

## INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS: THE GATHERING STORM

by

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Just in case you don't know it, you fellows are under the gun these days. More importantly, so is everything you stand for.

There are two great national institutions which simply cannot tolerate either internal dissension or external interference: our armed forces, and our interscholastic sports program. Both are of necessity benevolent dictatorships because by their very nature they cannot be otherwise. A combat squad which has to sit down and poll its members before it reacts to an emergency has had it, and so has a football team which lets its opponents tell it whom to start in next Saturday's game.

Ridiculous, you say? Yet both these ridiculous things are happening, or threatening to happen. If you're up on the news at all, you're familiar with the problem the army and marines have been having in recent months with men who go on hunger strikes and who refuse to obey orders on the battlefield. You should be even more familiar with what's happening on the athletic field.

To pinpoint what I'm talking about, let's look at a couple of examples of how sports are being pressured and used to do things they were never intended to do at all.

First, let's look at the "Great Pumpkin," as his Oregon State players call coach Dee Andros. Andros is of Greek descent, like Spiro Agnew, and he's just as good at football coaching as Agnew is at pointing out the faults of the news media, which is pretty darned good. Unfortunately, Andros has a problem.

For 21 years, he's had an invariable rule that his gridiron gladiators look the part. His squads have always enjoyed sky-high morale, much of it due to the fact that the players are encouraged to regard the team as more important than the individual player, and the combined effort more valuable than the heroics of the loner. Long ago, the coach banned the freak-out as an acceptable avocation for Oregon State footballers.

In other words: If you want to play for me, fellows, no girlish necklaces and cutesy medallions, no Iroquois scalplocks, no hair-mattress beards, and no Fu Manchu moustaches. You can sport these execrable excrescences and still go to Oregon State, but you can't massage your egos thus publicly and still play football for Dee Andros. Period.

At least right up until last spring it was "period." The Battling Beavers of OSU won a lot more games than they lost, and what's far more important they managed to win them while looking like decent human beings instead of like fugitives from a Barnum and Bailey side show.

They were shaven, they were shorn, they wore men's clothing rather than feminine fripperies, and they actually looked as though they bathed once in a while. In short, the varsity players stood out like lighthouses alongside the campus activists, many of whom look and smell as though they had recently emerged from ten years' solitary confinement on Devil's Island.

And this last is undoubtedly what triggered Andros' current crisis.

It seems that some hulking lout on his squad decided to defy the team's personal appearance rules and to sprout a luxuriant thicket of facial foliage which viewed under his helmet and behind his face-guard made him virtually indistinguishable from a gorilla. The coach said: "Shave it off or shove off." The player refused and appealed to Oregon State's president on the grounds that his civil rights were being violated.

Instead of backing up his coach and telling the hairy one to get lost, the OSU prexy appointed a Commission on Human Rights to investigate the coach, thus firmly establishing the president's credentials as an even bigger ass than the exhibitionist player. The commission dutifully censured Andros for showing "insufficient sensitivity" to the sacred right of adolescent showoffs to break coaching rules.

Kindly note at this juncture that nobody at Oregon State is compelled to play football. Note also that the coach's rules have been part of his winning formula for more than two decades, and are well-known to almost everyone in the State of Oregon. The alternative is laughably simple, and it's true on every campus and for every sport: If you don't like the rules, don't go out for the sport.

Now just where does the decision by the Human Rights Commission's driveling academicians leave Dee Andros? What's the future of a coach whose players now know he may be road-blocked and face slapped by some ad hoc committee every time he tells them to do something they don't want to do?

I can't think of a better way to destroy a fine football team, can you? Or a fine coach, for that matter. But maybe that's the whole idea.

Up to now, I've never known that exquisite sensitivity to a player's pampered ego was one of the prerequisites for a good coach. I've always thought a coach's job was to make men out of wet-behind-the-ears boys.

Can you imagine the expression on gruff old Knute Rockne's face if some cap-and-gowned buffoon had called him "insufficiently sensitive"?

Second, along the same lines but with even more unsavory overtones, there's the recent case of Stanford University's foray into the unlovely field of religious persecution, with athletics playing the role of unwilling patsy. It seems that Stanford recently and scathingly severed athletic relations with Brigham Young University because of one of the fundamental tenets of the Mormon faith: that the descendants of Canaan are ineligible by Old Testament mandate to hold the highest offices in the church. Inasmuch as those descendants are held by long tradition to be black, Negroes are thus disqualified from taking their place as priests and bishops of the Mormon faith.

Result: not many Negroes are Mormons. Additional result: no black football players at BYU. So Stanford joins several other colleges in a kind of anti-Mormon coalition which is boycotting the Utah school until it mends its allegedly wicked ways, and they are presently writing unctuous letters to each other congratulating themselves on their own virtue.

So far, so good. But let's carry the story one step further. The coalition isn't trying merely to get Brigham Young to put Negroes on its football team. If that's all there were to it, you wouldn't be hearing a single squawk out of me, because I firmly believe that all education, and athletics in particular, should be completely integrated and conspicuously multiracial. Unlike some Southern schools which the coalition somehow didn't get around to denouncing, though, BYU is perfectly willing to do just that, has in fact featured black athletes on some of its past teams, and is currently looking for some more. No, what the coalition is really demanding is something far, far different. It's that the Church of the Latter Day Saints repudiate part of its established dogma, given to it a century and a half ago, according to its scriptures by divine revelation.

Now this is quite another matter. What on earth would you do if you were athletic director in a case of this kind? Brigham Young University, you see, is a church school. Its policies must perforce reflect the teachings of that church, and cannot contravene them. In effect, the church IS the school, and vice versa. So the coalition isn't just demanding that a sister school simply change an athletic policy; it's conducting an organized boycott of a deeply held theological belief, and this sort of religious persecution in the final third of the twentieth century is absolutely intolerable.

It's as though the Coalition were to boycott an Episcopalian college because we Episcopalians don't permit females to be bishops, or to put pressure on a Jewish university because Judaism won't allow ham sandwich munchers to become rabbis. I don't happen to agree at all that the color of a man's skin should keep him from becoming a priest, a bishop, or a pope, for that matter, in any church. But I don't happen to be a Mormon, and what the Mormons devoutly believe is simply none of my Episcopalian business. Neither is it the business of athletics in general, or the coalition in particular.

So long as BYU keeps up its academic standards, behaves itself properly on the playing field, and opens its classrooms and its athletic teams alike to all who qualify for entrance regardless of color or race, it's as outrageous for the coalition to use athletics to interfere with a church's right to practice its own faith as it was for the jolly jesters of the Third Reich to interfere with the German Jews' right to practice theirs. The BYU students, incidentally, have an impeccable record in regard to the criteria I've just listed, and what's more, stayed soberly in class last year while the Stanfordites were bloodily occupying administration buildings and raising hell generally.

Ah, well. Football is supposed to teach players sportsmanship, fellowship and fair play. I'm sure BYU can find other schools beside those of the coalition to supply this desired mixture, and which won't also expose its players to the added and unwelcome ingredient of religious intolerance.

My purpose in bringing these incidents before you today is simply to remind you of their increasing frequency. At San Jose, Wyoming, Washington and a dozen

other distracted colleges, players have challenged their coaches, walked out on their own teams, and boycotted their own schools, all in the name of some social, economic or political grievance which the sport in question had never had anything to do with and with which it was never set up to cope.

As athletic directors, you're up against more than just a challenge to your authority or that of your coaches, a temporary roadblock in the path of bigger and better athletic competition. What's facing you in the very near future is the possible elimination of school sports altogether, if only because sports as we know them cannot survive their transformation into a mere tool of various activist groups with their own nonathletic axes to grind.

It's ironical, in fact, that those who hate athletics the most are the ones currently trying to use athletics for their own ends. These, of course, are the "Let's give aid and comfort to the Communists" agitators, the hairy, loudmouthed freaks of both sexes who infest our campuses today like so many unbathed boll weevils. The activists and the pseudo-intellectuals have created a myth - a kind of anti-athlete cartoon caricature which I'd like to analyze briefly.

The stereotype is that of the muscle-bound and moronic athlete. Of late he has receipted for so many "avant garde" jokes that he has become a permanent cliché, like the college widow and the absent-minded professor. Yet when one puts the myth of the jug-headed, oafish muscle-man under the cold light of logical analysis, it doesn't hold up worth a nickel.

The beard and sandal set claims the athlete is stupid. Yet in every high school where I've ever worked, the grade-point average of the varsity players was higher than that of the student body as a whole.

The lank-haired leaders of our campus revolutionists sneer at the varsity letterman for his allegedly juvenile enthusiasms and his willingness to die for dear old Rutgers. But they themselves are quite openly and ardently guilty of enthusiasms for such strange causes as raising bail money for Mario Savio and paying Joan Baez's taxes, and they seem ready to die at a moment's notice for a smile from Kosygin or even for the slightest relaxation of the built-in scowl on the face of Mao Tse-Tung. By comparison, dying for Rutgers has its points.

Their intellectual vials of wrath are constantly overflowing onto the hapless head of the athlete because of his hopeless Philistinism and his alleged inability to communicate with his peers save in monosyllabic grunts. Yet the halls of Congress and the board rooms of giant industrial complexes are alike populated by a striking number of ex-athletes who seem to have no difficulty whatever in communicating. And the Philistine mentality of such former contenders on the playing fields as Douglas MacArthur, John F. Kennedy and Justice Byron "Whizzer" White may be left safely for history to judge.

As another football season ends and another basketball season begins, I have to confess a lifelong fondness for the amateur athlete. Over the past thirty years, eight of which were spent as a high school coach and athletic director, I've seen a remarkable number of athletes fighting and even dying for their country, and remarkably few of them ending up in jail or taking the Fifth Amendment before a Congressional investigating committee. They seem to be conspicuously absent, too, from Communist-inspired demonstrations and Filthy Speech Movements.

They are, in short, above-average, decent, reasonably patriotic Americans. Maybe that's why they're under increasing attack from the Kooks, the Crum-bums, the Commies.

I'm not too worried about the outcome. The love of clean, competitive sports is too deeply imbedded in the American matrix, too much a part of the warp and woof of our free people, ever to surrender to the burning-eyed, bearded draft card burners who hate and envy the athlete because he is something they can never be - A MAN.

Our greatest soldier-statesman of the twentieth century once had this to say about athletics and the men who follow its rigorous and rewarding discipline: "Upon the field of friendly strife are sown the seeds which, in other days, on other fields, will bear the fruits of victory."

As athletic directors, you have a decision to make. The college syndrome I have noted and documented in this brief talk is spreading into American high schools even as we meet together today. Your choice is simple: you can back up your coaches' authority to do with their teams what coaches have done for the last hundred years, or you can play a cowardly game of patty-cake with the activists and watch your sports program go down the drain with your own jobs going right along with it.

I didn't come here today to make you feel good, but rather to do two things: warn you, and promise you help. Little enough of idealism and faith and cheerful willingness to fight on steadfastly for the right remains to us Americans in these the Sick Sixties. Interscholastic sports, rising surprisingly and increasingly above their age-old status as mere games, serve today as the staunch custodians of these treasured concepts out of our great past.

If you elect to cop out on all this and to let your teams be used for their own sinister purposes by those who are the enemies of all athletics, you will deserve exactly what you will get, and you will receive no sympathy from me. But if you decide to stand your ground and fight for the future of American sports against those who would destroy everything you've worked for all your lives, then indeed you will have formidable allies: my own Department; the vast majority of our State legislators; above all, the millions of Californians who love athletics and who believe with all their hearts that it symbolizes the clean, bright, fighting spirit which is America herself.

A tough job, this one which I am urging upon you? You bet. But you are tough men, or should be. These are rugged times and we need rugged men to stand up to them. My own job, over the years, has not been exactly a bed of roses. All you and I can do is to lower our heads and do our level best, keeping the goals of our great profession constantly before our mind's eye, disregarding as best we can the barrage of the opposition, striving to keep our feet despite the shell holes and the booby traps, satisfied if the end of each day finds us a little closer to our hearts' desire.

When I grow tired, as I occasionally do - when I get discouraged, as once in a while happens - when the slings and arrows of our common enemies get to me, as they do now and then - there is one never-failing source of inspiration upon which I learned long ago to rely, and which always sends me back into the fray with renewed strength and a stout heart.

It's a very simple thing. I merely close my eyes and call up from the depths of memory my old teams - the myriad faces which have passed before me for so many years - the bright, fresh, questing faces of the kids with whom I lived and worked for so long. Those strong, eager boys, so willing to learn, so wrapped up in the joy of playing the game for the game's sake, the only way it ever should be played. I look back upon the long parade of faces, and in my mind I see the countless more whom in reality I will never get to see - the youngsters of California - your own teams - thronging in their untold thousands from the redwood country of the north to the great desert which lies along our southern border.

And suddenly it's all worthwhile. What men ever had more children than you and I to work for, to hope for, to live for? More than two million boys - the job, the hope, the whole future of our State. It's a family worth fighting for.

I recommend it to you.