The Ohio State Buckeyes' football program may not be quite out of the woods just yet, but Friday's actions by the NCAA confirm that whatever else the drive-by sanctimonious and moralizing numbskulls at the Columbus Dispatch, ESPN and Sports Illustrated want to have you believe, the Buckeyes are not the rogue and lawless program they've been unfairly painted to be.

By telling Ohio State on Friday that there will be no new allegations against the program (in other words, the vast conspiracy alleged by Sports Illustrated, flamed by the Dispatch, and piled on by other even lesser media outlets who felt they were late to the party, wasn't true), the case sits where it started, with one man, Jim Tressel, having lied to the NCAA about potential NCAA violations by a handful of his players.

Tressel, having paid the ultimate price for his sins, now stands as the new face of all that is supposedly wrong with college athletics but at least we know that the Buckeyes program is hardly USC of the 1980s. And while I'm sure that ESPN and Sports Illustrated will continue to excoriate Tressel as a means of deflecting their shoddy coverage and treatment of the Buckeyes generally, it may be best if you read the transcript of the NCAA's 5-hour interview with Tressel yourself in order to draw your own conclusions.

If there's a picture that emerges of Tressel from that interview, it's one of a coach who cares very deeply about his players and his program but constantly wrestled with all the day-to-day realities of the multitude of issues that can veer either or both wildly off track. In many ways he comes across as perhaps too naïve to have ever gotten himself into the position as the head coach of a major Division I program, too unsure really of how to handle situations that his own

upbringing may never have prepared him for. What he doesn't do, though, is come across as a cold, manipulative phony deliberating shielding himself by creating a false public portrait of who he really is.

On the key issue of a small group of players trading on their status and memorabilia for free tattoos, Tressel was straightforward in admitting that he understood this was a NCAA violation. But the circumstances surrounding those infractions were complicated by the shady character that at least some of the players had gotten themselves involved with and the specter of a FBI criminal investigation of that character.

Tressel didn't make light of the potential NCAA violations that these players had committed but like a parent he casts aside that immediate concern for what he believed was a far greater threat—their safety and personal welfare.

Where Tressel blew it and admits as much is that he should have taken this to the university's lawyers or the compliance department (which, by the way, comes across pretty well actually in the Tressel interview) and gotten their input. He says he didn't do that because he was working off of what he thought was confidential information that if disclosed could make the situation even worse, from a safety standpoint, for those players.

Ultimately, it was this bad calculation and what Tressel did to hide it that cost him his job. But yet when you ponder the interview it does leave you with a sense that as wrong as Tressel was he shouldn't have lost his job. It makes me wonder whether anyone on the school's Board of Trustees bothered to even read the transcript before arriving at the conclusion that the only way for the school to get past all of this is for Tressel to go. Shame on them if they didn't.

We undoubtedly live in a society where we too readily and too often dismiss simple truths in favor of far more elaborate and cynical explanations of human behavior. Thus I have no real expectation that those who jumped to crucify Tressel and Ohio State so quickly will be swayed by anything that came from the NCAA on Friday or anything they read (or probably glanced over) in the Tressel interview. But this case was always more nuanced than any of them had time to uncover in favor of a story line about a phony coach leading a too successful program that flaunted the rules in order to get that way.

I'm far from suggesting that Tressel was a victim here. He brought this on himself by making what amounts to two really bad decisions. But Tressel never was and still isn't the worst person in the world. What was needed most in his case was what the university gave him first and then abandoned—the benefit of the doubt. As the facts continue to emerge, his actions may not be any less wrong but they are for more understandable.

What's less understandable and always will be, is why so many people were so quick to judge and then to revel in the downfall of a decent, honorable man.

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The NFL's lockout still hasn't been lifted and the reason for that remains the same as it was when the lockout was first imposed. The National Football League Players Association is an overmatched, outmaneuvered trade organization wholly incapable of adequately dealing with the complicated issues of a multi billion dollar business.

Led by DeMaurice Smith, a lawyer by trade who talks a good game but whose inexperience in labor negotiations put the union at a disadvantage, backed by a group of players too ill-informed and disconnected from the business side of their sport to fully comprehend exactly what's taking place, and supported by a group of clever lawyers more interested in making their bones on the backs of the players, the NFLPA has bungled every step of this labor dispute to the point where they found themselves backed into a corner by the owners. Now they're trying to scratch their way out and look rather small doing so.

Roger Goodell, the NFL commissioner and the de facto lead negotiator for the owners, always faced two real challenges in this negotiations. First he had to corral a group of owners who are nothing more than a loosely affiliated group of competitors. No small task certainly but Goodell did a good job of keeping them in check throughout the negotiations. Second, Goodell had to find a way to keep Smith and his advisers from leading their lambs to slaughter. That's been the far more difficult task as these recent and final days of the lockout demonstrate.

While there appear to be a few remaining issues between the parties that could get quickly resolved if that was the players' desire, it appears that what's mostly keeping the lockout lasting these few extra days is Smith and his executive board's parochial interest in looking like they won't be bullied by the owners. Thus does Smith and his executive board continue to insist, for example, on using the most inefficient means available to re-certify as a labor union, a prerequisite to actually having a collective bargaining agreement, just because they want to demonstrate one last act of defiance, as if they're punishing the owners when all they're really doing is hurting themselves and the fans they claim to love.

But perhaps I'm getting ahead of myself. For those too jaded to want to pay attention to all the nuance and minutiae of these labor negotiations, let me just refer back for a moment to the process I laid out previously about how this matter gets resolved.

The collective bargaining agreement the owners voted on is merely tentative because the NFLPA, in a wrong headed strategy that has served only to prolong the lockout, claimed they decertified as a labor union. Thus until they recertify, the parties can't enter into a new collective bargaining agreement. And before they can recertify, they have to get all the lemming-like players they got to sign decertification cards last year to sign recertification cards this year. The union could accomplish this electronically but has chosen not to, opting to have the cards signed once the players report to camp. But of course the players can't report to camp until the lockout is lifted so what this is about is Smith and his executive board, the same group that caused this headache in the first place, telling the owners to go ahead and lift the lockout and trust them that they'll get their business taken care of.

Understandably the owners are in more of a "trust but verify" mode at the moment though I really think that a leap of faith could be taken here with little harm. Still it's a measure of the unnecessary acrimony that this situation created that this kind of issue is further holding up the NFL.

Smith claims that he and the players will work through the weekend, meaning that by the time they end up voting it will be close to six days since the owners tried to end the lockout. In the grand scheme, these six days will be meaningless. But likewise in the grand scheme, these six days are a marker for why this dispute has dragged on for as long as it has. The owners have always been willing to get a deal done. Sometimes the biggest roadblock is not an opposition that continues to say "no" but an opposition, like the NFLPA and Smith, that don't know how to say "yes."

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If there's one thing to really admire about the Cleveland Indians' management at the moment, it's that they've learned their hard lessons. In the days when former general manager and now club president Mark Shapiro used to come out and readily admit things like the Indians didn't have the budget to make any significant off-season or in-season moves, he would be lambasted by the fans who were tired of hearing excuses.

Not this time. Shapiro and general manager Chris Antonetti have done an effective job of using beat writer Paul Hoynes to get out the word that they really, really are looking to make a few moves before the trade deadline in order to bolster the roster in a pennant race. It's the right thing to say and it may actually be true. We won't really know until a move gets made.

If the Indians do make a move, the goal should be a bit more long term. Grady Sizemore, once again on the disabled list, has now proven to be a player that you can't count on. He's injury prone. And with each injury he comes back a little less effective than he was before. He's a centerpiece of this roster and because of that his absence becomes more magnified.

The Indians, like any other team in their situation, will probably end up relying on the if/come with Sizemore until it's well too late. His potential remains alluring, but pinning their hopes on his health and a permanent return to productivity will end up being a fool's game. Sizemore's injury-plagued career has followed a resulting pattern of regression. At this point it's far more likely than not that he'll never be the player we always thought he could have been.

Every sport has their Grady Sizemores and it's always sad when such promising careers end up never being fully realized. Sizemore is a good guy and the kind of guy that teams should build around. But in this case, whether it's because of his style of play or because he just has one of those bodies that injures more easily than others, baseball will end up never seeing the full value of his potential. That is until the Indians dump him.

Seriously, though, it's doubtful that the Indians can really replace Sizemore in a late-season deal. It's a problem that needs a larger solution. But when/if the Indians make a move, whether it's next week or in the off season or the one after that, it will undoubtedly be with the realization that what they really have to do is not supplement a roster but fill a new hole they were praying wasn't going to open but secretly feared always would.

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With the NBA in lock out mode as well, here's this week's question to ponder: What's more likely to occur first, the end of the NBA lockout or a long-term solution to the nation's debt crisis?