



'TIS THE SEASON: SAINTS, STEROIDS AND SYSTEMS.

By Kerry Schmidt 12-12-2004

I know many of you readers have your own gripes about your NFL teams, so I'll not dwell on the "high school" known as the Saints.

I will make only one short comment, and get on to other gripes.

I have been involved with pro football for 35 years. Never in that time have I seen one half of football like I witnessed last week.

The other media folks around me in the press box were trying to top each other on how pathetic it was. I won.

With three minutes left in the first half, I checked my stats, and get this!! After 27 minutes, the 4-7 Panthers had gained 227 yards. The Saints? 12!! That amounts to about 16 inches every minute of play! With the football about 12 inches long, maybe if they had taken Viagra, they might have done better.

Last week I spent most of this space drubbing the B...S...C business, so I won't dwell much longer on it.

Final comments. As expected, USC/Oklahoma for the crystal ball, Auburn gets the Sugar cube.

I still scream loud and long for a playoff system, like there is in every single other college sport at every other level.

Until the fans literally storm the castle, this will be unlikely. Why? Money, and control thereof.

The six conferences that make up the BCS – Big East, Pac 10, Big 12, Big 10, SEC and ACC – hold the key to the vault. A playoff system would allow other (deserving) teams to get a piece of this \$100 pie, and the fossils that run the bank fear a playoff would mess up their monopoly, i.e., give some of that Holy Grail to other teams other than those in their "Holy Six."

Here is my last gripe. Each of the winners of the Grand Six get automatic bids under this system, so let's take a peek at this year's schedule.

USC/OK, fine. Sugar-sweet Auburn. OK. But check out the opponents in the other two \$17 million games. Texas plays Big 10 winner Michigan, ranked No. 13 in the country in the final BCS rankings. In the opinion of many, me included, USA TODAY's John Sagarin has the best ranking system. He has Michigan ranked No. 23. MSU has two losses and barely beat lowly San Diego State.

But the biggest farce is the Fiesta Bowl. Utah, the first non-BCS school to crash the party – and they deserve to be there – plays Big East winner, Pittsburgh, ranked 18th in the BCS and a whopping 52nd in Sagarin's poll, behind such powerhouses as New Hampshire, William & Mary and Harvard

The biggest loser is California. I firmly believe that there always has been prejudicial reaction to West Coast teams. Thus, Texas jumped over Cal. in the BCS (Sagarin has Texas 5th, Cal. 3rd).

Texas is deserving of a BCS bowl, but to leave out California, who I think would beat any team except USC, just because horrible Pittsburgh, in the weak Big East won their



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

league, is a joke. NOTE: Sagarin, in hypothetical match-ups, has Cal. 2 ½ over both OK. and Auburn. Well, enough. It sucks, but what is is what it is.

Steroids in sports. Whoa, stop the presses.

The “San Francisco Chronicle” leaked Grand Jury testimony last week, putting steroids in baseball back in the news. In the fore front is the BALCO Company and two individuals, one who is trainer for Barry Bonds.

The media is howling like drunken cows over this atrocity. Commissioner Bud Selig says he will “really” do all possible to straighten this out. Senator John McCain says the government may get involved.

I have stated my opinion on this before, but once more: Give me a freakin’ break! First off, THG and another cream that Bonds is alleged to have taken were not illegal when he allegedly did so.

But that is not at the heart of the issue. Hypocrisy is!

Publicly, owners and management rail wildly against this problem

Privately, they smile all the way to the bank. Ever since 1998, the Sosa/McGuire homer year, attendance at games is way up as is TV viewing. Why? Fans want to see monster home runs, and lots of them.

Charles Yesalis, a Penn-State professor of health policies, says “I have seen nothing that shows customers care. If using the drugs makes the ball go out of the park more, that is what fans want. And that means money for owners.”

David Wallechnisky, the recognized expert on steroids in sports, says, “People want their heroes. They don’t care. They look the other way, and that includes management.”

Hall of Fame pitcher Jim Palmer says, “Selig says the MLBPA won’t allow stronger testing. This is a major cope-out. He and (MLBPA union chief) Don Fehr should look in the mirror. They allowed this to happen. Fans loved the home runs, so, essentially, management looked the other way.”

Why kill the golden goose?

Doctors have stated that steroids build muscle, but too much will inhibit reaction time, which is critical for hitters, so how much this helps is debatable.

Old timers say today’s players are “cheating.” Thomas DiBacco, professor emeritus of business history at American University, says, “Steroids were developed way back in the 30’s. Documentation shows athletes, among others, used them, so that argument is false.”

Regardless, it all goes back to hypocrisy. Fans want the big production, owners and management covet the bucks it produces, so let the show continue

If adults want to put stuff in their bodies that may hurt them later, but earns them millions now, that’s their business.

Sports is entertainment. Give the fans what they want and go to the bank, especially since no one, not even the government, will be able to stop it. Shut up and enjoy the show.