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Opinions

NCAA's expansion throws out purity

Did you enjoy the first two weeks of the NCAA basketball tournament? I know I have.

This year's Big Dance has had it all: buzzer-beaters, upsets and all the trappings of high drama.

Now imagine this tournament watered down. Imagine thrilling games replaced with snoozers. Imagine February becoming just one more month of college basketball rather than do-or-die time for all 347 Division-1 teams. That nightmare might happen if the NCAA has its way. The culprit? Profit.

Obviously, American sports playoffs are — and must be — profitable. That's why all postseason games — college and pro — have expanded since inception. Sometimes this has been good — all American sports leagues have grown in both size and popularity.

But many more times this has been bad. The prestige of the postseason is sacrificed for television money. Look no further than our own Georgia football team.

In the past, bowl games were a reward for a stellar season in college football. Instead, we looked at our game in Shreveport as emblematic of a season of missed expectations.

The NCAA Tournament as of right now is remarkably pure. Sixty-five teams — only conference champions and the top at-large teams — square off in a single-elimination series until the two remaining match up for the title.

This system ensures an incredible level of competition and passion. Just making the tournament is an achievement in itself.



MICHAEL BRAZEAL

Once there, the selective entry criteria ensure that many of the games are close. Any team — whether a perennial powerhouse like Duke or a little giant like Butler — can go on a run into the Final Four.

Expanding the tournament to 96 or 128 teams while retaining the single-elimination format, as has been discussed, from the perspective of competition thus makes no sense — except from a financial perspective.

Think about it — a 96-team tournament means 31 more games than the current 64. Thirty-one more games to be hosted in cities across the United States — I know people would go.

CBS has a contract with the NCAA to broadcast the Big Dance for 11 years. But the NCAA can opt out of that contract after this season.

Do you think the network, worried about losing a cash cow to a rival, won't be receptive to any sort of NCAA plan?

Essentially, the NCAA faces a choice between purity and profit — to keep the tournament full of drama and passionate play, or to succumb, as always, to the lure of TV money and exposure. As basketball fans, let's hope they make the right choice.

— *Michael Brazeal is a senior from Marietta majoring in newspapers and real estate*



Dating in college not only for couples

After nearly a decade of dating, I've come to the conclusion that the only thing a girl needs to do to get a date is get a boyfriend.

Let me explain. It seems the only people who actually go on dates are already a couple. Dates just don't happen anymore for single people.

And no, a drunken sleeper does not count as a date. I'm talking about a good ol' fashioned dinner and a movie arrangement where two people go out and enjoy each other's company.

Take a look around next time you go out to eat. You're probably not witnessing anybody's first date. Your fellow diners likely have been an item for months, because the concept of meeting someone new, asking them on a date and actually following through with it no longer exists.

Instead, the scenario goes a little something like this: meet someone new, text message them on Friday night to "see if they're out" — this usually involves some embarrassing form of text speak, i.e. "R u out 2nite?" — and maybe even accidentally bump into them at Boar's Head. Every girl's dream right?

And for that matter, I don't think it's every guy's dream either. What is anyone really getting out of this situation, anyway?

So you save a few bucks on dinner, but you miss out on getting to know someone, doing something fun and different, and hopefully good conversation — one that you



KATE PARHAM

can actually remember the next morning.

Seth Cohen of "The O.C." fame knows what I'm talking about: "Kids our age don't even date anymore. They hang out in groups and then they peel off to hook up."

How romantic! Now, I'm sure at this point you're thinking, "Ease up, lady! Just because you can't get a date, doesn't mean the rest of us can't either!" But I can get a date. In fact, I go on a lot of dates ... with my boyfriend.

Before I had a boyfriend, I had no dates. I met plenty of eligible bachelors. I even gave my number out to a few of them. But to no avail. All I got was some lousy Facebook message saying how it was good to see me at Buddha Bar.

Good to see me? You know, you could see me on purpose sometime, too, if you asked me out. I think guys don't realize how easy it could be to get a girl.

My first date was at Your Pie — it doesn't have to be the five-star restaurant you think we require — and my girlfriends and I gushed for hours over how amazing this guy was solely for asking to see me in a sober setting.

I realize that a lot of guys don't

want to be tied down in college — save the serious relationships for post-graduation kind of thing.

But if you met a girl in class and thought she was cute and interesting, why wouldn't you invite her over to watch the new episode of "The Office" or join in on the pot of spaghetti you made for dinner?

I suppose the answer is pretty obvious. We — and by we, I mean women — tend to take things too seriously and rather than enjoy being young and in college, we try to turn everything into a serious, monogamous relationship. This scares guys off from ever asking a girl out, for fear that she'll always want more than they're willing to give.

But it doesn't have to be that way. It can be great to just meet new people, hang out and get to know them.

You never know where it could lead: a friendship, a girlfriend, sex, job contacts or absolutely nowhere, and then you're off to the next date. An open mind might surprise both sexes.

To be clear, I'm not suggesting that everyone start pairing off. "Men! Grab your spears and catch you a woman!" I'm not saying that at all.

What I am saying is that dating can be fun and exciting and worth it. Relationships ... well, that's for another column.

— *Kate Parham is a senior from Roswell majoring in magazines*

Mailbox

E-mail and letters from our readers

Univ. without legitimate excuse for campus coal

In Michael Prochaska's March 29 article "Coal may not be in future for University," the volatility of natural gas prices was brought up as a main reason for the University's continued reliance on coal.

However, this is a weak claim, for it ignores the reality of the natural gas market.

Recent advances in the extraction technologies have opened up access to large stores of shale natural gas that will allow the United States to double its reserves.

This means that not only will natural gas remain affordable, but prices may drop even further in the future. This does not even account for the savings in negative externalities, as natural gas is 70 percent cleaner than coal, according to Michael Ming, president of Secure Energy. It seems that UGA's excuses for coal on our campus are running thin.

ARSHA SLAUGHTER
 Junior, Palmetto
 International affairs

Allowing drilling 'filthy' decision

President Barack Obama made a filthy move by siding with dirty energy and the dirty oil companies.

He proposed a bill to expand offshore drilling, repealing a moratorium

that has been over oil exploration on the East Coast for over a decade.

His proposal would open up 167 million acres of ocean stretching from the coast of Delaware to central Florida. How could this happen? Does he realize the environmental, and — even more pertinent — human health implications of this decision?

Maybe he is trying to keep the pace with radical change after the passing health care reform less than two weeks ago, but these two actions are counterproductive.

Not only will increased drilling introduce a slew of toxic materials to the environments, but the continued pursuit of these polluting fuels is most disturbing.

Expanding health care for all Americans should be partnered by the promotion of energy practices that deteriorate the health of all Americans. Here in Athens we are victims of dirty energy.

The steam plant on UGA's campus still operates a coal boiler, which emits carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, and mercury into our community. As citizens, it is our duty and our right to ensure that we are living in a safe environment. We need clean alternatives, and we need them now.

AMBER DAVIS
 Junior, Hiawassee
 International business and marketing

Let serendipity take course when traveling

Istare out at the crowd with my hands and head trapped under the guillotine. A small boy weeps for me, triggering tears to then roll down my cheeks.

These glistening droplets do not fall because I'm mourning my life's end, but they start because of my uncontrollable, stomach-cramping laughter.

I was the lucky American chosen to be the "victim" of an authentic, Italian Renaissance performance during my study abroad session this past summer in Florence, Italy.

Before going abroad, everyone bombards you with the clichéd stereotypes of how you're going to change for the better, become more mature, and even have "the greatest time of your life."

I actually never knew people could use so many superlatives when speaking about one topic, but clearly I was wrong.

When picking where to study abroad, choose somewhere different. I went through CET Academic Programs, a private study abroad organization based in Washington, D.C., and my particular program was also jointly administered with Vanderbilt University and the University of Florence.

So not only did I delve into a whole new culture, but I also learned the dynamics of an entirely different college campus.

Like many UGA students, I'm a Georgian, so going to UGA fails to represent one of my most adventurous decisions.

But by going abroad through another program, I really stepped



BRIDGET DONLEY

out of my comfort zone and would recommend it to anyone.

What made my Florence trip so memorable was that none of the other students knew Lumpkin Street and none of the other students knew how to properly bark on a Saturday afternoon.

No one knew me. I couldn't fall back on standard UGA conversations concerning freshman dorms or football games — I had to start over again, and that was remarkably refreshing.

A lot of people go abroad and spend most of their weekends traveling all over Europe to other destinations, but I recommend staying put. I, along with many of my friends, chose to stay exclusively in Italy, only traveling to other Italian cities.

So I spent seven weeks solely understanding the complete paradox of being "Italian."

Not unified until 1860, this nation still stands highly divided, with each region, city and town having their own traditions, beliefs, environments and even dialects.

So though each "Italian" region does eat pizza and pasta, these labels just scratch the surface of this diverse country. Italians are not just Italians — they are Sicilians, Florentines, Romans ... each with their own identity.

When you go abroad, you simply have to go with the flow and let the journey lead way. This final tip brings me back to the Renaissance Festival.

This particular weekend we actually scheduled a horseback vineyard tour and a private wine tasting in a traditional Tuscan castle.

Though the horseback ride lived up to our expectations, the supposedly "private" wine tasting was, in reality, a full-blown Italian Renaissance Festival.

Just imagine the look of astonishment on all of our faces when we approached the overcrowded castle with jousting men on horseback. The only solution in a predicament such as this one, however, is to simply laugh and live it up.

Though this day did not turn out as planned, we still had that clichéd, overly-advertised "time of our lives." I like to refer to these unexpected incidents as serendipitous abroad moment.

Serendipity — meaning a fortunate accident — stands as one of my favorite words. Just think about it: how many times in your life have you been dreaming about one goal and then completely achieved another you had never even pondered. The complete oxymoron embedded within its very own definition solidifies the phenomenon of this lucky mistake.

So if you get the opportunity to study abroad, make it happen and let serendipity take its course.

— *Bridget Donley is a senior from Atlanta majoring in English*

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