Sandusky is convicted. The Paterno statue is gone. The NCAA hammer has just fallen on Penn State. Kickoff at Beaver Stadium is at noon on September 1st against the Ohio University Bobcats. If that last bit strikes you as more than a little bit unseemly, join the club.

(Note: This column was written before Monday's NCAA press conference, though it has been edited slightly since)

I have pretty much kept my powder dry as far as writing on the Penn State situation here on the front page at TCF. To begin with, the subject is itself repellant, and the ”unspeakable” quality of the crimes and the cover-up rendered it that way for me for quite some time. Besides that, I went for many weeks making a point not to join the “I’m more outraged than you are” competition going on among genuinely outraged Americans with keyboards. To paraphrase Ms. Steinem, I felt the world needed my opinion on the subject like a fish needs a bicycle. Little has changed in that regard I'm sure, notwithstanding what follows.

With the Sandusky trial behind them and years of civil suits still ahead, Penn State University is pressured by the looming season opener to come to grips *now* with just how Penn State football will proceed...or not proceed...in light of the
Freeh Report’s
damning findings
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After seemingly being content to remain on the sidelines in the early going, the NCAA has now entered the fray, and has reportedly decided on a package of what are said to be “unprecedented” sanctions for the university and its football program, to be announced Monday. They are reportedly taking pains to deny that the sanctions represent any kind of a “deal” with the university, and sources familiar with the proposed penalties have said Penn State might prefer the “death penalty” to what is about to befall them.

So we know it's *not* going to be the death penalty...a penalty said by nodding heads everywhere to have been permanently shelved by the NCAA as a sanction even considered for member schools, because it is so disabling of a program in the longer term. Can't have that.

To their credit, the Penn State Board of Trustees has acted responsibly, and with surprising dispatch, not only with the summary dismissals of the four principal administrators involved in shielding Jerry Sandusky from accountability for over a decade, but with the timely completion and forthright conclusions of their investigation. But now it's crunch time, and they must decide if they are going to pack 110,000 loyal fans into the stadium and kick off a football game against Ohio University on September 1, even in the event that the NCAA permits it.

If they do, I'm afraid outrage will not be a strong enough word to describe the public reaction.

You want to talk about innocents?

We've all heard the arguments against suspending football at Penn State altogether, whether for one season or longer. They'd be punishing innocents...players and coaches who had nothing to do with enabling Jerry Sandusky...to say nothing of the local economy...from peanut vendors to motel operators who depend on the 110,000 ticket buyers seven or eight times each fall for their livings. For the State College, PA community, Penn State, and especially Nittany Lion football, is *all they have*.

I am far from the first to make the blindingly obvious point that this "*football is everything*" cultur e is precisely what led to the horrendous errors in judgment that allowed Sandusky to rack up additional victims long after he should have been in prison. And it should not go unnoticed that the Penn State community is deluding itself and lying to us as long as they claim collective innocence in the matter of the protection of Jerry Sandusky, and the decade-long denial of his criminality.

Because as we have learned, people knew. Of course a few...and maybe a lot...of PSU administrators knew...and the victims themselves and anyone in whom they confided knew. But others did too. Coaches like McQueary and his father knew, and other Penn State coaches could hardly help having a clue. The janitors who were unwitting witnesses to Sandusky's child molestation knew, as did anyone they talked to about it. A district attorney who could have brought charges in 1998, and who later turned up missing and is now presumed dead surely knew. Mrs. Sandusky knew.

The locker room was reportedly rife with rumors and whispers about Sandusky and why he was suddenly "retired" from the program in the prime of his career. And his ongoing presence on campus, escorting pre-teen boys to football functions could only have added to the general sense that something profoundly creepy was afoot.

Aurora, Colorado is a community innocent of any blame for the evil acts perpetrated there recently. The place that calls itself Happy Valley clearly is not. And when that community shares

in the loss, and the hurt, and the monetary and emotional pain of a sanctioned Penn State program, sympathy from this corner will be in short supply.

Something Beyond Symbols, Please

So the statue is gone, and there will be a multiple-year bowl game ban and scholarship reductions, and vacated victories from the years spent covering for Jerry Sandusky. Word is now leaking that the NCAA will levy a fine on the university that could be as high as $60 million. But with each passing day I am less persuaded by the arguments listed above that there should be no interruption of actual Penn State football games going forward.

Readers who follow the TCF message boards know that I have expressed my hope that the university will self-impose a one year hiatus from football at the school. Our own Jesse Lamovsky made that case eloquently in his column this week , citing the example set by the University of San Francisco when their basketball program was deemed by university administrators to be corrupt beyond repair in the early 80's.

Among the Freeh Report's findings was that Joe Paterno *"was an integral part of the effort to conceal"* Sandusky's crimes, behavior by Paterno that Freeh called *"callous and shocking"* . It was a finding that more than justified the removal of Paterno's statue from the campus. But it was not the worst of what Freeh found in the course of his investigation:

"Our most saddening and sobering finding is the total disregard for the safety and welfare of Sandusky's child victims by the most senior leaders at Penn State...The most powerful men at Penn State failed to take any steps for 14 years to protect the children who Sandusky victimized."

Oh yes...the victims

My placing of part of the blame for the concealment of Sandusky's crimes onto the broader "Penn State community" should be qualified here by saying that the majority of citizens in that community are doubtless decent people who were and are appalled and embarrassed by what happened there, and are largely supportive of the actions taken by the criminal court and the university in its wake.

Some or all of the reported NCAA fine of PSU will be set aside for the victims, and those victims will soon be having their day in civil litigation, which could result in many more millions in awards to them. None of that will ever give them back their innocence, but one hopes it will help to make amends.

If I may...

Maybe the following notion is entirely fanciful or naive, but I have a suggestion for the Penn State community to demonstrate their concern for the victims of Jerry Sandusky...and yes, of

Joe Paterno.

Regardless of what the NCAA brings down on your head this Monday...and here I'm assuming it will not involve the forced cancellation of any 2012 games...

Cancel the Ohio University game on September 1st. Make Ohio U. whole for the loss of revenue they will experience, and encourage your loyal fans to show up at Beaver Stadium anyway, in a show of support for the victims. Schedule some speakers...do whatever you like...but *be* there. Fill the place.

Yes...all 110,000 of you...paying the full price of your regular football ticket for admission, plus whatever additional amount you'd care to donate, with all proceeds to go into a fund for the victims. Spend your fall Saturday afternoon doing something that shows you care about those *other*
young men.

It would not be an award from a civil court. It would not be a fine imposed by the NCAA on the university. It would be a profound demonstration of care and concern and regret...directly from the hearts of *the fans of Penn State football*.

It would show that you know that Penn State football is not all you have in Happy Valley.

It would be a start.

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