

Our Man Hoppe**Defense! Defense!
Defense! Defense!****Arthur Hoppe**

Following is the text of the locker room statement issued by the ace quarterback of the Skewer University Plumbers after their bitter clash with their arch cross-town rivals.

Seven Plumbers were tossed out of the game for illegal play stealing, five more were suspended on charges of unsportsmanlike conduct and the team was assessed a record 615 yards in penalties.

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FIRST, let me say to you, that I did absolutely nothing wrong. And I'm sorry. Let me repeat that I never played dirty. I never knew any of my teammates were playing dirty and nobody can prove it.

Nor do I question the right of the referees to call 'em as they see 'em, no matter how lousy those calls were — and no matter that it's become increasingly clear that they're out to get me, the quarterback, personally.

But because certain of my over-zealous teammates broke the rules under my quarterbackship, I accept full responsibility — no matter how many of them have to go to jail.

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LET ME EXPLAIN to you what I did when seven of my teammates were tossed out of the game for illegal play stealing right after the opening gun. Right then, I went back in the huddle and said right off, "Are any of you guys in this huddle involved in playing dirty?"

They all denied it. So I told them, "What really hurts when over-zealous people in these games play dirty is if you try to cover it up. If you play dirty, tell the referees you played dirty. That's the decent way to play the game."

So on the second play, our scatback, Dean, draws 15 yards for gouging. "Dean," I said to him in the huddle, looking him

straight in the eye, "did you or did you not gouge?"

And he assured me at that time that neither he, nor anyone else in the huddle had gouged. I immediately directed him to launch an intensive investigation to determine whether he or anyone else in the huddle had gouged.

Throughout the first half, as the penalties mounted, I continued to press the question of who was playing dirty. And I continued to get the same answer: no one.

Because I trusted my teammates conducting these investigations, I was convinced there was no cover-up because I was convinced no one was playing dirty.

It wasn't until the fourth quarter that Dean, after we'd been penalized 535 yards, informed me someone was playing dirty. Without asking him who, I kicked him out of the game.

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NOW IT IS TRUE I bugged the huddle and the tapes would prove me innocent. But to release those tapes would destroy my teammates' freedom to talk openly and candidly with me, knowing what they say is in the strictest confidence. Which is why I bugged the huddle in the first place.

Now let me say I reject the cynical view, that football is a dirty game. Just because the other guys played dirty and didn't get caught, it's no reason we should have played dirty. Which I didn't.

And I pledge to you that one of the results of this game will be a new level of good sportsmanship in American football. So let's forget about it and support me and what teammates I have left in the great season of decency and fair play that lies ahead.

God bless us, every one.