

Hockey Bears are done for the first half. p. 13

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Dean Bennett

Hypocrisy

As the 1986 Grey Cup recedes into memory (Yeah, Cats!), it's now time to reflect back on one aspect of this year's playoffs that I found particularly disenchanted.

After the poor attendance showing at the Calgary-Edmonton semi-final, a hue and cry rang about the city that Edmonton fans were lazy and had no civic pride. One local TV station even gave away "I'm not a wimp" t-shirts to supporting fans. This whole scenario represents to me the underlying hypocrisy of professional sports.

If you hear about a new film that's come to town — a film that's been panned by critics and friends alike — you probably won't go see it because it's a bad film; and you don't feel guilty because a bad product should not be purchased. That's good business. The same applies to stage plays, consumer goods, anything.

In sports, however, it's different. Where else can a company like the CFL not fare well in the marketplace, but still be able to throw the guilt back on the consumer?

Maybe at one time sports could draw on fan allegiance as a justifiable form of financial support, but not anymore. Pro sports has made it perfectly clear in the last decade or so that it is, first and foremost, a business. For example, the introduction of free agency allowed baseball players to ply their trade for bigger bucks in distant cities. Al Davis apologized profusely to the good fans of Oakland, but still took his Raiders south to the land of milk and money. CFL players owe no allegiance to the league, jumping to the NFL if a better offer presents itself. And who can blame them? They're earning the most amount they can in the limited time available. However, for these leagues to turn around and expect blind faith from the fans is ludicrous!

Okay, if it's a business, it's a business. I paid my dough, give me a show. And if I don't like it, I'm not coming back.

One particular moment will forever exemplify this hypocrisy to me. It happened at an Oilers game last year. The Oilers came out, floated for three periods and ended up losing badly to an inferior Pittsburgh Penguin team. So when Gretzky came out as a game star, he was booed. I was there. We weren't booing Gretzky; we were booing the one representative of a hockey club that didn't try.

But after the game, print and electronic media alike were all over the fans for booing Gretzky, and the Oilers in general, after all the good times the team had brought them. And then, if you can believe it, fans were phoning sports talk-in shows and apologizing. Apologizing! Here's a fan who paid \$20 plus to go watch Paul Coffey go through the motions and now he's phoning in to apologize. What a scam!

For fans like that, don't sell them a "I'm not a wimp" t-shirt, sell them a "I'm a naive sucker" shirt. They're more a sign of the times.

Catch-22 for CIAU

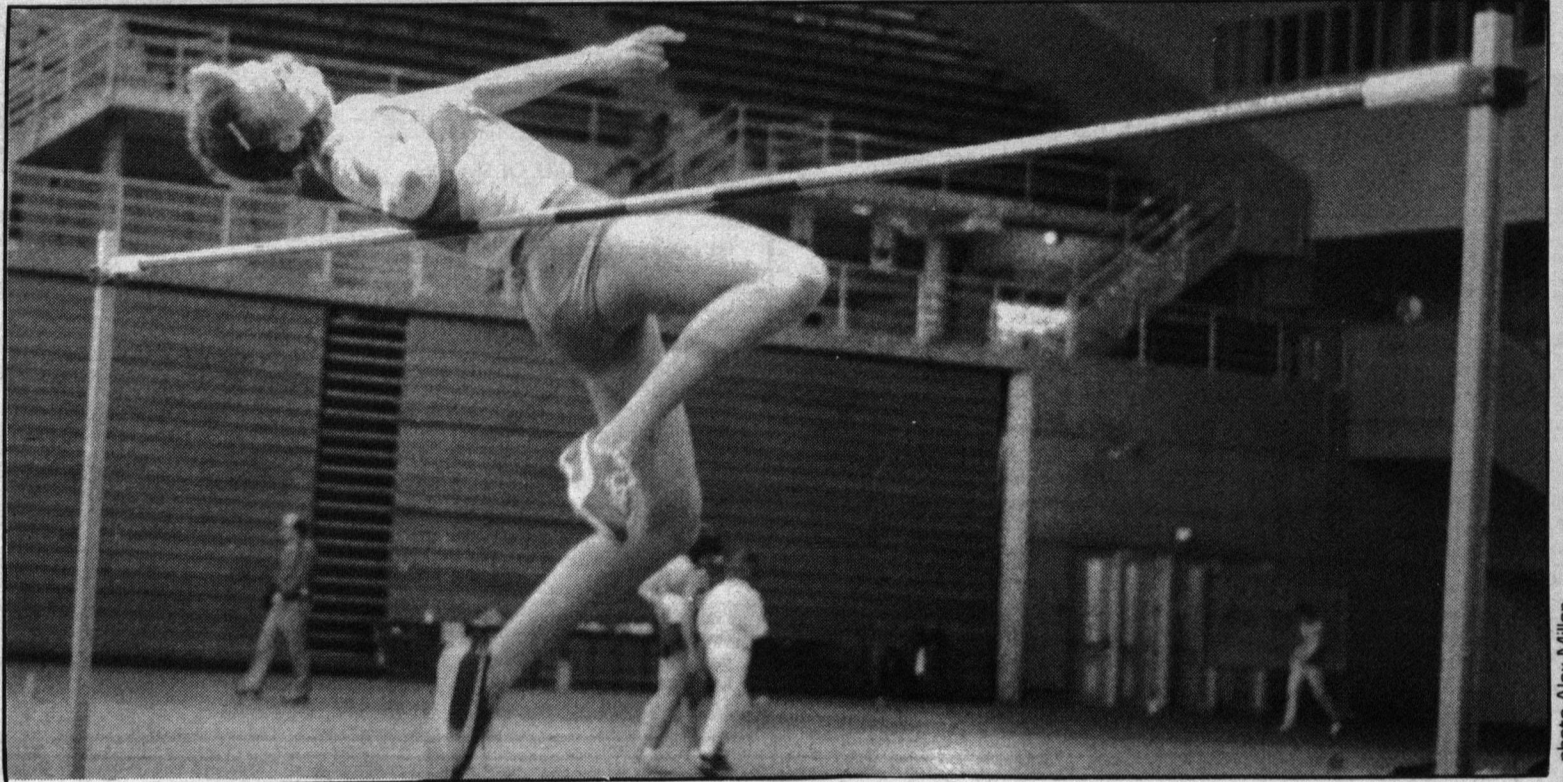


photo Alex Miller

Empty stands are a common sight at CIAU sports events. "We need a change in attitude."

by Philip Preville

The Golden Bears Invitational Basketball Tournament had an attendance of approximately 2800 fans over three nights. Those are very encouraging numbers, but it is unlikely that they will stay that way, and therein lies a problem. University Athletics is an expensive proposition, and it needs to pay for itself as much as possible.

Many people feel that exposure is the key; more University sports in the media will generate the interest that will make the CIAU a self-supporting organization.

The Sports Network offers the most comprehensive CIAU coverage in the country, and one can wonder if it isn't merely a measure of meeting Canadian content requirements. TSN airs a weekly game package (either football, basketball, or hockey) and also Canadian College Magazine, a weekly wrap-up of CIAU events. Peter Watts hosts this show, and also participates in weekly game broadcasts. He sees a lot of CIAU sports before the year is up.

"The numbers we had for football were a little better this year," said Watts, describing crowds of 6,000 people for the Shrine Bowl games in Edmonton and Calgary. 10,000 people when York played at the University of Toronto, and 18,000 for the Carleton/Ottawa football game at Lansdowne Park in Ottawa. He also mentioned the 13,000-strong crowds at Western's and Queen's Homecomings (not televised).

So why don't we see and hear more about CIAU sports?

"There is a good reason why

network television doesn't do a game-of-the-week package," Watts said. "It costs just as much for CTV to do a CIAU game as it does for a CFL game. The common belief is that poor crowds in the stands equals boring coverage, no matter how good the product is. And there is no guarantee of good or even decent crowds.

"The viewership just wouldn't be there, so neither would the advertising. CTV probably does the Vanier Cup for Canadian content purposes, even though it sells reasonably well."

Doesn't all this leave the CIAU in a Catch-22 situation? Increased media would escalate fan attention, but media won't move in further until the crowds show up.

Watts had no problem solving that one. "The role of the media is to inform, not to sell tickets," he said. "Selling the college game begins on the college campus."

Jack Donohue, coach of the Canadian National basketball team and TSN's basketball analyst, agrees. "What's needed is a change in attitude towards university athletics in Canada," says Donohue, "and it's not just the fans. It starts higher up."

Donohue says administration must realize the importance of athletics and encourage its development. He uses the Universities of Alberta and Calgary as examples. "Look at the jobs Don Horwood (Alberta) and Gary Howard (Calgary) have done. In only a couple of years, both have put together first-class programs for basketball. They've been getting lots of support. My understanding is that this is one of the few places where the President of a university will attend

an athletic function."

Donohue was referring to Dr. Myer Horowitz' appearances at games and at a breakfast for the athletes and the media.

Donohue discussed Bishop's University as another example. Bishop's, with a total enrolment of 1,200, fielded a football team that was a Vanier Cup contender. Their basketball team participated in the Bears' Tournament, and although they finished last, the team was tough, disciplined, and quick.

"I get great support from the Dean and the Athletic Director," says Bishop's basketball coach Ed Pomykala. "The program is advancing in leaps and bounds every year. We'll be a force in our conference this year."

"Bishop's is a great example of what can be done," says Donohue, "but the attitude needs to be more universal."

The attitude also has to find its way down among the students. Dale Schulha is the Director of Marketing and Public Relations for the Department of Athletics at the University of Alberta. He has found the riddle of the fans impossible to solve without the use of alcohol.

"We've been told that if we go back to the 'Cheer for Beer' idea, the kids will crawl out of the woodwork," says Schulha. "But we decided not to continue that on philosophical grounds. We may re-evaluate that position if this persists."

"We've tried everything. We've given away tuitions, a trip to the Grey Cup, and we've had a few single-game sponsorships as well. The kids still don't come."

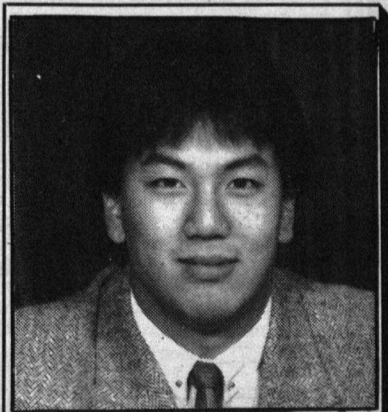
Watts offers a reason why. "There

is an incredible number of people involved in intramurals and the like, on this campus and on other campuses. People today are do-ers, not watchers. It takes a heck of a lot to pull them away from whatever it is they're doing and go sit on their hands and watch somebody else do something."

Schulha may be finding that out the hard way. "We want to do a big market survey, on and off campus," he says. "But that involves a lot of money. It won't happen for a while."

Meanwhile, in campus gymnasiums, arenas, and stadiums across Canada, excellent young talent is being showcased and exciting games are being played.

No one is watching. According to Dale Schulha's statistics, they're busy somewhere else, drinking beer.



The Wak'er tops 'em all

Bears right winger Stacey Wakabayashi has been chosen as the Canada West Player of the Week for the week ending November 30th.

In Alberta's two game sweep over the University of Regina last weekend, Wakabayashi scored three goals and four assists, including the game winner in the Golden Bears' 10-2 drubbing of the Cougars Friday night.

The Kamloops, B.C. native is now tied for fifth place among CWUAA scorers with 12 goals and 15 assists for 27 points.

The 5'8", 180 lbs., Special Education student is in his third year as a Golden Bear.

Bears pass midterms

by Mark Spector

The Bears have wrapped up the first half of the Canada West season and they find themselves in a tie for third place with the Saskatchewan Huskies. Both teams have 16 points... Considering the troubles that coach Clare Drake has had to deal with, a record of 8-6 can't be considered that bad. Especially in the CWUAA, the toughest conference in the CIAU. Manitoba, a

team that has blossomed into a favourite along with Calgary to win the league this year, has 21 points (10-3-1) and is just one point behind Calgary (11-3)... Of course, if you look at the CIAU Top Ten rankings for hockey, it seems hard to swallow that Alberta plays in the best league in Canada, but as in every other university sport, the eastern bias lives and breathes in these rankings too... Consider that the

fourth place team in Canada West won the nationals last year. Also consider that the Calgary Dinosaurs would have been there too, but after two extremely physical series with Saskatchewan and Manitoba, they lost in Trois Rivières to a finesse-orientated UQTR. The Patriotes, in turn, were handled methodically by an Alberta squad

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