



At times, it can be virtually impossible to right a wrong.

By Kerry Schmidt 04-22-2007

There are times in life when emotions, lack of common sense and downright stupidity will foster the continuation of an (incorrect) criminal charge.

I am referring to the Duke Lacrosse team scandal that exploded 13 months ago and finally and mercifully came to a final and completely proven end just this last week. The infamous team lacrosse party at an off campus house on March 13, 2006, quickly became front page headlines around the country, and continued to grow and grow in sordidness over the months.

As we all too well remember, the players hired two strippers to attend the party and dance for the beer boys in attendance.

But when one of the women, a 28 year old mother announced the next day that she had been forced into a bathroom by three men and raped, beaten and sodomized, all hell broke out.

Players were suspended and/or expelled from school, the team was disbanded and unable to play that year (they were ranked # 2 in the nation), the coach was asked to resign and more hatred and venom was excreted than at a rattlesnake convention.

Obviously, the fact that the woman was black and the players white, really gave those who wanted to be front and center a forum.

Obviously, Jesse Jackson and Rev. Al Sharpton were the first to decry the horrendous happenings. They got themselves on TV in a New York minute, and, basically, exposed the alleged monsters to the extreme.

Women's groups from all over the country were on hand to preach the awful behavior of "rich white boys against poor black women."

The team, the school and all male athletes at the school were vermin.

The coach that resigned, Mike Pressler and many players and male students were hounded with obscene phone calls. Signs were posted on men's fraternity houses saying "Rapist Lover" and many other less-than-kind slogans

Originally, the players never got a chance to even begin to defend themselves. No one wanted to hear a word of their side of the story.

All the crazed news media wanted to talk about was this horrible sexual attack by rich kids.

But for the delighted accusers and women's groups, huge cracks, then craters and finally the dams burst on the whole thing.

Just last Wednesday, every and all charges were dropped against all accused.

North Carolina's District Attorney Roy Cooper gave a scathing denunciation of then Durham County's DA, Mike Nifong, stating how the case "had been handled with pre motivation and lack of common sense, let alone facts."

Cooper sited "no credible evidence that (the three men) committed a crime." He said the charges resulted from a tragic rush to accuse and a failure to verify serious allegations" and that "caution would have served justice better than bravado.



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Early on, to keep the flames roaring, DA Nifong went in front of TV cameras calling the players “hooligans,” and hinting at a sense of entitlement.

It must be noted that Nifong was running for re-election for DA, and his blasting of the horrendous behavior of these young men would not be tolerated. He won re-election.

Just in time, because the case very quickly began to fall apart.

DNA tests proved that none of the accused was connected to the alleged crime.

The accuser began to change her story, several times, finally even admitting she was not raped and did not even remember if she was in that bathroom.

And worse, Nifong intentionally withheld information showing that further DNA of five different men were found on the accuser, but none of it belonged to the accused!

Just before Christmas last year, Nifong dropped the rape charges, but said he still would prosecute sexual harassment.

Further explorations of his handling of the case caused Cooper to take Nifong off the case. Nifong was charged with violation of ethics, and may be disbarred.

Then, finally, on April 11, all charges against all individuals were dropped.

13 months of hell had ended for the accused men.

But has it? There are still many small groups out there who believe it all still happened, and that the boys got off because they are rich and white.

Pressler, one of the top coaches in the country, remains at a Division II school.

And believe me, these young men, will carry this stigma well beyond their “young” stages and will never be able to completely shed the stench of the affair.

20 years ago, 15 year old Tawana Bradley, a black girl who claimed she had been gang raped by white men, but a grand jury quickly concluded that absolutely nothing of the sort had occurred. Yet, 10 years ago, a woman named Collette White told the New York Times that “If Tawana Brawley was to get up...and say it was a hoax, I’d say she was lying. We know what happened.” That’s the crux of the problem. Some people will always believe what they want to believe, damn logic and facts.

Amazing as that is, it is too often the case. While these men are legally free and clear of all charges, a black cloud will always hang over their heads.

Sad.

On to lighter and more useful information.

As we know, next week end will be the multi-million dollar meat market auction known as the NFL draft.

Given the info in the column I wrote last week on the “New Felony Lists” of NFL players, we must look very closely at the kids coming out of school.

Well, a good number of them have already proven that they are ready for this level.

At least 26 players have already made a name for themselves. They have proven they are worthy of making the NFL grade.

Florida’s Marcus Thomas, a sure-fire No. 1 draft choice, failed two drug tests and was dismissed from the team.

A few other players who would/could go in the first two rounds have made a name for themselves.

Rufus Alexander, Oklahoma LB, was arrested last October on misdemeanor charges of disturbing the peace and interference with police. My man, Rufus!



Texas' CB Tarell Brown was arrested on misdemeanor weapon and marijuana charges last September. Now since he is a top player, charges were dropped.

However, he must have forgotten that his "get-out-of-jail-free" card was punched, since he was arrested again last March for more Mary J.

Marshawn Lynch California RB was accused of sexual assault in January. No charges were pressed

And here's a fine, upstanding young man. Brandon Meriweather, a Miami safety, fired shots in 2006 at someone who had shot a teammate. No charges. Self defense, I guess. Then on national TV, in a game against Florida International, he stomped on the head of a FI player. He was suspended for one game.

Marcus Russell, Florida DT, kicked off the team for failing drugs tests twice.

Oh yea, that boy is definitely NFL ready!

Tank Tyler, DT from North Carolina State, pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct after a confrontation with a police officer and also was ejected for a game for spitting on an opponent.

Note: He must have had lessons from Bill Romanowski.

OK, one more NFL ready guy. Eric Wright, CB, UNLV. While at Southern Cal. in 2004, he was accused of sexual assault and in possession of Ecstasy pills in his apartment. All charges were dropped. Just like they would be for you and I. ... If we were great football players. How can one have a bunch of Ecstasy pills in their apartment and have it be OK? But not all potential NFL players are that familiar with law enforcement.

I give you Amboy Okayed, who all say will be a top draft choice.

Okayed – no relation to former NFL player Christian Okayed, although Amboy is also from Nigeria.

Not only is he predicted as a No. 1 draft choice, they say he likely will start right away.

Oh, I forget to mention a couple of things. Okaye is just 19. He started school in Nigeria at 2 ½ and when his family moved to Huntsville, AL, he tested into the 9th grade at age 12. At 15, he was accepted to Harvard, but chose Louisville for its combination of football and academics. He has already graduated Magna cum Laude.

At 6'2" 306, Okoye is "a freak of nature," said former Louisville coach Bobby Petrino (now the coach of the Atlanta Falcons).

When Petrino first saw this 15-year old freshman, he told him that as soon as he was ready to shave, he would start him.

For his 16th birthday, Petrino gave him a razor (although he did not yet need it) and told him, you're playing!

Besides his already tremendous talent at 19 – hell, most college players are just freshman at that age, coaches say he can, and will get quickly better. "He will soon be very scary," said Tampa Bay coach Jon Gruden.

Petrino can only hope that Okoye will still be on the board when the Falcons chose at the No. 8 spot, though most do not think he will be around that late.

And, he is said to be the "most model citizen" I have ever seen, said Mike Cox, his defensive line coach at Louisville.



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He is a good friend of LeBron James, and has already joined with LeBron for endorsements and, as Okoye said, "I want to get involved in charities. I have so much to give back to this great country."

What a breath of fresh air!

You know how some NFL players get fined 25 to 75 thousand of more for minor violations such as taking off their helmets on the field.

Well at the Super Bowl, Brian Urlacher got hit hard. He was fined \$100,000.

His crime? He wore a hat with a bottled water brand that he drank, and since that water was not an official NFL sponsor, well, big fine.

Last (thankfully) and least, talking of suspensions.

Here is a different one. The Spurs' Tim Duncan was ejected after getting two technical fouls, but, get this. Veteran referee Jerry Crawford was suspended from refereeing any more games this year. Allegedly, he told Duncan he would fight him.

How about that. A player getting a ref suspended.

Duncan may get fined, because he said he hoped that the other referees would not turn against him or his team during the playoffs over the situation.

Now do not commit a crime --- unless you are a NFL player. Then it's OK.

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