

Sports is no respite from the goofiness of life

Contributed by Bill Webb
Wednesday, April 11, 2012

Last night I was catching up on baseball scores on ESPN's "Sports Center" program but it was the off-the-field shenanigans by a couple of coaches that dominated the sports news on April 10.

So much for taking a respite from the demands and stresses of real life.

By day's end, a prominent football coach, Bobby Petrino, after four years with the Arkansas Razorbacks, had been fired "with cause" for violating his contract. Because of his misdeeds, he will receive no termination payout.

Another coach, Ozzie Guillen, a Venezuelan in his first week as manager of the Miami Marlins baseball team, spent the day apologizing for telling a reporter he admired Cuban revolutionary dictator Fidel Castro, shocking and angering fellow Hispanics, especially the rather large Cuban community in the Miami area.

Petrino, a successful coach known for his scowl along the sidelines, ultimately was fired by the university's vice chancellor and athletic director, Jeff Long, because he was a liar -- and not a very good one. He demonstrated that he lacked character.

On April 1, Petrino, an avid motorcyclist, was involved in an accident about 20 miles from Little Rock and suffered injuries to his ribs and a vertebra, and wound up with scratches on his face. He said he was the only person on the cycle when it went down.

Subsequent police reports revealed his 25-year-old mistress, a former Razorbacks volleyball player, was his passenger when the motorcycle crashed. Petrino had recently hired her for a position in the department over 158 other applicants and had given her \$20,000, apparently from his own funds.

When the athletic director announced the firing, he laid out a scenario of manipulation and outright lies that had become clear based on police reports and other sources. Petrino was not the kind of person the university could continue to trust with its student-athletes, Long indicated.

Guillen, long known for saying outrageous things and going into angry and profanity-laced diatribes, told a Time magazine reporter that he admired the Cuban dictator. He had made a similar comment to a reporter in 2008 when he was the manager of the Chicago White Sox.

In his new role -- considered a natural fit for a Latin coach -- the remarks drew angry reaction, especially from the community of Cubans who had fled the island nation over the past several years. Many still have family members in Cuba that suffer under the Castro regime.

Guillen gave an emotional apology on national TV and asked forgiveness from the team, the fans and particularly the Latin community in southern Florida. The team suspended him for five games and he had no plans to contest the suspension.

Cuban-American leaders are still calling for the Marlins to fire the coach and have promised to boycott Marlins' games in their brand-new glitzy stadium.

Predictably, both Petrino and Guillen apologized after their deeds had become known. We can only take their word that they are truly remorseful. In the case of these two, it perhaps would be wise to withhold a final assessment on that issue.

Petrino is known as a winning coach so he may wind up coaching again where character, honesty and marital fidelity are secondary concerns. His "I-am-bigger-than-the-game" attitude may be acceptable in some venues -- if his teams win. The current Guillen misstep may not have played out fully yet.

We could only hope people in the coaching profession and elsewhere might learn from these two sorry examples of leadership, sensitivity and integrity.

By the way, I checked the baseball scores but I had to look a little longer to see the highlights. Seems the sports soap operas had co-opted the games themselves.