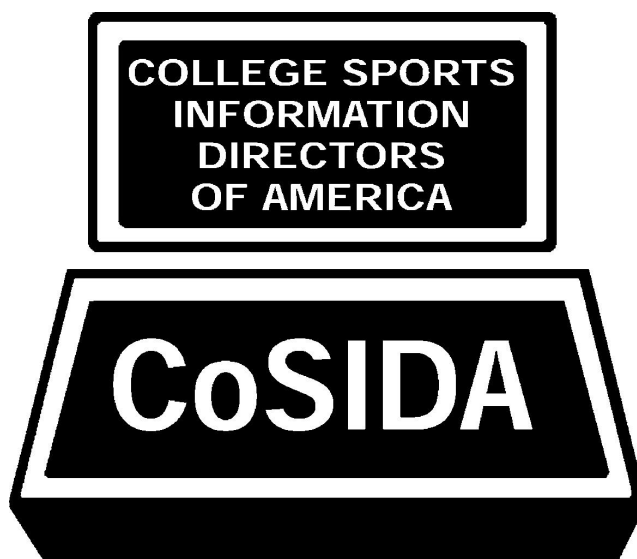


CoSIDA NEWS

Intercollegiate Athletics News and Issues from Around the Nation



OCTOBER 6, 2006



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Richard Obert
The Arizona Republic
Oct. 6, 2006 03:15 AM

Marshall Dilworth has never stepped foot in a classroom at Peoria Sunrise Mountain High. He won't walk with the school's class of 2008 at graduation ceremonies.

But he is the fastest swimmer on his high school team. He will rack up points to give Sunrise Mountain a chance to crack the top five at the Class 5A Division II championships.

He is the team's biggest hope.

How does this happen?

Dilworth, a junior, is one of a growing minority of athletes in the state who is home schooled.

Under an Arizona Interscholastic Association rule to comply with state law, Dilworth can play a sport at the high school as long as it is in his neighborhood.

He happens to live closest to Sunrise Mountain.

Last year, as a sophomore, Dilworth won Class 5A-II championships in the 100-yard breaststroke and 200 individual medley.

He is expected to repeat that feat this season - all while taking courses at Glendale Community College, tending to his landscaping business and working out with the Gauchos swim club at GCC.

The only time he is part of Sunrise Mountain is when the school has a swim meet.

"I'm definitely one of the team," Dilworth said. "I'm not there as much. We still enjoy each other. Being an upperclassman, you're there to support the underclassmen."

Those sentiments are echoed by Sunrise Mountain senior swimmer Jessica Piorkowski, who is part of the school's student population.

"We consider him part of the team," she said. "We don't look at him differently. He's a team player."

Few complaints

The AIA does not keep statistics on how many high school athletes are home schooled, but Executive Director Harold Slemmer said, "We get the occasional call" from parents on the home-school rules.

Arizona is one of 31 states that allow home-schooled students to play high school sports.

Slemmer, a former teacher at Tempe McClintock and a former principal at Phoenix Mountain Pointe, has mixed feelings about the home-schooled athlete.

"I certainly don't want to see any kid excluded from the benefits of extracurricular activities," Slemmer said. "But I think it's more meaningful when you're part of the student body."

There are potential pitfalls that could send red flags up at the AIA offices, such as the parent dodging the districts' no-pass, no-play rules by home schooling the child and giving out a passing grade; or multiple outstanding athletes who are home schooled attending the same school.

Detractors believe it's a shortcut to athletic success, allowing the athlete more time to indulge in the sport of choice.

Believers say it allows for more control of the environment and influences.

Slemmer said there have not been a lot of complaints.

According to figures from the National Center for Education Statistics, in spring 2003, there were roughly 1.1 million home-schooled youths in the nation.

Dilworth never attended a kindergarten class. He is the last of four children in the Dilworths' Christian household to be home schooled. The older three are now in college.

"When they were younger, we felt it was kind of an analogy of a tree," said Cris Dilworth, Marshall's mother, who with her husband, Jim, started a co-op for home-schooled students that has grown from three families to 65 and organizes drama and musical productions. "You don't stick a sampling out in the wind storm. You wait for it to be strong, then you pull those braces off. We felt it was our responsibility to instill the character.

"We're Christians. This is something we didn't want to have to tiptoe around at the public-school level. We felt it was a shortcut really. Instead of having them out of our influence for six to seven hours a day, let's counteract."

Dilworth said she doesn't want to knock the public-school system but feels home schooling has provided confidence "that would be hard to come by at the pure arena."

"Consequently, he makes friends easily," she said. "He's not pitted up against people. He likes all age groups, younger and older. When he goes to the swim meets, he talks to the parents.

"There are some with better SAT scores, but I'll take the character."

Gaining eligibility

It was in 1997, when Cris Dilworth's daughter, Rebecca, was a ninth-grader and wanted to play volleyball and basketball at Sunrise Mountain, that Cris discovered her daughter wasn't eligible in the Peoria district because she was home schooled.

"I called the district and went up the chain of command," Cris said. "They addressed it. They changed it. {ellipsis} We refer to it as the Becca Bill."

Slemmer said that in 1998 the Arizona Department of Education allowed home-schooled students to participate in high school sports.

Phoenix Horizon senior swimmer Buddy Turner, a two-time state champion in the 50-yard freestyle, was home schooled until he started high school.

"It depends on the person and the personality," Turner said. "I had a lot more exposure academically and socially when I went to public school. But Marshall excels at it."

Dilworth maintains a 4.0 average, taking math, Spanish and chemistry courses at Glendale CC, where he is mixed with college students and receives dual credits.

His classes normally end before noon, but he said this has been his busiest semester.

He said there is a tiny faction of the college population who are like him, high school-aged students taking courses that will go into his high school credits. He's gotten to know some of them.

Moving on

Dilworth wants to swim in college. But he'll have to register with the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse to do so. That will determine his athletic eligibility and whether he can receive financial aid.

When he graduates in 2008, he and other home-schooled Arizona seniors will meet for a ceremony at a non-school facility, usually a church, where there is enough room to seat the graduates.

Last year's class, Cris Dilworth said, had about 110 seniors.

"It seems to grow (each year)," she said. "Some come and some don't. You still get a cap and gown with a speech."

Cris won't let Marshall slide through. Before the high school swim season, Marshall told his coach that he didn't think he'd be able to swim in the opener because he had a lot of schoolwork to do.

"He usually says yes to too many things," Cris said. "He doesn't realize his body needs sleep."

He got it done, and has been a good teammate, where he shares the joys of winning.

"There is always that thing, you don't know what you've missed unless you've tasted it," Marshall said. "Since I never tasted it, I don't know what I've missed."

Online schools are starting to grow

Andy Erbs, an 11-year-old in Scottsdale who loves baseball, takes online courses with Arizona Virtual Academy, which this year launched a sports program with CY Sports.

Baseball and golf camps for AZVA online students are being held Oct. 9-13 in Queen Creek.

"On Mondays, Andy takes a math class in Chandler," said Barb Erbs, Andy's mother, who became disenchanted with the public-school system.

"On other days, he's on his computer. It gives you flexibility. At 10 a.m., he can work on his pitching with Ron (Davis, a former major league pitcher who gives special instruction for youths in the Valley). We're big sports fans. If he wants to go to a Suns game, he can get home at 11 p.m. He can sleep in and go to school late. That's the beauty of the program."

Andy Erbs, a sixth grader, has an online teacher. He e-mails her or talks to her on the phone. He has homework every night.

"You learn a lot more," said Andy, who started going online for school in December. "You can get done a lot quicker. But there are some disadvantages. You just don't get out of the house as much. I get a field trip once a month. Or we go to a baseball game or something."

Ron Davis, whose son Ike, a Scottsdale Chaparral High graduate and one of Arizona State's top baseball players, said he often gives baseball instruction for home-schooled students who turn that in for physical-education credit.

"We get tons of kids," said Davis, whose didn't consider home-schooling his three children, all of whom all graduated from Scottsdale Chaparral High.

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ON COLLEGE FOOTBALL

The Boston Globe

Playoff the solution? Debate resurfaces with BCS rankings out soon

By Mark Blaudschun, Globe Staff | October 6, 2006

The debate is only a few losses from raging once again. As college football approaches the first week of the Bowl Championship Series rankings (Oct. 15), which will determine the national championship game participants, teams around the country are wishing, hoping, and praying for the right results. Once the first rankings are released, there will be weekly arguments about who is worthy and who is not.

Right now, Ohio State is No. 1, Southern Cal No. 2, and Auburn No. 3, which poses the classic BCS equation of dividing three into two -- a problem that plagued Division 1-A a couple of years ago.

The solution, of course, is a playoff. But that, as NCAA president Dr. Myles Brand reiterated earlier this week at the ECAC fall convention in Hyannis, is not likely to happen any time soon. "As you know, the regular season has added a 12th game," said Brand. "And I think the college presidents want the emphasis on the regular season. They're the decision-makers and I don't really see much inclination from them for a 1-A [playoff] tournament."

But Brand did hint at a compromise, a "Plus One" bowl game after the four BCS bowls are played, with the two highest-ranked winners meeting for the title.

"That's a possibility," said Brand. "Fox is televising the games [all but the Rose Bowl] and I can't see anything done during the length of the contract [through the 2009 season] unless they feel they have to do something because of the ratings. But after that, it's a possibility."

The "Plus One" system has its backers, even among university presidents, a group steadfastly opposed to any playoff system.

It also has its doubters, those who point out you still have to pick two teams from the four winners. "Don't think for a minute it would solve all your problems," said American Football Coaches Association executive director Grant Teaff.

It could also be the first step toward a more compact playoff system, involving eight or 16 teams. Such an arrangement, contend the presidents, would extend the season too long with too many games.

But that argument weakens when you look at the presidents' acceptance of a 12th regular-season game. With a potential league championship game and a bowl game, that's 14, which is what an eight-team playoff would entail for the teams reaching the title game.

The BCS has been tweaked by increasing the at-large berths from two to four teams in addition to the six league champions (Big East, Atlantic Coast, Big 12, Pacific-10, Big Ten, Southeastern). The format of pitting the No. 1 and No. 2 teams in the final BCS standings remains the same, but that game will be played in Glendale, Ariz., Jan. 8, a week after the BCS bowl games -- Rose, Sugar, Fiesta, and Orange.

"There might be some opposition from the non-BCS schools with Plus One," said Brand, "because it would cut the at-large back down to two spots again."

That opposition might be muted, however, by a much more liberal guarantee of an at-large spot (for example, a non-BCS school gets the bid if it is ranked higher than a conference champion).

SEC commissioner Mike Slive, who is also the BCS coordinator this season, is in a precarious position as he was two years ago when Auburn went undefeated, won the SEC title game, and was shut out of the BCS title game by USC and Oklahoma.

The same scenario could develop this season. This week, for example, Jeff Sagarin's rankings -- which are used in

compiling the BCS standings -- had the SEC ranked as only the third-toughest league behind the Pac-10 and Big Ten.

Although Brand offered a few openings for some sort of playoff format, he was adamant when it came to the issue of "pay for play," which has been brought up over the last several years as schools reap huge revenues and players face stricter amateur regulations.

"We've drawn a line in the sand and we're not going to do it," said Brand. "Once you go over that line [paying athletes] that ceases to be the case. You're dealing with professionalism."

No pay for play and no playoffs. Let the arguments continue.

Bearish in Bay Area

It's been a while since the San Francisco Bay Area has been a college football mecca. When No. 11 Oregon visits No. 16 California tomorrow it will be the first meeting of top-16 teams in the area since 1991, and only the second encounter of top-16 teams since 1972 . . . Sunday night will be Northern Illinois running back **Garrett Wolfe's** main Heisman Trophy audition. Wolfe has torn up the competition in his first five games, picking up 1,181 yards -- a Division 1-A record. Wolfe, who ran for 353 yards in a 40-28 win over Ball State last week, will be on ESPN Sunday night when Northern Illinois faces Miami (Ohio) . . . Don't look now, but Washington, which was a woeful 2-9 and finished in a last-place tie in the Pac-10 a year ago in coach **Tyrone Willingham's** first year, is 4-1 and 2-0 going into tomorrow's meeting with USC . . . Penn State fans were close followers of the Minnesota Twins this week. Had the Detroit Tigers won the American League Central instead of the Twins, the Penn State-Minnesota game, scheduled for the Metrodome tomorrow, would have been played Nov. 25 because of a conflict with the playoffs.

'Dawg-gone stingy

Georgia comes into tomorrow night's SEC game against Tennessee with a struggling offense, but a defense that has allowed only 9 points in two SEC games and is ranked No. 1 in the country in scoring defense (6.8 points per game) . . . Stanford (0-5) faces Notre Dame tomorrow in South Bend, Ind. The Cardinal will be the first team the Irish have faced this year with a loss. A victory will give Notre Dame a 5-1 start for the first time since 1998 . . . Missouri is 5-0 for the first time since 1981 . . . Texas coach **Mack Brown** was a media presence all week as the Longhorns prepared for their annual meeting with Oklahoma in Dallas tomorrow. Brown also played a cameo role in NBC's debut of "Friday Night Lights" Tuesday . . . Auburn has not allowed a rushing TD . . . The Florida Gators will be getting lots of love if they are still undefeated at the end of the month. Last week, the Gators handed Alabama its first loss. The next three games for the Gators: No. 9 Louisiana State, No. 2 Auburn, and No. 10 Georgia.

Material from wire services was used in this report. ■

Today's News

Thursday, October 5, 2006

Congressman Sends Letter Grilling NCAA on Tax-Exempt Status of College Sports

By [PAUL FAIN](#)

In the latest salvo in what appears to be building interest on Capitol Hill for an investigation of college athletics, an influential congressman has asked the National Collegiate Athletic Association to justify its tax-exempt status.

That request came on Monday in a letter to the association's president, Myles Brand, from U.S. Rep. Bill Thomas, a California Republican and chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means.

"Most of the activities undertaken by educational organizations clearly further their exempt status," Mr. Thomas wrote. "The exempt purpose of intercollegiate athletics, however, is less apparent, particularly in the context of major college football and men's basketball programs."

Among other pointed questions in the [letter](#), Mr. Thomas asks: "Why should the federal government subsidize the athletic activities of educational institutions when that subsidy is being used to help pay for escalating coaches' salaries, costly chartered travel, and state-of-the-art athletic facilities?"

Erik Christianson, a spokesman for the NCAA, said the organization would respond to the letter and noted that NCAA officials have met with staff members from the Committee on Ways and Means. However, Mr. Christianson took issue with several points made by Mr. Thomas in the letter.

"We simply disagree with the fundamental assertion that intercollegiate athletics is not part of higher education," Mr. Christianson said, referring to the letter's comments about football and men's basketball.

Sen. Charles E. Grassley, the Iowa Republican who is chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, was sent a copy of the letter. Whether Mr. Grassley's or Mr. Thomas's committees will pursue hearings on the financing and educational benefit of college sports is unclear and may depend on the outcome of the November elections, which could tilt control in both chambers to Democrats. The two committees have been conducting reviews of nonprofit organizations, with the Senate panel having recently investigated governance at American University in the wake of a spending scandal ([The Chronicle](#), May 18).

"My understanding is that this is a serious inquiry," Richard A. Grafmeyer, a Washington lawyer and former tax counsel for the Senate Finance Committee, said of the questions raised by Mr. Thomas.

Proponents of major college athletics have long argued that football and men's basketball earn their tax-exempt status by generating money used for other sports. However, Mr. Thomas stated in the letter that sports programs "must contribute to the accomplishment of the university's educational purpose (other than through the production of income)" in order to be tax-exempt.

The 25 questions from Mr. Thomas, several of which are multipart queries, include:

- How does the NCAA accomplish its purpose of maintaining the athlete as an integral part of the student

- What benefit does the NCAA provide taxpayers in exchange for its tax exemption?
- Is added educational benefit derived from participation in expensive Division I-A sports, particularly football and men's basketball, as compared to sports in other divisions or intramural athletics?
- What actions has the NCAA taken to assess the substance of the courses taken by athletes, and, more generally, the quality of the education athletes receive?
- How much do the NCAA's member institutions spend each year on sports?
- How has the transformation of the NCAA men's basketball tournament into "commercial entertainment" (a reference to CBS's agreement to pay the NCAA an average of \$545-million per year for broadcasting rights) furthered the educational purpose of the NCAA and its member institutions?
- What percentage of NCAA revenue is spent by member institutions on solely academic matters?

The letter is strongly worded. For example, Representative Thomas writes that "corporate sponsorships, multimillion-dollar television deals, highly paid coaches with no academic duties, and the dedication of inordinate amounts of time by athletes to training lead many to believe that major college football and men's basketball more closely resemble professional sports than amateur sports."

Mr. Christianson contested that point, noting that college athletes attend class, usually earn degrees, and, in the vast majority of cases, never play professional sports.

"They're students, not professional athletes," Mr. Christianson said.

The NCAA's most recent graduation-rate report, released last month, found that 77 percent of Division I athletes were graduating within six years of enrolling in college ([The Chronicle](#), September 28).

The association and its members institutions have recently been studying the financing of college sports. The organization's Presidential Task Force on the Future of Division I Intercollegiate Athletics, composed of about 40 college presidents, is planning to release a substantive document later this month discussing ideas for curtailing expenses in big-time sports programs.

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THE PLAIN DEALER

New rules tick off coaches

Tressel is no fan of changes that shorten games

Friday, October 06, 2006

Doug Lesmerises
Plain Dealer Reporter

Columbus- There are two changes in college football that most coaches hate this season. By happenstance, the two might cancel each other out, though that wasn't the plan. By next season though, one problem might be fixed.

The issues are the addition of a 12th game and the changes in the clock rules that have shortened games and decreased the number of plays. Ohio State, for instance, has had 42 fewer plays through five games this year compared to last year.

When the NCAA approved a 12th game starting this season, Bowling Green was plugged into OSU's schedule. The Buckeyes were originally scheduled off this week.

While Ohio State coach Jim Tressel is a fan of neither the new game nor the clock changes, he's made a point of linking the two, mentioning that fewer plays each game might decrease the risk of injuries, which otherwise might have increased with an added game.

"There was some discussion by a lot of [coaches] that you start adding another game to the those guys' bodies, is that going to make an impact on them?" Tressel said.

It's a nice idea: the money of the 12th game balanced by shorter games out of concern for the player. But it's not true.

NCAA spokeswoman Crissy Schluep said Thursday that while the well being of student-athletes is always considered, when the NCAA Football Rules Committee changed the clock rules, safety "was not a determining factor for this specific rules change."

So what can these angry coaches do? About the 12th game, nothing.

"From the very beginning, we were very adamantly against a 12th game," said Grant Teaff, executive director of the American Football Coaches Association. "The reason we lost that battle was purely, without a question, financial."

But the clock is a different situation. Teaff said the AFCA is gathering data about every aspect of the clock change - the number of fewer plays, the length of TV timeouts, injury numbers - and will use those to make its case. Teaff expects a vote of the coaches at the AFCA January convention, which he assumes will be to reverse the clock changes. Then, he expects the Rules Committee, composed of 12 coaches and athletic directors, to pay attention to that vote.

"They've always listened to the coaches," Teaff said. "I believe we can get the rule either changed or eliminated, but it will be because the NCAA Rules Committee always listens."

That would put the action at an all-time high next season, with the number of plays increasing and teams playing either 12, 13 or 14 games, depending on conference championships and bowl games. Will coaches have to ease up on their players as a result?

Ohio State has already lightened the load this year. The Buckeyes work out in full pads only on Tuesday

after the first week of the season. In previous years, the Buckeyes would go in full pads two days each week through the first part of the season. But Tressel downplayed that, and said he hasn't made any adjustments for the missing bye week, maybe just for the evolving world of college football.

"When you have 12 games compared to nine or 10 when I started, it's a different world," Tressel said. "We used to only have five, six plays, so what could you do [in practice] other than beat each other up?"

Now there's plenty of time for other teams to do that, and next season there should be even more.

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Oct. 6

Ball's in the NCAA's Court

Myles Brand and company have a homework assignment to complete. Call it what you want — a term paper, a final exam, a thesis defense. It's due October 30 at a Congressional office building.

The task for the National Collegiate Athletic Association: Explain to the [U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means](#) why the group's member colleges should maintain the tax-exempt status of their sports programs. Or, in the words of one question in the committee's request: “Why should the federal government subsidize the athletic activities of educational institutions when that subsidy is being used to help pay for escalating coaches' salaries, costly chartered travel, and state-of-the-art facilities?”

Rep. Bill Thomas (R-Calif.), chairman of the House committee that handles legislation affecting tax issues and nonprofit organizations, sent the [pointed eight-page letter](#) to the NCAA [earlier this week](#). He is demanding — and an NCAA spokesman said the committee will receive — responses to 25 highly detailed and often sharply worded questions on such topics as corporate sponsorships, graduation rates and coaches' compensation.

The letter is part of Congress's continuing look into the behavior and tax-exempt status of charities and other nonprofit entities. The Committee on Ways and Means has held a series of hearings on the growth of the tax-exempt sector in recent years. The last two decades have seen various attempts by lawmakers and federal agencies, including the Internal Revenue Service and the Federal Trade Commission, to force colleges and universities that play big-time sports to pay “unrelated business income tax” on all or at least more of the revenue their sports programs earn. Nonprofit groups pay such taxes on money they receive from activities that aren't seen as “substantially related” to the primary mission for which they earned their tax exemption.

House staff members have met in recent months with NCAA officials to discuss the association's status. “We disagree with the fundamental assertion of the letter that intercollegiate athletics is not a part of higher education,” said Bob Williams, an NCAA spokesman. “Look at the emphasis on academic reform and it shows clearly how we feel.”

Questions remain about the muscle behind the House's efforts. A Ways and Means Committee aide said the main purpose of the letter is to gather information, and that a decision to hold a hearing or pursue further action would depend on the NCAA's response. A spokeswoman in the Senate Finance Committee office, which parallels the Ways and Means Committee and has undertaken [its own review of nonprofits](#), said Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa), the committee's chairman, will be interested in the response but doesn't plan to “duplicate the House's work.” No hearings are scheduled in that chamber, the spokeswoman said.

Bruce Hopkins, a lawyer whose practice focuses on nonprofit organizations, called the letter “a huge

“It’s the first time in a long time there’s been a formal challenge by Congress asking [the NCAA] to justify exemptions,” he said. “This is a serious, well-researched letter; obviously some time has gone into it from staff.”

Hopkins said that the request places a “huge onus” on the NCAA, and that association officials have their work cut out for them. “They should make this their highest priority for the coming weeks and put together a quality response,” he said. “[Thomas] is striking at the heart of revenue generated by college sports.”

Frank G. Splitt, a member of the Drake Group — made up of faculty members who outspokenly criticize big-time college sports — and author of [“The Faculty-Driven Movement to Reform Big-Time College Sports,”](#) said the letter is the “biggest step forward” in the campaign to reduce what he calls the exploitation of college athletes. “This is the first step in pushing the stone up the hill. There’s always the chance this is going to play out.”

But Gary R. Roberts, deputy dean of Tulane University’s law school and director of its sports law program, said the House committee’s effort is just another case of Washington grandstanding. He said the “college sports establishment” is too strong and the resistance in Congress too heavy for any significant movement to be made.

“There’s no way Congress is going to take millions away from college sports,” Roberts said. “It’s not that there isn’t a seed of a good idea here, because commercialization is a legitimate issue, but they should be fighting other battles.”

Sheldon E. Steinbach, a lawyer in the higher education practice at Dow Lohnes and recently retired vice president and general counsel at the American Council on Education, agreed that the letter “has everything to do with November 7,” adding that the matter has strong political appeal. “The NCAA sometimes becomes a political punching bag because their functions and activities are misperceived,” he said.

Hopkins, however, said he doesn’t see attacking the NCAA as politically expedient.

The House committee’s letter refers in general to the status of college athletics but focuses particularly on the highest-profile sports. “The exempt purpose of intercollegiate athletics ... is less apparent [than that of higher education], particularly in the context of major college football and men’s basketball programs,” it says.

Steinbach said that each year around the time of the men’s basketball tournament, questions arise about the NCAA’s financial arrangements, and the association “dutifully responds with candor.” CBS’s multimillion-dollar deal with the association, as well as money that comes in from corporate sponsorships and other agreements for the tournament, represent more than 90 percent of the NCAA’s annual revenue. That money isn’t taxed, and a major change to the status quo could be debilitating, he said.

But James J. Duderstadt, a former University of Michigan president and member of the Secretary of Education’s [Commission on the Future of Higher Education](#), said the Congressional inquiry is more likely to produce tweaks than transformation.

“Someone has to hold up the NCAA’s hands every once in awhile,” Duderstadt said. “I just think it’s highly unlikely that the tax-exempt status [of college sports] would be removed.”

He said Congress could remove the deductibility of skybox leases, force financial aid decisions out of college coaches’ control, and press athletics directors on why a 12th game was added for college football. “The House committee is asking questions that the NCAA ought to be asking itself every time it makes a decision — how will this move affect the educational objective?”

Hopkins said that for the NCAA to get a passing grade in its response to the House's letter, it will need to stick with the argument that has worked for decades — that major college sports generate alumni, student and public interest in institutions and promote loyalty.

Some have justified the tax-exempt status of college sports by pointing out that high-profile programs attract both donors and potential students to a university. Hopkins said these are “deadend arguments,” and Thomas agrees. “Neither of these arguments is valid from a federal standpoint,” the letter says, explaining that taxpayers have no interest in increased student pools at one school over another, and that money given to an athletic department is money not spent on other charities.

“To be tax exempt,” the letter says, “the activity itself must contribute to the accomplishment of the university's educational purpose (other than through the production of income.)”

— [Elia Powers](#)

*The original story and user comments can be viewed online at
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CHRIS DUFRESNE ON COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Pac-10 Is Surprise Ratings Star

Chris Dufresne

October 5, 2006

September was to the Pacific 10 Conference what packaged spinach was to your refrigerator — something you couldn't wait to get rid of.

The Pac-10 produced a major officials' controversy, several reputation-damaging performances against Southeastern Conference opponents and Stanford.

So it came as no surprise this week when USA Today computer czar **Jeff Sagarin** released his weekly conference ratings and had the Pac-10 ranked ...

... Last?

Nope.

First.

Sagarin rates the Big Ten second followed by the SEC, which is considered by many the nation's top conference this year.

The SEC has five teams ranked in the top 15 in this week's Associated Press poll; the Pac-10 has three in the top 16.

The rankings were not accidentally logged upside down, Sagarin confirmed in an e-mail.

And it's not just Sagarin. The Pac-10 also ranks first in Anderson & Hester's system and the Massey Ratings — that's half of the computers used in the Bowl Championship Series formula. One index rates the Big East No. 1, one doesn't list conference rankings, and another isn't revealing until the first BCS standings are released on Oct. 15.

"Certainly there is strength in numbers, perhaps even truth and justice," Pac-10 Commissioner **Tom Hansen** said jokingly. "I feel confident this ranking reflects the admiration of the manner in which Cal held down Tennessee."

Tennessee beat Cal, 35-18, so the commissioner has a sense of humor.

What pushed the Pac-10 over the top?

Maybe Arizona's losing by 42 points at Louisiana State?

Oregon State's coming up 28 points short against Boise State?

Cal's "statement" win against Portland State?

Stanford's sinking like an anchor against Navy?

Washington State's getting drubbed at Auburn, and then almost beating USC?

What might a 35-point loss by Stanford at Notre Dame this week do for Pac-10 credibility, secure it conference-of-the-year honors?

"I think most people's perceptions are based on the top one-two teams in each conference, and they don't consider the rest," Sagarin explained.

Sagarin's point is that you have to look at conference strength top to bottom. The Pac-10 has fewer lousy teams than the SEC, which is being dragged down by ankle weights Vanderbilt, Mississippi, Mississippi State and Kentucky.

The Pac-10 did score some nonconference points in September:

USC routed Arkansas and soundly defeated Nebraska.

Washington is vastly improved.

The Pac-10 played a more challenging nonconference schedule than most conferences.

And although the Pac-10 had to formally apologize for Oregon's 34-33 win over Oklahoma, it was a quality win in Sagarin's computer.

"I have the game recorded as Oregon 34, Oklahoma 33," he wrote.

SEC schedule strength lurks as a potentially explosive issue for the BCS. Two years ago, the SEC was outraged when undefeated Auburn finished third in the BCS behind USC and Oklahoma.

SEC Commissioner **Mike Slive** has all but vowed this could not happen again in a civilized society. But right now Auburn is ranked No. 3 in both BCS human polls, behind Ohio State and USC. Sagarin has Auburn ranked eighth.

"In my opinion, the Southeastern Conference is the No. 1 college football conference in the nation," SEC Associate Commissioner **Charles Bloom** said. "This season we have the highest nonconference winning percentage in the nation and the most teams ranked in national polls. Computer rankings include a lot of data that changes from week to week. At the end of the season, I feel the SEC should be ranked as the nation's top conference."

The SEC is in a difficult position because it recently inherited administration of the BCS — rotated every two years among all BCS conferences except the Pac-10 and Big Ten.

Slive not only is SEC commissioner this year and next, he's the BCS coordinator, which puts him in the prickly position of fighting for the SEC as he defends a system that could potentially keep one of his schools out of the title game ... again.

Bloom, it should be noted, when he worked under former SEC commissioner **Roy Kramer**, in 1998 helped identify and select the rankings system utilized in the BCS formula.

Sagarin is aware most SEC fans can read.

"Not too much heat yet from anyone," Sagarin wrote, "but I'm sure that's simply the proverbial lull before the storm."

Blitz Package

- Oregon at California is not just the best game in the Pac-10 this week, it's almost a family reunion. Cal Coach **Jeff Tedford**, who coached at Oregon from 1998 through 2001, has loaded his program with former Ducks coaches and administrators. Included are assistant coaches **Bob Gregory**, **Dan Ferrigno** and **Bob Foster**; strength coach **John Krasinski**, video coordinator **Matt Fox**, equipment manager **Ed Garland**, assistant equipment manager **Brett Flores** and recruiting assistant **Kevin Parker**.

Last summer, Cal also recruited fundraiser **Jim Bartko**, who in 17 years at Oregon helped raise more than \$150 million for the program.

- Let the lobbying begin. Western Athletic Conference Commissioner **Karl Benson** said this week that he is confident a 12-0 Boise State team would earn automatic qualification — and a \$14-million paycheck — into a BCS bowl game. "It's easily attainable," Benson said.

We'll see. This year, a team from a non-BCS conference needs to finish in the top 12 in the final BCS standings, whereas before it had to finish in the top six. In 2004, the year Utah earned an automatic bid by finishing sixth, 11-0 Boise State finished No. 9.

"The system's in place; it was tweaked this year," Benson said. "I have confidence the system will reward a 12-0 team."

The potential problem: Boise State moved up only one spot, from No. 22 to No. 21, in the USA Today coaches' poll after a 36-3 win over Utah. The combined record of Boise State's seven remaining opponents is 12-19.

- Texas versus Oklahoma at the Cotton Bowl on Saturday lacks the luster it has had in recent years — when national titles figured into the equation — but it's still important in this sense: The loser of the game featuring one-loss schools probably will be eliminated from BCS-bowl consideration.

This would be even more interesting if a second loss was handed to Oklahoma, which rightly believes it should have won the disputed game at Oregon on Sept. 16. Texas won last year after losing five straight in the series.

Not much bulletin board material to report. The closest thing we could find is Texas defensive end **Brian Robison's** saying that Oklahoma is "probably one of the biggest rivalries that we have."

Probably?

- A team to watch the next two weeks is Michigan State. The Spartans are coming off consecutive fiascoes, blowing a double-digit lead to Notre Dame and then losing last week to lowly Illinois. But the Spartans can still have plenty to say about the Big Ten race. They play at Michigan this week and then play host to Ohio State.

Said beleaguered Michigan State Coach **John L. Smith**: "We're good enough to win every game on our

schedule; we're good enough to lose every game on our schedule."

For Michigan, Smith is playing a familiar card: "They come here to play Michigan," he said of his players. "Let's be honest, those guys down the road didn't care about them. Didn't recruit them. So let's go play them. Show 'em that we're good."

- Checking on Chuck. First-year San Diego State Coach **Chuck Long** is off to an 0-4 start and has lost quarterback **Kevin O'Connell** (thumb) and backup **Darren Mougey** (shoulder) to injuries. This leaves Long no choice but to start **Kevin Craft** this week against Brigham Young. Craft is the son of former Aztecs coach **Tom Craft**, who was fired last season and replaced by Long.
- Believe it or not. The top quarterback in the Pac-10 this year, according to NCAA statistics, is the same **Nate Longshore** who looked helpless in Cal's season opener at Tennessee. Longshore, rated seventh nationally in pass efficiency, is the only Pac-10 quarterback rated in the top 30. USC's **John David Booty** is No. 33.
- For what it's worth: Georgia leads the nation in scoring defense, giving up only 6.8 points per game. The schools Georgia has mostly kept out of the end zone have been Western Kentucky, South Carolina, Alabama Birmingham, Colorado and Mississippi. Georgia has given up only three touchdowns in five games. Temple has given up 28.

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Lawmaker Challenges NCAA on Tax Exemption

Rep. Thomas questions athletic programs' link to education, but group says IRS supports status.

By Greg Johnson
Times Staff Writer

October 6, 2006

U.S. Rep. Bill Thomas (R-Bakersfield) is questioning whether the NCAA, with its \$521.1-million annual budget and lucrative television rights package, deserves its tax-exempt status.

In a pointed, eight-page letter sent Monday to NCAA President Myles Brand, Thomas suggested that big-time athletic programs might be at odds with the purpose of higher education and might not qualify for tax-exempt status.

Thomas, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, said in his letter that educational institutions deserve tax-exempt status. But the lawmaker described the need for a college athletics exemption as "less apparent, particularly in the context of major college football and basketball programs."

Thomas, who reviewed nonprofit hospitals and credit unions, said the nonprofit sector must be scrutinized because it is growing "in size, scope and economic impact."

But the letter drew a strong reaction from the NCAA in Indianapolis.

"The NCAA disagrees with the fundamental assertion that intercollegiate athletics is not part of higher education," said NCAA spokesman Erik Christianson. "We also challenge the underlying assertion that not-for-profit status is linked to the amount of revenue an organization may generate.

"Instead, the correct view, as supported by previous IRS rulings, is to examine how not-for-profit organizations utilize generated revenue for the common good."

Trent Stamp, executive director of Charity Navigator, an online database that rates charitable organizations, said that the NCAA's status would comply with existing tax law if its administrative costs are appropriate and the television rights money "is doled back out to their member institutions."

"That seems to be consistent with the rules for tax-exempt organizations," Stamp said.

It's uncertain whether any attempt to strip the NCAA of its tax-exempt status would gain traction in Washington.

This year, Gary Roberts, director of the Tulane University Sports Law program and the school's NCAA representative, described the political power of college sports as "unbelievable" and football and basketball as "a religion" among many fans.

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Print This Article

[SEC taking defense to next level](#)- [Jake Curtis](#)

Friday, October 6, 2006

Those watching Southeastern Conference games on television are liable to incur a few welts. Or so it seems.

The hits in Auburn's 7-3 victory over LSU last month could almost be felt through the TV screen, and it figures to be the same this weekend in the conference where defense is king.

We'll leave it to sociologists to ponder why folks in the deep South crave defense while people out here relish offense. It's enough to know that Tennessee coach Phillip Fulmer feels lucky to have depth at running back, because, he said, "In this league, you get banged up and bruised."

The No. 13 Vols could get a little banged up on Saturday when they go to Athens for a big game against Georgia, which is unbeaten and ranked No. 10 despite getting virtually nothing from its quarterback. The Bulldogs have done it with a defense that ranks No. 1 nationally in scoring defense.

And the Bulldogs might not have the best defense in the conference. They might not even be among the top three.

SEC teams Georgia, LSU, Auburn and Florida rank first, second, third and fourth in the country in scoring defense, and Cal fans know about the Tennessee defense, which completely shut down a Bears offense that has scored more than 40 points in each of its four games since.

Points will be at a premium in the Tennessee-Georgia game, but they might be harder to come by in Gainesville, Fla., when No. 5 Florida plays No. 9 LSU. Florida's defense could be even stronger if its best lineman, defensive tackle Marcus Thomas, plays after sitting out a suspension, reportedly for failing a drug test. Gators coach Urban Meyer has yet to say whether Thomas will play against the Tigers, although it seems unlikely. Even if he does play, Florida might have the second-best defense on the field.

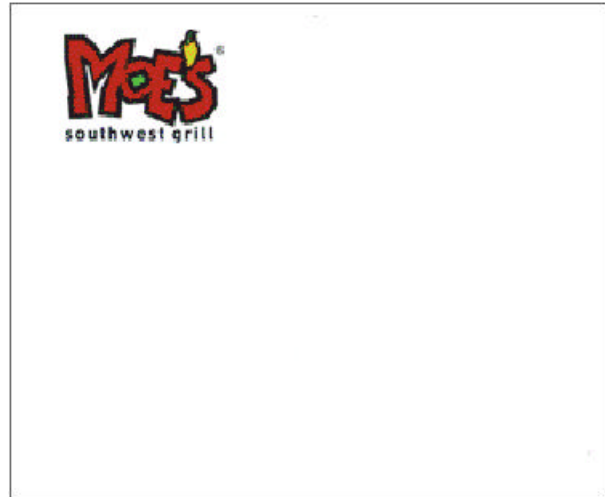
Not only is LSU second nationally in scoring defense, it leads the country in total defense as well.

"Their defensive personnel is second to none," said Arizona coach Mike Stoops, whose team managed only a late field goal in its 45-3 loss to the Tigers last month. "To watch their personnel is somewhat frightening. Their speed and size is pretty overwhelming."

Mississippi State coach Sylvester Croom, whose team scored 14 of its 17 points against the Tigers last week after the outcome had been decided, was impressed by the unpredictability and complexity of the LSU defense.

"They're getting those kids to learn NFL schemes," he said.

LSU foes might think they're facing an NFL defense.



Husky fellow: USC recruited Isaiah Stanback, and he was interested, but the Trojans wanted him as an "athlete," and Stanback wanted to be a quarterback.

So on Saturday, USC will try to stop Stanback, whose improved quarterback play is a chief reason Washington, which was picked to finish last, is 4-1 overall and 2-0 in the Pac-10.

"I don't think there's been a more valuable player in the conference, to this point," Stoops said.

Spartan existence: Things couldn't look much worse for Michigan State and coach John L. Smith. A week after blowing a 16-point fourth-quarter lead against Notre Dame for their first loss, the Spartans blew another lead in a home loss to lowly Illinois. Players were involved in a postgame melee when Illinois players tried to plant their flag on the Spartans field, resulting in a \$10,000 fine for both schools and a reprimand for both head coaches. Smith also got roasted in the media for his postgame comments suggesting he had no answer for the Spartans' play.

This letdown looks a lot like past Spartan collapses. In 2003, Smith's first season at Michigan State, the Spartans were ranked No. 9 when they lost 27-20 to Michigan, which started an MSU run of four losses in its final five games.

The next year, the Spartans were 4-3 and leading Michigan by 17 points with less than nine minutes left. They lost that game in three overtimes on their way to losing four of their final five games. Last season, MSU was ranked No. 11 when it lost in overtime to Michigan, sending the Spartans to five losses in their final six games.

So here comes Michigan again on Saturday, and this time the Spartans will be without their leading rusher, Javon Ringer, who is probably out for the season with a knee injury. Quarterback Drew Stanton is expected to start the game for the Spartans, but the first solid hit on his bruised ribs could end his day.

The good news is, an MSU win could resurrect its season, and possibly save Smith's job.

Wake Forest surprise: A win against Clemson would give Wake Forest its first 6-0 start since 1944, when it got as high as No. 12 in the rankings. The Demon Deacons are doing it without starting quarterback Ben Mauk and starting tailback Micah Andrews, who are out with injuries.

No one knows whether Wake Forest is the surprise team of the country or simply the beneficiary of a soft early schedule. We will find out Saturday when the Deacons host Clemson, which is second in the nation in scoring and outscored its past two opponents 103-7.

What to watch

12:30 p.m. -- No. 9 LSU (4-1) at No. 5 Florida (5-0), Channel: 5 Channel: 13 Channel: 46

-- Florida QB Chris Leak and LSU QB JaMarcus Russell are having standout seasons, and the one that can solve the opponent's stingy defense should win.

4:45 p.m. -- No. 13 Tennessee (4-1) at No. 10 Georgia (5-0), ESPN

-- Joe Tereshinski is back as Georgia's QB, which should help its struggling offense some, but he's completed only 45 percent of his passes.

12:30 p.m. -- No. 7 Texas (4-1) vs. No. 14 Oklahoma (3-1) at Dallas, {KGO}Channel: 10

-- Sooners RB Adrian Peterson might be the nation's best back, but Texas' defense yields only 1.42 yards per rushing attempt, tops in the country.

5 p.m. Sunday -- Northern Illinois (3-2) at Miami-Ohio (0-5), ESPN

-- There are a limited number of opportunities to see NIU's Garrett Wolfe, who is on pace to set the record for single-season rushing yardage.

Other games: Washington tries for a big road upset at USC (12:30 p.m., FSNBA), Clemson tries to end the Wake Forest dream (9 a.m., ESPN), Michigan State tries to regain its footing at Michigan (1:30 p.m., ESPN), and unbeaten Missouri tries to earn national respect against Texas Tech (4 p.m., TBS).

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USC coach has manufactured a program bent on winning

Friday, October 6, 2006

By TED MILLER
P-I COLUMNIST

LOS ANGELES -- For a moment, Emmanuel Moody doesn't appear to understand the question.

Why did the Parade All-America tailback from Dallas want to join three other Parade All-America tailbacks in USC's 2006 recruiting class?

Further explanation in response to a baffled look: Out of 119 Division I-A schools, at least 100 of them, including a handful of perennial national powers, would have essentially guaranteed him a starting job, which would allow him to immediately showcase his talents for the NFL.

So why take a chance that he might get lost in the shuffle?

Moody pauses because he has to shift away from the way he thinks, from the way Trojans coach Pete Carroll thinks, from the thought patterns of the USC dynasty. To explain himself, he has to adopt the way most everyone else thinks, stepping into the mind-set of society at-large, in which complete confidence and obsessive competitiveness are foreign and often even unseemly.

"It's all about competing," he said. "It's how confident you are and knowing your abilities. I know my talents. I didn't care what running backs came to USC. I just knew I wanted to come here.

"It's USC. It offers you a chance for a national championship every year."

It would be easy to reduce USC's going-on five years of dominance to a simple formula: Great players plus good coaching equals victory.

It's more than that. USC is a cult of competitiveness.

"One of the key statements that I make to the team is that we're going to do things better than it's ever been done before," Carroll said. "That mentality has to be throughout. It has to be woven through the fabric that we will not rest, that we will not settle, that we will be relentless in pursuit of a competitive edge."

Maintaining an edge

Ask Carroll about the secrets of USC's success -- a 52-4 record since 2002, with two national championships and one runner-up finish -- and terms repeatedly appear that have little to do with football, at least on the surface: belief system ... philosophy ... construct ... overall culture ... formula ... process.

He engages the subject with enthusiasm. He is, not surprisingly, a great salesman ("These are good questions!" he said, eliciting a grin from a reporter trying to maintain critical distance).

Carroll talks about John Wooden, the legendary UCLA basketball coach, while sounding like self-help guru Anthony Robbins. He's a fit, tanned, fast-talking 55-year-old who energetically bounces around practice like a man half his age.

His fun-loving charisma, however, never robs him of his ability to lead. He maintains an edge. Just ask him about his four years as an NFL coach, judged a failure by most but not by Carroll.

Just ask him about the last-second loss to Texas in the Rose Bowl that denied his team an unprecedented third consecutive national title.

"I'll mourn forever," he said.

This draws a brief laugh -- he's playfully overstating things, right? -- but, no, Carroll isn't smiling. He's serious.

"I'll never forget that game," he continues. "I'll always be pissed about that game. It was so close. So close. So close to winning forever. It was right there and there were a million ways it could have been different and it just wasn't."

This touches something interesting about Carroll. He's an evangelist of focus and preparation, of living and working in the moment instead of looking ahead or behind. He tells his players to focus on the present -- not just the game ahead, not just the next practice, but the next play at practice.

Yet he admits that his all-encompassing competitiveness compels him to retain the wounds of defeat while leaving a far larger collection of successes mostly behind.

You get the idea, despite natural skepticism, that Carroll does what he does not to create a legacy of greatness but because he loves the process. It's almost as though he'd trade a great win in the past for a merely good win tomorrow.

"I don't take that much pride in what's already happened," he said. "It's OK. But what are you going to do now? What's your next step?"

Team over individual

So what is next for USC? Probably at least another national championship during the next three years.

The Trojans, ranked No. 3, feature just five senior starters, though a couple of their juniors -- particularly receiver Dwayne Jarrett and defensive end Lawrence Jackson -- figure to bolt for the NFL a year early.

Still, the lineup is so talent-laden, the bench so deep with former prep AllAmericans, that stratospheric expectation don't seem unreasonable. Carroll is a recruiting powerhouse, having hauled in the nation's No. 1 recruiting class three out of the past four years, even though the school's football facilities are far less impressive than most elite programs.

"Other schools can dazzle and dazzle you with their facilities, but it's just about winning here," said backup quarterback Mark Sanchez, a redshirt freshman who was Parade Magazine's Player of the Year in 2004.

"(Carroll) doesn't promise anything. If a coach promises something, you know he's promising someone else. And if a coach talks bad about his own players, he might talk bad about you the next year to incoming recruits. What he said to me was, 'We have great quarterbacks here. We think you're great. You can compete with those guys. I'm not going to tell you you can start here. But I think you're good enough to play here.' "

It's not just about getting the best athletes, though that's obviously exactly what Carroll does. He emphasizes evaluating competitiveness almost as much. He wants great athletes who want to beat out other great athletes. He also wants them to hate losing as much as he does, so they buy into the idea of team over individual.

Sanchez admits he's not thrilled being a backup. He said he believes he has a shot to beat out starter John David Booty next spring, just as Booty legitimately challenged Matt Leinart in the spring of 2004 even after Leinart led the Trojans to a Rose Bowl victory and a national championship.

"I'm still competing," Sanchez said. "That's the way it's got to be or I'm going to be miserable."

It would seem that, at some point, the recruiting would hit a saturation point. For example, what elite tailback prospect would sign with USC knowing that its depth chart currently features two juniors and four touted freshmen?

How about the No. 1 player in the nation, running back Marc Tyler of Westlake Village, Calif., who has already committed to the Trojans.

No guarantees

There's presently no such thing as unrealistic expectations at USC. It's not just fans who expect national titles and define a successful campaign as that and nothing else.

"We don't wait for the fans to do that," athletic director Mike Garrett said. "That's our deal, too. Losing to Texas was bad. But the only thing worse would have been to not be at the dance."

Dancing can be lucrative. While USC is a private school and doesn't release financial data, such as Carroll's salary -- widely reported to be approximately \$3 million annually -- the Department of Education requires athletic departments to release revenue figures in order to monitor gender-equity compliance.

In 2002, USC reported \$38.6 million in revenue, about the same as the previous year. Last year, that number was \$60.7 million, an increase of 57 percent over three years. That's all football cash, and it's helped a department that notoriously operated in the red balance the books.

But for how long will the revenue-generating championships continue to pile up? The Ming Dynasty fell, as did the Roman Empire. Perennial college football powers rise and fall from dominance to mediocrity and back again.

There are no guarantees. After winning five national titles from 1962-78, USC failed to finish in the nation's top five from 1980-2002 and was owned by rivals Notre Dame and UCLA.

The most recent college football dynasties, Florida State, Miami and Nebraska, each has fallen into mediocrity and is struggling to recover.

FSU hasn't been the same since offensive coordinator Mark Richt left for Georgia and master recruiter Chuck Amato took over at N.C. State. Miami and Nebraska slipped after head coaches bolted.

USC thrived last year despite the departure of highly regarded offensive coordinator Norm Chow. But the offense has sputtered at times this season, so perhaps that's a minor fissure worth watching.

And, of course, Miami's dominant run in the 1980s and early 1990s came to an end because of NCAA sanctions.

USC might have its own NCAA problems. A Yahoo Sports report last spring that Heisman Trophy-winning tailback Reggie Bush received money and gifts from sports agents while playing for USC could entangle the program.

Yahoo has alleged that running backs coach Todd McNair may have known about Bush's involvement with agents who were trying to woo him, which could expose USC to a charge of lack of institutional control.

Proving USC knew what was allegedly going on, though, will be difficult, particularly because Bush isn't legally compelled to cooperate with the NCAA investigation.

"I don't really know (what will happen)," Carroll said. "I only know what Reggie says. He's the only one who knows anything about this stuff. And I know the strength of his conviction that nothing went wrong. He's the one who has to deal with it. We have no information at all with any of this stuff. All we can do is cooperate."

As far as Carroll's future, he makes no guarantees but he appears content. He's repeatedly said he isn't interested in another shot in the NFL, but it shouldn't shock anyone if an owner one day successfully tweaks Carroll's competitive nature and lures him away.

His goals for the future? They aren't exactly modest.

"The goals I have, have no end," he said. "I want to win forever. It's not winning a championship. It's how many can you win."

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New Media A Weapon in New World Of Politics

By John F. Harris
Washington Post Staff Writer
Friday, October 6, 2006; A01

At first glance, three uproars that buffeted American politics in recent weeks have little in common.

Former congressman [Mark Foley](#) (R-Fla.) ended his political career over sexually charged e-mails to former House pages. [Sen. George Allen](#) (R-Va.) stumbled over his puzzling use of the word "macaca" and his clumsy response to revelations about his Jewish ancestry. Former president Bill Clinton had a televised temper fit when an interviewer challenged his terrorism record.

All three episodes, however, were in their own ways signs of the unruly new age in American politics. Each featured an arresting personal angle. Each originally percolated in the world of new media -- Web sites and news outlets that did not exist a generation ago -- before charging into the traditional world of newspapers and television networks. In each case, the accusations quickly pivoted into a debate about the motivations and alleged biases of the accusers.

Cumulatively, the stories highlight a new brand of politics in which nearly any revelation in the news becomes a weapon or shield in the daily partisan wars, and the aim of candidates and their operatives is not so much to win an argument as to brand opponents as fundamentally unfit.

In interviews, figures as diverse as Clinton, Vice President Cheney and White House strategist Karl Rove spoke about their experiences navigating the highly polarized and often downright toxic political and media environment that blossomed in the 1990s and reached full flower in recent years. Their comments, and those of their associates, underscore just how dramatically changes in media culture have influenced the strategies and daily routines of leading political figures.

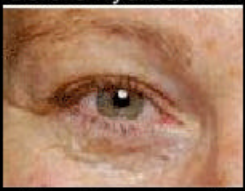
Cheney said he often starts his day by listening to radio host Don Imus, whose trash-talking style has given him legions of fans and made his show a frequent stop of politicians. Cheney's wife, Lynne, people close to her say, is an avid consumer of Matt Drudge's online Drudge Report, which often either breaks or promotes stories with a salacious angle and in recent days has bannered every new disclosure in the Foley case.

Rove said he has benefited on occasion from the new-media echo chamber. When he gave a speech last year saying liberals want to give terrorists understanding and therapy, he delighted when Democrats howled in protest. This guaranteed that the story would stay alive for days. "I was sort of amused by it because it struck me, well, they're just simply repeating my argument, which was good," he said.

Clinton -- who regards Rove with a mixture of admiration and disdain as the most effective modern practitioner of polarizing politics -- said in an interview that he has become fixated on the problem of how Democrats can learn to fight more effectively against the kind of attack President Bush's top political aide leveled. Associates of the former president said he thinks that Democrats Al Gore in 2000 and [Sen. John F. Kerry](#) (Mass.) in 2004 lost the presidency because they could not effectively respond to a modern media culture that places new emphasis on politicians' personalities and provides new incentives for personal attack.

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While the Foley and Allen episodes burned Republicans, Clinton said in an interview earlier this year that he thinks the proliferation of media outlets, as well as the breakdown of old restraints in both media and politics, on balance has favored Republicans. Without mentioning Gore or Kerry by name, he complained that many Democrats have allowed themselves to become unnerved and even paralyzed in response.

"All of this is a head game, you know. . . . All great contests are head games," Clinton said. "Our candidates have to get to a point where they don't allow other people to define them as either people or as political leaders. Our people have got to be more psychologically prepared for it, and there has to be more distance between them and these withering attacks."

Associates said he regards this as his most important advice to his wife, [Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) (D-N.Y.), if she runs for president in 2008.

In any generation, the disclosure of Foley's sexual overtures to teenage boys would have been a big story and ended his public career. But it was the confluence of new media trends and a trench-warfare mentality pervading national politics that turned the story into a round-the-clock furor.

House Speaker J. [Dennis Hastert](#) (R-Ill.), fighting for his career amid allegations that he did not respond properly when told of Foley's e-mails, has gone to conservative media outlets to make his case. On Rush Limbaugh's radio show, Hastert agreed when the host said the Foley story was driven by Democrats "in some sort of cooperation with some in the media" to suppress turnout of conservative voters before the Nov. 7 elections.

Limbaugh offered no evidence. But the same accusation was leveled in Hastert's interview with Hugh Hewitt, another prominent conservative radio host and blogger, who said the speaker is a "target right now of the left-wing media machine."

Those comments are a reminder that a changed media culture that creates new perils for politicians also provides new forms of refuge. For a full generation on the conservative side, and more recently among liberals, ideologues have created a menu of new media alternatives, including talk radio and Web sites. New media have also elevated flamboyant political entrepreneurs such as Ann Coulter on the right and Michael Moore on the left to prominent places in the political dialogue. New media platforms make criticism of traditional "mainstream media" part of their stock in trade.

This development usually ensures that any politician in trouble can count on some sympathetic forums to make his or her case. It often ensures that any controversy is marked by intense disagreement over the basic facts or relevance of the story, and obscured by clouds of accusation over the opposition's motives.

Clinton benefited from this phenomenon during his recent showdown with Fox News. Appearing on a network that many liberals regard as enemy terrain, he said interviewer Chris Wallace and his bosses were distorting his terrorism record to carry water for conservatives.

Kerry advisers think the most important factor in his loss was the group Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, which attacked his war record. The group initially received scant attention in old media outlets, but its accusations were fanned by the Drudge Report, Fox News and other new media platforms. By the end, the accusations dominated coverage in both old and new media.

Each time a similar episode occurs, it is often covered as an isolated and even eccentric event. But Clinton, in an earlier interview, said his party should understand that the ideological and financial incentives among politicians and media organizations mean that every election cycle will feature such episodes -- and it should plan accordingly.

But he said Democrats of his generation tend to be naive about new media realities. There is an expectation

among Democrats that establishment old media organizations are de facto allies -- and will rebut political accusations and serve as referees on new-media excesses.

"We're all that way, and I think a part of it is we grew up in the '60s and the press led us against the war and the press led us on civil rights and the press led us on Watergate," Clinton said. "Those of us of a certain age grew up with this almost unrealistic set of expectations."

Few conservatives would make a similar miscalculation. Many of the first generation of new media platforms, including Limbaugh's show and Drudge's Web site, first flourished because of a conviction among conservatives that old media were unfair.

All this has given Republicans a comfort and skill at using new media to political advantage that most Democrats have not matched. At the Republican National Committee, leaking items to the Drudge Report is an official part of communications strategy.

During the 2004 campaign, current and former RNC staff members said, opposition research nuggets on Kerry were almost always leaked first to the Web site. Sometimes they were trivial -- such as the fact that Kerry got expensive haircuts at the Christophe salon -- other times they were controversial quotes from his days as a Vietnam War protester. All together, these and other items contributed to Kerry losing control of his public image.

Ken Mehlman, the RNC chairman and head of Bush's reelection campaign, said his operatives leaked to Drudge because it inevitably drove wider coverage, including to old media organizations: "He puts something up and they have to follow it."

Last year, a delegation of RNC officials flew to Miami Beach, where Drudge lives, for a dinner at the Forge steakhouse to introduce the Internet maven to Tim Griffin, the party's new opposition research director.

One of those who salutes the changing landscape -- with as much passion as Clinton deplores it -- is Cheney, who said he considers the breakdown of what he called an old media "monopoly" as among the most favorable trends of his years in politics. He said the change requires politicians to grow a thicker skin. Once while shaving, he heard Imus referring to someone as "Pork Chop." Only after a few minutes did he realize the host "was talking about me. I'm Pork Chop. And I laughed like hell."

"Sometimes it's pretty trashy," he said of new media's rise. "But I guess I'd put the proposition that there's more time and opportunity for policy discussions and debate than there used to be."

The next several weeks -- in which Republicans will bear the heat of an intense media-driven scandal in the Foley case -- may test Cheney's faith in that proposition.

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