

"Over My Shoulder...."

By Steve H Kehoe

I'm confused. In yet another example of prejudice, leverage, and favoritism emanating from the NCAA, the so-called "control board" charged with keeping players, schools, coaches, alumni and fans honest, we have the absurd statement posted on the internet regarding the board's ruling on the five Ohio State players charged with-get this: "Selling items they received as awards*" during their playing careers. Q'elle Horreur! First of all, let's get a few things clear-not only for this instance, but as background to the whole magilla. #1, collegiate athletes have been, are now, and (hopefully) always will be amateur athletes. They are not (yet anyway) professionals. They are not supposed to be paid for their services on the courts or playing fields. Their "pay" is having been recruited (hopefully honestly, by school representatives, be they coaches or rich alumni) to play for dear ol' "U", then in a remarkable quid pro quo, receive for their "trouble" four years plus of fully-paid tuition, meal allowances, free rent at athletic dorms, in other words, "all the basics"-and then some-things the average Joe or Jane College wouldn't see in three lifetimes. And yet there still in some circles is a continuing hue and cry that these (amateur, mind you) athletes should be considered employees of these universities and be paid a salary just like professors or administrators! Surely they jest! For one thing, there would never be enough budget to do so-place athletes "on the payroll", and for another thing, there goes their "amateur" status if so done. Also, it is likely that instructors' and professors' salaries would have to be cut in order to pay the "gladiators" what their skills demand. But mainly, I hold to the reasonable argument, which I've written about before, that Isn't four-plus years of all the above-free tuition, books, living quarters, meal allowances, etc-what is that if not "pay"-again, something the average college student will never see, nor will their parents. Paul Hoolahan, a spokesman for the NCAA, had the audacity to publicly post the NCAA's "position" on the banished five Ohio State players, saying that he "pushed" Ohio State officials to push to allow those offending players to play in the Sugar Bowl against the Arkansas Soo-ies. He goes on to say that he wanted to preserve the "integrity" of the game, and didn't want to city of New Aw-Luns to have to sit and watch a "watered-down" product! Wanna hear the capper? Even Arkansas officials agreed that they (the school admins) should allow the players to play against their team. What is this, a nest of thieves? A confederacy of conspirators, with total disregard for right and wrong? Holy Tsin-tock-Itoh! The "punishment" meted down by the NCAA boiled down to this: The suspended five players will hafta sit out the first five games (of 12) of the 2011 fall season, but will be allowed to play in the Sugar Bowl. That's kind of like saying that, should someone commit a crime, he should be allowed to go ahead and go thru with a scheduled wedding, or family celebration, and then be trundelled off to serve his sentence in the gray bar inn.

Surely I see pressure here also from the City (of Noo Aw-Lins) Fathers, who likewise want to be the best "product" on the gridiron. Bowl games bring untold millions of greenbacks into a city, benefiting hotels, airlines, restaurants, bars, you name it. It's like having two Christmases, back to back! Naturally the City Dads wouldn't want an "inferior product" rolled out...people would make other plans-perhaps go to another bowl-rather than watch some second-stringers play against Big Bad U.

In case you have been slow to get the drift here-and I know you're not, hey, you're reading my column, aren't you? That alone testifies that you are one smart cookie, and I would never insult your taste or intelligence by wasting your time-it's all about MONEY!! No matter whose point of view here, it is all about revenue-money-dollars-lots and lots of 'em! Why do you think there are now 34 bowl games, when back in our time (50's - 60's perhaps) there were six. And with ridiculous names, and with the ridiculous sponsor's name heading the bowl name. No longer "the Orange Bowl, sponsored by Fed-Ex, it's the "FedEx Orange Bowl"-like they owned it, or birthed it. On second thought, maybe they did-uh-do-own it.

One other thing bothers me here: The rings, plaques, etc that the five OSU players sold, weren't these items theirs? And if so, then, like you and I, they should have been allowed to sell them to whomever would be foolish to pay the price asked for them! The players maintain that they sold them "to benefit (our) families". Fam-ke!** It may or may not be true, who knows, who really cares. It may have gone up their noses-or not, isn't fair for me to try and judge. Bottom line: If these items were given (here, see: "awarded") to those players, what right does the school have to say they can't sell them, flush them down the toiler, use them for dart practice, or whatever? If they are the players' possessions, they ought to be able to do whatever they want with them. Coach Tressell-on the surface at least-a real "stand up guy"-allows and explains that he himself "may not have fully and properly" explained the university's rules to the players (possible, although I choose to believe that it went in one ear and out the other if/when he did. It may have been in a handbook the players received when they were recruited, but who knows? You gonna believe that those players took anything seriously when it comes to some vague, ambiguous, and seemingly unfair, rule? Not in this world.

It was nice to see the sometimes beleaguered NFL (now, these are the professional football players-not to be confused with the collegiate, or amateur (ha-ha!) players) come out and fine Brett Favre the sum of \$50,000 for his part in sending lewd pics (of himself? What else?) to a comely media rep working for the New Yawk Jets. Although by doing so, Mr. FARVE (well, that's how you are suppose' to pronounce it!) once more is thrust into our consciousness, as if we haven't had enough of the man who has retired more than Richard Nixon), the fine, such as it is, was deserved, and more. I know, I know...fining someone with FARVE's income the sum or fifty K is like the local cops giving you and me a ticket for twenty-five dollars, but still, the NFL took action. (Side note: Have you SEEN pics of the object of his-uh-affection?) Her name is Jenn Sternge and day-um if she ain't a "looker" Elle c'est formidable! But Brett should have romanced her in a proper way, charming fellow that he was/is. Trying to get her attention through dirty pictures is kinda like having all the charm of a junior high school boy. It got her attention, all right! She went to the authorities, and you know the rest. And isn't our boy FARVE married? Of this last point, I'm not totally sure.....no matter.

I've said it B4: We are the New Romans. We love-and handsomely pay-our

gladiators-professional and amateur-if there is such a thing-way disproportionately to their productivity, and we will continue to do so. Maybe it's the times we're in. No, that dog don't hunt-we paid and paid and paid more during prosperous times, as well. Maybe it's just because we can-hey! We're human. We make choices. Every day.

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*awards: Items given in recognition to a person or an organization for superior accomplishments.

**Fam-ke: Mandarin for "Bull S..."

p.s.: In a late-breaking bit of news (today 12-31-2010) the University announced that the five suspended players, in order to play in the Sugar Bowl, were told they had to sign pledges that they would return in 2011 for their senior year and not flee (as they surely might anyway, given their treatment by the University-and not this latest indignity) to the NFL (where at least four out of the five were considered top draft picks).

Whattya bet this ol' writer that they sign and flee anyway? That ol' greenback is sure a power-ful lure, especially to 20-yr. olds who are eager to taste La dolce vita.

Conscience? What conscience?