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Initial college football forum helps narrow the communication gap

By WENDELL BARNHOUSE

wbarnhouse@star-telegram.com

DFW AIRPORT — Character actor Strother Martin played a Southern prison warden in the 1967 movie Cool Hand Luke. His signature quote became a catch phrase for a generation.

“Whut we’ve got heyah is.... fale-yure to communicate.”

A communication disconnect between college football’s leaders and The Media has increased as The Media has grown to encompass everybody and anybody with a laptop and Internet access.

The 2008 College Football Forum that concluded Friday was designed to increase and improve the dialogue. For six hours Thursday and five hours Friday, a panel that included TCU coach Gary Patterson discussed, debated, dissected issues and answered questions.

So what? Does it matter that The Media has access to coaches, coordinators and players? We — The Media — write what we want to anyway, right?

Not to go Journalism 101 or First Amendment here, but The Media is the information conduit between fans and The Sport.

With more than 48 million fans attending Division I-A football games last season, the Bowl Championship Series, saturated television coverage and hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue, a lack of understanding can be harmful.

The Las Colinas-based National Football Foundation and the Football Writers Association of America worked together to make the forum happen. It will be continued and improved over the next few years.

Starting the process increases the understanding between two sides where the trust factor is often non-existent.

“It’s hard to do our job without (trusting the media),” Patterson said.

Florida State president T.K. Wetherell and Your College Football Insider engaged in a spirited discussion about blogs. His understanding of a blog and how it works is approximate to my understanding of astrophysics.

“If an 18-year-old college athlete gets arrested for a bar fight with a bunch of other college students, why does that end up on the front page of a newspaper?” Wetherell said. “Aren’t we supposed to treat them like the rest of the students?”

No. A football player plays a sport that brings tens of millions of dollars into a school’s athletic department. That has to be an accepted quid pro quo considering the media coverage and attention devoted to college football.

I might get the last word (in print) but that doesn’t mean I’m right and Florida State’s president is wrong. What’s important is that both sides were presented and the volume didn’t reach the level of a cable news network roundtable.

Wetherell said Friday that the reason a 12th regular-season game was added was “money.” And he said, “It’s not a question of if there’s going to be a (I-A) playoff but when.”

Interesting.

Washington’s Tyrone Willingham, one of six minority coaches in Division I-A (120 schools), was blunt in his assessment of hiring practices.

“It’s a shame and an embarrassment,” he said. “We’ve gone too long with the numbers the way they are. We have to change what we’re doing. The good ol’ boy network is alive and well.”

Provocative.

The last coaching shuffles sullied college football’s image.

“Coaching contracts are now are like pre-nups,” Notre Dame athletic director Kevin White said. “You negotiate the breakup before you get married.”

Well said.

If you’re a college football fan, be of good cheer. The football forum was the start of much need construction work. Bridge repair, not building, is what’s needed.