

OUTLINE FOR TV SHOW ON “THE GAME THEY PLAYED”

1. Your book was published in 1977, but was republished 24 years later in 2001. Such republication is not usual. Why was your book republished? -- What about it did you and the publisher believe made it of contemporary interest?
2. Today the NCAA tournament -- March Madness -- is one of the biggest events in sports, and the National Invitational Tournament -- the NIT -- is not important. But it was not always this way. Explain how and when the NIT and the NCAA tournaments began, where they were played, how teams were selected for them, and their relative importance early-on.
 - 2(a). Explain the origin, effect and tradition of the Madison Square Garden doubleheaders in the '30s and '40s.
 - (b). Explain that teams in different parts of the country had different styles, and the Garden was where styles got matched one against the other and where New Yorkers saw and adopted the techniques of other parts of the country.
 - A. Would it be true to say that, in enabling people to use different styles and techniques, the Garden doubleheaders performed the same function in New York as TV has performed throughout the country for roughly the last 30 or more years?
 - B. Describe the impact of Hank Luisetti in the Garden. (Would it be accurate to think that the one handed, on the run shooting of Irwin Dambrot that one can see in “City Dump” is the kind of shot that was introduced by Luisetti?)
 - C. Who invented the jump shot?
 - (c). Explain that basketball was the New York City game, and that the NYC colleges -- schools like LIU and St. John's -- were perennial national powerhouses, primarily using players from the City, who learned the game in the City's schoolyards in three on three games.
 - A. There is one thing about three on three half court games in New York that is different from most -- perhaps even all -- of the rest of the country. In New York, it's winners' outs after someone makes a basket, i.e., it's make it, take it. In the rest of the country it's usually loser's outs after someone makes a basket. Do you think that the practice of winners' outs somehow reflects the nature of life in New York City?
- 3(a). Describe CCNY (today CUNY, correct?). Tell what it meant to generations of immigrants, that it provided their children with an entree to a better life when other colleges would not take them (the Ivy League had not-very-well-hidden quotas and was too expensive anyway), that it had numbered among its students young people who became some of the most

brilliant intellectuals of American life, (Irving Crystol, Nathan Glazer, etc.). Also describe the physical majesty of the school. (I personally had never seen it till I saw pictures of it in "City Dump." It looks very impressive, very Ivy Leaguish.)

- (b). Describe the struggle and the middle class morality of the parents who sent their children to City College, and that was therefore the background of CCNY's students.
 - A. Isn't this the same kind of middle class morality which exists among many striving immigrants today, not to mention the middle class generally today?
- 4. Explain that CCNY won both the NIT and the NCAA in 1950 and was the only team ever to do this. Describe what CCNY's sweep of the two tournaments meant to the New York community, especially the Jewish community in New York. Include explanations of the following:
 - A. In those days, I suppose (rightly or wrongly?), the City was largely, or at least *very* extensively, comprised of four groups: Irish Americans, Italian Americans, Jewish Americans, and African Americans. Each of these groups had been, and to varying but large extents still was, the subject of massive discrimination and outright hatred in America. Partly -- probably largely -- because it was so heavily populated by these groups, NYC was the object of vilification by what in recent decades might have been called "Middle America." The Midwest and the South thought of themselves as the repository of the small town virtues which America supposedly stood for -- and *stands* for?, and thought of New York as the cynosure of big city, immigrant-fostered evil, correct? They looked down upon the NYC populations -- and often thought them not fully fledged Americans, right?
 - B. In return, New Yorkers looked down in various ways on the people from the Midwest and the South, and thought them rubes, correct? Yet, underneath it all -- or maybe not *so* underneath -- the populations of New York, including the Jews, and among them especially the immigrants and their first generation children, wanted to become real Americans, right?
 - C. So when CCNY -- a team comprised of two blacks and apparently all the rest Jews (was Marvin Kalb correct in plainly implying in "City Dump" that there was not a single white Christian on the team?) -- swept both the NIT and the NCAA, this was thought a form of vindication by New Yorkers, especially the large Jewish community of New York.
 - (i). Explain how the young men on the team were all from the same streets as average New Yorkers, the same schools and playgrounds, the same candy stores, and were known to New Yorkers -- you yourself used to play with Ed Roman on occasion. These were the local neighborhood kids who had triumphed over Middle America, over the groups that had oppressed them for

two or three generations.

- (a). And it was the sense of triumph over oppressors that went smash when the point shaving scandal broke, right?
 - (b). What also went smash was the idealistic sense that sports were heroic and athletes were heroes, right?
 - (i). You speak at times of rhetorical excess being a common mode of writing in the '40s and '50s. This contributed to the idealistic sense about sports and athletes, didn't it?
 - (ii). I take it that it was the fact they caused these things to go smash, and had let down their own people, that caused the CCNY players to never speak for attribution about the matter even 25 and 50 years later, to have unlisted phone numbers, and so on. Yet, one notes, you feel they had about the same degree of success later in life as could have been expected had the fix never occurred.
 - (iii). The discovery of the fixing had such a traumatic effect on New Yorkers that you say that, as with Pearl Harbor, the shooting of Kennedy and 9/11 (and I might add the death of FDR), one remembers exactly where he was when he heard the news).
- D. We will get back to this later, but, when the scandal struck, southerners and midwesterners like the bigoted Adolph Rupp, the coach of Kentucky, and Phog Allen, the coach of Kansas, blamed it on the east and New York and said that gamblers could not reach their players. It turned out that players were participating in fixing games all over the United States, with more probably being fixed outside of New York than in the City. The bigoted Rupp own teams were guilty to an horrific extent. (When he learned of this, Rupp tried to excuse it by saying they were just shaving points, not throwing games.)
- E. Do you think the kind of New York City/Middle America schism we are talking about here still exists, even if in somewhat altered form? For example, it has become a matter of some note that the Republican/Democrat split in this country is a split between the east and west coasts and a few large interior cities (e.g., Chicago and Detroit) on the one hand, and the South, the Midwest and the rural west on the other. (This was never more clear than in the November, 2000 election.)
5. Let's turn to the nature of the fixing of games that was occurring.

- A. Explain that, in the main, the fixing involved the point spread. That is to say, when teams were favored to win by a lot of points, e.g., eight or ten, they were paid to hold down the score so that they won by *less* than the point spread. The gamblers who paid them would bet against them and would win if the teams won by less than the point spread. Explain how all of this worked.
- B. Explain that this created what you call a “double win” for the players. They won the game, and they won by being paid to keep the size of their victory below the point spread.
- C. Explain how a player, without calling attention to what he was doing, could take action to narrow the spread. He could miss a long shot, allow his man to score, fail to get a rebound, throw a bad pass. An object was to control the spread while not “stinking out the joint.”
- D(i). Yet at several places in your book you seem to imply, and at one or two places even to say, that the attempt to control the spread, particularly when the spread was narrow, caused a team to actually lose a game, even if inadvertently.
 - (ii). You also seem to imply in places that some games may have been truly dumped -- deliberately lost. Are you in fact implying this? Do you think Kentucky deliberately lost the first game of the 1949 NIT tournament because of a deliberate dump?
 - (iii). Explain the amounts of money that the fixing gamblers were wagering on individual games and the amounts the players were receiving. To understand these amounts in today’s terms, one would, I suppose, multiply by about ten.
 - (i). Yet, when the players got caught, most of them hadn’t even spent the money they got. It was put away in shoe boxes, safety deposit boxes, in attics, etc.
 - (ii). There also were more than just one ring of gamblers fixing games. And sometimes there even seems to have been fix and counterfix.
- 6. Explain why you feel that, without gambling, there would not have been as great an interest in college basketball (or virtually any sport, except maybe golf and tennis?). I gather you feel this is still true today.
- 7(a). The coaches, if they are to be believed, knew nothing about what was going on -- didn’t have a clue, if they are to be believed. Explain what Forddy Anderson of Bradley said after watching movies of a game over and over again. Explain what Nat Holman said about not being able to detect motive.
 - A. Explain Holman’s background and personality.

- B. Explain how Holman was suspended, went through various proceedings and then was reinstated.
- (b). How can the coaches *not* have had serious suspicions about what was going on? As Murray Sperber has said, they all knew about the pseudo jobs at the hotels in the Catskills, and that gamblers were like locusts there. The prevalence of gamblers and gambling in the Garden itself was open and notorious. And while the coaches would say that a bad play could have been just that and only that, some of the plays shown on City Dump as allegedly exemplifying deliberate shaving of points were so terrible (especially some of the missed shots) that I find it impossible to think they could have been done for any reason other than with deliberate intent. (*Were* the awful plays shown on City Dump thought to be plays that illustrated the dumping? If not, if they were *real* plays, so to speak, than I *can* believe that players could make horrid plays without coaches knowing. But, what today's fans might find surprising -- and what is shown on other film clips on City Dump -- is that those guys back in the '40s and early '50s could *really* play, even if their style was different. It's hard to believe that people of their ability to play could unintentionally make plays as horrible as some of those shown on "City Dump" as exemplifying the dumping.)
- C. Yet another reason it is hard to believe the coaches didn't suspect anything is that the word was all over the street that the games were fixed. You say, if I remember correctly, that every schoolyard basketball player in New York knew it. Not only was this the word on the street, but there were dead-giveaway-indications, e.g., teams (like LIU) would regularly fail to cover the point spread against teams they should have whopped, there would be an influx of last second money that was bet on the underdog (money which would win if the spread weren't covered), bookies -- whose living depends on keeping their ears to the ground and on noticing it when unusual things happen -- would pull games off the boards.
- (i). Describe your view that the evidence needed in the street to know the truth, and needed in a court of law, are very different things. Explain also why you seem to feel that the truth of the streets can be far more accurate than the truth known to law. Also discuss your view that the passage of years without indictments and arrest proved that fixing *was* going on, but successfully and without being detected.
- D. In addition to all the above, the same kind of moral crookedness existed in getting and keeping basketball players in school as exists today: there were "special admits," tampering with transcripts, phony jobs, phony grades, scholarships at LIU though they were against NCAA rules in those days. (Also, the schools and the coaches were doing well while the players got little.)
- E. Yet I gather that, despite the fact that one could hardly miss that something was rotten in the state of Denmark, idealism caused people -- from teenage ballplayers to Marty Glickman -- not to *want* to believe that games were being fixed. Explain that

Glickman (like others) was even *told* what was going on by a participant, yet still didn't believe it.

6. Explain who Junius Kellogg was and how and why he came to blow the whistle on the scandal.
- 7(a). Describe how the scandal grew to include teams all over America. Describe Gene Melchiorre and what his role was.
- (b). Describe the two great Kentucky teams, how they were deeply implicated, and what happened to the Beard/Groza/Jones team that was in the NBA.
- (c). Describe why you feel it was naive to think that the fixing was not in actuality far more prevalent all over the country than was uncovered. Include the fact that fixing or attempted fixing went back at least to 1931, and surfaced again in 1945 and 1949. Explain the reason that vast jumps in logic were required to believe that there was *not* a lot more fixing than was uncovered.
- (d). Explain that, outside of New York, very little legal action was taken against players who fixed games.
 - A. Describe your view that small towns won't punish their own, because college sports teams were all they had. As well, describe your view that New York saw itself as a moral conscience of America.
 - (i). This view reflects, does it not, the split spoken of earlier between New York on the one hand and the South and Midwest on the other.
 - (ii). You feel that the small towns -- MidAmerica -- passed off the fixing as only a result of "overemphasis" on basketball, using verbal slight of hand to largely ignore the awful truth. I gather you feel such euphemistic use of language became pretty typical of America (e.g., use of "overzealous"). (My own favorite, during Viet Nam, was Nixon's use of "advanced protective reaction" to mean bombing the hell out of the enemy.)
7. Describe the word on the street that Cardinal Spellman put out the word that St. John's shouldn't be implicated by the police. Describe what Kellogg and Marty Glickman said.
8. Describe Judge Streit's discussion of the abuses of college basketball, and his sentencing of defendants. Also explain why his sentencing did not seem to reflect either the actual facts or his own purported criteria. Instead it reflected whether a player had served in the war and whether the judge approved of his family background. Two of the four ballplayers he sent to prison were black, though most of the culprits were white, right? Do you think today that racism was involved?

9. Describe how Streit and others claimed this would serve as a lesson to those who might be tempted to transgress in the future (and legal penalties were increased to deter future transgressions), but this had absolutely no effect. In the sixties there was an even bigger set of fixes, but there just wasn't the same resonance the second time around.
- A. Explain that there have also been subsequent gambling scandals in '75, '85, etc.
10. I gather that you yourself were a reasonably decent player (once shooting 14 of 15 from the floor and 10 of 10 from the line), and made your college team at Hunter. But at a Friday game at CCNY you seemed to have something of an epiphany that this all belonged to the past, and you quit the team the next Monday. To what do you attribute this epiphany? Was it because the fixing scandal had robbed you of enthusiasm? Was it because you realized, especially since you weren't playing much, that it was time to put "childhood things behind" and get on with the real business of life? Was it something else?
11. At the end of the book you discuss taking your son back to the old neighborhood. Explain that:
- A. You saw one of the same people hanging out on a corner and were tempted to say hello, but didn't because you had gone separate ways, would have little to talk about, etc. You felt that there was time for change in life and that failing to change enacts a terrible price.
- B. The Creston school yard, where you used to play, was empty, had no "monuments" to your generation, etc. As for all of us, the past was all a reverie in your head, never to be reclaimed in real life.
12. Explain your view that virtue's greatest ally is lack of opportunity.