

Opinion

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Let's take the charade out of amateur sports

LATELY, THIS sports situation is getting a little worrisome.

No, no, I'm not talking about the professional-type slam, bam, big-bucks sport scene. That's business. Its indiscretions are perfectly understandable.

All hail to the players who can get as much money as possible by playing their designated sports. If an owner wants to move his team from one town to another, that's fine, too.

What we really should be concerned about is the ever-increasing exploitation of our youth — all for the sake of lining someone else's pocket. The familiar ruse used is "amateur." We must keep our school sports amateur, they say.

BALONEY AND double hogwash. I say, drop the charade and do what's right by the college athlete. Pay them for playing their sport — up-front cash.

Yeah, sure, I know what some of you are saying — scholarships. Good old scholarships. At the end of every season, schools pass out the little buggers as incentives for athletes to come and play at their institutions. "Free education," they tell the kid.

Before we get taken up with the Los Angeles games, let's step down from the Olympic heights and think about this at our level — at the colleges and, especially, the high schools.

And these days, one is inseparable from another. That's right: inseparable — the high schools, from the colleges, from the Olympics, from the professional leagues.

And while high school sports certainly could exist without professional sports in mind, the opposite certainly is untrue.

VERY rapidly, high-school athletic programs are becoming essential to the multi-billion-dollar sports industry.

The day did exist, barely a decade ago, when high-school sports stood apart from the fray. Lots of students played high-school sports and let it go at that. Fewer sports were played, fewer scholarships existed.

Women, unfairly so, had even fewer scholarship opportunities.

I remember doing a series on how high-school women's athletic programs were far behind men's. While doing those stories I recall a woman's coach, considered a person with old-fashioned ideas at the time, saying that she was opposed to women athletic programs becoming like the men's — training grounds for professional sports.

'Watch Your Pants' on opening day

FROM HIS vantage point in the plush press box high atop the third deck in Tiger Stadium, The Stroller couldn't help recalling his first trip there as a recognized major league baseball writer.

It was back in 1924 — 61 opening days ago — when he was a rookie on the staff of the Detroit Free Press and was assigned to write some notes on the Tiger opener.

It was a far cry from the present facilities at what is now Tiger Stadium. In the first place, we had to climb a ladder and then travel along a catwalk to get our positions.

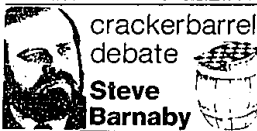
IN THOSE days, the stadium had a far different appearance.

The stands ran only as far as third and first bases. The outfield had a background of cement walls, and there was only a small section of bleachers in right field. The seating capacity was less than 30,000 compared to today's more than 50,000.

But it was an opening game several years later that still is recalled with a laugh — and it was the talk of the town for years. In those days, Cherry Street was right behind the center and left field wall.

There also was a home that faced Trumbull Avenue. It had a long, V-shaped roof that was a good background for the pitcher.

AS OPENING day approached, John Rosink, a downtown clothing store operator, was owner of the Detroit Stars, a



crackerbarrel debate

Steve Barnaby

To her, women athletics had upheld the spirit of amateur competition in the midst of the scramble for the big money. Male high-school sports, she said, should strive to be more like women's programs.

Certainly women should have the same opportunity for scholarships as men. But, however idealistic and naive that coach may have been, her point is worth pondering, at least when it comes to high-school and college sports.

Think about the number of athletes who are lured to college campuses with the promise of a scholarship and the hope of big money in the professional ranks. Then think about all the stories you've read about college athletes who never earn a cent — and never graduate from college.

Think about Rick Leach, the former Detroit Tiger and U-M football star who, after all these years, still hasn't obtained a college degree.

AND HE has been one of the lucky ones — until this year, when the Tiger organization told him to take a walk. He made a little money off baseball. Others haven't made anything.

Then think about how many dollars are made off the talents of college athletes — for the coaches, for the universities and for the television networks.

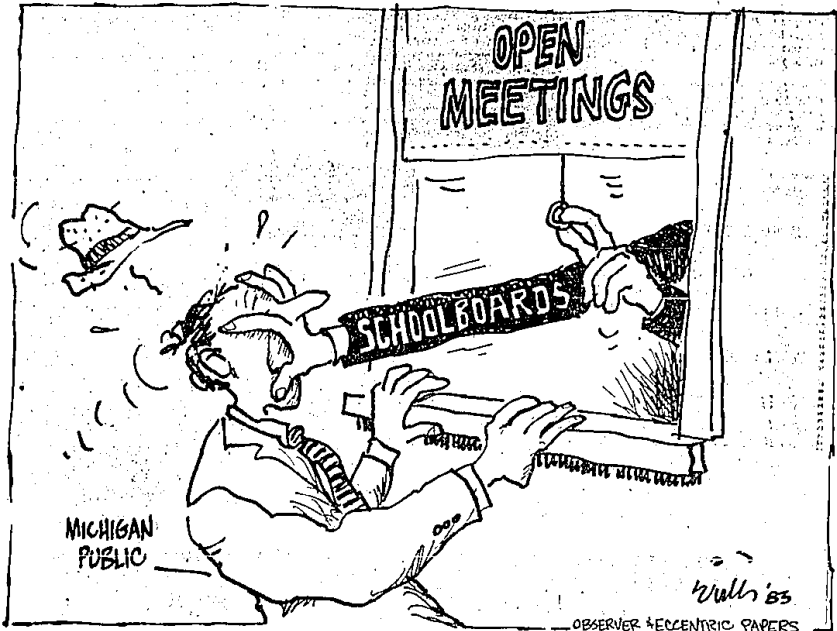
Think about the college women athletes who get even more ripped off because they don't even have the chance to make money in the professional ranks.

Yet most college athletes, male or female, never make it to the pro ranks, many never get a degree, and some end up illiterate and unemployed.

And it all starts in high school, where recruiting is becoming more common, place and the promises of riches at the end of the athletic rainbow more outrageous.

Next time you attend or watch a college game on television, take a moment to ponder who is making out on the deal. It certainly isn't the majority of college athletes who are watching.

Let's stop the hypocrisy, drop the amateur talk, and pay these college semi-professionals.



House majority fails test

MAXINE BERMAN, state representative from Southfield, gets an A on her report card for voting against House Bill 5219.

Reps. Justine Barns of Westland, Ruth McNamee of Birmingham and Wilfred Webb of Hazel Park get Cs for being absent that day. It takes 56 votes to pass a bill, so an absence is as good as a negative vote.

Nevertheless, the state House of Representatives passed HB 5219, a crippling amendment to the state's Open Meetings Act. It would allow boards to do annual performance evaluations of school superintendents, college presidents and city managers behind closed doors.

The vote was 75-17 with 18 members absent. The bill goes to the Senate.

THE PURPOSE is to take away by law what the public won from the Michigan Court of Appeals in a 1981 suburban Wayne County case.

The Dearborn school board, as trustees of Henry Ford Community College, got sued for trying to close the doors on the president's evaluation. Said the court:

"People have a strong interest in public education. Because a large portion of the tax dollar goes for the support of the schools, the taxpayer is increasingly holding the boards and administrators accountable for these moneys."



Tim Richard

"Further, the public continues to have an increasing interest in the educational process and expects this public body to be accountable for its actions."

Shooting down the board's alibi that matters of a private nature "might" come up, the court found, "There was nothing in the public notice, nothing presented to the court, of a specific privacy nature which would outweigh the interest of the public to know how their public officials were performing."

Oh, and the appeals court made the college pay the plaintiff's attorney costs.

The appeals court panel consisted of three suburbanites: Walter Cynar of Warren, Dorothy Comstock Riley of Grosse Pointe Farms and Hilda Gage of West Bloomfield. (Riley is a candidate for the state Supreme Court. Gage is an Oakland circuit judge who was filling in on the appeals court.)

A STRONG and vocal minority of local public officials in Michigan just can't ad-

just to the idea of doing the public's business in public. It conceals one bad idea after another to achieve official secrecy.

Kathleen Strauss, representing the Michigan Association of School Boards, told the House committee that a performance evaluation discussion "can be more open and honest" if the doors are closed to the public.

It was an incredible admission. Strauss is saying local boards are less than honest when they hold open discussions.

If her appalling assertion is correct — that closed discussions are more honest — how can the public ever learn what happens? In the Strauss-MASB book of politics, the public is fed up in open meetings, gets shut out of closed meetings and loses both ways.

THOSE FROM the Observer & Eccentric area who flunked the test by favoring HB 5219 are: John Bennett of Redford, W.V. Brotherton of Farmington, Mat Dunaskis of Lake Orion, William Keith of Garden City, Jack Kirksey of Livonia, Gerald Law of Plymouth, Robert McGee of Union Lake and Gordon Sparks of Troy. In the Senate, the bill goes to the Administration and Rules Committee chaired by Majority Leader John Engler of Mt. Pleasant.

Let us hope for a better decision from the upper house.

Ump sometimes misses one

WITH APRIL comes the organizing of kids' baseball and softball leagues.

Much has been said and written about the benefits and disadvantages of such competition. Criticism has focused on the over-involvement of some parents.

As this new season begins, I thought I would reprint this poignant article:

DONALD JENSEN was struck in the head by a thrown bat while umpiring a Little League game. He continued to work the game, but later that evening was placed in the hospital by a doctor. While being kept overnight for observation, Jensen sent the following letter:

"Dear Parent of a Little Leaguer: 'I am an umpire. I don't do it for a living, but only on Saturdays and Sundays for fun."

"With all the fun I've had, there is still something that bothers me about my job. Some of you feel I'm here to exert authority over your son. For that reason, you often yell at me when I make a mistake."

"Yet no matter how hard I try, I can't be perfect. I counted the number of calls I made in a six-inning game today. The total number of decisions, whether on balls and strikes or safes and outs, was 146."

"THERE WAS one real close call that ended the game. A runner for the home



Nick Sharkey

team was trying to steal the plate on a passed ball. The catcher chased the ball down and threw to the pitcher covering the plate. The pitcher made the tag, and I called the runner out."

"As I was getting my equipment to leave I overheard one of the parents comment, 'It's too bad the kids have to lose games because of rotten umpires. That was one of the loudest calls I've ever seen.'"

"I wanted to quit umpiring, but fortunately, my wife reminded me of another situation that occurred last week."

"It was umpiring behind the plate for a pitcher who performed his displeasure at any call on a borderline pitch that was not in his team's favor. One could sense that he wanted the crowd to realize that he was a fine, talented player who was doing his best to get along, but that I was a blackhearted villain who was working against him."

"For two innings the manager watched this. When the kid returned to the dugout

in the top of the third, the manager called him aside. In a voice loud enough that I was able to overhear, the lecture went like this:

"LISTEN, SON, it is time you make a decision. You can be an umpire, an actor or a pitcher. But you can only be one at a time when you are playing for me. Right now, it is your job to pitch. And you are basically doing a lousy job. Leave the acting to the actors, the umpiring to the umpires, or you won't do any pitching here. Now what is it going to be?"

"Needless to say, the kid chose the pitching route and went on to win the game. When the game was over the kid followed me to my car. Fighting his hardest to keep back the tears, he apologized for his actions and thanked me for umpiring his game. He said he had learned a lesson that he would never forget."

"I can't help wonder how many more fine young men are missing their chance to develop into outstanding ball players because their parents encourage them to spend time umpiring, rather than working harder to play the game as it should be played."

The following morning Donald Jensen died of a brain concussion. (Reprinted with permission from "The Washington Journal of Health," Spring 1978.)