

## The Lion Looks the Other Way

Written by {ga=jb}

Friday, November 11 2011 4:00 PM - Last Updated Friday, November 11 2011 8:23 PM

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I noticed something the other night that I've never noticed before. I was glued to the ubiquitous Penn State University coverage and The Network was displaying the Penn State athletic logo of the head of a mountain lion. I never noticed the detail. The artwork appears to make the lion's head turn and look away from the line of the backbone that should have the head facing left, and the face is instead turned to the right. The Penn State athletic logo may be the perfect Rorschach test a mourning nation needs for the young victims this hideous machine, absent of any responsibility, decency, humanity and manhood cultivated and failed.

Full disclosure here; I am a Buckeye fan. I have always looked at the Penn State program as Holier than Thou for no good reason, particularly considering their student-athlete arrest record for the football program between 2002 and 2008. As a grown man whose idealism has long ago been molly-whomped by life's cynicism, I know better. I know what goes on at every single big time athletic program, and many lesser division programs in both the NCAA and NAIA. Every big time football program has its seedy, dark underbelly. I will also tell you that it doesn't matter. Sure, before I read the full Grand Jury Report I felt a twinge of comeuppance toward Joe Paterno and the phoniness of his facade he carefully created for about six decades. But after about one paragraph into the report I felt deeply ashamed that thought even crossed my mind and I started to look in the mirror myself.

Aside from the tragedy of this heinous child abuse (and not to take the focus off the victims) all of this is a fascinating series of developments. After watching the campus reactions on Wednesday night with utter disdain, if Penn State University had a shred of credibility left as an undergraduate academic institution, the faculty senate would mandate that a week's worth of curriculum would be dedicated to reviewing the entire Grand Jury Report from the perspective of the class's academic discipline, irrelevant STEM classes exempt. Mandatory attendance should be required and enforced and any student who ditches that week ought to be suspended for a semester and go home and cry to mommy and daddy. The next Mike McQueary is sitting

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in those classrooms right now.

There is so much beneath the surface. There are definitely black and white areas here where you have to draw the hardest of hard lines. What was done was never acceptable in our society. There is also no excuse for the lack of responsibility that is at its very best gutless dereliction and at its worst complicity. May the rage of angels fall upon all those involved and may God have the mercy on their souls that I cannot muster as a mortal. Once you get past that horror and shame, the ambiguities begin.

Please take a moment to [read this hyperlink](#) to the Pittsburgh-Post Gazette's piece on Mike McQueary. Try to reconcile it to his inaction and subsequent actions. It eludes me. In the early 1960's, an apartment building full of cynical New Yorkers took no action as they heard Ms. Kitty Genovese stabbed, sexually assaulted, and murdered as they tried to sleep. At the time it was a shock to the nation. This has a similarly chilling, but perhaps more profound, effect. How does this man, groomed deeply in every big-time athletic tradition possible, elect his choice set? Is it particular to him as an individual and it stops there? Is he a product of a system and cultural upbringing that explains, but does not mitigate? I have the hardest time thinking Mike McQueary walks home alone at 2:00am and cuts down an alley way on Beaver Avenue and sees a coed being assaulted in a similar manner and walks away as he did. I don't think he saw a little boy being raped. I think he saw Coach Sandusky raping a little boy. And why does that matter?

Is this a failure of a single human being who abdicated personal responsibility and decency in a callous manner to further a career? Is this the action of a coward? Is this a product of the modern big-time athlete groomed in a petri dish of twisted priorities and false idols perpetrated by the cult of personality? Is this generational and do we live in a society that, for economic and sociological reasons, has made 30 the new 20 for young men over the past two decades and too many fail to grow up and take their on responsibilities? I can't decide. On one hand, I think of a Chris Spielman, and can't even imagine him following a similar path in that moment of truth

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as a 17 year old at Washington High School, let alone working for his university at 28 years old. I think they'd still be cleaning up the body parts. Then I wonder to myself if my perceptions are a true reflection of the most stand-up football character ever produced or a last bastion of my boyish hero worship even as the man in reference is a chronological peer.

One of my favorite, if not well-known films, is a movie called [City Hall](#) starring Al Pacino and John Cusack. Ostensibly, Al Pacino plays a character who is Mayor of New York City. We all know Al Pacino plays himself in every movie, but I digress. In the plot, a man who has spent a lifetime in public service doing untold good becomes embroiled in a scandal out of misplaced loyalty that brings him down. The central question posed is whether it is fair and just to judge a man based on one action given the entirety of his life's work. But the transgressions of the film are not about these crimes in "Happy Valley" which are beyond the pale of modern human decency. Nevertheless, the question is fascinating. Who are we really as people, and who are these men and women we hold up as paragons? I think we have long lost our belief in politicians and celebrities as anything but shameless opportunists and cartoons. But if you had to create a short list of the very last famous people you would expect to find harboring monsters and devils, I have to believe that Joe Paterno would be on that list. The very thought shocks even an individual apathetic toward Penn State football. But to see [the reaction of the students and his sycophants](#) is nothing short of stunning to me. Read the public comments from that link to understand the mindset inside the petri dish. To far too many, this issue is still about the cult of personality and false idols, as well as, shockingly, the sport of football.

This weekend, I am making a trip I have been planning for months. My 14 year old son and I have tickets to The Ohio State University Buckeyes game played in West Lafayette. We are planning on staying in South Bend, Indiana to visit the College Football Hall of Fame the next day. For some reason, I feel differently about this trip than I did a week ago. My unbridled excitement is replaced with wondering what my role is as a man and a father in all of this. I have nothing to do with this tragedy and I have everything to do with it. I played the sport as a young man until my athletic mortality was exposed and I bought into what I was taught. I buy the tickets. I obsessively follow football. I spend eight to ten hours every fall weekend watching games. I drink the beer. I drive the ratings. I do this even as I know full well what happens inside the football factories masquerading as institutions of higher learning.

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I wonder if coaches like Mr. Kehres, Mr. Kyle and Mr. Rotsky feel likewise as they wonder anew what they think they teach and if it is really getting through. I wonder whether every faculty member and university executive has shuddered for a moment this week wondering what we value most. I wonder if I go too far and what happened at Penn State is so sick and peculiar that it is still acceptable to wink at the cheating, the economics and the culture to enjoy the sport I love.

In all too few cases in life, right is right and wrong is wrong. Pedophilia is as absolutely wrong as it gets short of taking life, and unlike the latter can never have a gray area. One can in no way say that our national obsession with football played a role in creating those crimes. Nor can one say that the subsequent inaction and cover up wasn't perpetrated in part by the culture that was uniquely that of State College when it came to the perfect storm of a lack of media scrutiny, the cult of personality, big-time finances and wealthy power brokers, and the cloak of hubris that they were somehow different and immune. I now hope that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has the fortitude to not just punish the criminals, but to shine a light on how the cover up was possible. A trial similar to Nuremburg after World War Two should be the goal so that we can all learn why it was acceptable to just "follow orders" and how these unspeakable crimes were kept hidden for over a decade when any thoughtful and seasoned adult knows that ignorance and silence was not possible.

I hope the result is that as a society we all take long look in the mirror, and we stop looking away. After this week it is very difficult for me to look at the pageantry and the game that I love so much and enjoy it same as it always was. This is no longer just about players having garage sales of trinkets abetted by misguided and foolish white lies. This is no longer about boosters sending money under the table or academic fraud as an ugly but perhaps necessary byproduct. This is no longer about paying a coach whose life goal it is to teach some kid to throw a ball exponentially more than an ethics instructor with a doctorate degree.

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I think I may be done looking the other way.