

Spotlight on Huskers covers Rutgers' black eye

By Larry Pritchett

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The college basketball season is over. The three tournaments that close out the season are the NCAA Men's and Women's tournament, the NIT, and the CBI crowned Louisville, UConn, Baylor and Santa Clara as champions.

During the tournaments this year there were a few interesting stories to pop up that sometimes showed the less appealing side of college athletics, but also why we find college sports appealing.

The ugly side of things didn't really have college athletes in trouble, but another coach. If you were to ask about any college basketball fan who was a coach that used fear as a factor in their coaching methods and maybe was borderline abusive at times I would bet that the name Bob Knight would surface in a lot of answers. It would be a proper response.

I liked Bob Knight's approach to basketball. His philosophy was fundamentally sound and he was very successful. He was helpful to high school coaches.

On a couple of occasions when he was at Indiana, I called and he actually answered the phone. He was always helpful and polite. Did he talk to me very long, no, but he always got me to an assistant or graduate assistant that would help me with my questions. His philosophy of teaching his players how to play basketball, however, was questionable.

The story that broke during the NCAA tournament, I thought, made Coach Knight appear to be a choir boy in comparison to Rutgers men's coach Mike Rice.

ESPN obtained film clips of Rutgers' basketball practices where Rice screamed at his players, cursing them, using gay slurs, throwing basketballs at them and in many cases pushing them, pulling them into different positions on the floor or shoving them off the floor and replacing them with another player. Many times the pushes were not love taps but pretty hard from behind the players so they had no chance to brace themselves.

The practice films may never have appeared, but one of the assistants had told the athletic director Tim Perneti about how practices were being conducted and the assistant was not rehired. Perneti fined Rice \$50,000, suspended him for three games without pay and reported the incident to the president of the university.

Long story short, the president said he never looked at the tape, so he didn't know what was going on but in the end, Rice was fired. Another assistant who had used the same physical coaching methods resigned, and the athletic director resigned a couple of days later.

Like all stories I am sure that the public doesn't know all of what was going on, but after watching the tapes, I am not sure I want to know.

Coaches talk about teams being family. I know that families don't always get along. There are disagreements. Sometimes families fight. I think if you have coached you have some of the family problems. I know I did. Even though teams are family sometimes they are a little

dysfunctional.

I know that with all of my teams my vote counted more than the combined vote. Do I think that Rutgers is the only place that this sometimes happens, no, I don't. Do I think it is worse than this in some places, I hope not.

I am still wondering how this happened without a players striking back or the players revolting and going to the administration themselves. At some places players have revolted because they thought practices were too hard.

I don't know and can't imagine how the players put up with Coach Rice's tactics. My college football coaches were great at grabbing your face mask and getting your attention. Yes, we had face masks and no we didn't have leather helmets! I am not sure that what we thought was out-of-line during my entire playing time at Fort Hays would even add up to one practice at dear old Rutgers. Rutgers will be part of the Big 10 next year, nice advertisement for the conference.

If the Rutgers situation was a black eye for the Big 10, the University of Nebraska, Coach Pelini, Rex Burkhead, and a seven-year-old kid named Jack Hoffman put a spotlight on everything that is good for a program without really having a goal to gain from what they did.

Rex Burkhead, as most people know, had befriended this little seven-year-old boy who has been battling brain cancer and Burkhead help start "Team Jack" to bring attention to the problem.

In the spring game the idea was brought forth that Jack would suit up and run a play with the Husker offense. Good thought, but more had to go into the idea than you might think.

Burkhead stated that because Jack was going through chemo treatments etc., how much strength did he have and how far could he run. That was answered on the field when they brought him in wearing Burkhead's old number 22 and with help from quarterback Taylor Martinez, Jack took off on a 69 yard scoring run, the longest run from scrimmage for the day. The entire Husker squad was in the end zone and lifted young Jack up on their shoulders and the 60,000 at the spring game shouted their approval.

What happened later, I am sure that no one had figured into the plan. The run hit YouTube and then it went crazy. It was on a number of ESPN programs, it was on all the networks. Jack's parents were interviewed on TV. Jack was interviewed on TV. It made ESPN's top plays of the day and it is still in first place on top plays and might just stay there awhile.

Numerous athletes, TV announcers, and other well-known people hit Twitter big time. Everyone thought it was a great thing for Jack and a great thing for the university to do for Jack.

Sometimes even tough guys like Coach Pelini can bring a tear to your eye. Great job Cornhuskers.