Little/AP

Making the only decision it could possibly make, the Paterno State University Board of Trustees parted way with the Paterno part of its name when it mostly unceremoniously fired the morally-addled Joe Paterno on Wednesday evening.

Until that moment, Paterno seemed to be doing his usual stiff arm of any resistance by preempting any personnel action against him when he announced he would retire at year's end and then telling the Board of Trustees not to spend one minute contemplating his status because they had more important things to consider.

I tend to doubt that Paterno was writing his own press releases so some of the blame for the nature of that approach has to lie with the incompetent public relations staff at the university. But since Paterno had to sign off on the release once drafted, it really does underscore exactly why Paterno's status was one of the most important things the Board had to consider.

Paterno's preemptive retirement was the most tone deaf answer yet to the burgeoning child abuse scandal that is rocking not just the Penn State football program but also the entire university. It took longer then it should have but eventually the Board of Trustees understood how depraved this situation really is and how absolutely vile they have been in their reaction to it to that point.

To call Paterno clueless is not even close to doing justice to his moral failings here. He wanted the opportunity to say goodbye to the fans, the students and all of the Penn State sympathizers while making only passing reference to the victims. He forfeited that right when he put the

welfare of himself and his vaunted program above the interests of a 10-year old boy.

If the latest reports are true, there are at least 20 victims of the most horrific child abuse imaginable, any number of whom could potentially have escaped the abuse if Paterno had acted with any sort of moral center, who now will never escape their own personal hells. As it is, at least one of the victims whose situation is outlined in the grand jury proceedings suffered abuse in the years following the underlying incident that Paterno failed to do much of anything about.

The same lack of compassion that caused Paterno to make a perfunctory, late report to a campus administrator about something "inappropriate" (his unfortunate words) involving former defensive coordinator and lifelong Paterno friend, Jerry Sandusky, is the same lack of compassion being exhibited by Paterno now. It's sad, really, where we as a society cannot fully embrace the real victims of abuse and yet will give a pass to Paterno's own despicable conduct in this whole thing.

You can't expect drunken college students to understand the human tragedy of this situation, which is why they showed up en masse at Paterno's house on Tuesday evening and then, for good measure, rioted on Wednesday in support of their fallen coach. I suspect that once maturity overtakes inebriation they'll start to realize that the person they lionized is really a pretty evil fuck after all.

If Paterno really did have a moral compass that he could consult, it would have immediately told him that the only response was an immediate resignation and a pledge to never stop raising funds for those innocent victims of Sandusky's conduct. But hey the Nittany Lions are 12th ranked at the moment and have 3 games left in a season that could result in them playing in the Big Ten Championship. There are priorities, after all.

He did give a shout out of sorts to the abuse victims when his student supporters visited him Tuesday evening, but most of his words were reserved for himself and assuring his supporters that he is indeed doing fine. Nice to know. I wonder how that poor child who allegedly was being sodomized in 2002, was feeling right about the time he discovered that students were clapping out their support for the man that did little to stop the abuse.

I'd like to think that at some point soon Paterno will come to his senses and realize that the year end resignation he tried to engineer was such a worthless and disrespectful response that he'll publicly apologize for being such a creep. But I won't hold my breath.

Paterno couldn't do the right thing in 2002, when he wasn't nearly as senile as he apparently is now, so why should we expect him to act in a more dignified manner now? He couldn't comprehend then how truly despicable the allegations against his buddy Sandusky were then so why should he understand how awful it is for him to try and remain in his current position now?

It's humorous in the most tragic sort of way to hear the addled Paterno try to justify his reaction to the 2002 report because the true seriousness of the situation with Sandusky wasn't conveyed to him, the suggestion being that had he known there was sodomy taking place he might have done more. But even if the only thing that Paterno was told was that his long time buddy was showering late at night in the locker room with a 10-year old boy and nothing more, isn't that sufficiently creeping to warrant a more outraged response? Yet by Paterno's own accounts he never even confronted Sandusky about the allegation and the two remained friends.

The eternal gratitude of Penn State Nation seems just a little too good for what Paterno really deserves. If the there was any justice, Paterno's statute on the campus would be taken down, his office cleaned out, and he be shipped off to wherever codgers like him go to contemplate why they ultimately did little to prevent more kids from becoming Sandusky victims.

Paterno, of course, was shocked by the decision to fire him, confirming what we've known for years. You don't have to be much of a cynic to wonder whether the Board's action came after Paterno (with their implicit approval) floated the trial balloon of a year-end retirement only to see the adverse reaction to it. Unable to sustain an unsustainable position, the Board had to take the action that Paterno refused to take himself.

One fear I have is that as with most story arcs, there will come a point soon where many try to paint Paterno as a sympathetic figure. This scandal doesn't erase all the other good in his life but neither does that good erase his morally bankrupt conduct in this case. If there is even one additional abuse victim once Paterno knew about Sandusky's alleged conduct (and by all accounts there were), then Paterno and many others are complicit in that abuse and should pay a heavy price. If Paterno's inaction is not a crime, then hell it should be.

Ironically, at some point soon you can bet that the Big Ten Commission Jim Delaney and the NCAA will add some additional unintentional humor into this by announcing that neither Paterno nor Penn State violated any NCAA rules. That will be the final confirmation, really, of the NCAA's irrelevance in really being a force for something positive in the lives of young men and women. And if that brings about the downfall of the NCAA as well, then so much the better.

When you stop and consider this situation you start to realize that in every important respect it mirrors the scandals of the Catholic Church over much the same issues. In each case the knee-jerk reaction was to protect the institution at the expense of the victims, which only served to cause even more heartache to the real victims.

I'll never understand that sort of reaction because if the institution is worth protecting then it is strong enough to withstand the individual misdeeds of rogue miscreants. But the wrong-headed approach of Paterno and many others associated with Penn State, including the late acting trustees, runs counter to that purpose. They each had an opportunity to demonstrate at the outset that the abuse was not indicative of the values of the institution by taking immediate, decisive and forceful action. Instead by covering it up in the name of the higher purpose of football, they just proved they are every bit as corrupt and sick as Sandusky.

Paterno hung around the Penn State program probably decades past his expiration date from a purely coaching standpoint. But the fact that he did hang around for so long doesn't just suggest but demands that he go to greater lengths then anyone at Penn State to ensure that its moral compass never get questioned.

Well, surprise, surprise. Paterno didn't do the right thing then and didn't do the right thing now. At least he's consistent. I guess stress does bring out the true character of a person. Thankfully, that kind of character won't be around any longer.