

Clips eFLASH

Below is a follow-up by the Drake Group's Frank Splitt about some recently posted pieces on the Clips site -- the most recent being from the Washington Post's Sally Jenkins in which she provided a Top Ten List for a possible presidential sports agenda for Obama's first 100 days in office. Ms. Jenkins used provocative call-to-action phraseology like "Liberate college football from the tyranny of the BCS," which is run by a "despotic cartel" that results in a "commercial swindle.

Time to Put Childish Things Aside

By Frank G. Splitt

The dark side of the college sports entertainment industry is illuminated by several recent articles.¹⁻⁶ These articles provide strong support for I.R.S. action to press college and universities to further reveal the activities of their sports entertainment businesses—as discussed in the AFTERWORD to the author's previous *College Athletics Clips* commentary.⁷

What's going on in the wonderland of NCAA D1 athletics does not paint a pretty picture. Here's a quick look from the perspective of The Drake Group:

The cited references provide excellent examples of the excesses in the highly commercialized college sports entertainment business ... excesses that are undermining America's system of higher education. Those involved in serious college sports reform can attest to the fact that it is exceedingly difficult to bring this unregulated business under control.⁸

It is now approaching five years since Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky placed remarks in the *Congressional Record* that called attention to the need for reform in college athletics.⁹ Over the ensuing years The Drake Group has worked with the House Ways & Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee to not only introduce appropriate measures of transparency, accountability, and oversight into the operations of the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA), but also to pressure America's institutions of higher education to focus their attention and resources on academics rather than athletics.

Why the difficulty? A major reason is there is simply so much money to be made by so many people who are doing the undermining. These people include, but are not limited to NCAA, school, conference, and BCS officials who are, for the most part, ignorant of the unintended consequences of their action (or lack of action as the case may be).

The situation is akin to the commercial raping of the South American rain forests by people who remain clueless as to its destabilizing impact on the earth's climate and its degradation of biodiversity. Unrestrained market forces are not only at work in the Amazon, but on 'beer-and-circus' campuses all across America. The tragedy is that those in leadership positions really think and act as if they have everything under control.

Finally, not lost on members of The Drake Group was the relevance to college sports reform of President Obama's scripture reference in his inaugural address—"The time has come to set aside childish things."

Bob Gilbert captured the context of "childish things" in a recent column:¹⁰

Watching on television Tuesday as Barack Obama became the first black and 44th president of the United States, I saw people of all races among the estimated 2 million people on the Washington mall, there to see history made and to be part of it.

The moment reinforced for me the insignificance of sports, the thing I've loved and written about for most of the past 40 years. But as Congressman Heath Shuler, a former Tennessee and NFL quarterback, said in a recent television interview: "Sports are a game; they're entertainment."

Sadly, the lives of millions of Americans revolve around cheering for their favorite college football and basketball teams while remaining oblivious to the long-term devastating impact that their addiction to professionalized college sports entertainment has on the academic integrity and competitiveness of our nation's institutions of higher learning. Unfortunately, many of these Americans are in a position of profound influence over priorities at these institutions. It's time to put their childish things aside.

Need more be said to evoke responsible bipartisan government action re: prioritizing academics over athletics at America's colleges and universities by imposing requirements for transparency, accountability, and oversight?

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NOTES

1. This piece was prompted by the rash of articles stemming from President Obama's remark during a pre-election TV interview that he would "throw his weight around" to bring about a football playoff.
2. Splitt, Frank G., "Ongoing College Sports Tax Scam Puts Madoff to Shame," *College Athletics Clips*, Dec. 23, 2008, [http://www.thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Ongoing .pdf](http://www.thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Ongoing.pdf)
3. Palaima, Tom and Tublitz, Nathan, "Barack Obama and the International Education Bowl," *Inside Higher Ed*, Jan. 9, 2009, <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2009/01/09/palaima>.
4. Sack, Allen, "Why worry about who's No. 1 when education is No. 2?," *SportsBusiness Journal*, Jan. 19, 2009, http://thedrakegroup.org/Sack_1-19-2009.pdf .
5. Heyser, John, "Michigan football coach Rodriguez's total compensation: \$6.6 million," *Ann Arbor News*, Jan. 22, 2009, http://www.mlive.com/wolverines/football/index.ssf/2009/01/michigan_football_coach_rodrig.html,
6. Jenkins, Sally, "Mr. President, The Ball is in Your Court," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 21, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/20/AR2009012003559.html>
7. Splitt, Frank G., "College Sports: National Priorities and Unplugged Loopholes," *College Athletics Clips*, Jan. 12, 2009, AFTERWORD, Jan. 18, 2009, http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_National_Priorities.pdf
8. _____, "Time for accountability in sports," *The National Catholic Reporter*, Nov. 14, 2008, http://www.thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Time_for_Accountability.pdf
9. Schakowsky, Janet, "Why Congress Should Review Policies that Facilitate the Growth and Corruption of Big-Time College Sports," *Congressional Record* , March 17, 2005, http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Essays.pdf.
10. Gilbert, Robert, Untitled Bg21, Column (409), Jan. 21, 2009. Columnist Bob Gilbert, former Associated Press writer, retired University of Tennessee news operations director and author of the Bob Neyland biography, can be reached at rwgilbert@charter.net