

Our bucks chase the wrong kind of competition

Years back, brother Clark and I would await Saturday University of Michigan football with great anticipation.

On no, it wasn't for the sake of the game. Rather it was our entrepreneurial instincts at work. On those Saturdays we would trek out to Grandmother's house to park ardent fans' cars in her backyard. She did have a huge backyard. And for the few hours of work we did, the economic return was appreciable. Afterwards, we rewarded ourselves by each spending a dollar for a ticket to the game. We still had plenty left over to buy the stuff kids like to buy.

Lots of things have changed over the years. Grandmother's house has been replaced by an apartment building (so what else is new in Ann Arbor?). And, of course, nobody gets into a U-M football game for a dollar anymore.

As a matter of fact, U-M Athletic Director Don Canham wants to raise the price of seeing Bo's boys in blue to \$12. Now, I'm not bitching. If somebody is



crackerbarrel
debate
Steve Barnaby

sucker, enough to pay that much to see a football game, so be it. Certainly, the 100,000 some seats in U-M Stadium will fill up sure as Christmas happens on Dec. 25, no matter what is charged.

But what should disturb folks is the incredible importance put on collegiate sports by far too many persons at the expense of academic development.

WE'RE TALKING big bucks when it comes to college football, big bucks like \$95,000 a year in salary for one George Perles, newly hired coach for

the Michigan State University Spartan football team.

That nearly \$100,000 a year salary exceeds even the wage paid to MSU President Cecil Mackey.

Now that's crazy, really crazy. Ironically, Perles' hiring comes after pressure from the MSU alumni militants — some of the same folks who raised cane when Mackey went out and bought a \$12,000 piano for the president's residence.

The coach's salary isn't going to break the educational system of the country. But hiring a coach for that amount certainly shows our priorities have gone awry.

Sure, some will say that a healthy football program will bring in more alumni contributions and therefore all will benefit. And maybe some merit does exist to that argument.

But somehow I have a difficult time imagining the University of Michigan having less of a law school or music program because it went without a

football team. Same goes for MSU. Even though it is without a law school, it has one of the finest agricultural programs in the nation and an Osteopathic School of Medicine. Both will continue without a George Perles to overpay.

I also somehow imagine that academics who have slaved to get master's and doctorates so they may teach the sciences and humanities are stomping with rage when money is thrown around like that — just so MSU can have a winning football team.

SPARTAN ALUMNI shouldn't get me wrong. Lots of other universities are just as guilty of slapping their academics in the face by overpaying football coaches. MSU certainly isn't a pioneer in the field.

And while this country may be competitive on the football field, it is failing miserably on the world market. More than ever we need to dedicate our resources to the true education of the next generation so we have a chance at the really important competition in life.



Nick Sharkey

Prep sports in trouble — Don Canham

High-school sports can be exhilarating — and rewarding.

Last weekend, Our Lady of Mercy, a regional school in Farmington Hills, won the class-A girls' state basketball championship. A few weeks ago, Farmington Harrison took the class-A state football championship. That's a rare double honor for any city.

But high-school sports cost great amounts of money. Equipping one high-school football player costs about \$500. Local school districts, which all face serious budget problems, are being forced to re-examine their commitments to high-school sports.

In case you've missed our sports pages, the long overdue emphasis on girls' sports has nearly doubled the number of high-school sports.

NO LESS AN authority than Don Canham, athletic director at the University of Michigan, is worried about the future of high-school sports. He spoke about it Monday during a luncheon sponsored by the Economic Club of Detroit.

"High-school sports programs are in trouble," Canham said. "Many school systems can't afford to finance them. Some schools are dropping football and picking up soccer because soccer is cheaper."

Canham said he believes one reason why school districts make cuts in athletics is because it is so visible.

"If a millage fails, the first activities cut are band and music. But sports come right after them. Sports gets a lot of publicity when they are eliminated. A voter is more likely to approve a millage the second time if he can see what has been cut."

CANHAM HAS a vested interest in high-school sports in this state. The University of Michigan has the best chance of recruiting quality athletes within the state of Michigan. It's not easy to persuade the best athletes of Florida or Georgia to enroll at the University of Michigan.

Nevertheless, what he has to say should be considered.

Few school districts in the Observer & Eccentric area have made serious cuts in sports programs. Nearby schools have. For example, the Pontiac school district eliminated football after residents rejected a tax increase. This year the school tax increase passed, and football was restored.

Several school districts have considered "user fees." A person taking part in an activity would pay a specific charge, for example \$100, for playing football.

A few years ago, the Rochester school district eliminated some junior varsity sports during a budget crunch. They have since been restored. The Plymouth-Canton school district cut out junior varsity sports.

With those exceptions, sports programs at schools in the Observer & Eccentric area have not been affected by the poor economy. But how long will that continue?

DON CANHAM admitted that one shouldn't worry about the future of athletics at the University of Michigan. Although expenses are high, the athletic department generates \$16 million per year in sales.

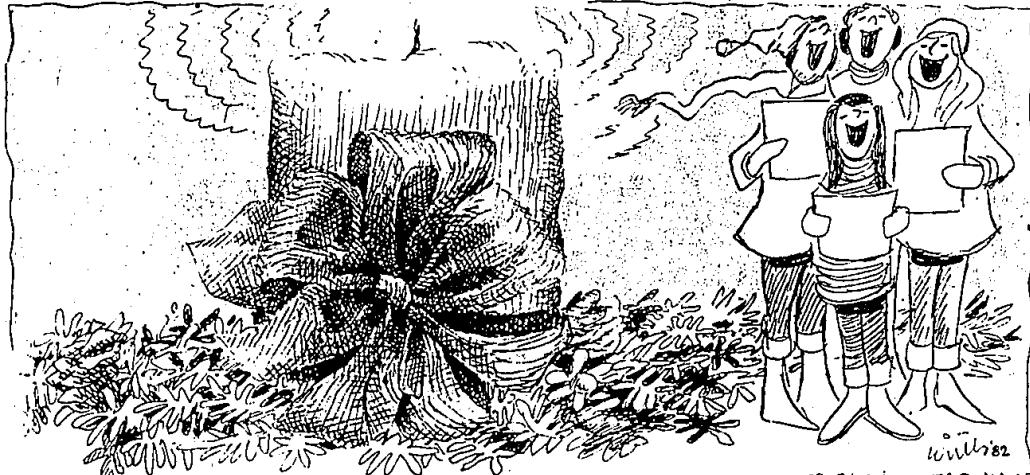
Ticket sales alone for one home football game bring in \$1.1 million. That doesn't include hot dogs ("We sell a lot of hot dogs," Canham said with a smile) or program booklets.

The Rose Bowl will produce a cool \$8.5 million in sales. Of that total, U-M will take back \$3 million. After expenses of \$800,000 are deducted, the Big Ten will divide the remainder evenly among its members. U-M will end up netting about \$220,000 for the Rose Bowl.

Canham doesn't lose any sleep about his program. But he has serious doubts about how the high school in your neighborhood can continue to finance its many sports activities.

That's something for all of us to think about.

'Tis the season . . .



Larsen wrong scapegoat for GOP

IN ANCIENT times, it is said, when things went wrong, people assumed the king had lost the favor of the gods. Off went the king's head, and a new monarch was enthroned until the next drought.

They didn't have satellite weather pictures, insecticides and dams to help control farming conditions. They held the man at the top personally responsible.

I was reminded of these ancient practices while working on the stories of the fall of Mel Larsen as Michigan Republican state chairman.

A significant conservative minority of the Grand Old Party wants Larsen's head for the 1982 defeat. Larsen saved them the trouble of sharpening their axes by announcing he wouldn't seek a third term at the next convention in February.

THAT'S TOO BAD because from all I could see, Larsen was a fairly effective state chairman, perhaps worthy of being in the same class as the Democrats' Neil Staelen in the 1940s and '50s.

The Larsen technique was to pinpoint a specific, winnable target, and then pick it off. He didn't worry about the safe areas. He shed few tears for the places that weren't winnable. He targeted areas where money and effort could change things.

That was what he did in 1972 when he won a previously Democratic state representative seat in Pontiac and northern Oakland County. It was how



Tim Richard

he worked in local races.

AND IT WAS how he worked as state chairman from 1979 to the present. The results:

- In two elections, Larsen's party picked off seven state-representative districts.
- In the 1982 election, Larsen's party picked off four state-senate districts. When you add in the votes of conservative Democrats like DeSana, DiNello and a few others, you come up with trouble for Governor-elect Jim Blanchard in Lansing.

- In 1980 Larsen's party picked up one congressional seat. Redistricting, however, strongly favored the Democrats, who targeted the 5th and 6th Districts for takeover. They won the 6th (Carr over Dunn) but failed in the 5th (Sawyer survived over Monsma).

When you consider that the big gripe against Lar-

sen's predecessor was the loss of legislative and congressional seats, you really have to conclude that Larsen did what needed doing.

THE CONSERVATIVES' underlying theory, as I read the material from United Republicans of Michigan, is that Michigan voters really adhere to Reagan/Republican values, and that the Larsen leadership simply failed to capitalize on the phenomenon.

What solid facts support the theory. I don't know. Considering that in the 1980 presidential primary Michigan Republicans strongly favored George Bush over Ronald Reagan (who was already virtually a winner), and considering that Michigan Democrats gave a slight edge to Ted Kennedy over incumbent President Jimmy Carter, I fail to see how anyone can detect a shift toward "traditional Republican values."

Michigan is in a class with Massachusetts and Oregon rather than Arizona and Utah.

And as GOP state secretary Weldon Yeager pointed out, Michigan is a ticket-splitting state. As many as 40 percent of the voters will pick a Democrat for one office and a Republican for another.

If Michigan voters disliked Headlee, Brennan and the rest of the 1982 Republican ticket (with the notable exception of Supreme Court nominee Dorothy Comstock Riley), then I suspect they knew what they wanted.

Depression: bean soup at the fire hall

IN RECENT days, the present economic slump has been referred to as a "depression" in some quarters and a "recession" in others. Which is correct?

Well, speaking with the voice of experience, The Stroller, who has lived through both, claims the current conditions are not nearly as severe as they were in either the slump of 1919, right after World War I, or in 1929, when the banks across the country closed and left the populace in severe trouble.

The Stroller's first experience came in 1919 when he was starting his career as a machinist.

NOW THE WAR was ended. Defense work was halted, and jobs were hard to find. The Stroller was fortunate in that he was hired and paid the magnificent sum of 25 cents an hour provided he worked the 13-hour night shift. That meant he could earn \$16.25 a week for working 65 hours.

There were no such things as unemployment compensation, hospitalization insurance, medicare and medicaid. You were on your own. When the slump came, you were laid off with no source of income.

MOTHER FACED a great job of keeping our home together and feeding five children. But she solved this by some great dishes. Her favorite was



the stroller
W.W. Edgar

"mock duck." This was a piece of meat, cut as steak and then folded. It made a good meal.

When men were laid off, they gathered at the fire hall where we were volunteer firefighters. There was no complaining by the townspeople because it meant we were on hand in case of fire — and that was something.

We spent the entire day there, just to be out of the way at home. Chipping in 15 cents a day, we bought a bean bone and a few pounds of beans and feasted on bean soup all day.

THEN CAME 1929 and another dip in the economy.

By this time, The Stroller was in Detroit and on the sports staff of the Free Press and headed for another experience. When the banks closed, we were given three 10-percent pay cuts in a week.

Just imagine that.

"When he looked at his pay envelope, he was being paid \$1 a week more for being sports editor than he received as a rookie reporter a few years prior."

To top things off, he married in 1930 and proudly he and his bride deposited \$300 in the bank to get off to a good start. Then the banks closed. We had to wait a long time to get our money.

Then the Free Press paid half scrip with the wish that these paper notes would be redeemed later.

Things got so bad that the young bride called the landlord and told him we couldn't afford to pay the rent he was asking. He answered, "Do the best you can. I understand."

NOW, IN OUR present slump, we have unemployment compensation, and in many cases the worker is paid 85 percent of his regular income for 39 weeks. It can be extended and supplemented by the company.

We have food stamps, social security pensions, medicare, medicaid, and even the option of hanging onto health insurance with eye and dental care.

Sure, we are again in what can be called "hard times," but they can't compare with the days of 1919 and 1929. Those were really days of depression.