

Commentary

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When giving it that old college try comes at too high a cost

When John Prine and Iris DeMent sing about the virtues of decent down-home living, they contrast the decadence of high-class folks and fancy places with the plain goodness of ordinary people and small towns:

"No, we're not the jet set

We're the old Chevy-let set

There's no Riviera

In Festus,

Missouri

And you won't find Onassis
In Mullinville, Kansas."

They sing about Rome, Ga., and Paris, Tenn., But what about Memphis, Texas?

There is a real Memphis, Texas, a tiny Panhandle town. But what of the metaphorical Memphis, Texas? It's located in a Lone Star state of mind in the offices at Royal-Memorial Stadium on the University of Texas at Austin campus.

If you read the sports pages regularly,

you know that the latest heavyweight title charade between Lennox Lewis and Mike Tyson almost didn't take place because Sodoms and Gomorrhas of boxing like Las Vegas refused to host the fight. After the Nevada boxing commission paid a rare visit to the moral high ground, promoters tried to find a manger for Tyson in San Antonio. To its credit, the Texas Boxing Commission, encouraged by Gov. Rick Perry, denied Tyson a permit to fight in Texas. They looked at his history — a prison sentence for rape, ear-biting in the ring, brawling at press events, refusals to be drug-tested and pending criminal investigations for further violence against women — and decided, in the words of Perry, "it would be best not to subject Texas families, fans and venues to a Mike Tyson fight." They weighed money and notoriety against simple values and did the right thing. So the fight caravan went up to Tennessee.

Well, Austin now has a chance to become the Memphis of collegiate sports, and the powers that be at

UT-Austin seem determined to make the most of the opportunity.

Why it seems like only yesterday (actually, it was Wednesday) when we read in the American-Statesman that Jamie Carey, high school valedictorian and PAC-10 women's basketball freshman player of the year in 2000, has been cleared to play UT basketball for the Lady Longhorns. Like prizefighters who take too many blows

Jamie Carey

Cleared to play UT basketball despite history of concussions.

to the head, Carey is in a delicate and terrible situation. The year 2000 was the last she could play intercollegiate ball because her former program, Stanford University, decided that her history of 10 — count them 10 — concussions and the ease with which she suffered her last one made it unwise for



her to risk her well-being. In other words, they looked at her big-worldly talents and its impact on their team's performance and weighed it against their moral responsibility. They then did the right thing.

Carey is in an awful situation, and our hearts should go out to her. Imagine having her level of talent and having worked hard to hone skills like hers and then not being able to use them. But her symptoms speak for themselves: dizziness and headaches, all day, every day, seven days a week; loss of hearing, and loss of memory and disorientation.

The UT intercollegiate sports program, however, has found room. The Lady Longhorns coach says ask the team doctor. The team doctor has found an otolaryngologist who disputes the prevailing medical diagnosis that the symptoms of concussions are related to the brain. He thinks concussions affect the inner ear. So let her play. (Where was he when Troy Aikman was grasping at medical straws to continue playing pro football?)

And if Carey suffers another concussion simply by bumping into a teammate's elbow in practice, everyone in authority has an out. The coach points to the team doctor, the team doctor points to the specialist, the specialist points to his data. And every higher administrator from the athletics director up to the president says that the decision was made according to proper procedures. But a young and gifted student-athlete will be left with her horrible symptoms.

Why it almost makes me wish for the recent golden days when all we had to worry about was the morality of a star second baseman arrested for kicking in the head a man lying defenseless on the ground. But we were told that he was simply defending a young woman's honor and he continues to play ball.

Good old days. Good old values taught. The UT athletics program is the jet set, but it sure does look a lot like Memphis.

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