

## John Thelin Response

### Malcolm Moran

For more than three decades, in press boxes and along press rows, I have observed college coaches conducting their own scholarly inquiries of officials during basketball and football games. I have seen these inquiries take place in Washington, DC; Bloomington, IN; Storrs, CT; and Las Vegas, NV, among other places.

John Thelin of the University of Kentucky, in his analysis of the complex relationship between institutions and the athletic departments operating in them, has connected dots that link Paul Bryant, the Internal Revenue Service, the University of Michigan, and the KGB. As a resident of State College, PA, I have noticed that this is not the first suggestion of a link between Michigan and some secret, sinister force, but that is a conversation for another day.

The element to underline is the commitment to informed concern. I have been fortunate to work at newspapers that devoted considerable resources to examining the economics and ethics of college sports. More than two decades ago, *The New York Times* published an article about the decision by Homer Rice, then the athletic director at Georgia Tech. In an effort to keep pace economically, Rice created a marketing structure that would allow corporations to become title sponsors for individual football games.

Fast forward to the BCS National Championship football game played recently in New Orleans and the sight of corporate logos on the artificial field and throughout the Superdome. At the end of the third quarter, as fans from Louisiana State began to celebrate their victory over Ohio State, the LSU band began to play "Hold That Tiger." The fans began to roar during one of those sweet moments that separate the college game from the environment at a National Football League game.

The problem was that the sound of the band became overwhelmed by a soft drink commercial playing on the video boards.

After years of calls for presidential intervention leading to an unprecedented effort to take control of college athletics, it has become clear that college presidents cannot successfully go it alone. More and more frequently, former university presidents appear more capable of speaking freely about the problems within the system: spiraling coaching salaries, the competitive construction of new facilities, and the handling of legal issues involving athletes.

How is it that campuses that are so united on fourth and goal can become so fragmented when it comes to understanding the work that creates the spectacle?

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As a result of the intensifying competition between mainstream media and its emerging digital competitors, *sensational* can translate to *incorrect*. In the 24/7, 500-channel media universe with all-sports radio and bloggers everywhere, there is a dangerous acceptance of the notion that being wrong is part of some risk/reward ratio. High-profile coaching searches have become the demolition derby of sports journalism. The coverage of the legal issues surrounding the Duke men's lacrosse team, starting in the spring of 2006, revealed a trampling of this thing known as a presumption of innocence in an effort to get a story first.

The need for careful, fair, and accurate reporting has never been so great. We are seeing the evolution of a different kind of coaching fiefdom, fortified by bricks and mortar, the \$20 million practice facility.

The speed of coaching hires, designed to overcome risks of the marketplace, often takes place without regard for the need to examine a full, diverse pool of candidates.

Embarrassing behavior by coaches, including excessive public alcohol use plus personal indiscretions, legal and otherwise, can be overlooked when a candidate pool is assembled.

I do contest one of John's observations, the notion that professors have ceased to know and care. The athletic industry has become so specialized, right down to its language, that keeping track of its daily evolution has become a full-time job. The late Mike Wadsworth, the former athletic director at Notre Dame and one of the most respected administrators in the nation, said his move into athletic administration forced him to unlearn much of what he had learned in his legal training.

The fact is that many of us do care. We care about the credibility of the enterprise. We care about the students whose effort makes these spectacles possible. We also care about their futures. When I watch replays of famous old games, I cannot help but wonder, where are these people? We care about the value of their experience and their preparation for what is to come when there are no more games to play.

I defer to Dr. Lawrence, and her Dream Team of researchers at the University of Michigan, to describe the carefully examined attitudes of faculty members across the country.