

# Arsht Ethics Debates at Sportsfest 2011

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## Case Packet

UNIVERSITY  
OF MIAMI  
ETHICS PROGRAMS

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**Arsht  
Ethics Initiatives**

## Case One: Rancid Oranges

The Orange Bowl had its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary game in 2009. College bowl games are an opportunity for football teams to collect revenues, recruit, and win prestigious trophies. Many football fans have disdain for the college bowl system because the bowl system unfairly excludes schools from the Non-Automatically Qualifying (non-AQ) Conferences.

Teams that are not able to compete at bowls lose out on the opportunity to reap the benefits that participating teams enjoy. Aside from benefiting from sizeable revenues and valuable recruiting opportunities, teams that compete at bowls are also able to schedule more practices than non-competing teams. Some argue that system benefits an exclusive association of schools that deliberately construct guidelines to prohibit other schools from getting a piece of the pie.

While some suggest that perhaps college teams should participate in a playoff system rather than a bowl system, many believe a playoff system would never work.<sup>1</sup> The bowl system limits the number of games by only allowing teams with six wins against Division 1A schools to advance to a bowl. Sixty-four teams were able to compete last year. A playoff system would undoubtedly last far longer. University presidents are reluctant to give up their academic goals for their athletes by allowing a longer football season.

The TCU Horned Frogs had a perfect 13-0 season last year. The team is finally moving to the Big East conference after many years in the mid-majors. Many attribute the Big East's decision to welcome TCU to the fact that TCU is near a major media market. Although college football is a commercial enterprise, many expect the system to fairly reward the most capable teams.

The Orange Bowl Committee recently bought cruise tickets for South Florida's athletic directors and their spouses.<sup>2</sup> While on the cruise, this group was lavished with more gifts from the Committee. Bowl Committees across the country are making similar gifts. There are those who argue that the Bowl system is inherently corrupt.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/10/sports/football/10playoff.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/01/05/2002743/orange-bowl-perks-flagged-with.html>

## **Case Two: Footing the Bill for Football**

Nick Saban, the head coach at the University of Alabama, was paid over \$6 million last year<sup>1</sup>. The average salary of NCAA college basketball coaches (coaching teams that reached the 2009 NCAA tournament) was \$1.3 million<sup>2</sup>. College athletic coaches are earning very high salaries even as colleges are struggling to pay the bills. Public and private universities across the country are raising tuition rates and reducing scholarship awards. Some universities are freezing faculty salaries in an effort to weather the recession.

Often salary decisions are made by a very small group of administrators at universities. Perhaps if the faculty and the student body were to decide coaches' salaries democratically, the coaches would be paid less than they are today. On the other hand, having a successful athletic program is of the utmost importance to many faculty, students, and alumni. There is even a growing consensus among officials at the NCAA that the current system of wooing coaches is unsustainable.

Many consider college athletic programs to be a profitable business for universities. On the other hand, only six of the Division I programs consistently earned profits the past five years<sup>3</sup>. Perhaps the universities stand to gain by investing their money in other ventures.

College athletic coaches draw high salaries because athletic programs are willing to pay top dollar in order to sign the coaches with the most sterling reputations. One could argue that the market determines what salaries coaches rightfully deserve. Coaching a team to a championship often takes tremendous expertise and effort.

On the other hand, perhaps this market is artificial. Salaries appear to many observers to be absolutely unreasonable. Universities condemn themselves to scraping together enough funds to support money losing athletic programs. Although Title IX is often cited to explain why college athletic programs are not profitable, high coaches salaries certainly cannot help universities' bottom line.

The University of Miami recently fired Hurricanes head coach Randy Shannon. Although many observers supported the decision to fire Shannon, others did not believe that it was not worth the \$1.5 million to buy out Shannon's contract<sup>4</sup>. Many of the players on the team asserted that Shannon was not responsible for their lackluster performance. Nevertheless, the University opted to take a gamble and bring on Al Golden.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tidesports.com/article/20101209/NEWS/101209646>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.usatoday.com/sports/college/mensbasketball/2010-coaches-salary-database.htm>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.onlineathens.com/stories/011310/foo\\_547411225.shtml](http://www.onlineathens.com/stories/011310/foo_547411225.shtml)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.miamiherald.com/2010/11/28/1946337/shannons-status-is-unknown.html>

### **Case Three: From Raiders to ‘Roiders**

An enterprising entrepreneur had a grand slam idea. He was trying to come up with an idea for an exciting new format for professional wrestling. Suddenly it occurred to him that he could sell tickets to battles between superhuman giants. Then it dawned on him that there was no reason to contain his idea to just professional wrestling. He could create a new league exclusively for steroid users.

Athletic associations impose strict bans on steroid use<sup>1</sup>. They are a threat to human health and they make the competition unfair<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, if there was a league where all of the athletes had equal access to steroids, perhaps this league would be more fair than a league where athletes surreptitiously use steroids. At the very least all of the steroid use would be out in the open.

The entrepreneur reasoned to skeptics, “a team sport is just another form of entertainment. Models and actors take a whole array of substances to impress audiences. Why prevent athletes from taking anabolic steroids?” He established a system of guidelines. The athletes must freely consent to taking steroids. Doctors would regularly inspect the athletes to ensure that the prolonged steroid abuse did not result in serious health complications. Minor health problems are often the cost of doing business when playing a sport. All athletes expose themselves to a certain amount of danger.

Nevertheless, critics continued to lambast the entrepreneur’s idea. They argued that the potential health complications would be unacceptable. They also asserted that such a league would set a bad example for young impressionable fans. The potential for an athlete getting their hands on better steroids than their competitors ensured that the possibility for unfair competition remained.

The entrepreneur countered that all of those problems already existed in the status quo. The new steroid league would only lead to increased openness and to a more entertaining game. The entrepreneur argued, “Professional athletic leagues are commercial enterprises. Isn’t the point of businesses to give the customers what they want? Let the free market decide whether it accepts the idea of a steroid league!”

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<sup>1</sup> <http://espn.go.com/special/s/drugsandsports/steroids.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.drugabuse.gov/infofacts/steroids.html>

## **Case Four: Hailing Mary to the Extreme**

Quarterback Brett Favre, a twenty-year veteran of the NFL, had one of the longest quarterback careers in the league. He holds many records including winning the AP's Most Valuable Player Award three consecutive times. He officially retired just a few weeks ago<sup>1</sup>.

His legacy is in jeopardy because of allegations of sexual harassment. He allegedly sent inappropriate pictures (nude below the waist) via cell phone to Jen Sterger, a sports reporter.<sup>2</sup> Other women have also alleged that Favre sent them inappropriate sexts. The NFL fined Favre \$50,000 for not complying with their investigation into the matter.<sup>3</sup>

The NFL found that Brett Favre did not violate their personal conduct policy. Nevertheless, as these investigations were not open to the public, we cannot be certain that the allegations were not true. The NFL clearly defines the professional responsibilities of its members. Players who cannot conduct themselves in a manner befitting the NFL are supposed to be suspended or fired.

Many argue that celebrities have ethical responsibilities that surpass professional rules and regulations. Misconduct, such as sexual harassment, might lead impressionable young fans to mimic their role models. Others counter that athletes do not surrender any rights when they enter the public spotlight.

The widespread publicity of unethical acts might desensitize fans to their sinister nature. Conversely, publicizing the consequences that befall those who do not comport themselves in an ethical manner might discourage members of society from committing immoral acts.

One could argue that as a celebrity's prominence grows, they ought to be held to a higher standard. Nevertheless, does one have to sacrifice freedom in exchange for popularity?

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<sup>1</sup> [http://voices.washingtonpost.com/early-lead/2011/01/report\\_brett\\_favre\\_submits\\_ret.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/early-lead/2011/01/report_brett_favre_submits_ret.html)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083\\_162-20019237-504083.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083_162-20019237-504083.html)

## Case Five: BASE-ically, Suicidal

BASE Jumping is an activity that involves leaping off high structures with only a parachute on the jumper's back. BASE stands for buildings, antennas, spans (bridges), and earth (cliffs).<sup>1</sup> BASE Jumping is one of the most dangerous sports. It is even more dangerous than skydiving. While James Bond always seems to survive the jump in Bond movies, many BASE Jumpers are not as lucky. One study from 2002 found that one in sixty BASE Jumpers fell to their deaths<sup>2</sup>.

Skydivers often fall at much higher speeds than BASE Jumpers. This allows them greater control over their aerodynamics. BASE Jumpers tend to tumble as they fall, making it more difficult to control their descent. During this tumbling phase, the chances of a parachute malfunction exponentially increase. Skydivers have a certain period of time to level themselves before deploying their parachutes. Jumping from lower altitudes affords BASE Jumpers less time to deploy their parachutes. BASE Jumpers also fall perilously close to the platforms that they leapt off.

The BASE Jumping website reminds jumpers that they are the ones that are ultimately responsible for their survival.<sup>3</sup> Aren't we all ultimately responsible for our own survival? Nevertheless, perhaps some activities are a little too dangerous. We can certainly discourage individuals from taking certain risks. The BASE Jumping community does not share this aversion to risk. At an event where a veteran jumper died, jumpers continued to leap off the New River Gorge Bridge.<sup>4</sup>

Our society has placed legal bans on speeding, drinking while driving and mandated the use of seatbelts and bicycle helmets; nevertheless, jumping off high structures is legal and unregulated in many places.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://adventure.howstuffworks.com/outdoor-activities/urban-sports/base-jumping.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://bjssportmed.com/content/42/6/431.abstract>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.basejumper.com/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-10-21-wv-jump\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-10-21-wv-jump_x.htm)

## Case Six: Betting on Sports

Gambling is often considered just another form of entertainment. Many Americans bet on sports illegally. Some wonder why laws prohibit this specific form of gambling. While gambling is legal at certain institutions, betting on sports is prohibited at many legal casinos. Americans turn to gambling websites that are based outside of the United States<sup>1</sup>.

Many states have outlawed sports betting, but do have official state lotteries. Some argue that gambling is gambling, and that the position of the federal and many state governments is hypocritical<sup>2</sup>. Others counter that the stakes in these types of bets are much higher. Illegal sports betting often takes place outside of brick and mortar establishments where it might be monitored. Officials are also concerned that high-stakes betting might affect the outcome of games. Accusations about athletes deliberately throwing games were made when betting on sports was legal.

Gambling addiction hotlines are expecting a high volume of callers before the Super Bowl. Gamblers have the potential to lose their entire life savings on a single foolish bet. The poor may be especially vulnerable to the false promise of victory. Gambling losses might threaten the stability of families. Often times, betting decisions are not made as a family. The gambler unilaterally makes a wager.

On the other hand, in a free market we expect to do what we want with our money. Regulations on free market practices are often considered an unethical constriction on individual autonomy. Proponents of sports betting contend that it can be regulated and taxed. Opponents argue that no amount of regulation can effectively protect desperate gamblers.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.usatoday.com/sports/2003-08-21-online-betting\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/sports/2003-08-21-online-betting_x.htm)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.openmarket.org/2011/01/19/stossel-and-oreilly-on-sports-betting/>