B.A. arenas, reporters in some cities have been moved out of earshot of the repartee among players, coaches and referees.

“You could tell what Jerry Sloan was thinking by hearing how much he was swearing,” said Phil Miller, who until recently covered the [Utah Jazz](#) for The Salt Lake Tribune, referring to the team’s longtime head coach. “His reactions really guided your knowledge of what was going on on the floor.”

The [Denver Nuggets](#), for example, added eight new courtside seats at \$750 apiece by moving the press elsewhere. At Quicken Loans Arena, the [Cleveland Cavaliers](#) added 16 courtside seats (at \$1,600 each) that flank the scorer’s table by moving reporters to comparatively distant locations. Similar changes have been made by the [Los Angeles Clippers](#) at Staples Center, and by the Jazz and the Golden State Warriors.

For next season, the [Los Angeles Lakers](#) have sold 15 new courtside seats, at \$2,300 each, at Staples Center, moving reporters 20 rows back, said John Black, a team spokesman.

Paul Andrews, executive vice president for Kroenke Sports Enterprises, the Nuggets’ parent company, said the team tried to balance its goal of raising revenue with respecting the news media, even as it moved reporters to a low corner at the [Pepsi](#) Center.

Some of the Nuggets’ new courtside seats, which are similar to others in the league, allow fans to sit behind the scorer’s table as the press once did, beside the team bench, with a television monitor and waiter service to augment their experience.

This season the [Knicks](#) moved the last of the reporters who were still working courtside at Madison Square Garden to a press area behind a basket. That let the team sell 20 new seats, some of which cost \$2,000 or more.

“Fans will pay a premium to experience the game in a way they haven’t before, and to separate themselves from Joe Average,” said Dan Migala, the publisher of a sports-marketing

newsletter, The Migala Report.

The N.B.A. has left it to the teams to determine whether they would move reporters and where they would put them, while keeping TV broadcasters at scorer's tables. Brian McIntyre, a league spokesman, said the change was not made because of the weakening influence of newspapers.

"It was strictly a way to get revenue," he said, "and some people closer to the game."

But in doing so, said Brian Windhorst, who covers the Cavaliers for The Akron Beacon Journal, the presence of nearby reporters working on deadline "has upset a lot of fans, and there've been some, and caused some nasty incidents."

He added, "We're trying to do our job, and they're trying to have fun."

At U.S. Cellular Field, the relocated press box prompted a demand by the Baseball Writers' Association of America to meet with Commissioner [Bud Selig](#) to receive assurances that a similarly drastic change would not occur at other ballparks. (The [Kansas City Royals](#) are moving their press box up a level, but still behind home plate, next season.)

"We're paid to do the job to the best of our ability," Mark Gonzales of The Chicago Tribune said as he watched Wednesday's game from high above first base. His new sightline hindered his ability to best describe, with his own eyes, Mark Buehrle's no-hitter on April 18.

"I just feel hopeless," he said.

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Monday, June 11, 2007

Courier-Journal reporter ejected from U of L game

Bennett removed for blogging super-regional

By Rick Bozich
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The Courier-Journal

A Courier-Journal sports reporter had his media credential revoked and was ordered to leave the press box during the NCAA baseball super-regional yesterday because of what the NCAA alleged was a violation of its policies prohibiting live Internet updates from its championship events.

Gene McArtor, a representative of the NCAA baseball committee, approached C-J staffer Brian Bennett at the University of Louisville's Jim Patterson Stadium in the bottom of the fifth inning in the U of L-Oklahoma State game. McArtor told him that blogging from an NCAA championship event "is against NCAA policies. We're revoking the credential and need to ask you to leave the stadium."

Advertisement

Courier-Journal executive editor Bennie L. Ivory challenged the NCAA's action last night and said the newspaper would consider an official response.

"It's clearly a First Amendment issue," Ivory said. "This is part of the evolution of how we present the news to our readers. It's what we did during the Orange Bowl. It's what we did during the NCAA basketball tournament. It's what we do."

U of L circulated a memo on the issue from Jeramy Michiaels, the NCAA's manager of broadcasting, before Friday's first super-regional game. It said blogs are considered a "live representation of the game" and that any blog containing action photos or game reports would be prohibited.

"In essence, no blog entries are permitted between the first pitch and the final out of each game," the memo said.

Bennett had filed Internet reports from U of L's NCAA Tournament games at the Columbia (Mo.) Regional and did so from the first two games of the super-regional.

He was told before yesterday's game by U of L assistant sports information director Sean Moth that he was violating NCAA policy by filing periodic reports for The Courier-Journal's Web site, courier-journal.com.

After consulting with his editors, Bennett filed a report at 4:12 p.m. after the top of the first inning and added 15 more reports before he was asked to leave. U of L won 20-2 to advance to the College World Series in Omaha, Neb.

"It's a real question that we're being deprived of our right to report within the First Amendment from a public facility," said Jon L. Fleischaker, the newspaper's attorney.

"Once a player hits a home run, that's a fact. It's on TV. Everybody sees it. (The NCAA) can't copyright that fact. The blog wasn't a simulcast or a recreation of the game. It was an analysis."

During the middle of yesterday's game, Courier-Journal representatives were told by two members of the U of L athletic staff that if the school did not revoke Bennett's credential it would jeopardize the school's chances of hosting another NCAA baseball event.

"If that's true, that's nothing short of extortion and thuggery," Ivory said. "We will be talking to our attorneys (today) to see where we go from here."

Said U of L athletic director Tom Jurich: "As an NCAA institution, we must abide by all NCAA rules, including those in hosting NCAA events. Our staff sought an amicable solution to this situation from many angles.

"It's unfortunate that it led to the actions that were taken. This is not an issue that should mar the most fantastic day for college baseball in this state."

McArtor said he did not "think it serves any purpose" to answer questions and declined further comment.

U of L's associate athletic director for media relations, Kenny Klein, referred questions to Michiaels, who did not return a telephone call yesterday.

Rick Bozich can be reached at (502) 582-4650.

STORYCHAT

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Don't see how this is a free speech issue.

Bennett is an agent of a "for profit" media outlet. A different "for profit" media outlet paid for exclusive rights to the property in question, a baseball game.

A little foresight and preparation, possibly including making an arrangement with the NCAA or the network, could have prevented this.

But cloaking themselves in the First Amendment is weak. Would the C-J consider such arguments germane to copyrighted material?

Posted: Mon Jun 11, 2007 6:32 am

This all gets into a very complex topic regarding rights to sports information.

There was a case a few years ago where, I think the NFL (or was it Major League Baseball? Can't remember now and I don't have time to look it up) tried to say that all the statistics on players used by Fantasy leagues was proprietary information. That case was thrown out.

The Internet is not like anything the legal community has ever had to deal with. Existing copyright law just doesn't cope with it very well. I think you'll be seeing incidents like this for many years.

The fundamental issue is what's the difference between Brian Bennett posting to a freely accessible blog (the fact that the blog is freely accessible is a critical point, by the way) and me doing the same to my blog at the same time from the stands?

The surface answer is nothing except that Brian is employed by a media outlet. That's the difference the NCAA will use as a defense and up to now courts have not given a lot of weight to that difference.

I hope this ends up in court. It will be interesting.

Posted: Mon Jun 11, 2007 6:18 am

This took no money away from the NCAA, ESPN, or anyone else. This should be allowed, and the CJ does allow blogging, what do you call this? Some people can not get to a TV, or much less the game, so this may be the only way to stay updated.

Posted: Mon Jun 11, 2007 6:12 am

I was one of the "new" Cards baseball fans that had to rely on the C-J blog for progress during the 3-game series. About 3:00 Sat. afternoon, I stopped mowing the lawn, turned on WHAS84 radio for an update. Listened to 7-8 minutes of newscast, NONE of which referenced the UofL game. So in frustration I called my brother who said last he heard it was tied at 2-2. Yikes! So, I had to resort to booting up my computer and using my dial-up to access the the info I was seeking. And I left the Internet on while I continued mowing, diving back into the house periodically until the C-J posted the loss.

So, I was neither at the stadium nor did I have access to ESPN. The C-J was my only source of up-to-date, vicarious involvement in the baseball Cards' ride to the college world series.

Posted: Mon Jun 11, 2007 6:11 am

"It's clearly a First Amendment issue," Ivory said. "This is part of the evolution of how we present the news to our readers. It's what we did during the Orange Bowl. It's what we did during the NCAA basketball tournament. It's what we do."

Actually, it isn't. According to the Supreme Court, the NCAA isn't a state actor. However, all rulings have been 5-4 and the Court may be primed to reverse its role, providing that certain challenges are made...

Posted: Mon Jun 11, 2007 6:02 am

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The Huntsville Times

Commodores succeed without a traditional athletic department

Monday, June 11, 2007

Huntsville Times

The clannish, insular world of big-time intercollegiate sports gasped when Vanderbilt chancellor Gordon Gee decided to disband the traditional structure of the university's athletic department nearly four years ago.

First, they gasped. Then chuckled. Then guffawed.

Many onlookers, including a sizable percentage of Vandy alumni and supporters, thought it was the craziest idea they'd ever heard. Gee was called everything from an out-of-touch egghead to an outright nitwit. In the view of the critics, his vainglorious and impractical notions were as quaint and outlandish as his collection of bow ties.

"Vanderbilt has a hard enough time winning as it is," bemused commentators hastened to point out. "Now they're eliminating the athletic department? And the AD job? So much for Vandy athletics."

Gee was stubbornly undeterred. He insisted that "nothing short of a revolution" will stop a growing crisis of faltering conscience and slipshod integrity within the framework of college athletics. He said a pervasive culture of win-at-all-costs has increasingly undermined the fundamental mission of higher education across the country, creating a malignant climate "where responsibility is diffuse, the potential for abuse considerable, and the costs - both financial and academic - unsustainable."

His decision to perform "radical surgery" on the Vanderbilt athletic department in no way lessened the school's commitment to varsity athletics, declared Gee, but he pointedly added: "We intend on competing consistently according to the values of a world-class university."

Not surprisingly, the scoffers were loud and numerous.

"People were laughing at us," Gee said in an interview during the recent Southeastern Conference Spring Meeting in Destin, Fla. "People were writing my obituary. People were writing Vanderbilt athletics' obituary."

"Well, guess what? We're both still alive and well."

As part of his long-range plan to reorganize Vanderbilt athletics, Gee recruited an old friend and ally from Ohio State, David Williams II, and installed him as Vanderbilt's vice chancellor of student life and university affairs in 2000.

For more than two years, Gee and Williams, a nationally respected educator with salt-and-pepper hair and mustache and boundless energy, quietly planned their makeover of the athletic department.

Andy Geiger, the athletic director at Ohio State, had reported to Williams during the time Gee was OSU's president. When Gee came to Vanderbilt from Brown University, Williams was one of his first hires.

"We both knew we wanted to do something with athletics," Gee said, "but I didn't have anything specific in mind. All we knew was, it would be something dramatic and something meaningful and something that

would work."

Williams, said Gee, "is the architect of the whole thing - the one who put it together and the one who's making it work. But our philosophies about the program are one and the same."

Essentially, what Williams did was integrate the athletic department into the university as a whole, combining varsity sports with intramurals, student recreation and community sports programs under the umbrella of a new Office of Student Athletics, Recreation and Wellness. Various athletic responsibilities were divided among four other vice chancellors.

The athletic director, Todd Turner, eventually moved on to the AD job at the University of Washington, but most of Vanderbilt's varsity coaches decided to stay. In addition to their usual duties, every coach is required to become actively involved in some other aspect of campus life. Admissions, for example. Or facilities. Or student government.

In much the same way, athletes on scholarship at Vanderbilt are expected to participate regularly in activities outside their varsity sport. Like the student council. Or honor council. Or dorm council.

"I tell our student-athletes that when you go out on campus, you need to make sure people see you as more than an athlete," said Williams.

By the same token, the coaches are asked to be seen on campus as something more than a coach. According to Williams, all the coaches have enthusiastically embraced the concept, including the head coaches in football (Bobby Johnson), basketball (Kevin Stallings) and baseball (Tim Corbin).

What it has done, said Williams, is establish a stronger, more positive relationship with the rest of the campus.

"That's important anyway," he said, "but in our case, it's very important. Because in our case, there's absolutely no way, under our configuration, that athletics at Vanderbilt will ever produce enough money to be self-sufficient."

Even if Vanderbilt's football team was the best in the country, Williams said, the school would have to charge three times the price everybody else charges to make money because the stadium seats only 39,000, less than half the capacity at of such SEC rivals as Tennessee, LSU, Alabama, Georgia, Auburn and Florida.

"We're a private institution with about 6,400 students," Williams noted, "and we're very cognizant of the fact that we're subsidized by the university, and on any given day I can walk across the campus and have a hundred different people tell me how they can better use that money."

That reality makes it all the more important, he said, that others on campus know and understand what Vanderbilt athletics is about: credibility and integrity, financial conservatism, and running a clean program.

And something else, too - the most important thing.

"They need to know that we view the central mission of the university to be academics," Williams said. "Above athletics comes academics. Always. So when there's that call between the two, it's not going to be them against us. It's going to be us, together."

For Williams, a former athlete and coach who later oversaw the country's largest athletics program when he was at Ohio State, it has always been a matter of focusing on the right priorities. Frankly, it's easier to underscore that focus at a place like Vanderbilt.

"Gordon and I first started formulating these ideas when we were both at Ohio State," Williams said. "We saw the opportunity put them into practice at Vanderbilt because the school is smaller and athletics at Vanderbilt, while very, very important, certainly did not have the same status that it did at Ohio State."

All about integrity

Has it worked?

Will Gordon Gee have the last laugh?

"We already have," Gee said. "We've had seven teams ranked nationally over the last few months, and that's pretty damn good."

It's a point well taken. Football, the kingpin sport, is still trying to turn the corner under Johnson, but most of Vanderbilt's other teams are not only thriving, but excelling.

The baseball team was ranked No. 1 in the nation for most of the season, and star pitcher David Price was chosen by the Tampa Bay Devil Rays as the No. 1 pick of the major league draft. The men's basketball team advanced to the Sweet 16. The women's basketball team won the SEC Tournament. Sophomore Jon Curran finished eighth in the NCAA men's golf championship.

In April, the women's bowling team, coached by former Ole Miss football player John Williamson, won Vanderbilt's first national championship in any sport.

Do Gee and Williams feel vindicated after all these giddy headlines?

Absolutely.

"A lot of people thought Gordon had lost his brain," Williams said, "so I'm sure he takes a certain amount of pleasure in what's happening."

Williams admits he does, too.

"When we first did this," he said, "I was always having to tell people, 'No, we're not de-emphasizing athletics. No, we're not leaving Division I-A. No, we're not leaving or getting kicked out of the SEC. No, Vanderbilt athletics isn't going to be all about intramurals.'"

Yet Williams fully understands why the decision was so widely ridiculed and why many thought the Vanderbilt administration had gone off the deep end.

"What happened was, people didn't take the time to understand it," he said. "Things were being written and said that just weren't true. They were saying, 'Vandy's going to intramurals.' That wasn't true. 'They won't have an athletic department.' That wasn't true. 'The coaches will leave.' They didn't. 'Kids won't come to school there.' They still come."

"So, yes, I guess there's a certain satisfaction in knowing we were right and they were wrong. Some have even called to say they were wrong. I appreciated that."

Part of the satisfaction, Williams said, comes from the knowledge that Vanderbilt has done it the right way.

"It's easy to have integrity when you lose," said Williams. "But when you win, it's a lot harder."

He mentioned that one of the key baseball players "had a little hiccup" just before the SEC baseball tournament. Corbin benched him.

On another occasion, men's tennis coach Ian Duvenhage called Williams one day and said: "I've got a problem. One of our kids broke team rules and I'd like to sit him down for a match. But I need to explain to you two things. We've only got the minimum number of players. If I sit him down, we'll have to automatically forfeit a doubles and a singles. So it'll be very hard to win."

"OK," said Williams.

"The other thing is, we're playing Tennessee," Duvenhage said.

"I told him, 'Sit him down,' " said Williams. "So he did, and he takes those kids up to Knoxville and we win 4 to 3.

"That's integrity. I've had kids come to me and say, 'Thank you for hiring our men's tennis coach. He has taught me more about life than I could ever learn about tennis.' Winning is bigger than what the score is at the end of the game. But when you win that bigger thing, you've also got a good chance to win the other."

What about football?

All the early negativity has made the recent successes in the various arenas of competition that much sweeter for the students and faculty at Vanderbilt's picturesque Nashville campus.

For Commodore fans, it's refreshing to have something to brag about other than the typical Vandy student's grade point average.

"I can't tell you how much winning the national championship in bowling meant to us," Williams said. "Not only was it our first, but it re-energized the entire athletic staff. For a long time, we all sat around trying to figure out who'd be the first coach to win a national championship. Would it be Tim? Would it be (women's basketball coach) Melanie Balcomb? Would it be (women's tennis coach) Geoff MacDonald? Would it be Martha (Freitag) in women's golf?

"Everybody was happy for John Williamson to be the one. Now the question is, who's next?"

When Balcomb's team won the SEC Tournament, the first two text messages she received came from Tim Corbin and the women's soccer coach, Ronnie Coveleskie.

When the bowling team returned from winning the national championship in Apopka, Fla., Bobby Johnson was among the revelers who greeted the bus. Kevin Stallings, the basketball coach, has been known to provide color commentary on Vandy's baseball radio network.

"After she won the SEC championship," Williams said, "I was talking to Melanie and she said, 'You know, I don't know if I'd feel that kind of support at a big athletic school. I don't know if I would've gotten an e-mail from the baseball coach and the soccer coach.' "

Gee, Williams and Commodores everywhere understand, of course, that winning in basketball, baseball, tennis, swimming, golf, track and field, lacrosse and bowling is nice. But ultimately and most of all, Vanderbilt needs to start winning in football, too.

Football has always been the steepest hill to climb. Vanderbilt hasn't had a winning football season since 1983. Only one Vandy coach (Steve Sloan in 1973-74) has managed an overall winning record in the last 55 years.

Johnson, who compiled a fine record at Furman, has enjoyed a few shining moments, including an upset victory at Georgia last season and a stunning win over Tennessee the year before. But the bottom line is, Johnson is 2-10, 2-10, 2-9, 5-6 and 4-8 in his five years at Vanderbilt.

"I do think we're getting close," Johnson says, and that may be. Last year, the Commodores lost by a field goal to Alabama (13-10), a touchdown to Ole Miss (17-10) and a touchdown to eventual national champion Florida (25-19).

Despite the record, Johnson - who was given a long-term contract extension after his third season - has the full support of both Gee and Williams.

"We have the absolute right coach for who we are," Williams said. "We understand it's a building process. I never like to predict things, but I think Bobby has been right on schedule as far as developing his program.

"Our program is going to continue to improve. I like going to bowl games, and I haven't been to a bowl game since leaving Ohio State. I'm about ready."

Making progress

Williams and Gee are familiar with the old put-down about Vanderbilt athletes ("Vandy will always be Vandy.")

In the academic sense, they hope the slogan lives forever. In the athletic sense, they hope and believe it's beginning to go away.

"People who've recruited against Vanderbilt," said Williams, "have always told recruits, 'Why do you want to go there? It's too hard?'"

"We tell our coaches, 'Sell 'em on who we are, not who we're not.' Football's hard. Basketball's hard. Life is hard. We're going to prepare you for that. We tell parents, 'If your kid's looking to do one year of college and then go to the pros, we're all wasting our time. But if you want to compete in the toughest conference, at the top level, and get an outstanding education, then you need to look at us.'"

"I always tell people I'm very happy Matt Frieje got a chance to go play for the Miami Heat," Williams said. "I love the fact that Jay Cutler is going to be the starting quarterback for the Denver Broncos. I'm anxiously awaiting to see where Derrick Byars is going to be playing in the NBA. David Price will be a star in the big leagues some day."

But his proudest moment, said Williams, will be this time next year when he goes to the law school graduation and watches former Vandy basketball player Russell Lakey, whose career was cut short by injuries, receive his degree.

"I'm thankful he came here, but Jay Cutler would've been an NFL player wherever he went to school," Williams said.

"I believe Russell Lakey could've only been a law graduate because he came to Vanderbilt."

Like Williams, Gee has no illusions that the other schools in the SEC will follow Vanderbilt's lead in its new approach to athletics

"We couldn't have done this at Ohio State," Gee said. "I couldn't have done it when I was at Colorado. Or West Virginia."

"I really don't expect our structure to be widely followed. We do hope the philosophy will have some positive influence. A lot of my colleagues are very much kindred spirits in that regard. Unfortunately, many of them have problems similar to what we saw at Colorado and Ohio State."

Said Williams: "I hope other schools will adopt at least some aspects of what we're doing,. There'll be some reluctance by some people, but you already see some others who're picking up some things. I had a discussion (in Destin) with the ADs about some of the philosophies we've put into place as relates to summer school and things like that.

"They don't talk much in large groups," Williams said. "But they'll talk to me one-on-one. I imagine Gordon gets the same thing.

"To me, that's progress."

Contact John Pruett at john.pruett@htimes.com or visit his al.com blog at <http://blog.al.com/pruett>

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Series Ends On Bad Call

Vols Pull Plug On Rivalry

By LORI RILEY
Courant Staff Writer

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It was always The Game in women's basketball.

Even if the two teams were not No. 1 and No. 2 in the polls - which they often were - people always tuned in to watch UConn play Tennessee, the premier rivalry in women's sports. Networks fought to televise it. Pat and Geno, both Hall of Famers, were on a first-name basis with viewers.

But it may have all come to an end. Tennessee has elected not to renew the contract for the regular season series between the two schools, which began in 1995.

No reason was given for the decision.

"Tennessee has elected not to renew its series with the University of Connecticut," Tennessee women's athletic director Joan Cronan said in a statement. "The Lady Vol basketball team will continue to enjoy its rivalry games with teams from the Big East, the ACC, the Big 12, the Pac-10 and other conferences. Year in and year out, we pride ourselves on the strength of schedule we play and our RPI."

Tennessee coach Pat Summitt did not return phone calls. UConn coach Geno Auriemma would not comment, but AD Jeff Hathaway issued his own statement.

"We are disappointed for UConn fans, Tennessee fans and women's basketball fans in general who look forward to this annual event featuring the greatest women's basketball rivalry in the nation," he said.

UConn has scheduled a two-year series with another SEC school, LSU, to fill the void left by the Tennessee withdrawal.

But it's simply not the same.

"No matter who they schedule to fill that spot, it's not going to matter," said ESPN analyst Rebecca Lobo, who played in the first UConn-Tennessee game in 1995 and in the rematch in the national title game, a 70-64 UConn victory that finished a 35-0 season.

"I'm tremendously disappointed, as somebody who was part of the start of it, as a fan, as someone who's had a chance to cover it. It's bad for the game that it's not being played anymore. It's the one game casual sports fans were attracted to. It's a shame all the way around. I don't know what the reasons are, but whatever they are, they're not good ones."

The two teams have combined to win nine of the 13 NCAA titles since 1995, meeting four times in the final. UConn won all four and leads the overall series, 13-9.

The game was originally televised by ESPN before CBS took it over. In 2000 and 2001, perhaps at

the height of the rivalry, there were two UConn-Tennessee regular season games, one for each network.

In January, Michael Aresco, senior vice president of programming for CBS Sports, said the UConn-Tennessee game was still the network's "signature game in women's college basketball."

ESPN was slated to televise the game for the coming season and tried to keep it alive.

"We're disappointed," ESPN spokesman Josh Krulewitz said. "It's been an annual highlight, a great thing for the sport."

Courant columnist Jeff Jacobs contributed to this story.

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Coaches play shell game of summer

At USC and across SEC, large classes on signing day create season of angst in bid to meet NCAA limits

By JOSEPH PERSON

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In February, with the ink barely dry on national letters of intent, the signing day buzz at South Carolina focused on the number 10.

Steve Spurrier's third USC recruiting class was the highest-rated group in school history. It cracked the top 10 in the national rankings of every major recruiting service.

Four months later, as the humidity settles over Columbia for the summer, Spurrier is crunching a different set of numbers, trying to find room for the 31-player class while keeping the Gamecocks under the NCAA's scholarship limits.

It is a shell game played by nearly all Division I schools this time of year, when recruits finish their high school classes and, in some states, mandatory exit exams. As coaches learn which signees failed to make the grade, the coaches make arrangements to place the players in prep schools or junior colleges.

If schools still exceed the 25 scholarship newcomers the NCAA allows each year, coaches will approach signees about "grayshirting," a relatively recent phenomenon in which players delay their enrollment until January, thus counting against the following year's scholarship numbers.

While the process occurs everywhere, it appears to take on greater urgency in the Southeastern Conference, whose schools signed more players than any of the other five BCS conferences during the past six years, based on an analysis of recruiting classes from 2002 through 2007.

SEC schools signed an average of 25.1 players per class during that period, according to Rivals.com's recruiting database and information found on the schools' Web sites. Big 12 schools had an average of 24.7 signees, followed by the Big East (24.3), Pac-10 (23.2), Big Ten (22.1) and ACC (22.0).

The reasons for the disparity are varied. Coaches and recruiting experts say public schools in the South are likely to produce more nonqualifiers than other parts of the country, forcing teams to sign extra players to account for academic casualties.

Also, schools on NCAA probation — something the SEC is all too familiar with — often try to re-load quickly after the expiration of sanctions, which often include scholarship reductions. That was not necessarily the case at USC, which returns to the full 85-scholarship allotment this year after losing two scholarships the past two seasons for violations that occurred during the tenure of former coach Lou Holtz.

Whatever the reason, Spurrier does not want to make a habit of signing more players than he has spots.

"I certainly haven't always done that. We don't like to do that, but sometimes it just happens that way," Spurrier said this week. "You have a few that you've been recruiting and they want to come, so you go ahead and oversign. Then you've got to work it out with a grayshirt, or if you have some that you don't think will qualify, it will work itself out."

During the past six years, USC has assembled some of the country's largest recruiting classes, at least among the major conferences. The Gamecocks have signed an average of 27.8 players. Only Oregon State (29.3) and Mississippi State (28.0) have signed more.

Clemson signed 23 players per year during the same period.

Applying simple arithmetic principles to the 85-scholarship limit suggests that schools with the largest signing classes also have the highest attrition rates.

USC's 28-player class in 2005 was signed three months after the arrival of Spurrier, who dismissed a handful of players for disciplinary reasons and did not renew the scholarships of several others.

This year's numbers were more a product of momentum. Spurrier landed a couple of unexpected commitments when prep school teammates Ladi Ajiboye and Clifton Geathers, both of whom spurned USC in 2006, contacted USC recruiters and said they wanted to play for the Gamecocks.

Oregon State signed 35 players in February, the fourth consecutive year of 30 or more signees for the Beavers. Including USC, the SEC had four schools with 30-member recruiting classes or larger. Mississippi State (34), Tennessee (32) and Auburn (30) were the others.

Tennessee coach Phillip Fulmer could not recall signing a bigger class during 15 years in Knoxville.

"It's basically to get the upper hand on being able to place a young man that you don't think is going to make it academically," Fulmer said. "You can only have so many in a class and an 85 cap, so you just work the process the best that you can — youngsters that you would like to have some say on where he goes to junior college, prep school or wherever."

J.C. Shurburt, the Southeast recruiting analyst for Rivals.com, said many of the big schools in the South are forced to go overboard on signing day to offset signees expected to fall short of initial eligibility standards.

"It's a sad reality that in the Southern states there are more kids that don't qualify academically," said Shurburt, a South Carolina native. "The schools, by signing more than they have, (it) kind of serves as insurance policies."

A 2005 study by the Manhattan Institute, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, found that Southern states lag behind the rest of the country in high school graduation rates. Seven of the 10 states with the lowest graduation figures were in the South; South Carolina was ranked last at 53 percent.

Spurrier said "academics" likely were part of the reason that SEC schools signed more players than other conferences. That is not an issue at Vanderbilt, which does not offer scholarships to potential nonqualifiers, according to Commodores coach Bobby Johnson.

Vanderbilt signed an SEC-low 14 players this year and has averaged 21-player classes during the past six years — four fewer than the conference average.

"When I first got to Vanderbilt, our fans came up to me (and said), 'So-and-so school signs 30 a year and we only sign 18,'" said Johnson, a Columbia native who arrived at Vanderbilt in 2002. "I said, 'Well, you can only have 85 on scholarship. No matter how many you sign.'"

"You've got to pare them down somehow. I'd rather have fifth-year seniors coming back playing for me than a hotshot freshman."

Johnson suspects some schools use big freshman classes to squeeze out unproductive upperclassmen — a practice he referred to as "planned obsolescence."

"Unless you're one of those 15 schools that have All-American after All-American lined up — Florida, Southern Cal, Texas — you can't afford to have two or three defensive backs that can't play dead in a movie," Shurburt said. "You can't afford to have offensive linemen that don't work hard in the weight room. So you've got to have guys to replace them."

But Georgia coach Mark Richt dismissed the notion that SEC schools were loading up on players, as legendary Alabama coach Bear Bryant and former Pitt coach Johnny Majors did before the NCAA implemented scholarship limits.

"In the end, you're only allowed 85 at one time, so you're not stockpiling," Richt said. "What some people don't understand is there may be a kid or two within a class that knows if everything hits right on the button that they may end up coming in the next midyear. So they know that ahead of time."

"But then attrition here, attrition there, by the time you get to the first day of class, they all get in."

It is not always so neat and tidy.

Georgia Military defensive lineman Jarriel King, a North Charleston native who was part of Spurrier's first USC recruiting class, plans to re-sign with the Gamecocks after failing to qualify two years ago.

This year Spurrier anticipates as many as three signees will come up short academically. That still would leave the Gamecocks a couple of players over the 25-player limit for initial enrollees, perhaps leading to a grayshirt or two.

"We still don't know exactly who all will be here in September. But we've got a very good idea," Spurrier said. "So far it's worked itself out."

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Leggett: MLB disrespects college game

By Ken Burger
The Post and Courier
Sunday, June 10, 2007

STARKVILLE, Miss. — Despite the growing popularity of college baseball, the sport still gets no respect from Major League Baseball.

Going into the most important series of the season, Clemson coach Jack Leggett learned that 11 of his players were taken in the Major League Draft, including pitcher Daniel Moskos who went fourth overall the day before he was to start the opening game of the Starkville Super Regional.

Moskos lost that game to Mississippi State (8-6), and things went downhill from there for the Tigers they fell to the Bulldogs again here Saturday (8-5), ending their hopes of a trip to the College World Series.

To make matters even worse, eight high school prospects Leggett is counting on for next year were also drafted.

"Wonderful timing," Leggett said sarcastically.

As usual, the big leagues cherry-pick the best players coming and going and do it while college teams are still competing.

Asked if the news of suddenly becoming a millionaire might have affected Moskos in Clemson's first loss, Leggett issued the standard company line about how yesterday was yesterday and today is today.

But under his breath, he said, "It has to affect you."

Mental interference

No other sport has to endure this kind of mental interference.

When the MLB Draft started last Thursday, 16 college teams were preparing to play in eight super regionals all around the country. And it stands to reason that these better teams would be the ones with the most pro prospects in the dugout and on their recruiting list.

To have someone come up to you in the dugout during a game and whisper in your ear that you've just been drafted by such-and-such a team is, at best, a little distracting to a 20-year-old kid.

And it's got to be tough to build for the future when you don't know who's going to show up for

classes next fall.

To get hit so hard on both ends of the spectrum can be devastating to a top-level program like Clemson which had the second highest number of players drafted in the country.

The collective numbers are similar to the 2002 Draft that gutted the Tigers and resulted in back-to-back seasons that produced less than 40 wins.

There has to be a solution to this insanity.

Should be changed

Leggett, of course, won't use the draft situation as an excuse for his team bowing out of the postseason in two straight losses.

But, he wishes somebody would do something to change things.

"It's a little bit of a distraction," Leggett said in an understatement.

"It's something I think personally should be changed.

"It's like having the NBA Draft the morning of the Elite Eight or the Final Four or having the NFL Draft on New Year's Day when the bowl games are going on. It just doesn't make any sense at all.

"I'd like to see them have more respect for college baseball and change the date so it doesn't affect the thinking of these kids during the part of the year that everybody works so hard to try to compete for. I don't think it's asking too much for some give and take there."

Unfortunately, there is little communication between the big leagues and college baseball on this topic.

"They pretty much do what they want to do," Leggett said. "That's the way it's always been."

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Being tops in Virginia is only ranking that counts

Sunday, Jun 10, 2007 - 12:01 AM

By JOHN MARKON
TIMES-DISPATCH COLUMNIST

NEWPORT NEWS It would be difficult to think of anything more bogus than the concept of national high school rankings in sports. If there's anyone anywhere capable of making meaningful comparisons between baseball teams from Midlothian, Va., and Walla Walla, Wash., I'd like to know who he is and how he does it.

"Me, too," admitted James River High catcher Tyler Gruhl. "I don't think there's anyone watching our game and then flying off to another state to watch another championship game to compare the winners."

The number that counts for the Rapids -- currently ranked 16th in the nation by USA Today -- is one. That's their rank in Virginia and it was earned on the field with a 5-1 victory over crosstown rival Deep Run in yesterday's Group AAA championship game.

For players who spent all year with large targets on their backs, it was the only acceptable conclusion to a 26-2 season.

"Our goal from the start of the year was nothing less than a title," said Pete Schumacher, the Rapids' first-year head coach. "We had enough to shoot at without worrying about where we belonged in the country."

Anyone scouting the Rapids yesterday couldn't help but be impressed. Rarely will a seven-inning high school game elapse without both teams making a few mistakes. Against Deep Run, however, James River approached being fundamentally flawless.

Errors: none.

Stolen bases allowed: none.

Throws to the wrong base: none.

Baserunning screw-ups: none.

Unnecessary baserunners allowed: maybe one. In the fifth inning, the Wildcats' Mike Kaczka struck out on a pitch that bounced in front of the plate, and Kaczka was able to reach first base before Gruhl's throw. One pitch later, Kaczka was picked off by Rapids left-hander Austin Sadler, who pitched a complete-game three-hitter, striking out 13.

The other half of the game was James River's carefully plotted assault against Deep Run right-hander Deck McGuire, who's about the size of a small deck at 6-5, 240.

"Only a few of our guys had ever hit against him," said shortstop Chris Briere. "It was a hot day . . . he's a big guy. We wanted to run some long counts on him and tire him out, like we would any pitcher."

With two out and the bases full in the third inning, McGuire had already thrown 50 pitches when Briere hammered one off the left-field fence for a three-run double.

"We did stress being patient at the plate," said Schumacher, "but some it was just our guys playing the game the right way."

And the smart way. As Sadler contined to roll through the Deep Run batting order, it was obvious someone had doped out the Wildcats' hitters exceptionally well. The guys who couldn't catch up to high strikes were seeing nothing but high strikes. The guys who were waving at off-speed pitches and waiting on fastballs are still waiting.

"That's Tyler calling the pitches," said Sadler. "We'd played Deep Run in the regional championship game and he remembered their hitters and what they liked. One of the first changes coach Schumacher made this season was to stop calling pitches from the dugout and let Tyler do it. He's great. I never shook him off once today and that's not unusual."

Whatever you could have been looking for from the Rapids, you saw it. Whether it makes them No. 6, No. 16 or No. 66 is anyone's guess.

"I don't know if there are 15 teams better than we are or not," said Gruhl, "but, if someone wants to hold a national tournament, I think we'd show up and play and do OK."

Walla Walla . . . it's your move.

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Division III dissension

Sunday, June 10, 2007 -

By Darren Epps
Staff Writer

SEWANEE, Tenn. -- Demanding academic standards and an expansive selection of sports programs make the University of the South an ideal NCAA Division III institution, a model of genuine amateur athletics.

But the model is becoming blurred by universities with different interpretations of the Division III mission statement, and the school also known as Sewanee is watching membership and dissension swell.

The fractured membership could result in Sewanee and other traditional schools competing in a new division starting in 2009, possibly under the designation of Division IV or even Division V. Numerous presidents, athletic directors and administrators interviewed said a plan to split Division III, which does not allow athletic scholarships, is imminent when the group meets at January's convention in Nashville.

It's a case of multiplication forcing more dividing.

"It may go to two subdivisions or a fourth division, or potentially even both," NCAA president Myles Brand said. "I think what's happened is that Division III has gotten too big, and there's some philosophical differences within the division that we might do better at treating them separately."

The crux of Division III's civil war is indeed the rising number of universities, now at 450 counting the provisional schools. The influx of schools means a sweeping range of standards concerning admissions, financial aid and the vigor in which Division III programs are pursuing national championships.

Traditional schools like Sewanee want to align with academic peers. Other programs will pursue the athletic spotlight. And even more schools are resistant to change, unwilling to relinquish 80-year-old rivalries or accept a perceived demotion to a potential Division IV.

A poor recruiting season doesn't just affect wins and losses for some Division III schools. At Sewanee, more than 400 students participate in athletics, making up almost one-fourth of the school's enrollment. If student-athletes don't like the stigma of Division IV, the number of admissions at Sewanee -- and its reputation in the rankings of elite colleges -- could drop.

"But I don't believe anybody will think of it as a demotion," said Sewanee vice chancellor and president Dr. Joel Cunningham, who graduated summa cum laude from the University of Chattanooga in 1965. "It would actually join us with people more consistently focused with our values. That's not up or down; it's more of a tightly focused gathering."

Several coaches said they disagreed, and commissioner Steve Argo of Sewanee's league -- the Southern Collegiate Athletic Conference -- admitted a change to Division IV would be a "hard sell" in recruiting.

"From a coach's perspective, it's already hard enough to put that 'three' out there," Argo said, referring to Division III. "It's like you're third-best."

But presidents and coaches can agree that Division III's diversity prompts the need for change. The profile of the less traditional, more athletic-minded school includes offering fewer sports to direct more money into their programs, making more financial aid available and accepting athletes with heightened academic risks. Many are former NAIA programs.

"I don't want to sound elite," said Al Van Wie, the former Division III chief who believes the alliance needs to split, "but I really question how true some of these schools' commitments are to Division III principles."

And then there's Sewanee, with a tuition of \$36,910, counting room and board, and a broad-based athletic program. The mountain stone architecture on this sprawling, 10,000-acre campus on the Cumberland Plateau houses 24 sports -- more than any other SCAC school -- at the cost of \$3.4 million per year to the athletic department.

But the South's oldest football field isn't home to any winning seasons in the last six years, and the Sewanee women's tennis team recently claimed the school's first conference title in any sport since 2004.

"If you go to the convention, athletic directors are all over the board with what they do in terms of sponsoring sports and how they recruit and conduct nontraditional practice," Sewanee athletic director Mark Webb said. "Is it frustrating? You hear coaches talk about different admissions standards or selectivity or financial-aid policies."

"An athlete might say, 'Why should we come to your school when School B is offering \$10,000 more dollars?' For whatever reasons, it's certainly not equal footing or a level playing field. But we have to deal with who we are and control what we can do at Sewanee."

In many instances, Sewanee's athletes are competing against players who couldn't get into their school, who wouldn't receive enough financial aid, who practice longer or who were recruited more heavily. Unlike in Division I, no NCAA clearinghouse exists for Division III. Colleges determine who's admitted and how much financial aid they receive.

An athlete who couldn't get into Mississippi State, for instance, could attend a Division III school with lax admission requirements. But not Sewanee.

"I don't want to come off sounding entitled," said new Tigers football coach Robert Black, a former Sewanee athlete, "but originally, NCAA Division III was about a small-college experience that had the kids' academic welfare at the front. I don't know necessarily if that's the case across the board now."

But who should move to the new division? The less traditional schools say they aren't forcing anyone to change and, therefore, shouldn't be the ones moving to Division IV. The traditional Division III schools, such as Sewanee, say they were there first when the NCAA created divisions in 1973.

"It's the other schools that should be in the other division," Black said. "I think we should stay where we are. We founded it. We were small-college football. The other ones can create

their own division. Or just put academic requirements on it. If I were part of the debate, I would suggest a clearinghouse for Division III."

Administrators in Division III offered varying ideas, including the separation of divisions by the size of the school. But a large, elite school such as New York University would certainly object. Another idea is dividing the schools by the number of sports they offer. But there are numerous academic elites who offer fewer sports because of financial constraints.

And then there's the backlash against the Division IV moniker. Brand said one option is using Division III-A and Division III-AA. Or, following the lead of the former Division I-A and I-AA, the alliance can stray from numerical attachments and assign names such as National Division and American Division.

Yes, a lot has changed since Alex Guerry Sr. led the effort for Sewanee to resign from the Southeastern Conference in 1940 and commit to small-college athletics.

"Everybody is going to take a step back, look at each other and decide, 'Who do you want to be aligned with?' " Argo said. "It could be awkward."

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Chattanooga Times Free Press
<http://www.timesfreepress.com/>

SFGate.com**ON THE ONE-YEAR PLAN****Does NBA's age restriction hurt integrity of college game?**

Jake Curtis, Chronicle Staff Writer

Sunday, June 10, 2007



The day Greg Oden and Kevin Durant stepped on their respective college campuses last fall, most of the basketball world assumed they would not be there in a year's time.

They were right, and many believe they would not have gone to college for that one year were it not for the NBA rule passed in 2005 requiring American players to be a year removed from high school and at least 19 years old to be eligible for the NBA draft.

The ramifications of that rule for the NBA and college basketball remain speculative, for the most part. A number of college coaches, however, recognize the potential for the rule has hurt the integrity of the college game. Now a player who arrives at college with no intention of playing there a second year before turning pro, can, in theory, do virtually nothing academically in his second semester as a freshman and remain eligible the entire season.

In February, Texas Tech coach Bob Knight called the rule "the worst thing that's happened to college ball since I've been coaching."

NCAA President Dr. Myles Brand, however, thinks the rule serves the greater good.

"I'm not as much worried about the Greg Odens and those like him, the small number of elite players who could play in the NBA, which may be a single-digit number," Brand said. "I'm looking at the hundreds of thousands of others who think they can play professionally. I think it sends a message to high school students, even seventh and eighth graders, that if you want to play professionally, you have to prepare for college."

Only eight freshmen have declared themselves eligible for the June 28 draft, which is not many more than years in which high school seniors could turn pro, and is fewer than 2001 when nine first-year college players as well as six high school players entered the draft.

The first year is not necessarily indicative of a trend, though, and the concern that players are becoming one-year mercenaries perhaps could be remedied if the NBA required players to be two years removed from high school and/or 20 years old to be eligible for the draft. A majority of college coaches seem to prefer a two-year college minimum, which would be more in line with

football, although their reasons revolved around recruiting and stability as much as eligibility-integrity issues.

Arizona coach Lute Olson, for example, said the rule causes agents to put more pressure on college freshmen at a time when they are least equipped to handle it. That's why he'd prefer no rule or a two-year college requirement. Washington coach Lorenzo Romar also prefers a two-year minimum but said he has not noticed any more pressure from agents on freshmen. "And," he said, "I think the agent issue was worse before because they were all over the place in high school."

In fact, NBA Commissioner David Stern proposed a minimum age of 20 during the last contract negotiations before a compromise of 19 was reached with the players' union. Stern says the age issue might be addressed again when the current contract expires in 2008, but the rule seems to have served the NBA well. Not only is the NBA spared the rap of taking naive teenagers just out of high school and subjecting them to the rigors of pro basketball, but it can better evaluate the talent pool.

"From a business perspective, we wanted to look at players tested in more intense conditions than high school, with better coaching," Stern said. "We should benefit with wiser decisions."

Plus, the NBA rakes in the marketing benefit of having fans be familiar with incoming stars like Oden and Durant, who already have performed on a national stage, a visibility high school players don't have.

The rule probably helps the college game improve its talent level a bit, but some observers wonder if it will foster a generation of players who would have turned pro out of high school but instead try to find the easiest means to remain academically eligible for just one season, knowing they will be gone in a year.

O.J. Mayo had said before the rule change he planned to go directly from high school to the NBA, but instead he has signed to play at USC this fall. He and Michael Beasley, rated the No. 1 high school player by rivals.com who will be a freshman at Kansas State this fall, have not disclosed their future plans but already have been projected by several scouting services as the top two picks in the 2008 draft.

Bill Barton, Beasley's coach at Notre Dame Prep in Fitchburg, Mass., acknowledges the potential problem for colleges.

"I agree with coach Knight on that," he said, "but the complaint shouldn't be with the kid or the NBA but with the college."

The NBA did not consult with the NCAA when formulating its rule -- "I learned about it in the newspaper," Brand said -- but Stern says that if the rule creates eligibility-integrity issues, the

NCAA should modify its rules.

As it stands, a college basketball player technically needs to enroll as a fulltime student in the fall, which means taking at least 12 units. He must pass six of those fall units to remain eligible, then must enroll in at least 12 units in the next semester, which ends after the basketball season is over. The rules are similar for schools on the quarter system.

Otherwise, the player is required to remain in good academic standing, like any other student at the institution, and maintain progress toward a degree. A few conferences have stricter guidelines (the Pac-10 not among them), but that's basically it.

Coaches determined to maintain the school's academic integrity would make sure the latter two requirements are followed. With the amount of money and prestige involved these days, less scrupulous coaches and institutions could turn a blind eye. Romar said if that happens, "It wouldn't surprise me. And that could be a concern if it sets a precedent."

Nonetheless, Romar, like Brand, says the number of players who fall into that category is so small that it's not a big issue. Yet.

None of the current high-profile freshmen has committed a glaring abuse of the eligibility rule.

Ohio State coach Thad Matta, who has three of the freshman from his NCAA runner-up team turning pro, likes the rule but acknowledges the merit of Knight's concern.

"You can look at it both ways," he said. "From my perspective, looking at what the players went through, the joys and enthusiasm of college life, and walking around campus with Greg Oden recently and him saying, 'I am going to miss this,' it's a positive.

"But I see (Knight's concern). I see that (the rule) could put a bad spin on things. We were fortunate that our guys did well academically. Greg Oden had a 3.7 grade-point average, I believe."

Oden eventually dropped out during the spring quarter after completing fall and winter terms. He didn't drop out until after announcing that he was entering the draft. One could quibble with the courses Oden took during the winter term (sociology, history of rock and roll and basketball), but the NBA rule had nothing to do with those issues, which were a concern before.

The other focal point of the rule, Durant, also was academically proficient, according to reports. He claims he had a 3.0 grade-point average in the fall semester at Texas, and was shooting for a higher GPA in the spring semester, which he recently completed.

Stanford would seem to be immune to such issues, because of its academic standards. In fact, the Cardinal have two players who could have turned pro out of high school, Brook and Robin Lopez,

both of whom announced immediately after their freshman seasons they were returning for their sophomore seasons. Cal coach Ben Braun agrees that Knight's concern is genuine but says his players could not abuse the eligibility rule because of the scrutiny the staff has on them.

"You can only be responsible for your own team and your own ethics," Braun said.

Several other factors could minimize the abuses.

A few years ago, the NCAA created the Academic Progress Report (APR), which measures student-athletes' academic accomplishments on an ongoing basis. If a player fails courses or drops out, it could affect the school's APR score enough to cost the team scholarships.

A coach might be willing to sacrifice a scholarship if the addition of such a player could mean a national championship, but Matta said he would not recruit a player willing to abuse the eligibility rules just so he could play one season and leave. "He would be hard to coach," Matta said.

Also, gaining initial eligibility to play as a freshman could sift out possible abusers. Besides the required standard test scores, a player must pass 14 core high school courses, and the number will increase to 16 in 2008.

Finally, there is the media, which might expose any eligibility abuses by a high-profile player, causing considerable embarrassment to the school.

"There's no hiding it," Matta said.

He would expect coaches to monitor such high-profile players' academics closely as a result.

It should be noted high school players with pro potential who are not interested in college could go overseas or elsewhere to play for a year before entering the NBA draft, but they would not get the exposure they would in college, which might affect their draft status.

This might seem like a lot of debate about something that will affect only a handful of players and just a few institutions each year. To people like Knight, it is about the rule's effect on the image and integrity of college basketball. To people like Dr. Brand it's about the rule's impact on a generation of would-be basketball players.

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Tim Stevens:

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Recruits only part of picture

TIM STEVENS, Staff Writer

One of the unusual things about college athletics scholarships is that many times acceptance comes down to whether the family can afford to take the scholarship.

The notion seems strange because a scholarship is free money, right?

But athletics scholarships usually aren't full scholarships.

So the lists we are including in today's section (pages 9-12C) of some area high school students who are accepting athletics scholarships is deceptive.

A few of the athletes, football and basketball players primarily, are receiving full athletics scholarships. Many are receiving some athletics financial aid. But many -- perhaps most -- are getting very little athletics financial aid.

Colleges rarely give full athletics scholarships to anyone other than football and basketball players.

The NCAA regulates the number of athletics scholarships its member schools can give. So often, a single scholarship is divided among several athletes.

That division forces many families to make a decision.

An athlete's family might need an additional \$20,000 a year to cover expenses if their college-bound student accepts a half-scholarship to a school that costs \$40,000 a year.

They either must find other funding or the student can give up on the dream of participating in athletics at that school and attend a less expensive one.

But high school athletics never were envisioned as a way to get college scholarships.

High school athletics exist in the United States -- and almost nowhere else in the world -- to help develop citizens for our democracy.

High school athletics are meant to teach lessons about sportsmanship, teamwork, loyalty and sacrifice.

But mostly, high school athletics are supposed to be fun.

High school athletes generally play for enjoyment, which is good because 99 out of 100 high school athletes never receive an athletics scholarship to college.

According to a recent U.S. News and World report, there are about 7 million high school athletes, but there are only 151,000 athletes in Division I of the NCAA and 75,000 in Division II.

And get this. Less than half of those NCAA athletes receive any athletics financial aid, according to the same article.

Take football and basketball out of the equation, and the odds get out of hand pretty quickly.

High school athletics and athletics scholarships have changed a lot in the past 30 years.

Colleges rarely recruit from high school teams anymore except in football.

Some colleges recruit athletes without ever talking to anyone at the high school.

Much of the recruitment takes place during college teams' offseason, primarily the summer.

Not everyone who wins an athletics scholarship is a great student, but for the vast majority of high school students, the best way to get financial aid for college is to be a good person and to study hard.

High school athletes have a lot of fun, learn some life-long skills and test their boundaries, but an athletics scholarship usually isn't in the picture.

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INSIDE THE COLLEGES

And now, the best games . . .

Mike Huguenin
INSIDE THE COLLEGES

June 10, 2007

Last week, we spotlighted some of the most embarrassing games of the upcoming football season. This week, we're going to look at reasons to celebrate: the 12 most intriguing non-conference games of the season.

12. Southern Miss at Boise State, Sept. 27: This is the best non-conference game of the season not involving Bowl Championship Series-league schools. We'll get an idea of how good Boise is when the Broncos play at Washington on Sept. 8.

11. Kansas State at Auburn, Sept. 1: If Wildcats sophomore QB Josh Freeman makes the expected jump in productivity from his freshman season, K-State is a dark-horse contender in the Big 12 North. This is one of two good Big 12-SEC games on Sept. 1.

10. Oklahoma State at Georgia, Sept. 1: This is the other good Big 12-SEC matchup in a season opener. Oklahoma State should have one of the nation's best passing attacks, and WR Adarius Bowman is a legit All-America candidate. Good news for Oklahoma State: Georgia's secondary is a huge question mark. Good news for Georgia: Oklahoma State's defense isn't likely to be good. Cowboys offensive coordinator Larry Fedora was 2-1 against the Bulldogs when he was an assistant at Florida under Ron Zook.

9. Nebraska at Wake Forest, Sept. 8: The idea that this would be anything other than a Huskers walkover changed last season, when Wake won the Atlantic Coast Conference. How good are the Demon Deacons going to be this season? This will be a good gauge. A plus for Wake: Nebraska hosts USC on Sept. 15, so the Huskers may be looking ahead.

8. Alabama vs. Florida State in Jacksonville, Sept. 29: A lot of good subplots to this one. The best: This will be Bobby Bowden's first game against Alabama, the school where some folks thought Bowden eventually would coach. That's not going to happen now, obviously. Another subplot: Bowden vs. Nick Saban for the first time.

7. Oregon at Michigan, Sept. 8: Oregon's hotly contested non-conference victory against Oklahoma was one of the biggest games last season; a win in this one could propel the Ducks to a great season, considering they host Cal, USC and Oregon State. But Oregon struggled to stop the run last season, and you can expect Michigan to try to rely heavily on TB Mike Hart.

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6. Texas A&M at Miami, Sept. 20: Randy Shannon gets two monster tests in his first month as UM's new coach (more on that in a minute). Texas A&M was 9-4 last season, with the three regular-season losses coming by a combined six points. Aggies QB Stephen McGee and a nice tailback combo will make life tough for Hurricanes defenders.

5. USC at Nebraska, Sept. 15: Last season's game at USC was an easy victory for the Trojans; it was almost as if Huskers Coach Bill Callahan knew his team had no shot and thus played conservatively to make sure it wasn't a blowout. If USC wins this, a 7-0 start seems almost assured.

4. TCU at Texas, Sept. 8: The Longhorns' games against Ohio State the past two seasons played a huge role in determining one of the teams in the national-title games. Don't laugh: It could happen again this season -- for TCU. The Horned Frogs are 22-3 the past two seasons, and if they can beat their former Southwest Conference rival, a 12-0 regular season beckons. And a victory at Texas surely would garner TCU extra brownie points that Boise State never could gain last season.

3. Miami at Oklahoma, Sept. 8: Nothing like getting thrown to the wolves early, eh, Coach Shannon? The schools haven't met since the Orange Bowl after the 1987 season; the Hurricanes won to finish off an undefeated season and give Jimmy Johnson his only national title as UM coach. An advantage for UM in this one is that its defense will make things mighty difficult for Oklahoma's new quarterback -- whoever it will be.

2. Tennessee at California, Sept. 1: The Vols embarrassed the Golden Bears in the opener last season, but Cal still went on to have the better season. An advantage for the Vols this season is that Cal's defensive front seven has five new starters.

1. Virginia Tech at LSU, Sept. 8: A monster game. If the Hokies win this, there's no reason they can't run the table in the regular season -- which would make them a favorite to get to the BCS title game. Tech has it all -- except a solid quarterback. This is the first of four huge pre-November home games for LSU (South Carolina on Sept. 22, Florida on Oct. 6 and Auburn on Oct. 20).

Hoop talk

Does Florida Coach Billy Donovan have egg on his face because of the UF-to-Orlando-back-to-UF mess? Of course. But the idea of his about-face hurting recruiting is ludicrous.

Will it be brought up the recruiting trail? Of course. But Donovan has a nice comeback: "Yep, I changed my mind. But the reason I turned down an extra \$2 million a year to coach in the best basketball league in the world is because I still wanted to coach in college basketball. In other words, I want to coach guys like you."

We've said it a thousand times: The main things on the mind of most recruits is how often a team wins and how often it's on TV, and as long as Donovan keeps Florida humming along, recruiting is going to go just fine.

Grid Bits

Last week, we picked on BCS-league schools for playing mediocre-to-bad Division I-AA teams. That just shouldn't happen. Then we did a little more research and came up with this: BCS-league schools have scheduled 27 games against Sun Belt Conference teams. (Sun Belt schools are hosting five of those games, including two by Florida Atlantic.) The runaway "winner" is the Southeastern Conference, with

13 such games scheduled. The Big 12 is second, with six. Arkansas has three such games, and Florida, Oklahoma State and Tennessee each have two. (We're including games against Western Kentucky, a I-A provisional member.)

Finally, some sanity in Arkansas. A judge dismissed a lawsuit filed by an upset "fan" that said Arkansas Chancellor John White failed to properly investigate what the "fan" deemed a disparaging e-mail sent to former QB Mitch Mustain by a booster. "I have not been shown any reason that a state court should get involved in the administration of the football program or athletic program," Washington County Circuit Judge Mark Lindsay is reported as saying during his ruling by the Northwest Arkansas Daily News. The ruling means plaintiff John David Terry and his lawyer won't be allowed to continue with the discovery process; the school had been served subpoenas for computer hard drives, phone records and various other documents.

The Tampa Tribune reported that USF starting FS Danny Verpaele, a former Merritt Island High standout, is academically ineligible this season.

A Final Thought: So, how long does it take for UF to name the O'Connell Center playing floor 'Donovan Court' now?

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Media discover college baseball

By **DAVE MATTER** of the Tribune's staff

Published Sunday, June 10, 2007

It wasn't just the stands that overflowed at Taylor Stadium last weekend. The press box, usually a den for a few local scribes, unread media guides and a swarm of buzzing flies, was the place to be for local reporters as the Missouri baseball team hosted an NCAA Regional for the first time.

Usually a diversion for local media outlets between basketball and football seasons, Tim Jamieson's MU baseball club had the rare opportunity to hog the spotlight as media flocked to Taylor Stadium, including rare appearances by writers from Kansas City and St. Louis.

The enhanced coverage popped up in scattered college towns and major cities across the country where college baseball usually finishes a distant third in local interest behind football and men's basketball.

Why the sudden attention? Is college baseball really growing in popularity, evolving from a niche sport to a major player along the lines of football and basketball?

Well, if media coverage is any indicator of a sport's popularity among fans, college baseball might be climbing the pecking order. At least in some parts of the country.

"Nothing gets the coverage like college football, but baseball around here is starting to approach basketball," said Seth Emerson, who covers South Carolina's sports teams for The State in Columbia, S.C., which also hosted an NCAA regional last weekend. "The fact of the matter is, if you turn on talk radio or go on the message boards, they're talking about college baseball as much around here in Columbia as they are college basketball. And a lot of that has to do with the success of the teams."

Of course, South Carolina plays in the Southeastern Conference where interest in college baseball trumps every other region in the country. Last month, almost 400 media credentials were issued for the SEC Tournament in Hoover, Ala., with about 325 of those going to media from outside the Hoover/Birmingham metro area, SEC spokesman Chuck Dunlap said. The tournament was broadcast on two different cable networks in the Southeast.

Compare that to the Big 12 Tournament, which, according to a league official, hosted around 200 media in Oklahoma City and only televised the

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championship game.

At the Big East Tournament in Brooklyn, N.Y., only 75 media credentials were issued, according to a league official.

College baseball's popularity in the South is reflected in attendance, too. According to the NCAA's 2006 attendance figures, of the 15 Division I teams that drew the largest average crowds, 13 were either in the Southeast region of the country or the state of Texas. The only exceptions were No. 5 Nebraska and No. 13 Wichita State.

"The SEC gets a big amount of coverage because a lot of the towns in the SEC don't have professional sports," said Bryan Mullen, who covers the SEC for the Tennessean in Nashville, home of the Vanderbilt Commodores, who were college baseball's No. 1 ranked team much of the regular season and also hosted an NCAA regional.

It wasn't long ago that the Tennessean rarely covered Vanderbilt baseball games, Mullen said. That's changed in recent years as the program has improved and the local interest has skyrocketed. Mullen said the Nashville Regional drew as much if not more local media attention than a Tennessee Titans NFL game or Nashville Predators NHL game. He expects the interest to continue during the baseball regular season, too.

"I think it's going to get to that point for the local media if" Vanderbilt "continues to be ranked nationally in the top 10," Mullen said. "You just look at the response from fans and readers and viewers, and that's all you heard about on talk radio. And it was the lead sports story on TV and in our sports section."

That's not the case on the West Coast. UCLA's baseball team, playing this weekend in the Super Regional at Cal State Fullerton, barely registers a blip on Los Angeles' media radar.

"College baseball has the unfortunate circumstance of starting right in the middle of Lakers' season. And the Lakers are the king around here," said Peter Yoon, who covers the Bruins for the Los Angeles Times. "We've also got the Clippers, the new Stanley Cup champion" Anaheim "Ducks and just a lot of things that take precedence over college baseball."

Throw in Major League Baseball teams in L.A. and Anaheim and college baseball "really gets shoved onto the backburner until the playoffs start this time of year," Yoon said.

The L.A. Times rarely if ever covers a regular-season college baseball game because there's not much interest from the fan bases at either UCLA or Southern California, Yoon said.

"USC is football, and UCLA is basketball," he said. "That's what those two schools are most rabid about. We get more feedback from baseball fans at Cal State Fullerton and Long Beach State."

Here in the Midwest, college baseball coverage generally amps up this time of year but still trails the regular-season attention shown in the SEC. Just a few newspapers in Big 12 territory send reporters to road baseball series, including two that cover Nebraska: the Lincoln Journal Star and

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Omaha World-Herald. The Lubbock, Texas, Avalanche-Journal sometimes covers road series, too.

In the SEC, the Baton Rouge, La., Advocate is known to cover most road series, while other papers generally rely on stringers to cover games away from home.

Perhaps the most telling indicator of college baseball's increasing visibility occurred on Thursday when ESPN2 televised the MLB draft for the first time, though the broadcast earned a measly 0.3 overnight Nielsen cable rating, according to Street & Smith's Sports Business Daily.

● **BIG 12 ON VERSUS:** The Big 12 announced last week that Fox Sports Net has agreed to sublicense five football games to the VERSUS network for this season. VERSUS, formerly the Outdoor Life Network, also televises the NHL and the Tour de France. In recent years, the network has televised football games from the Mountain West Conference.

Iowa State's home game against Iowa on Sept. 15 will be one of the five games on VERSUS this season.

The only catch is that VERSUS is not as readily available as some cable networks. It's reportedly seen in 72 million homes nationwide, or about 20 million less than ESPN.

Locally, VERSUS is available through Mediacom's digital cable package at Channel 404 and Charter Communication's regular and digital packages at Channel 70. For local satellite subscribers, VERSUS is available on the two most comprehensive packages for both DISH Network (Channel 151) and DirecTV (Channel 608).

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