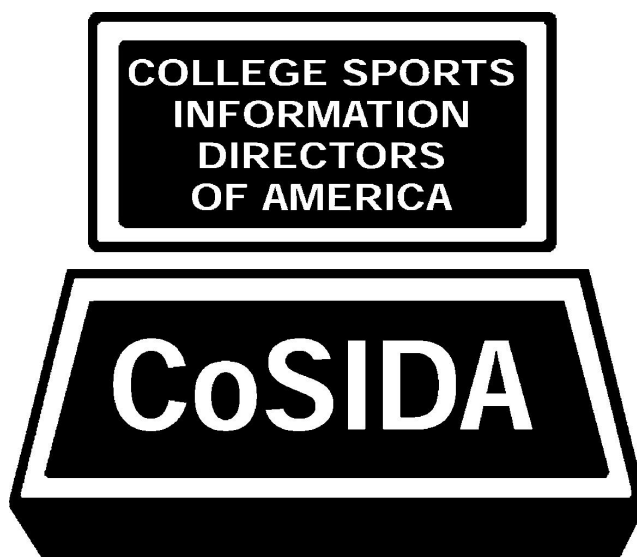
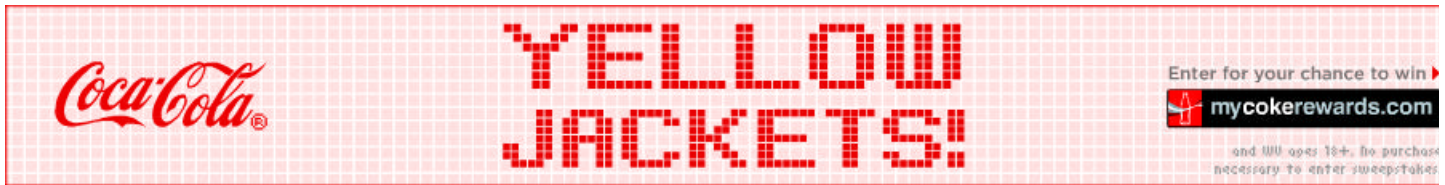


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SEPTEMBER 14, 2006



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COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Some coaches don't like time-saving rules

By [TONY BARNHART](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Published on: 09/13/06

Miami coach Larry Coker got a painful early lesson in how the new rules intended to shorten college football games are going to do exactly that.

On Sept. 4, the Hurricanes trailed Florida State 13-10. The Seminoles had the ball with 2:19 left. Before FSU ran its first play of the possession, Coker had to burn a timeout.

"Instead of making them run a play and then calling the timeout, we had to call it right away," Coker said. "That cost us."

Miami's defense stuffed three consecutive FSU running plays and used all of its timeouts, but there was only 1:14 left when the Hurricanes got the ball back. Miami lost.

Coker's complaint is one of many by coaches dissatisfied with the new "ready for play" rule instituted this season. When the ball changes possession, the official usually takes about 14 seconds to get the ball in position so the team on offense can run its first play.

Under the old rules, the game clock wouldn't start until after the first snap. Under the new rules, the clock starts immediately after the ball is marked ready for play.

Coaches predicted the new rules would take at least 10 to 15 plays out of each game — and they were right. In the first two weeks of the 2006 season, there were 14.6 fewer plays per game than in the first two weeks of 2005. On average, games have been 14 minutes shorter than a year ago.

"I don't like the rule, and I don't think it was necessary," Purdue coach Joe Tiller said. "We've eliminated a lot of plays and made the game shorter, but I just don't think the game is as entertaining as it was a year ago."

The game times, SEC commissioner Mike Slive said, was moved from "the back burner to the front burner" after the NCAA heard from administrators and fans that too many contests were lasting close to four hours, even though the national average last season was 3 hours, 20 minutes.

<http://ajc.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=Some+coaches+don%27t+like+time-s...> 9/14/2006

Asking television networks to take fewer timeouts during games wasn't an option, given the millions they pay for telecast rights. Still, Tennessee coach Phillip Fulmer believes TV was a factor in the change.

"The intent of the rule, I suppose, was around managing the number of minutes and hours of the game," Fulmer said. "But the truth is that television wanted [games] shorter so they could get more games in and start the games on time."

Not so, said Auburn coach Tommy Tuberville, who sits on the NCAA football rules committee, which proposed the new measures. The 13-member committee is made up of seven head coaches and six administrators, but only one, Tuberville, is a Division I-A head coach.

"The committee's concern was for the student-athletes and the fans," Tuberville said. "Players are now playing 12 regular-season games instead of 11 and so it made sense to keep them on the field for fewer plays per game."

Tuberville said the rules committee will take another look at the issue when it meets again in February.

"If we're just talking about five, six, seven or eight plays, I think that is something we can live with," Tuberville said. "But if we're affecting 30 to 40 plays a game, that was never the intent of the rule. We'll gather all the data and look at it again next February. If we have to make some changes, we will."

Not all coaches are against the new rules. Georgia Tech has averaged only 60 offensive plays in its first two games after averaging 73 a year ago. Yellow Jackets coach Chan Gailey insists he hasn't missed those plays.

"I don't think anybody's missed them," Gailey said. "If it's sped up the game, then it's good. In two years, nobody will pay attention to it."

Georgia coach Mark Richt, however, believes the coaches will bring pressure to go back to the old system.

"There is a pretty strong contingent of coaches that want to see it change back," said Richt, whose Bulldogs have run about nine fewer plays per game than they did in the first two games a year ago. "There are just less plays per game. I don't see the point in that. If you have the lead, it's a good rule. Overall, to cut down the number of plays in a college football game is not a good thing. A true fan wants to see them play."

—Staff writers Carter Strickland and Mike Knobler contributed to this article.

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Today | This Week

NCAA debates curbing text-message recruiting

Indianapolis Star
Sept. 14, 2006 12:00 AM

When the school day ended at North Central High in Indianapolis, it was only a few minutes before text messages from college coaches began rolling in to Eric Gordon, one of the nation's most coveted basketball recruits.

"I mean, it would be constant," said Gordon, a senior who committed to Illinois last November but is still being pursued by Indiana University. "They just tried to start a conversation. They might not even talk about recruiting. It got to the point where I didn't even answer."

At the height of the frenzy, Gordon said, he received more than 60 text messages a day.

"Right now, kids are just getting worn out," said Dave Telep, a national expert on recruiting for scout.com.

Text messaging has become the latest frontier in college sports recruiting. While schools used to worry about keeping the postage meter humming - recruiting with the old-fashioned kind of mail, on paper and delivered to the door - now text messaging is the communication of choice.

And it has become so pervasive - some say invasive - that the NCAA is considering rule proposals that would either abolish or limit it.

NCAA rules regulate phone calls and the type of material that can be mailed through the U.S. Postal Service; for instance, overnight mail is prohibited. But coaches are allowed to send unlimited text messages and e-mails to recruits after they've started their junior year of high school.

The NCAA is considering two proposals. One, from the Ivy League, would eliminate text messaging altogether. The other, from an NCAA subcommittee on recruiting, would limit text messaging from 4 to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. during the weekend.

Neither could become a rule until April 2007.

Jim Haney, executive director of the National Association of Basketball Coaches, said the NABC won't take a position until after it surveys all of its members. But an NABC committee on recruiting has gathered opinions on the issue.

Assistant coaches, who do the heavy lifting in recruiting, generally like text messaging.

"They say, 'This is the way kids communicate today,' " Haney said. "When you send an e-mail, the person might look at it sometime later. If someone responds to a text message, then you're into a conversation."

Opponents of text messaging point out that, depending on whether a recruit has a flat-fee wireless plan or pays for each message received, it can become expensive. They also say it's a lot more invasive than e-mailing, more akin to a telephone call.

"If you're text-messaging during an academic day, in particular, it can be a distraction in the classroom, which doesn't send the right message," Haney said.

The Ivy League proposal calls text messaging "intrusive and impersonal."

"Coaches feel compelled to contact prospects constantly, (and) prospects are distracted at all hours of the day and night," its proposal says.

Wearily describing modern recruiting in an article she wrote for the *New York Times* last year, former Colorado women's basketball coach Ceal Barry said: "Text them in the morning before school. Text them during chemistry. Text them during their free periods. Heck, text them during practice that afternoon. If their high school coaches let them respond, it's a good sign that you are 'in.' "

Gordon, of North Central, said few coaches sent him text messages during the school day. He thinks limiting, not abolishing, text messages is the best idea.

The NCAA Academics/Eligibility/Compliance cabinet last week endorsed the rule proposal that would do just that. It remains, however, an open debate, with the Ivy League proposal still alive.

Regardless of what happens, it's inevitable that some new technology will challenge NCAA rules in the future, perhaps even before the text-messaging issue is settled.

"For me, if I'm a recruiter, I'm always looking for another creative way to stand out," Telep said.

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Today | This Week

Posted on Thu, Sep. 14, 2006

Penn State starts incident report line for fans

From CDT Staff Reports

Penn State Intercollegiate Athletics has announced the addition of the "Beaver Stadium Lot Line," a new phone line that fans can call to report incidents that require either police or parking attendant assistance in the lots surrounding the stadium before, during and after home games.

Beaver Stadium Lot Line, accessed by dialing 814.867.FANS, will be available on all Penn State football home dates beginning at 8 a.m. and running one hour following the game's conclusion.

Complete information on the Beaver Stadium Lot Line and all Penn State Football game day details can be found within the Game Day Central content of Penn State Athletics' official website, <http://www.gopsusports.com>.

A limited number of tickets remain for the Youngstown State and Temple (Nov. 11) games in Beaver Stadium. Single game tickets can be purchased at www.GoPSUsports.com, or by calling 865-5555 or 800-863-3336 weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Student ticket lottery set for Ohio State game

Effective immediately through noon Monday, full-time Penn State students can go to GoPSUsports.com and register for a lottery that will result in an opportunity to purchase a ticket for Penn State's Big Ten opener at Ohio State on Sept. 23.

Complete registration details and a sign-up form can be accessed via the "Ohio State Student Tickets" tile on the site's home page, or by visiting this link: <http://www.gopsusports.com/osuform.cfm>

The application process is available exclusively on-line. Students may enter the lottery only one time.

Students who participate and come out on the positive end of the random lottery selection will be contacted by 9 p.m. Monday with instructions on how to purchase tickets.

Tickets are \$59 and must be picked up at Ohio Stadium in Columbus on Sept. 23 before the 3:30 p.m. kickoff. There is a limit of one (1) ticket per student. A valid Penn State student ID is required at pick-up.

All full-time Penn State students (12 or more credits) are eligible to register for the randomly assigned tickets and because of the lottery format, all applications will have an equal chance of being selected, regardless of when the student submits the on-line application. Penn State Athletics will confirm eligibility of winners and notify them via e-mail on Monday evening.

The random selection of a number will be made from all student applications received prior to the posted deadline. This will serve as the starting point and first accepted application. Tickets will then be awarded in sequential order beginning with that number until all tickets are awarded. Five percent of the total tickets made available by Ohio State will be offered to students, the same percentage normally distributed to Penn State students for Nittany Lion away games.

Posted on Wed, Sep. 13, 2006

Football coaches say new rules hurt the game - and fans

By Teddy Greenstein

Chicago Tribune

(MCT)

CHICAGO - Florida coach Urban Meyer makes your typical Type-A personality seem like a slacker.

He once said that "every second" in his day is accounted for, and he wasn't exaggerating.

So you might think Meyer and his fellow college football coaches would be embracing new rules that give them another 15 minutes each week to break down film, recruit or - heaven forbid - relax at home.

Instead, Meyer is part of an irate group that wants the new rules to be clocked - as in knocked out. And quickly.

"I'm very concerned with the direction of college football," Meyer said recently, adding that he would "go nuts" to discover the origin of the changes and to urge that they be rescinded.

Sound extreme?

The normally mild-mannered Mack Brown said he "hates" the new rules and maintained they made it far more difficult for his Texas team to try to rally against Ohio State in its 24-7 loss Saturday.

"They scored with six minutes left and the game was over before we had a chance to do anything," Brown said. "One of the great things about college football is a team's ability to come back. Now that's limited. Our game was 22 minutes shorter. That's a little below 10 percent of our game. That's not fair to our fans. We worry about them sitting there?"

Georgia coach Mark Richt also voiced concern about the public's welfare.

"People pay a lot of money to watch it and they're getting less of it," he said. "Are they going to give a 20 percent rebate on tickets because they're getting less football?"

What changed

All the fuss is over three rules changes:

After changes of possession, the clock starts when the official gives the ready-for-play signal. Previously, it started on the snap.

The clock starts on kickoffs as soon as toe meets leather, rather than when the receiving team fields the ball.

The kicking tee was lowered to one inch to reduce touchbacks. Fewer touchbacks mean longer kickoff plays.

The result has been shorter games (by about 15 minutes) with fewer plays (from about 140 to 126). Last year's average game lasted 3 hours 20 minutes, with one in four bowl games exceeding four hours because of high scores and extra TV timeouts.

"I don't like (the changes)," Purdue coach Joe Tiller said. "They're not necessary. It's not coaches or fans who were calling for this. It was people higher up in the food chain."

There's some truth to that, but Tiller should know that the 13-member NCAA Rules Committee, which spearheaded and approved the changes, is made up of football coaches, athletic directors and assistant ADs. Each division - I-A, I-AA, II and III - has three representatives, along with a secretary-rules editor.

The Division I-A coach is Auburn's Tommy Tuberville, who said the motivations were to shorten games and benefit student-athletes by limiting their exposure to injury in a new 12-game season.

Tennessee coach Phillip Fulmer isn't buying that.

"I think television just wanted it shorter so they could get more games on TV and start on time," he said.

While television executives had no direct role, SEC Commissioner Mike Slive acknowledged to the Birmingham News in February that their wishes were taken into account.

"There is, for those of us who work in conference offices, the issue of consecutive TV games and our TV windows," Slive told the paper. "On a given Saturday we have the JP (Jefferson-Pilot) game early, the CBS game in the middle and ESPN at night. One thing we want to be sure doesn't happen is an overlapping of those games."

Affects strategy

Northern Illinois coach Joe Novak faced a tough decision Saturday against Ohio. Trailing 28-23 and facing fourth-and-five with about five minutes left, he opted to go for a first down rather than punt. Phil Horvath's incompletion gave Ohio good field position and the Bobcats scored on a seven-play drive that essentially ended the game.

"There is no question about it," Novak said. "Five minutes to me looks like three minutes used to."

Northwestern coach Pat Fitzgerald felt helpless as the minutes melted away in his team's 34-17 loss to New Hampshire on Saturday.

"When a team goes into four corners and starts to play a Georgetown offense, you have to execute in every series," he said.

Dean Smith would remind Fitzgerald that he actually created the four corners' offense at North Carolina, but the point remains.

"A four-quarter game turns into a three-quarter game," Fitzgerald said. "It's a great challenge for a lot of offenses now. You need to make plays early. If you don't, you could run out of time very fast."

Northwestern's loss to New Hampshire took just 2 hours 35 minutes. But it wasn't televised and merely had radio timeouts. Last year, all of NU's games were televised and each lasted at least 3:05.

Northwestern is averaging 62 plays this year, 18 fewer than last season.

Ohio State ran just 55 plays against Texas on Saturday, and that was plenty for a 24-7 victory. Texas ran 63 plays, but that wasn't enough for Brown's liking.

Brown's complaint about the new rules making it harder to rally would have more validity if his team hadn't gone three-and-out after Ohio State took a 24-7 lead with less than seven minutes to play.

Asked about Brown's comment, Ohio State coach Jim Tressel was taken aback: "Gosh, I never noticed it from that standpoint. Meaning there were less plays? Well, I'm not sure about that. Perhaps that's a vantage point, and I wouldn't agree or disagree with it."

Tressel said he would wait to evaluate the new rules until after the season.

"There's the argument of: 'Hey, we have 12 games, so if we have 10 less plays each game then maybe we're not asking more of the student-athlete,'

" he said. "On the other hand, they work so hard all-year round, why would we have less plays in a game, especially in an important conference game or championship game?"

"But I'm not for or against it. It's the way the rules are. When you look up on the clock, you know how much time's left and what you have to do before it gets to all zeroes."

While most players seem ambivalent toward the new rules, Illinois linebacker Brit Miller endorsed the new up-tempo pace: "You realize you have to be ready to get on the field. It helps me and the other people on the sidelines be more aware of what's going on in the game."

Time saved bigger

David Parry didn't expect the rules changes to knock off 15 minutes from games.

"We were thinking between 8-12 (minutes)," he said.

Parry, the national coordinator of NCAA football officiating, said he understands coaches' concerns about losing plays. Then again . . .

"God love football coaches, but if they had 155 plays, they would want 160," he said. "And the (new) rules don't bother defensive coaches. They're probably saying: `I have a better world today than I did last year.'"

Parry said the rules committee considered proposals for either an NFL-style two-minute warning or a one-minute warning. But the overall goal of reducing the length of the game won out.

Parry, though, expects the rules to be tweaked for next season. One idea: Go back to the old rules for the final two minutes, so the clock doesn't start immediately on kickoffs or possession changes.

"That would be simple and clean and would open the door for the excitement of catch-up football," he said. "And we could still try to maintain games around that 3:10 or 3:15 mark."

Then again, some coaches say the new rules are fine.

Arizona's opener against Brigham Young lasted 3 hours 22 minutes, which was plenty for Wildcats coach Mike Stoops.

"It could have been four hours without the change," he said. "This is the most overreacted (to) thing I've ever seen. I think every coach in America has gone absolutely crazy."

Chicago Tribune staff reporters Terry Bannon, Reid Hanley and Neil Milbert contributed to this report.

Today's News

Thursday, September 14, 2006

Chancellor of U. of Nebraska at Omaha Resigns Following New Allegations in a Spending Investigation

By [ANNIE SHUPPY](#)

The chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Nancy Belck, resigned on Tuesday after a months-long controversy over university officials' use of funds from athletics boosters escalated with new allegations over the weekend that she had wrongfully altered an expense record for a restaurant dinner that took place two years ago.

Ms. Belck, who had earned praise during her nine years as chancellor for her guidance of the university through a period of academic and physical growth, said in an interview on Wednesday that she stepped down because it was in the best interest of the university and would end at least part of the controversy over the athletics-department allegations.

She also said she had not considered stepping down until the new furor erupted after questions about the expense record were raised in newspaper articles over the weekend.

The dinner, which cost \$1,263 and was submitted by a former vice chancellor, Jim Buck, as an expense reimbursement, took place during the 2004 convention of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, in Nashville. Mr. Buck, whose compensation was part of the larger investigation, resigned in August.

In dispute is whether its cost was for just eight people, all connected with the Omaha campus. In an article published on Sunday, the *Omaha World-Herald* reported that before allowing the paper to see the expense record, Ms. Belck altered it to state that "select NCAA Division II staff" had joined the Omaha group at the dinner.

The eight people from Omaha were Ms. Belck, Mr. Buck, their spouses, and four university athletics officials. The athletics officials told the newspaper that no NCAA officials had attended.

In a telephone interview on Wednesday, Ms. Belck said that because the dinner had taken place more than two years ago and the bill was so large, she was "truly not convinced" that it had served only eight people. She said she had changed the record only for accuracy's sake and had not been trying to hide anything.

The new controversy arose after months of news-media attention to athletics-department budget cuts and a university investigation into Mr. Buck's compensation and expenditures.

Ms. Belck said she realized this week that the scrutiny was not going to stop. "That's when I said, 'Hey, I've got other things I can do in my life, and I don't want UNO to do be disadvantaged,'" she said.

In a written statement released by the university on Tuesday, she had said that "because of the environment created by events of the past several weeks, I can no longer provide effective leadership."

James B. Milliken, president of the University of Nebraska system, accepted Ms. Belck's resignation. In a written statement, he commended her decision "to put the best interests of the University of Nebraska above her

<http://chronicle.com/cgi-bin/printable.cgi?article=http://chronicle.com/daily/2006/09/2006091406...> 9/14/2006

own interests."

John Christensen, the Omaha campus's vice chancellor for academic and student affairs, has been appointed as interim chancellor.

The larger investigation involving athletics boosters and university officials had started months earlier, after the *World-Herald* reported that Mr. Buck had received a vehicle and a country-club membership paid for through private booster funds given to the athletics department.

After that allegation surfaced, the *World-Herald* began asking for more public records, and the university began an internal audit of booster funds that had been directed on behalf of Mr. Buck.

On Wednesday, Ms. Belck described the money as "undifferentiated athletics funds," and said the vehicle and membership were not unusual compensation for an official with Mr. Buck's duties, which included oversight of athletics.

"At the time, he was providing very good insight with working across business and finance areas," Ms. Belck said.

Ms. Belck said that while there is "no question some of the spending that came out was excessive," her administration was working to improve how the athletics department was operating. She added that some of the athletics department's budget problems were the result of deficits built up under a previous athletics director.

The university system's president, Mr. Milliken, said in an interview on Wednesday that a preliminary report from the audit committee had not indicated any violations of the law or of university policy. He added, however, that there were clear indications that "good judgment had not always been exercised."

Mr. Milliken also said he was not surprised by Ms. Belck's decision because he thought her resignation was "unavoidable."

He said that reactions to Mr. Christensen's appointment have been positive and that he will name a search committee for Ms. Belck's permanent successor later this fall.

"There's some sense of relief that the campus can now recapture the momentum that it had and that it can turn attention to ambitious plans for that campus," Mr. Milliken said.

Ms. Belck said some of her proudest achievements at Omaha have been building student housing, starting a Division I hockey team, and establishing a new institute for information science, technology, and engineering. She said she planned to take a six-month sabbatical and may return to teaching.

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from the September 12, 2006 edition - <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0912/p09s02-codc.html>

The Economist effect: Not all news media are dumbing it down

Time magazine's changes could be a tipping point for the American media.

By Dante Chinni

WASHINGTON

With all the tumult in the news media today - the decline of the old media, the rise of the citizen journalist, the startling discovery that a woman can, in fact, read a teleprompter from behind a big desk just like a man - it is sometimes the subtle changes that go unnoticed.

Take, for example, the recent decision by Time magazine to hit the newsstand on Fridays instead of Mondays. What difference does a few days make? Possibly a big one. And the fact that it is going to happen at all shows how much the news media are changing.

For years the newsweeklies have been a picture of stodgy stability. The three big titles - Time, Newsweek, and US News & World Report - have changed their tone over time, focusing less on "hard news" and more on trend, health, and entertainment coverage. But their essential formula, a weekly low-cost digest of a little bit of everything, has stayed relatively constant. That's what makes the doings at Time so interesting.

Soon after the magazine announced that it would hit newsstands on Friday starting in January, stories also surfaced that Time was considering reducing the costs of maintaining its circulation by allowing its reader base to drop by as much as 25 percent.

Why the big changes? This is an industry in need of some changing. Since 1988, Time's circulation has fallen by about 13 percent. US News & World Report has also dropped by about 13 percent. Newsweek, meanwhile, has lost about 6 percent of its paid readership.

But during that same time period, other titles have thrived.

Take The Economist. The British news weekly has seen its circulation jump by about 300 percent, despite the fact that it is less flashy, more serious, and costs more than twice as much as its US counterparts. And since its launch in 2001, The Week, a new kind of Reader's-Digest-type summary of news accounts from other organizations, has attracted 439,000 readers.

So maybe it's all about format and content, and maybe Time's moves indicate that the other weeklies are beginning to notice.

Time's new publishing schedule will mean it hits the streets on the same day as its British competitor. And Time's idea about circulation, placing less emphasis on quantity, suggests an approach that several publications, including The Economist, have pursued: It's not how many subscribers you have; it's who they are.

The strategy is practiced by media outlets that are sometimes called the "elite media." They aim at better educated, more-affluent audiences that have more money to spend on news and are more desirable to advertisers. The news outlets that serve them place a premium on trying to bring more depth and breadth to their coverage.

Among newspapers, the rise of the elite media can be seen in the growing and increasingly nationalized circulations of The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal. On radio, it can be calculated in the increase of National Public Radio's audience. In magazines, the prime example is The Economist.

If Time, which, like the other newsweeklies, hasn't made serious changes for decades, is considering joining that club, it may signify a kind of tipping point for the American media. A great segregation of media outlets may be upon us, with many more news organizations choosing a specific path for their coverage.

There would be definite advantages to a flourishing "elite" media. Those interested in more complex news coverage would have a broader list of places to go and, overall, the quality of the news available to consumers might increase. But there is a twofold problem as well: 1) "serious coverage" might be considered an "elite media" trait only, and 2) the growth of these outlets might lead to a dumbing down (OK, maybe a further dumbing down) among other mainstream news sources.

As wealthier, more news-focused audiences leave mainstream outlets, those outlets will be forced to reach out to different groups to fill the holes in their audience - groups that probably have lighter definitions of news. In other words, a small group of coverage-rich news media will get richer while the rest get poorer in their content.

Is that good or bad? Both, probably. But good or bad, if we drift down that road, it will mean a different kind of democracy and a different society.

Just think, there may come a day not too long from now when Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes's baby not only finds time on the network news - as baby Suri did last week on CBS - but leads the newscast. The good news is you won't have to watch it. The bad news is a lot of others will tune in and possibly find little else.

• *Dante Chinni, a senior associate at the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism in Washington, writes a twice-monthly column on media issues. E-mail him at: dante@csmonitor.com.*

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ESPN.com: Wojciechowski

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Wednesday, September 13, 2006

NCAA shows a heart in allowing this 'extra benefit'

By Gene Wojciechowski
ESPN.com

The 2006-07 NCAA Division I Manual is 460 pages of indexes, by-laws and exasperation. The thing is thick enough to crush a Chihuahua and, sometimes, your spirit.

I tried reading it. Once. Then my head exploded and people had to spoon-feed me apple sauce for a month. Legal scholars could study it for years and their final response would be, "Huh?"

But something wonderful happened earlier this week. And believe it or not, it involved that much-too-complicated Manual and the supposedly inflexible people who enforce it at the NCAA's headquarters in Indianapolis.

Ray Ray McElrathbey is a redshirt freshman cornerback at Clemson. His beard is more tennis ball peach fuzz than stubble. Razor blades yawn when they see him.

McElrathbey ought to be thinking about classes, football and sorority girls -- in that order. Instead, he's 19 going on parent.

McElrathbey's mother is having an affair with drugs. It isn't pretty, but that's the reality of the situation. Meanwhile, McElrathbey's father is having fist fights with a gambling addiction. Gambling is ahead on all scorecards.

So, in review: mom and drugs, dad and gambling. This isn't exactly how you draw it up in parenting books, which is why Ray Ray now has temporary custody of his 11-year-old brother Fahmarr.

Do you remember when you were in your second year of college? Here's guessing you weren't playing Division I football, trying to make grades, and taking care of your little brother in an off-campus apartment. You weren't stiff-arming foster homes and what Ray Ray calls "the system." And your mornings probably didn't begin at 6:30, when you got your little brother up for breakfast and school.

So welcome to Ray Ray's life, which until this past Monday, meant he and Fahmarr were completely on their own. Of course, Monday is when the NCAA added an extra page to the Manual, one that included space for a heart.

In NCAA-ese, the Administrative Review Subcommittee agreed to waive a rule prohibiting extra benefits for Ray Ray. In this case, an extra benefit might have been something as innocent, but as vital, as having a Clemson assistant football coach's wife pick up Fahmarr from school and bring him to the Tigers' football complex. It might have been something as kind (but, in the NCAA's eyes, illegal) as a Clemson ticket holder giving Fahmarr a decent winter jacket.

But that was before Clemson submitted its ARS request Sept. 5. About two days later, the NCAA approved the request. Ray Ray and Fahmarr got the news Monday. Smiles arrived nanoseconds later.

"In my 20 years with the NCAA I have never seen a request like that," said Kevin Lennon, NCAA vice

 Ray Ray McElrathbey, right, and his brother Fahmarr.

Ray Ray McElrathbey, right, and his brother Fahmarr.

president of Membership Services.

Lennon was in a Washington, D.C., hotel lobby when I talked to him Wednesday. You could hear a piano being played in the background. He was there on business, but it was clear his mind was on the good deed done by the NCAA.

"We just wish him the very best of luck," Lennon said.

The NCAA gets pounded, often with good reason, for its cumbersome ways. But Lennon wants everyone to know that more than 1,000 ARS requests are submitted each year, "and the majority of those are granted," he said.

Clemson also was in the back-patting business Wednesday.

"They've done nothing but be supportive and act quickly," Clemson assistant athletic director Tim Bourret said of the NCAA. "They need to get their props, they really do."

Everybody does. Before the waiver was approved, Ray Ray did all the heavy lifting with Fahmarr. Everywhere Ray Ray went during the summer on his little motor scooter, so did Fahmarr. And once classes started -- for both of them -- Ray Ray's teammates helped any way they legally could. That's why Gaines Adams, a preseason All-America defensive end, was knocking on the apartment door one morning at 7:30 to take Fahmarr to school. Or why Chansi Stuckey, a first-team All-ACC wide receiver, also pulled chauffeur duty on occasions.

"There are seniors helping out a freshman," Bourret said.

No, more like friends helping out friends.

It didn't stop there. Clemson students would see Ray Ray and offer to babysit. That's what happened last weekend when Ray Ray and the Tigers were playing at Boston College. Now, thanks to the NCAA decision, Fahmarr can stay at the house of a Clemson assistant coach or administrator when the Tigers leave for Florida State later this week. Clemson athletic department officials and their families also are allowed to provide transportation for Fahmarr.

Ah, sanity.

The situation is better, much better, but the sobering fact remains that Ray Ray is raising his own brother. Bourret listens to some of the interviews Ray Ray does with reporters, "and I don't understand how he doesn't start crying."

It is a heartbreaking set of circumstances made just a tiny bit easier because Clemson cares, his teammates care, his fellow students care, the NCAA cares, and, as it turns out, college football fans care. There have been hundreds of phone calls to the Clemson athletic department asking the same question: How can I help?

The answer: You can, just give them a few days.

A trust fund, to be administered by a local Clemson bank, is being established to help the Brothers McElrathbey. An announcement detailing where to send any contributions should be available on ClemsonTigers.com early next week. In the meantime, don't be afraid to crack open the checkbook. Think of it as the extra benefit that keeps giving.

Meanwhile, nobody will likely write the NCAA a thank-you note. Check that. After listening to Bourret rave

about the Tigers' leading special teams tackler, Lennon shouldn't be surprised to get something soon in the mail with a Clemson, S.C., postmark.

It will be the one with the Ray Ray and Fahmarr signatures.

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Article published Sep 11, 2006

Student-athlete injuries should be made public

It's a simple concept: Secrecy breeds distrust.

It doesn't matter whether you're talking about secrecy in a marriage, in a workplace or in politics. The concept holds.

It's also true on a football field.

Not a place where you'd expect trench-coat intrigue? Take a look at Missoula.

There, University of Montana head football coach Bobby Hauck acts like a covert CIA operative lately when he discusses player injuries.

Actually, refuses to discuss them.

Was quarterback Josh Swogger's hand injury going to keep him out of Saturday's game?

"I'm not going to speak to injuries this year. At all," Hauck said.

In fact, after media inquiries about injuries to Swogger and punter Tyson Johnson, the UM Athletic Department issued a statement saying it would no longer disclose any injury information about any student athletes.

All of a sudden, privacy is a concern.

It's almost amusing given that week after week sports pages, magazines, blogs, radio shows and television programs are filled with reports of who's playing and who's not due to injuries.

So what's going on?

Is Hauck paranoid that equally covert scouts from competing teams will use his injury roster to devise game-winning strategies against the Griz?

Or is he so bent on control that he has to orchestrate not just what's happening on the field, but off as well?

It's easy to start dreaming up conspiracies.

And that's exactly the problem with secrecy. When people don't know what's happening, they'll find their own version of reality — no matter how flawed.

No one's asking to see personal medical files of athletes. But if a player gets carried off the field or is sitting on the sidelines in a cast, fans want to know what's going on.

If the coach won't say, the speculation and rumor mill will kick into high gear.

And if UM is truly worried about violating athletes' privacy, there's an easy fix. Merely have the athletes sign a release stating they waive their right to privacy in cases of sports injuries. Those releases can be narrowly construed to limit the amount of information released.

But it's hard to believe that privacy is the real reason for the hush-hush policy on injuries.

It's disappointing that Hauck, for whatever reason, is opting for a policy of secrecy.

And it's equally disappointing that UM Athletic Director Jim O'Day is letting it fly.

Does UM really want to foster this culture of secrecy? Is it what Griz fans want?

We don't think so. We urge Hauck and O'Day to reconsider the flawed policy.

NCAA Sets Goal of 80-Percent Graduation

By AARON BEARD

Tuesday, Sep 12, 2006 - 04:46:54 am CDT

ELON, N.C. - NCAA president Myles Brand wants to see an 80 percent graduation rate for Division I athletes, setting what he called an "aspirational" goal Wednesday to build on academic gains of recent years.

Brand announced the figure during a speech at Elon University while attending a symposium on the past, present and future of college athletics.

The 80 percent mark isn't a requirement.

"This is not an official NCAA number," Brand said. "This is Brand's number."

Brand said that the NCAA has improved its ability to measure graduation success over a six-year period by including about 25,000 transfer students who were unable to be counted in past years. When factoring in the transfers, last year's graduation rate for Division I jumped from 62 percent to 76 percent, he said.

Now Brand said he wants to see universities and athletes aim even higher.

"The fact of the matter is that 'good enough' is not good enough in athletics," Brand said during a news conference afterward.

Last month, the NCAA approved a way to identify teams with long-term academic problems and will begin assessing penalties starting in 2007-08, including postseason bans and the loss of scholarships. The system examines graduation rates over rolling four-year periods for individual teams.

The association already is implementing a system of short-term penalties that are assessed year-to-year, with a cutoff equal to about a 60 percent graduation rate.

Brand said measures to improve academic performance for student-athletes are working. He said the unadjusted 62 percent graduation rate for last year was up 10 points from 1990, while black male athletes had increased their graduation rates by 17 percent in the past 15 years.

"We're beginning to see the floor rise with student-athletes," he said. "So we really have a dramatic and good-news story, and I just want to push it even farther out and say that we can rise to a higher level of aspiration than we are right now."

A service of the Associated Press(AP)

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Thursday, September 14, 2006

Johnsons' father back from Iraq

He'll watch UK teammates play vs. Ole Miss Saturday

By Brett Dawson

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The Courier-Journal

LEXINGTON, Ky. -- Christian Johnson has a tattoo of a sword on his right arm.

Down the center of the blade is the word "warrior," and on the sides are the words, "Like father, like son."

Advertisement The ink is a reference to the University of Kentucky offensive lineman's father, Nathaniel, a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army.

"I tell him we're both soldiers, or warriors," Christian Johnson said. "That's kind of what I feel, but I feel his is more life-threatening. I just try to tie it into what he does. He gives his all, so I have to give my all."

But Johnson wants this made clear: The tattoo is a reference to his father. It's not meant to equate football to war.

"People make (casual) references about war," Johnson said. "My dad tells me, 'There's nothing about war that's pretty. There's nothing about war that's a good thing.' "

Nathaniel Johnson knows firsthand. On Tuesday he returned from a yearlong deployment in Iraq.

On Saturday, when Kentucky hosts Mississippi in the schools' Southeastern Conference opener, he'll be in the stands at Commonwealth Stadium to watch his sons -- sophomore Christian and freshman linebacker Micah -- play in person for the first time as collegians.

"It's real exciting to be able to play in front of him for the first time in a while," Micah Johnson said. "It's big."

And it's a big relief.

The last time Nathaniel Johnson attended his sons' football games, Micah was a senior at Fort Campbell High School. Christian was a freshman at UK and didn't play when his father attended last season's game against the University of Louisville.

In the year since, contact between father and sons has been sporadic.

They talked when they could, though inconsistent phone connections for soldiers in Iraq made regular calls difficult.

They exchanged e-mails from time to time, but Internet service, too, was sometimes hard for Nathaniel Johnson to come by.

Mostly, Christian and Micah waited for calls and turned to the news.

"It's always on the back of your mind," Micah Johnson said. "Any time the news comes on or you hear something about Iraq, you've always got to pay attention, make sure everything's good with him."

The news wasn't always encouraging.

"He had a few soldiers from his unit die," Christian Johnson said. "I was just praying every day that nothing would happen. In the end, it's all in God's hands."

This week the Johnson family can relax. Nathaniel Johnson returned home at about 8:30 a.m. Tuesday.

"I think it's been very difficult (for the Johnson brothers)," UK coach Rich Brooks said. "It's something that I know has weighed on their minds. They've got to be really excited and thrilled to get him back and to see him."

Christian Johnson is slated to start on Saturday at left guard.

Yesterday, Micah Johnson was sentenced to some extra working out -- "You're supposed to go to class around here," Brooks said -- but he's still in a battle with sophomore Braxton Kelley to start at middle linebacker.

Starting and playing are important to the Johnsons. But both say their father's experience in Iraq has put football in perspective.

"He's always telling us how fortunate we are to live in America and just talking about the whole situation there and what the people there are going through," Christian Johnson said. "It makes me real proud he's fighting for our country. It makes me proud that he came home alive."

As he does every game, Micah Johnson on Saturday will wear under his shoulder pads a set of dog tags his father gave him.

If he makes a big play, he said, he'll find Nathaniel Johnson in the stands and point in his direction.

If he doesn't? If he doesn't start?

There are worse fates, he figures.

"In football, you make mistakes, you have another opportunity to correct them," Micah Johnson said. "That being war over there, in the military, a costly mistake can cost you your life. It does put things in some perspective."

Brett Dawson can be reached at (859) 523-0706.

STORYCHAT 

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The Patriot-News

No area TV for Penn State game

Only fans with satellite TV will be able to watch Lions tackle Penguins

Thursday, September 14, 2006

Got any friends in Mahanoy City? Without access to Beaver Stadium seats or satellite TV, that's where you need to be to watch the Penn State-Youngstown State football game on Saturday. Only 65 miles up I-81. They have ESPNU on cable in Mahanoy City.

Otherwise, if you're a serious Penn State football fan and don't like the situation you're in today, clicking through your expanded basic or digital cable menu searching in vain for the game, get used to the feeling.

It could be a dress rehearsal for 2007.

ESPN and local cable providers have been playing hardball lately and PSU fans will be the losers Saturday.

ESPNU is the network's fledgling channel devoted to mostly nonrevenue college sports, but it's also carrying Youngstown-PSU (3:30 p.m.) among 70 D-I football games this season. The channel has not yet been picked up by any Harrisburg-area cable providers, even on their digital packages featuring hundreds of channels.

Launched in March 2005, ESPNU has so far managed to penetrate only 7 million homes (compared with ESPN's 92 million and ESPN2's 90 million). None of them is in the Harrisburg metro area.

Comcast, which dominates the region's cable-scape, has not come to terms with Disney-owned ESPN on ESPNU, though an ESPN spokesperson said yesterday the two jousting giants "are in discussion on the national level." Until terms are reached on distribution, ESPNU won't be showing up on a Comcast roster in Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Baltimore or anywhere else.

Time-Warner, which acquired the Adelphia chain and promptly dropped ESPNU, and mom-n-pop suppliers such as Blue Ridge have not taken on ESPNU, either. ESPNU games also are exclusive and not available on the network's GamePlan season package. The only way you can see Saturday's game locally is via satellite -- either DirecTV channel 609 or Dish channel 148.

It all could be a prep for next season, when the Big Ten Channel is scheduled to be up and running and will be taking all of the lower-interest games such as this one. It appears the days of such games appearing on broadcast stations such as WLYH (Channel 15) will then be officially history.

The Big Ten Channel, to be run by Fox and available on DirecTV, has stated its goal to deploy on expanded basic cable rosters, as well. But, from the looks of ESPNU's struggles, that could be next to impossible unless the conference accepts bargain-basement rates. The Big Ten Channel's format is basically a one-league version of ESPNU.

It's apparent ESPN is trying mightily to hammer-lock cable suppliers into surrendering by sprinkling ESPNU's schedule with college football games such as this one. A bolder version of that strategy worked for ESPN when it lured enticing college basketball games such as Duke-North Carolina on ESPN2 during The Deuce's infancy in the mid-'90s.

MOP-UP TIME:

I don't usually pump sports books -- like, never -- but I was sent a review copy of Ray Didinger's Eagles Encyclopedia and it is such a beautifully researched book I had to say something. You'd expect nothing less from Didinger, the former Philadelphia Bulletin and Daily News beat writer, now a writer-producer at NFL Films in Philadelphia. He wrote it with help from former AP reporter and La Salle prof Bob Lyons.

This is not a new book; it was published last September. It's also no puff stuff. You can have fun cracking it open anywhere. The quality of writing and critical perspective is the same in profiles of current star players or faceless general managers from the '50s. In the words of Fred McGriff, "I'm so impressed, I've given it my full endorsement."

- You probably know that Illinois did not score Saturday at Rutgers. You might not know the Illini never got into Rutgers territory. So, how would you like to be married to Ron Zook this week? ... Y'know, I suppose we don't need to qualify the time, do we?
- For those compiling possible lies to their wives about how vital the Youngstown State game is to Penn State's season and that's why you need to be up there this weekend: Tell her, "Hey, I-AA teams can beat you! New Hampshire beat Northwestern! And, and, and Montana State beat Colorado!" Say it with big bug eyes. She might just stare at you for five seconds and then tell you to leave.
- You probably know Syracuse actually gave Iowa a scare at the Dome. You might not know that the Orange, who received a gift-wrapped upset bid when QB Drew Tate couldn't go for Iowa, was unable to score on an OT series despite seven tries from inside the 2.
- Westwood One reps have been hounding me (two calls, two chirpy emails) since I wrote a story on deposed Notre Dame play-by-play man Tony Roberts last week. In the story, I wrote that CBS Radio bought Westwood One. That's not true and I'm sure you're all dying to know that in reality, Westwood One is a publicly traded company, merely managed, not owned, by CBS Radio.

So, let me reiterate with my sincerest apologies: Westwood One, which soullessly removed the beloved 26-year icon of Notre Dame football in May and actually had the gall to ask him if he wanted to show up at his replacement's news conference to make it look nice, is managed, not owned, by CBS Radio.

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ALGONQUIN COUNTRYSIDE — Sept. 14, 2006

Athletes careful about being tangled in Web

BY GEORGE M. WILCOX | STAFF WRITERgwilcox@pioneerlocal.com

School administrators have a important warning for area athletes:

"Pictures of inappropriate behavior may show up on the Internet."

The explosive growth of social-networking Web sites such as Facebook and MySpace, and the popularity of student blogs, digital cameras and camera phones, are getting students involved in athletics and extracurricular activities in trouble. Pictures they wouldn't want their parents to see could end up being viewed by coaches, athletic directors and school principals.

Schaumburg High School handed out suspensions to more than 10 athletes last year when photos from a party where alcohol was consumed appeared on student Web sites and blogs.

At Hinsdale Central, two members of the softball team were punished last season when a picture of them posing with beer in their hands was found on a blog.

Popular sites

Administrators are not scanning the Internet looking for code violations, but typically act on tips. MySpace has 94 million users; Facebook counts around 7.5 million users.

"What we do say is that if there are pictures of violations to the athletic code, we have to act on it," Schaumburg athletic director Tim Kirby said. "It will be brought to my attention. The best thing kids could do is not have (the Web sites).

"We offer a program where we've brought kids in to watch the Schaumburg Police Department discuss the dangers on the type of information found on MySpace," Kirby said.

Crystal Lake South athletic director and football coach Jim Stuglis recommends his players refrain from having social Web sites. South senior receiver Tony Benedetto took the advice, although many of his friends still post on the Web.

"Our coach told us to get off of it," Benedetto said. "He was afraid that you might get e-mail from other kids about parties or putting stuff in our hands to try to get us in trouble. You could find pictures on MySpace of one of us, and (digitally) put a Budweiser in your hand."

Keep in touch

Wheeling volleyball and badminton player Kate Flanagan maintains pages on both Facebook and MySpace. She uses Facebook, which is more popular among college students, to communicate with her older brother John at Loyola University. MySpace is her way to chat with students from other high schools.

"My friends use it to keep in touch with us throughout the day," the senior said. "On MySpace, I have a friend that every morning leaves a comment to her other friends."

District 214 schools address Internet usage during their preseason meeting with parents.

"They warn everybody," Flanagan said. "They even make an announcement over the P.A."

Elk Grove High School Principal Frank DeRosa said the athletic code doesn't specifically address the use of blogs and Web sites, because they fall under the umbrella of proper conduct.

"We look for any possible opportunity to inform our athletes their behavior is in effect 24 hours, seven days a week, 12 months out of the year," DeRosa said.

Prep athletes may face another consequence of MySpace and Facebook -- it might cost them a Division I scholarship.

Barrington senior Teddy Schell, the state's top-ranked quarterback prospect, said he has received requests from college football fans to be added to his "friends list" on his MySpace page.

"I've have had a lot of fans messaging me, sending a request, and telling me how awesome their school is," Schell said.

The issue of inappropriate contact with recruits will be addressed by the NCAA this month, according to SI.com. Since the e-mails and posts are anonymous, NCAA officials do not know if they are coming from casual fans or school representatives, which would violate NCAA regulations.

"When kids get in trouble, it opens people's eyes on this thing," Schell said.

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