

Post 11/24/72

Poster

The Sport of Politicians

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

Until last Tuesday Jack Scott has had to work for everything he's ever gotten. He went through Stanford on an athletic scholarship—track—and that's hard work; he got a Ph.D. in sociology from Berkeley, and even if being a phud doesn't mean much any more, you still have to work hard to get one. In addition, Scott started the Institute for the Study of Sport and Society, which, despite the resounding syllables of its name, subsists on a budget of about \$11,000 a year, contributed mostly from the wages of Scott and his wife. At age 29 he's also the author of a book, entitled "The Athletic Revolution."

The book is the lightning rod attracting Jack Scott's lucky strike. Because last Tuesday night Vice President Agnew attacked him for writing it. Now already Jim Bouton, the ex-Yankee pitcher who works for ABC sports, has been on the phone to Scott in Oakland, Calif., suggesting a debate between him and the man that the liberals of Maryland put into office. To be attacked by Agnew, at length and by name, has to be worth not less than \$10,000 in additional lecture fees.

It will help the institute in its social science research and its various modest aid programs. For instance, Scott says, they have just given Harold Connally, the great hammer thrower who has represented the United States in every Olympics since 1956, a grant of \$1,000. Connally and his hammer thrower wife who defected from Czechoslovakia, have four children, little money and great needs if they're going to be able to compete again this year.

"All those rich Los Angeles jock-sniffers promised to help," Scott says, "until they learned that the Connallys have been supporting the black Olympic athletes, and then they faded away."

Agnew's speech was given to the only kind of audience that will turn out and listen to him any more—The Birmingham (Ala.) Touchdown Club—on the occasion of an award, medal, scroll or trophy presentation to one Paul (Bear) Bryant, a football coach. Also speaking was Gov. George Wallace. Perhaps between courses he and the Vice President discussed football's biggest mystery: Why black men can star in every position in the National Football League but the most prestigious and best paid one of quarterback.

The text of the speech started with the de rigeur crack at this newspaper: "I'm the fellow from the nation's capital who's been criticized for not running the post pattern very well—that is, The Washington Post pattern . . ." There were more football in-jokes, all equally well re-

ceived according to eye witness Tom Dowling, the Washington Star's entertainingly literate sports columnist, and then Agnew went after Scott, accusing him of the ideological seduction of a middle linebacker on the St. Louis Cardinals, a professional football team.

Good man that he is, Dowling wrote a fun piece about the thing, and that drew an angry phone call from Vic Gold, Agnew's press agent, to The Washington Star. The Star has a record of consistently backing this administration, but apparently any criticism is too much, because Mr. Gold laid 'em out in terms that Agnew would have you believe only the New Left uses. This was followed by a more temperate letter to the editor which began, "Tom Dowling's campaign to become the Nicholas von Hoffman of the National Capital sports set proceeds apace," (I quote only in hopes of raising *my* lecture fees.)

Now all of this is rather inconsequential fun, save for Scott's repeated assertion that big time sports is constantly being used for political purposes. With Nixon phoning every kid in the country who scores a touchdown, it would seem so, but really, if you watch our number one fan closely, you can see he isn't doing it for political purposes. God help us, he's a genuine sports nut, a jock crazy fanatic, but Agnew isn't. Read these excerpts from his speech, and you read the words of a man trying to use sports to make people think America is what she isn't:

"... The importance of our competitive ethic lies in the fact that it is only by trial of their abilities—by testing and challenging—can they (young Americans) discover their strengths and yes, their weaknesses... Life is a great competition... sports—all sports—is one of the few bits of glue that holds society together... I would rather be a failure in the competitive society which is our inheritance than to live in a waveless sea of nonachievers."

Yeah? Our two biggest money sports, baseball and football, are exempt from the Sherman Antitrust Act. Organized, professional sports enjoy a special statutory tax break; they play in tax subsidized stadiums. In short, the guys Agnew drinks and plays golf with don't compete. Thus does the administration use the strain and endeavors of a few thousand young athletes to hide the continuing accretion of centralized power in every major area of life off the playing field.

Scott sees this and Agnew and Gold see that Scott sees it and that's why the phud from Berkeley got lucky.