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Desire for pro sports doesn't compare to love of college game

By Hal L. Hammons
Sports Writer

Once upon a time, a long time ago, I was carefully nurturing a love affair with a lady named Professional Sports.

Viewpoint

I finally broke it off when I found out more about her older sister, College. And since then I have started to see a lot of problems with Pro that I preferred to overlook before.

Pro and I still get along pretty well. I go and visit on occasion, and I always have fun with her. But there's no spark there anymore.

I really decided it was over this fall during football season. Sometimes it seemed the only thing Pro could think or talk about was money. If it wasn't a player holding out for a bigger contract, it was a coach breaking a multi-year contract to depart for greener pastures.

Plus, I finally got fed up with her ego. I constantly was barraged with players who thought they should have been recognized by more wire services for their on-the-field exploits. And so many of them became personalities instead of athletes because of their off-the-field exploits. They would make idiots out of themselves publicly and then write books that tried to make idiots out of others as well.

And Pro is so violence-oriented. She really looks to hurt people sometimes, especially the "big-contract types." And all in the name of friendly competition.

Pro has a drug problem, too. Everyone has known for a long time that she messed around with the stuff some, but it is more serious than people first thought. And it really has become common knowledge recently that she is no longer in control of herself.

Actually, she seems to take drugs more often in the winter and spring during basketball season. Strangely, that is the time of year when organizations like the NBA try hardest to straighten her out.

I guess she has concern for neither her own physical and moral well-being, nor her influence on others. And no matter what I and many others say to warn people, she remains a role model, particularly for children.

Literally thousands of kids in every state in the country want nothing more than to spend their lives with her. And that's scary. Because a few of them will get their wish, and unless they have a lot of inner strength, Pro could wreck the kids' lives.

It's her lifestyle, really. She came upon a lot of money over the years, and she has yet to find out how to stay in control of it.

She feels obligated to feel good all

of the time. She always has to enjoy herself. And as we all know, life is not prepared to accommodate her in that.

So drugs look pretty good to her. And as the old economics proverb goes, "demand creates its own supply." She never has run short of suppliers, and she never will. No matter what governmental, theological or personal war on drugs is waged, the simple fact of the matter remains: as long as drugs are popular, there will be drugs. Period.

All the time I was moping about Pro's lamentable condition, I was overlooking a truly fantastic alternative in College. After all, when one of two girls is more popular, more showy than the other, it's easy to get caught up in the glamour and miss the inner character.

And I'm not trying to pretend College doesn't ever slip up. She does. In fact, she has many of her sister's problems. Despite being older than her sister, she does look up to Pro and follow her example a great deal.

She can get a bit money-oriented at times. I mean, money gets hold of all of us once in a while. And she does have more than her share of ego, especially since non-conformism has become the trend with Pro.

And yes, she does dabble with drugs.

But College's problems are probably correctable if enough of the right people keep their eyes on her. She is human, and humans make mistakes. With proper measures, however, her slip-ups could be kept to a minimum. I'm afraid Pro may be beyond the point of no return.

Friends are really the key, aren't they? A support group has a direct impact on people, for good or ill. Pro's friends tend to be the "love-em-and-leave-em" type. When she's up, they are right beside her, but when Pro is in a tough situation, they are the first to start casting stones.

Fortunately, College has a group of supporters that is always loyal. We aren't happy when she's down, of course, but it's not like she is a banana peel that is cast aside after the good part is gone. We love her "for better or for worse," as the saying goes.

The biggest difference, I suppose, is that College still knows how to have fun. Somehow Pro has lost that. Pro is so concerned with her bankroll and her image that nothing else matters.

College, for the most part, still does what she does because it's what she loves to do. And if she can make money with it later in life, that's okay, too.

I, personally, like to have fun. And I have fun with College. Let's hope it stays that way.

UNLV returns to No. 1 spot in AP poll after short hiatus

(AP) — Nevada-Las Vegas, which had been No. 1 for six weeks earlier in the season, returned to the top of the Associated Press' college basketball poll Monday after a two-week hiatus.

The Runnin' Rebels, 21-1, received 48 first-place votes and 1,243 points from the nationwide panel of sportswriters and broadcasters, easily outdistancing Indiana, which jumped from fourth to second with 10 first-place votes and 1,181 points.

North Carolina, which had returned to the No. 1 spot for one week, was knocked from the perch after suffering a 60-58 defeat at Notre Dame.

The Tar Heels, 18-2, received four first-place votes and 1,148 points and will play the next two weeks without senior scoring leader Kenny Smith, who underwent arthroscopic knee surgery last week-end. Smith scored a career-high 41 points in his last game before the surgery, a 108-99 victory over then-No. 14 Clemson last Wednesday.

Nevada-Las Vegas broke the 100-point mark in each of its three victories last week. The Runnin' Rebels won two Pacific Coast Athletic Association games, 106-58 over Fresno State and 114-103 over Cal-Irvine, before beating then-No. 18 Auburn on the road 104-85.

Indiana, 17-2, registered two Big Ten Conference victories last week. The Hoosiers beat then-No. 12 Illinois 69-66 and then-No. 4 Purdue 88-77.

Iowa, the only team other than Nevada-Las Vegas and North Carolina to be ranked No. 1 this season, fell from second to fourth with 999 points and one first-place vote.

DePaul, the only Division I team besides Nevada-Las Vegas to have just one loss, jumped from eighth to fifth with 935 points, six more than Temple, which moved one spot from last week.

Purdue, Oklahoma, Alabama and Georgetown completed the Top 10. Syracuse, 17-3, leads the Second Ten with 556 points followed by Clemson, Pittsburgh, Illinois, Texas Christian, Duke, Providence, Kansas, St. John's and Auburn.

Last week's Second Ten was Georgetown, Illinois, Duke, Clemson, St. John's, Texas Christian, Pittsburgh, Auburn, Florida and Kansas.

The caller said he would be leaving Melbourne for Perth later today. Perth police and the Special America's Cup Police Division in Fremantle were notified of the threat and were investigating, the police spokesman said.

A spokesman for the America's Cup Police Division, Inspector Neville Thorpe, said extra security had been placed around the Stars & Stripes skipper as a precaution, and that Conner had been told of the threat.

The threat on Conner's life followed a hoax Monday when a man telephoned a Sydney television station to say that a bomb had been placed aboard Kookaburra.

Caller threatens to shoot Skipper of Stars & Stripes

PERTH, Australia (AP) — An Australian television station received a call from an anonymous man who threatened to shoot America's Cup skipper Dennis Conner, a police spokesman said.

The caller, believed to be an Australian man in his early 20s, telephoned the Melbourne studios of Channel 10 Tuesday morning, claiming that Conner, the 44-year-old helmsman of the San Diego's Stars & Stripes, would be shot rather than be allowed to remove the America's Cup from Australia.

Stars & Stripes currently holds a 3-0 lead over Australian defender Kookaburra III and needs only one more victory in the best-of-seven series to regain the Cup.

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THE MORNING AFTER (R) 7:35 9:45

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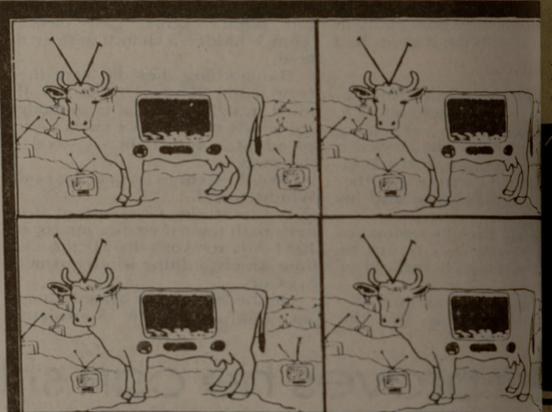
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