

Sports a privilege, not a right

by Brian Lennox

The past few days I have wondered what I was going to write for my last article. The CIAU completed all their tournaments two weeks ago and I leave the professional sports for those who make their living writing about them. The recent NCAA basketball tournament, though, gave me an idea for a final reflective column.

For those of you who follow the NCAA basketball tournament, there has been a remarkable story concerning Loyola Marymount University. On March 4, their star centre, Hank Gathers, collapsed on the basketball court from heart failure. Since that game, LMU has had the gut wrenching experience of having a friend and teammate die and then playing in the NCAA tournament and being the focus of the media.

Last Sunday their dreams of a national championship ended when the UNLV Runnin' Rebels beat them to advance to the NCAA's final four. The LMU players were not disappointed. On the contrary, they were happy to make it as far in the tournament as they did. They had dedicated the rest of the season to Gathers.

Without being trite, the experiences of that team should teach some valuable lessons, not just to sports fans but to everyone.

We too often forget how fragile an athletic career can be, never mind a human life. But Gathers's death surely demonstrates just how fragile we really are. Far too many athletes, no matter what the level, never consider that their

athletic endeavours can end at any time. One injury is all it takes for an athlete to be unable to participate in any sport.

In our competitive society we really do not appreciate how fortunate we are to play a sport. We forget that it is a privilege, not a right and it is something that can be taken away all too quickly.

The story of LMU will, hopefully, be remembered for some time. The team developed a bond with one another that no other team has. Unfortunately, it was their teammate's death that created this situation. What it teaches us is how valuable friendships can develop between teammates and competitors.

LMU players have constantly reiterated that their season was not about winning or losing but trying their best and letting the final outcome take care of itself. Again, at many different levels in sport this theme is frequently spoken of but rarely followed.

If you have played on a team before, you know that, long after a season is over, people don't recall which person or team won or lost. It is the friendships that develop that are far more important.

Finally, the death of Gathers struck people in many ways. Per-

sonally, I felt remorse because a friend who I had played basketball with in my hometown also died of a heart attack two days later. My first reaction was sadness, but I soon realized there is another message.

At university, we are in many ways attempting to secure our future. University is competitive but that merely reflects society, just as sports does. However, there is much to be said for living each day to its fullest. There is no question one must prepare for the future and have long range goals. But to sacrifice spontaneity in our lives, especially in those activities we enjoy, is a mistake.

Everyone has heard the phrase, you only have one life. It is an often used cliché but it is one well worth remembering. University only lasts a few years. To miss out on the overall experience is a shame. Similarly, athletics is an aspect of our lives that can last for a short period of time. Enjoy it.

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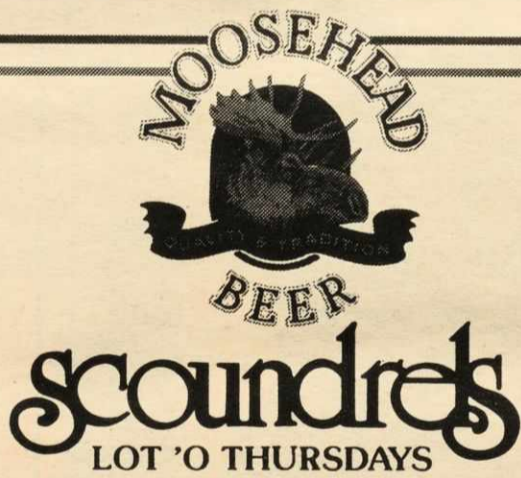
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