

VIEW From The Cheap Seats

By Mark Savoie

For those of you who don't watch Soccer Saturday on TSN on Saturday mornings, the big controversy in English football these days is the attack by Manchester United's Eric Cantona upon a fan whilst he (Cantona) was leaving the pitch after receiving a red card. Apparently, the fan was verbally abusing Cantona, and Cantona—who is notable for having a very short fuse—charged into the stands and attempted some sort of karate/kung fu kick at the fan. Reaction in England to Cantona after this incident has been almost universally hostile. He has been suspended for the rest of the season, and several people have proposed that he be given a lifetime ban.

While I do not necessarily condone Cantona's actions, I also feel that the English football world has seriously overreacted. In fact, I don't think that Cantona should have even been suspended. As far as I am concerned, the football establishment should never have gotten involved. Player assaults on other players are within the league's jurisdiction; player assaults on league officials are within the league's jurisdiction; but player assaults on spectators should fall under the court's jurisdiction. That is where this and all similar matters should be tried, and in many cases I am sure that you will find that the player's attack was indeed justified.

Over the last few years I have been an infrequent spectator of UNB Varsity Reds hockey games. In most of these games I have been particularly rabid in my support of the team, waving my UNB scarf and expounding upon the deficiencies of the opposing team and the officiating crew. At the Acadia game I just about popped a vein going berserk over the officiating and UNB's tremendous comeback. All in all, I had a great time, as did the Jones House boys who were doing much the same in the seats directly in front of me.

But what about the referee? True, it has become a maxim that the fans are allowed to jeer at the officials and the players, but what happens when they cross the line? And who draws that line? The AUC has a policy where all patrons using profanity will be escorted from the premises. However, I did not see a cordon of ushers rushing to evict the Jones House boys after their singing loud en masse singing chant of "Who's your father? Who's your father? You're a bastard referee!" (Perhaps they were too busy keeping people from putting their feet on the backs of the seats.) To my mind, any usher who ejected a fan for the occasional 'bastard,' 'cocksucker,' or 'fuck' would be exercising poor judgement. Only if the fan starts doing so in an obviously abusive manner should s/he be ejected. In other words, once they cross the line.

This does not, however, answer the question of where the line should be drawn. All it does is point out the inadequacy of an artificially created line such as the banning of profanity. Plus, there are lots of ways to be extremely offensive without using profanity. A fan could sit behind a team's bench and constantly insult one of the players. This has happened, and it is usually not commented upon. But what about a fan who constantly insults a black player by using racist epithets? This has happened at the Aitken Centre. A number of years ago a black player on the Maine Mariners was assaulted in this manner. The players on the Mariners approached the Fredericton City Police Officer working at the game and asked that the 'fan' be ejected, but were rebuffed. I know about this because the officer jokingly recounted this episode in the press room, laughing at the ludicrousness of such a request. I was appalled—clearly this fan had crossed the line—but as a seventeen year old kid new to the business I kept my mouth shut, . . . as did all the other reporters, except for those who agreed with the officer.

What would you do if a fan started harassing you in an obviously racist manner and the authorities refused to act? What could you do? You could sit there and try to ignore the taunts, or you could take retaliatory action. I, for me, would not respond by insulting the fan in a similar manner. I would, seriously consider going into the stands and kicking the living crap out of my tormentor. Had the black player on the Maine Mariners done this I would have applauded.

In this scenario, I leave it up to the courts to draw the line on a case by case basis. That way the players will not be encouraged to attack every fan who yells "You suck!" at him, since this does not cross the line, but it will also force the fans into some sort of accountability. To my mind, any fan who crosses the line probably deserves to get the crap kicked out of him/her, and no player should be penalised for obliging that fan.

In the Eric Cantona case, I think the courts should make the decision whether he should be punished. If no charges are pressed, or if Cantona is found not guilty, then the league should take no action against him. Only if the courts find that Cantona was not tormented to too great an extent should Eric Cantona receive a suspension from the league.

Engineers go Kamikaze

by Adam MacMillan
Bruns Sports

Over 200 spectators watched as seven entries participated in this year's Kamikaze Downhill Ski-Chair Race Friday afternoon. Winning this year's solo division was Eric Leblanc while EUS President Jules Michaud and Duane Beaton won the team division and placed first overall.

The object was to race in a sled of their own design that consisted of a sitting device attached to a sliding device. The event was staged as part of last week's Engineering weekend and was described as "being similar to the Downhill Cart race except on snow" by one participant.

Finishing in second place in the solo division was Bill Lamey while the award for best wipeout was given to the team Fast

Food, driven by Steve Sargeant, Dave Flook, Andrew Van Wart and Deryl Armstrong. Their race ended when the picnic table they were driving flipped over and threw the team off leaving them to finish the race by rolling down the hill..



Photo Kent Rainville

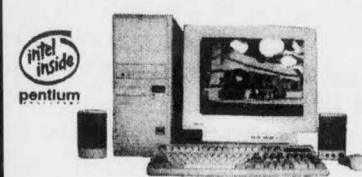
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