

10-15-2007 Media Ethics

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2 JOSH CENTOR: Dr. Brand, a couple of weeks back, we
3 saw controversy at one of our member institutions. Football
4 coach Mike Gundy at Oklahoma State kind of lambasted a
5 reporter for an article she wrote about one of his student
6 athletes, criticizing maybe his character as opposed to
7 exactly how he was playing on the field -- so not the results,
8 but maybe what was causing it, his personal characteristics,
9 his traits.

10 And I know you can't personally respond to an
11 individual institutional situation, but I did want to raise
12 the question of our college kids. Should they be subject to
13 the same criticism in the media as professional athletes?

14 DR. MYLES BRAND: You know, I think commentators and
15 reporters have an obligation to understand the context who
16 you're talking about. Of course, commentators, in particular,
17 have freedom to express themselves any way they like, but
18 there are issues and principles of good taste and proper
19 treatment of people.

20 When you're dealing with college students, when you're
21 dealing with an 18- to 20-year-old college student, it doesn't
22 strike me as fair to them and in good taste to really
23 criticize them as if they were professionals.

24 Now why is that? Is it because they're younger? Not
25 really. I think there's another reason for it as well. I

1 think the biggest reason is that they don't have a way to
2 fight back.

3 So if you're a professional athlete, and you have high
4 visibility and someone goes after you about your character,
5 not just your play, you have an automatic platform, and you're
6 mature enough to be able to state your case. What happens
7 with a youngster, whether they're a high school student or a
8 college student, is they don't have that platform to respond.
9 They're really being victimized by that approach.

10 So the unfairness is that it's really a one-sided
11 battle, and it's treating those individuals as if they have a
12 platform, and they don't. And a coach, understanding that
13 intuitively, will stand up sometimes to defend the players,
14 and I give credit to the coaches.

15 Now, coaches have to use good judgment in the way they
16 do it as well, and sometimes you can go over the top. But
17 generally speaking, I think coaches really understand that and
18 do have an obligation to defend their players, and to their
19 credit they do.

20 JOSH CENTOR: Let's talk a little bit about the
21 economics of the situation for a second.

22 College football, college basketball -- those are
23 revenue-producing sports. There's a lot of money there. Now,
24 that trickles to the newspapers. When they report on the
25 college teams, the football teams, the basketball teams, that

1 that can help them sell papers just the same -- and in some
2 instances, in some communities, reporting on the college teams
3 sells more papers than reporting on professional teams that
4 may not be in those towns. So this type of writing, maybe
5 that critical look at the student athlete, is reflective of
6 the big business nature, isn't it?

7 DR. MYLES BRAND: Well, it may be reflective of
8 newspapers, but I want to be very cautious of not accusing any
9 reporter or commentator of doing that. But to put it another
10 way, and not that they're doing it in order to sell papers, I
11 think they're doing it because in their profession now,
12 whether you're in the print media or the broadcast media or
13 blogs, there's a lot of competition for viewers and listeners.

14 And so sometimes people report in a way that's very
15 provocative in order to gather an audience. And this, they
16 believe, helps generate their professional stance. It gives
17 them a position perhaps for their next job of some such. That
18 strikes me as unfair to those who they criticize for that
19 purpose, particularly if they're young people, and as I
20 mentioned, who don't have a platform easily.

21 So I think it's not so much to sell newspapers,
22 although that's often said. I think it is really often
23 selfishness on the part of some critics when they become
24 overly provocative in order to generate interest in their own
25 columns. I understand there's a lot of competition out there

1 amongst media, but let's be fair to those -- particularly the
2 student athletes.

3 JOSH CENTOR: Dr. Brand, thanks for addressing this
4 issue.

5 DR. MYLES BRAND: My pleasure.

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