

The Week That Was: Penn State's Shame

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

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Right now, there is no other story.



If you're old enough, you remember a time when Jerry Sandusky was the most well-known assistant coach in college football. Sandusky was the mastermind of the defenses on which Joe Paterno hung his program's fate; defenses that brought Penn State two National Championships and scores of undefeated seasons. He devised the scheme that wrecked Vinny Testaverde in the 1987 Fiesta Bowl. He molded outstanding players like Matt Millen and Shane Conlan; Linebacker U developed on his watch. Sandusky was the gray eminence of the Nittany Lion program- Paterno's [Bormann](#) , if you will.

There was a lot of talk back in the day of Sandusky being the "heir apparent" to the head coaching position. His abrupt retirement at the end of the 1999 season always seemed oddly timed- he was only 55, nearly two decades younger than Paterno, and it wasn't as if his defenses were embarrassing themselves out there. Turns out, it wasn't oddly timed after all. We don't know if Sandusky's retirement was related to the [1998 incident in the Penn State football locker room](#) , but it is one of those things that make you go "Hmm."

The fate of Ray Gricar- the Centre County District Attorney who failed to pursue charges against Sandusky in the 1998 case- despite an [out-and-out confession](#) by Sandusky to the boy's mother- might be the biggest mystery. Gricar [vanished without a trace](#) on the morning of April 15, 2005, leaving only an empty car and a computer and hard drive dumped into the Susquehanna River. Whether or not Gricar's disappearance has anything to do with Jerry Sandusky is currently unknown. Again, though, it's just one of those things that make you go "Hmm."

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How long did key figures in the Penn State community know what Sandusky was up to? I'm not trying to be [Roy Hazelwood](#) here, but I'm guessing the man didn't roll out of bed one morning in 1998 and decided to start fondling children. He'd been doing it for years- probably since before he even started working for Paterno. There had to be talk round the campfire about him for a long time. Don't you think? Denial is a powerful thing, but the man apparently spent a lot of time in public with children that weren't his, and that's just weird.

The setting itself is another aspect of this drama. State College is located squarely in the "Alabama" portion of Pennsylvania, hours from Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, way off the Interstates; small and isolated geographically in a way no other big-time football school really is. Something this sordid may not have gone on anywhere else- at least not for this long. A bigger city might have exposed Jerry Sandusky in a way the rustic fastness of Happy Valley did not. A bigger city has more people that aren't bought, aren't controlled. A bigger city can't be owned the way the Lion football program owns State College.

At the same time, that isolation and Paterno's enormous stature made the Penn State community much more insular than most others. It was a family- and in a family there are no real secrets. There are always side-long glances, whispered asides, rumors and inside jokes. They knew about Jerry Sandusky- maybe not all of them, but enough of them. How much they knew is up for question, but they surely knew something.

Mark Madden knew something. The Pittsburgh-area radio host [wrote a column](#) six months ago in the Beaver County Times detailing the charges against Sandusky. A notorious loudmouth who was admittedly prescient in this case, Madden is in the news again with additional charges that Sandusky

["pimped out"](#) young boys to wealthy Second Mile donors. Would you be surprised if the charge was true? I'd be surprised if it wasn't. Actually, I'd be surprised if that's the worst thing that surfaces in this sordid story.

Think the University of Maryland is breathing a sigh of relief? Future Ohio State athletic director Andy Geiger [pursued Sandusky](#) for the Terrapins head-coaching job in 1991. After some hemming and hawing Sandusky decided to stay at Penn State and the job went to Holy Cross coach Mark Duffner. Sandusky [also interviewed for the Virginia job](#) in 2000 before the Cavaliers went with Al Groh. (Jim Caldwell would have been Sandusky's

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offensive coordinator.) UVA's loss of interest was reportedly tied in with Sandusky's all-consuming dedication to the Second Mile- at least, that's what was said at the time. Just as likely is the athletic department in Charlottesville catching wind of Sandusky's peccadilloes and backing off.

What good was Sandusky hanging around campus doing Paterno? He wasn't on the staff. Paterno had to have known about his ex-assistant's perverse tastes at this point; it may [have been a factor](#)

in his premature retirement. Paterno

[blew off Sandusky's retirement dinner](#)

in 2000, a curious gesture in light of the long relationship between the two. Why did he seemingly stand by and let him sleaze up the place? Was it loyalty for services rendered? Or maybe Sandusky had a little something on him or others in the program as well? I get this image of the Nazi leadership, where everyone had a file full of dirt on everyone else.

I'm not saying feel for Mike McQueary, the current wide receivers coach and recruiting coordinator and ex-
quarterback who [allegedly caught Sandusky assaulting a young boy in a shower](#) at the Lasch

Football Building. He went about his business as a full-time assistant coach (their price?) and kept his head down while the man he saw raping a child- and

rape is by no means too strong a word- strolled through the building like he owned the place. He'll pay for being a kept man and a coward. His soul has been blackened.

But think about it for a minute. You're a 28-year old graduate assistant. You've just caught maybe the second-most powerful man in the Penn State program- one of the most powerful men in the state- doing something unspeakable; something a certain type of man would do anything, and I mean anything, to keep quiet. Jerry Sandusky was buddies with politicians and policemen. Mike McQueary was an ex-jock who spent most of his college career sitting behind Wally Richardson. It was an unequal contrast.

Mike McQueary must have seen his career, maybe even his life, flash before his eyes in that moment. It would have taken a lot of moral courage to do the right thing, whatever that was- more than you might think, given the position he was in. He didn't possess that courage. To me he's a pathetic figure in all of this. That isn't sympathy. Calling someone "pathetic" usually isn't meant to be sympathetic. What's pathetic is that he had a chance to do something good, something heroic, and he choked it up. [So did his father](#) . "Go to Joe Pa." Seriously, Dad?

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By the way, it's very honorable of McQueary to continue coaching. If this was pre-war Japan he would have already slit open his belly with a sword, but in today's America it's a "game-time decision" as to whether he'll coach from the sideline or from the booth, as if he's a cornerback coming off a groin injury. I understand McQueary can't be fired yet without sparking a lawsuit. But he should resign. It's the decent option.

There's something chilling about the *La Cosa Nostra* way in which the 2002 incident was handled. Jerry Sandusky, made man, was caught doing something he shouldn't have been doing. Mike McQueary didn't go to the police; he had a sit-down with the Don and got his button for keeping quiet and staying loyal to the Family. The young boy in the shower- identified as "Victim One" in the grand jury report- was nothing more than an embarrassing problem that had to be made to go away. Paterno, McQueary- so far as it's known, they never even bothered to find out the little boy's name. The university's response was to bar Sandusky from bringing children onto campus- a restriction he openly flouted with no consequences:

"You can't rape young boys, Jerry. At least you can't in our facilities. How are we supposed to get ready for Purdue with you victimizing children in here? All right, just this once."

Nobody in a position to stop what was going on thought of these kids. They thought only of their own careers and of the power and prestige of Penn Statefootball. As late as 2007 Sandusky was [bringing a young boy to Nittany Lion practices](#) in full view of Paterno and McQueary and everyone else with an inkling of what was going on. The powerful are supposed to stand up for the powerless. So many powerful people had an opportunity to protect these kids. None of them did. It's almost astonishing that- aside from the mother of a victim- not a single person, when presented with the opportunity to do the right thing, seemingly did.

And these were the most vulnerable of kids. Sandusky wasn't trying this stuff with Matt Millen or Walker Lee Ashley. These were young boys who in many cases were from broken homes- the reason they participated in the Second Mile to begin with. These boys, and their families, were looking for a man they could trust. Sandusky violated that trust in the basest way imaginable. In all likelihood he ruined some of these kids' lives, permanently.

But that's what people like Sandusky do. In his own way he was no different than Ted Bundy or

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John Wayne Gacy. Their crimes were more heinous, but they came from the same place- a view of human beings as nothing more than objects he could use to satiate himself. And we don't fully know what this man was capable of, or what secrets he holds beyond the 23-page grand jury report (if you read the report and don't feel sick by page three, there is something wrong with you.) God only knows how deep the rabbit hole goes.

This disaster might be unrecoverable for the program and, to an extent, the university. Everything the Lions have accomplished on the football field- and off- for the last four decades has been rendered meaningless. The black mark is on the program and the university and it won't go away for a long, long time. And that black mark also applies to [the morons who took to the streets](#) Wednesday night and destroyed and disrupted in the name of "supporting" Paterno and his program. Especially the young men- don't they know that but for a trick of fate they could have been Sandusky's victims too?

Paterno could have perhaps avoided Wednesday's further embarrassment to the school by falling on his sword as soon as the news of Sandusky's arrest broke, or at least soon after. Instead he announced his retirement effective at the end of the season, not immediately. He essentially forced Penn State to fire him, [which it did](#) . At the end this man, who had spent more than six decades with the school, wasn't even fired in a face-to-face meeting. They did it over the phone.

I think Penn State- and I know this may be unfair to the many people in that program and in that university that did nothing wrong- should be made an example of. Penn State should burn for this, should be stripped to the bare boards. Let its ruins serve as a warning to others. That warning may yet still fall on deaf ears- but it's the right thing to do nonetheless. There have to be Lack of Institutional Control violations here somewhere, right?

But no NCAA sanction will equal the damage this scandal will do to the university in general and the football program in particular. This is Chernobyl in an athletic sense. This isn't free shoes or traded memorabilia or even hookers and blow. This was a program that allowed a predator to prey on small children within its walls and covered for his crimes. You don't come back from this. Penn State is finished. And it should be.