

THE IDLE AMERICAN

Oh, Woe Is Us....

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

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Walt Kelly is most remembered for his comic strip published more than a half-century ago.

Its central figure, Pogo--campaigning to fight world pollution--made an incisive statement that still rings true.

You remember it: "We have met the enemy and he is us." It's about money. The golden rule has become twisted, however. Now, "them" who have the gold rule.

Coach Jim Schlossnagle's leaving Texas A&M to head the baseball program at the University of Texas provides additional supporting data, but most of the financial implications concerning his move are far beyond salary implications....

Hurt to the core minutes after playing for the national baseball championship, he committed two colossal errors in a news conference. They were the kind resulting in "bench banishment" if his players had made such goofs.

He shouldn't have accused a sportswriter of being selfish, and it would have been the better part of wisdom if he had omitted his passionate "heart and soul" description of his efforts.

Millions of others are equally committed without \$1.35 million annual compensation. (To be fair, at his first UT news conference, his first order of business was to offer an apology to the reporter he had offended . earlier.)....

That said , he is a great coach--proven, committed, successful--and yes, well compensated. But additional "wants" projected for the future at A&M already are in place at UT. Perhaps most importantly, his long friendship with the UT athletic director--with whom he worked during his 17-year tenure at TCU--is immensely important.

Texas A&M is a great university, and most Aggies are good folks. Understandably, many feel stunned and left out to dry by Schlossnagle's departure. (As my Uncle Mort said the other day, they're probably designing a "bubble-head" doll of Schlossnagle, perhaps complete with a needle for Aggie fans given to voodoo activity. He points out that bubbles can float skyward when the Aggies score, but can sometimes wander aimlessly off course.).....

Now, back to Pogo. We are the enemy, because we have shown TV giants that we have insatiable sports appetites.

TV has responded accordingly. It calls the shots, the NCAA carries them out and the public buys in.

We should not blame Schlossnagle. His decision--untimely as it was--simply focuses on what big-time sports have become. When we hear, "It's not the money, it's the principle of the thing," we can be sure of this: Mostly, it's the money, whether salary, facilities or equipment....

Big-time college sports are out of control. It's a mess. Trustees and regents should work toward the re-establishment of sports being an integral part of education. For the real "biggies" in college sports, let them go their way. The rest could then get on with what intercollegiate athletics should be about.

But they won't.

Back to Schlossnagle: Stefan Stevenson wrote a definitive piece for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Schlossnagle clears up many details, most of which are believable and understandable....

I fondly recall when sports were integral parts of the educational process, long before the current "tail-wagging-dog" approach favored at many schools.

Two of my all-time favorites were Baylor's Grant Teaff and Texas A&M's R. C. Slocum, both football coaching legends. The former spent 21 years at Baylor, signing on for \$25,000 and receiving \$50,000 in his final year. I once asked Slocum about his agent. His response was sharp, "I never had an agent!" That was then, and this is now. The Aggies are grimacing, devoid in national championships in football, basketball or baseball since 1939....

My mind flits back to a quarter-century ago, when there were moments that the Lone Star State's TWO flagship universities sometimes cooperated. One example involved a valued friend, Dr. Kenneth Ashworth, former Commissioner of the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Upon retiring, he taught doctoral classes, once weekly, at both UT and A&M.

His business cards were printed in maroon on one side and burnt orange on the other....

Dr. Newbury is a longtime public speaker and former university president who is Texas' longest-running syndicated columnist, writing weekly since 2003.