

Arsht Ethics Debate at SportsFest '08

CASES FOR DISCUSSION



www.miami.edu/ethics

ARSHT ETHICS DEBATE AT SPORTSFEST '08

COLLEGE FOOTBALL: PAY FOR PLAY?

Few will doubt college football's status as a revenue-generating powerhouse. In 2007, the sport's three most lucrative programs—Michigan, Notre Dame and Ohio State—each garnered more than \$60 million for their respective schools.¹ This windfall allows teams to pay many of their employees handsomely for their efforts. Division 1-A head coaches routinely receive seven-figure salaries and compensation for SEC coaches in particular ranges from \$750,000 (Kentucky's Rich Brooks) to as high as \$4 million (Alabama's Nick Saban) per year.²

Advocates of the "pay-for-play" movement, however, argue that the individuals most responsible for the sport's revenue—the players—do not receive a fair share. Currently, the NCAA prohibits universities from paying players in an effort to preserve the amateur ideals of college athletics. Some disagree with this stance. "Everyone associated with [college football] is getting rich except the people whose labor creates the value," writes author Michael Lewis in a *New York Times* editorial, "[The] kids put up with it because they find it all but impossible to pursue NFL careers unless they play at least three years of college."³

Some argue that the financial hardship many of these athletes face further warrants some form of pay for them. For many players, the demands of school and sport leave no time for a job that would help meet expenses not covered by an athletic scholarship. "It just doesn't seem fair," Oklahoma center Vince Carter argued in 2003. "I'm at the number one school in the country right now, and I'm struggling to get groceries every month."⁴ Proponents offer other arguments favoring at least some sort of player stipend: players would have less incentive to take under-the-table compensation from boosters and agents and less financial need to leave school early to go pro.⁵

"Pay for play" has some detractors. NCAA president Myles Brand believes it would "ruin the integrity of the college game" and has refused to consider any rule changes.⁶ Some argue that players already receive adequate compensation in the form of a college education, free room and board, and the opportunity to showcase their talents for scouts and hone their skills before entering the NFL. Other critics question the feasibility of any sort of payment scheme. At most schools, profits from revenue-generating sports such as football or basketball are already used to underwrite the revenue losers of a university's athletic department, such as gymnastics and swimming.⁷

Other issues complicate things further. College basketball players participate in a big money sport; should they receive a piece of their program's pie as well? And how much money should players receive, if any? One could also argue that the financial success of the sport should not matter when determining the payment of stipends, and student athletes in every sport should receive extra money to help make ends meet.

ARSHT ETHICS DEBATE AT SPORTSFEST '08

KELLY'S BLUNDER⁸

Kelly Tilghman (pronounced TILL-man) is arguably one of today's most successful golf announcers. The first, full-time female play-by-play commentator in the history of the PGA tour, Tilghman is a familiar voice leading *The Golf Channel's* broadcasts alongside her color analyst, Hall of Famer Nick Faldo. The pair have been announcing together since the beginning of 2007.

To say that this year started off on the wrong foot for Tilghman would be an understatement. She set off a media firestorm during last month's Mercedes-Benz Championship when she, during an on-air exchange with Faldo, joked that young players trying to challenge black golfer Tiger Woods should "lynch him in a back alley."

As no one in the golf community regards Tilghman as outwardly racist, her comments have been seen by many as nothing more than an unfortunate choice of words. However, they are words that certainly come with a dark history. The term "lynch," defined as a mob-incited execution of an individual (usually by hanging) without legal sanction, has powerful historical connotations in the black community. Lynching was frequently used by white supremacists as a form of political terrorism against southern blacks during the 19th and 20th century. According to Tuskegee University, 3,466 African-Americans were lynched in the U.S. from 1882-1968.

Though Tilghman apologized, both on the air to her viewers and personally to Woods, *The Golf Channel* decided to suspend their leading voice for two weeks, calling her words "inadvertent" but "hurtful and grossly inappropriate."

Ethicists frequently deal with challenges regarding retributive justice, the concept that punishments should fit their respective crimes. After the story made national headlines, it sparked its own retributive justice debate. Some argue that because Tilghman lacked ill-intent towards Woods (the two actually are friends and have known each other for twelve years), suspending her for her actions is unjust. In a statement made by his agent, Woods himself called the story "a non-issue" and noted that he "has a great deal of respect for Kelly." Golf pro Fred Funk also sympathized with Tilghman, stating that "I think it was just a slip...when you're in the TV tower for that many hours, you're going to wish you didn't say some things.... I think you've got to give [her] a little grace."

Others, including Al Sharpton, see it differently and believe that *The Golf Channel* did not go far enough in their punishment. The noted activist threatened to picket the network's Orlando headquarters if it does not fire Tilghman. Sharpton argued during a CNN news program that "If I [went] on this show and said I wanted to put some Jewish-American in a gas chamber, I don't care what context I said it in; the entire Jewish community would have the right to say I should be put off this show." He further justified his beliefs by stating that her comments did not just affect Woods but were "an insult to all blacks."

Tilghman returned to work January 24 to cover the Buick Invitational—Woods' first tournament of the 2008 season.

ARSHT ETHICS DEBATE AT SPORTSFEST '08

INTERNATIONAL TENNIS PLAYERS AND U.S. AMATEUR STATUS⁹

Recent events have drawn the American public's attention to a debate concerning the ability of foreign tennis players, some with extensive professional experience, to compete collegiately as amateurs in the United States.

Tension has focused on confusion over relevant NCAA rules and the allegedly unfair competition for scholarships between American collegiate amateurs and players entering the pool from abroad. NCAA rules state that "athletes who have accepted any prize money beyond their expenses in any tournament, or who have played for a professional team in a sport, cannot compete collegiately in that sport."

Nevertheless, coaches at colleges across the country hold that over the past dozen years, many international players who failed at the professional level in their home countries have violated those rules and entered collegiate play as amateurs. In addition, they argue that such players are commonly older and more experienced, and thus should not be permitted to vie for scholarships against true amateurs in any fair environment.

More vocal coaches, like Vanderbilt's women's coach Geoff Macdonald, blame the NCAA for "lackadaisical" responses to their complaints and a blatant lack of oversight that have led to a "win-at-all-cost" climate among universities. College sports programs must try to compete as effectively as possible and current attitudes maintain that if that means going abroad for talent, then so be it as long as the rules are not expressly violated.

On the other hand, a few international players (some current USTA pros) have come to the defense of their younger counterparts. Their position is based on the reality that many of them had to go pro early back home, even if unprepared, simply to raise the money for a shot at an American scholarship. Further, a higher number of international players only serves to add diversity and enrich American competition.

Macdonald and Arizona State coach Sheila McInerney claim no objection to the international influence, but rather desire a codified "way to stop players who basically play a full-time professional circuit [only to eventually] declare themselves an [American] amateur, accept a scholarship, and beat up on younger, less-experienced players."

Meanwhile, at the NCAA individual championships last May, male international players filled 43 of 64 slots and females 29 of 64.

ARSHT ETHICS DEBATE AT SPORTSFEST '08

AGGRESSION ON THE ICE

Child violence has become an increasing social concern. It is often blamed on poor parenting, video game and television violence, and a lack of social skills education. However, many parents are discovering yet another unlikely cause for their children's hostility: sports, particularly hockey for many Canadian parents. Difficulties arise both on and off the ice regarding not only young athletes' safety and well-being, but also the presumed benefits of positive, team-building sports such as hockey.

In the rink, brawls and body checking – a player using his body to knock an opponent against the boards or to the ice – have become controversial issues. While it is not uncommon in professional hockey games to see the benches empty as players rush to join their teammates in mid-game fights, such violence only encourages younger athletes to emulate their sports heroes and older cohorts through similar displays of aggression. In a November 2007 hockey tournament in Guelph, Ontario, two teams of 8-year-olds emptied their benches to battle it out on the ice as their coaches stood by.¹⁰ About the same time, Hockey Canada voted to prohibit body checking among players under age 12, attempting to reduce body checking injuries to younger players.¹¹ Parents continue to call for further modification of the sport's rules to prohibit all body checking and other similarly aggressive strategies still viewed as part of the game.¹² Some even call for the criminal prosecution of coaches who appear to encourage such behavior by their players.

Detractors hold that "masculinity on the ice and the Canadian male psyche" have been and continue to be important parts of the game.¹³ Far from advocating aggression for the sake of aggression, they argue that the outright removal of such physicality from the sport would damage its integrity. Instead, they propose more oversight and regulation, not from the rulebook, but rather from parents and coaches, who should be charged with explaining and maintaining the spirit of Canada's exciting national sport in the next generation of players.¹⁴

Unfortunately, parents' concerns do not stop with public fights and body checking. After games, it is common for players to return to their locker rooms and engage in "locker boxing" in which players, wearing their hockey helmets and gloves, strike their teammates until they fall down or surrender.¹⁵ In some instances, players even lock the doors to the locker rooms, and the fights continue until one or more of the competitors are knocked unconscious.¹⁶ This practice occurs among amateur teams of all ages, and many of the participants are not even aware of the risks.¹⁷ They believe their helmets protect them, but even helmets cannot prevent concussions, other serious head injuries or bodily trauma.¹⁸ Now, as many fights are being recorded and posted online, the fights have become increasingly violent, perhaps in an attempt to create shocking, camera-worthy footage.¹⁹

ARSHT ETHICS DEBATE AT SPORTSFEST '08

¹ Lewis, M. (2007, November 11). *Serfs of the Turf*. Retrieved January 7, 2008, from New York Times: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/11/opinion/11lewis.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

² McCarthy, M. and Berkowitz, S. (2006, November 16). Million Dollar Coaches Move into Mainstream. Retrieved January 7, 2008, from *USA Today*: http://www.usatoday.com/sports/college/football/2006-11-16-coaches-salaries-cover_x.htm

³ Lewis, M. (2007, November 11). *Serfs of the Turf*. Retrieved January 7, 2008, from New York Times: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/11/opinion/11lewis.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

⁴ USA Today. (2004, August 31). *Pros, Cons on Pay for Play*. Retrieved January 7, 2008, from *USA Today*: http://www.usatoday.com/sports/2004-08-31-pros-cons-pay_x.htm

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Information in case ascertained from: Sirak, Ron. (2008, January 14). *Golf Channel announcer suspended 2 weeks for 'lynch' Tiger comment*. Retrieved January 14, 2008, from ESPN.com: <http://sports.espn.go.com/golf/news/story?id=318937>

⁹ Information in case ascertained from: Drape, J. (2006, July 9). *The New York Times*, s. 8; c. 1; Sports Desk; p. 7. N.C.A.A. and Coaches to Discuss New Limits for International Players.

¹⁰ No Place for Child Hockey Violence. (2007, November 28). *The Gazette*, p. A28.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Cheney, P. (2007, January 20). The Goon Show. *The Globe and Mail*, p. M1. No Place for Child Hockey Violence.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.