

College Sports Reform: Tempus Fugit

A COLLEGE ATHLETICS CLIPS GUEST COMMENTARY

ED. Is the NCAA "the best monopoly in America?" Our author makes a compelling case

by Frank G. Splitt

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ON SEPTEMBER 7, retired Motorola VP Dick Carsello, a classmate at Arthur J. Schmitt's Fournier Institute of Technology and my lifelong best friend, succumbed to sudden cardiac arrest while exercising at Motorola's Wellness Center in Plantation, Florida. Dick, a father of nine and a picture of health, had just turned 76. He was the last of my three closest friends and confidants – all died within the last two years, before or just after their 76th birthdays. I turn 76 on Nov. 2nd – so my tendency of late has been to do what I can while I can.

In a lengthily phone conversation the week before his death, Dick said he was concerned about the potential impact on my health of the frustration I was experiencing with my work on collegiate athletics – saying "no matter how right the cause and how well you make the case, you will never be able to overcome the big-money and political power behind college sports." I told him that I was coming to exactly the same conclusion, but was not yet ready to give up.

I shared the above with Brad Wolverton during the course of an interview for his Sept. 22, Chronicle article, "Congress Broadens Inquiry into College Sports, Focusing on Academic Problems and Lucrative Programs." The publication of the article buoyed my hopes a bit. The 'word' was getting out about the potential benefit of speaking truth to power via the House Ways & Means Committee. Nevertheless, I still have my doubts that these inquiries will ever lead to substantive congressional hearings no matter how well the staffers make the case. Why so?

The issues surrounding the NCAA cartel and its detrimental effect on America's educational system, its youth, and its future position on the world stage, never seem to rise above the clutter on the national radar screen. This, despite Stefan Fatis' and Skip Rozin's articles in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Indianapolis Star's* breakthrough series on college sports financials by Mark Alesia earlier this year, and the above average coverage by Pete Thamel and others at *The New York Times*.

It was also noteworthy that the Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education did not address the issue in its final report (see links to my related comments below). But not knowing the circumstances and the players (aside from Jim Duderstadt), who am I to say what went on behind closed doors? However, I did find a small bit of comfort in Commission Chair Miller's Sept. 20 letter to Spellings (see link below).

Today, the Congress has a long list of important, if not vital, unfinished legislative business -- and this will always be so. Still they had time to probe the H-P corporate

spy scandals, see "Probing the Pretexters: Congress Grills Hewlett-Packard Executives Over 'Sleaze' Investigative Tactics," [*The Wall Street Journal*, p B1, Sept. 29, 2006].

Needless to say, the Congress has no fear of H-P, but confronting the NCAA cartel appears to be quite a different story for reasons aptly described in the 1998 book, *College Athletes for Hire* by Allen Sack and Ellen Staurowsky. No doubt, many, if not most, members of Congress consider taking on the best monopoly in America to be political suicide -- no matter the long term harm to America resulting from the high-jacking of its education system by the college sports entertainment business. It is instructive to recall what Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1816: "*If a nation intends to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was and never will be.*"

We in America have a serious sports addiction problem. Apparently, we are willing to pay any price to feed our habit and satisfy an almost insatiable appetite for entertainment as well as gambling. Where is the outrage amongst the political leaders of our time?

Throughout my writing on collegiate athletics, I continue to be haunted by Thomas Paine's 230-year old words: "*Perhaps the sentiments contained in these pages are not yet sufficiently fashionable to procure them general favour; a long habit of not thinking a thing wrong, gives it a superficial appearance of being right, and raises at first a formidable outcry in defense of custom. But the tumult soon subsides. Time makes more converts than reason.*"

I still hope that, in the end, right will overcome might. But we do not have that much time, and, as I was constantly reminded by my high school Latin teacher, "Tempus fugit!"

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Frank Splitt's related comment re: Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education: <http://insidehighered.com/news/2006/09/27/spellings> and http://www.thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_College_Athletics.pdf

Commission Chair Miller's Sept. 20 letter to Spellings: [http://insidehighered.com/index.php/content/download/90292/1220299/file/personal%](http://insidehighered.com/index.php/content/download/90292/1220299/file/personal%20letter%20to%20spellings.pdf)