

FYI – Another interesting article by Lyle Phair of Michigan Hockey Online.

State of the Game

Is Everybody an Expert?

We are fortunate to be living in the “Information Age” but it might actually be much more entertaining than it is informative.

Advances in modern technology have enabled stories and pictures to be sent and received almost instantly, so our daily printed newspapers have much more detailed and timely information than they have ever had.

The internet is a veritable fountain of information, and in many cases misinformation, that is virtually right at our fingertips. With cable and satellite television we can pretty much watch anything that we want to see, any time we want to see it. And if that is not enough, here is a pretty good chance we can hear anything that would like to hear via the radio and internet, even if we can't see it.

Along with this instant access to anything, anytime, comes a steady slew of available expertise in pretty much anything that you might possibly have a question about.

Instantly there are plenty of “experts” out there to provide that information. From “talking head” professional television and radio talk show hosts, to “in-the-know” newspaper columnists to crazed and passionate fanatic talk-show callers, everyone has their opinion, and at least in their mind, some expert advice. And that can be the entertaining part. But it also might be a little dangerous, depending on how it is interpreted.

Certain times of the year are particularly entertaining. For example, it is amazing to me how University of Michigan head football coach Lloyd Carr can suddenly become an idiot who doesn't even know how to use his time outs properly when his team suffers a last-second loss in what might have been the most entertaining college football bowl game of the season. Here is a guy who has a lifetime of experience in football, has coached at the college level for decades with and against some of the legendary coaches of the era and who perennially has his team ranked in the top ten in the country. And now he is second-guessed by every fantasy football player and wanna-be dweeb who has never even strapped on a helmet, let alone stepped onto a football field? Now that might be entertaining. But it is also pretty sad.

All football season long, I find it extraordinarily amusing when I hear the “college football insiders” for MSU and UM on the local radio talk shows discussing the previous week's game and the outlook for the weekend ahead.

And it's not because both “insiders” are females and most likely have not played the game (well at least not at the Division I college level anyway). From that respect I am sure they probably do a better job of being around the team and reporting their “insider” knowledge than any male could. What I find somewhat humorous, yet somewhat appalling, is when they feel the need to second-guess the coaches on the game plan or strategy they employed, or the players on a decision that they may or may not have made during the action.

Let's be serious. Please tell me again how they are qualified to do that? Yes, I understand it is only an opinion, and you know what they say about opinions, “they are like _____, everybody has one.” So what's the danger in expressing an opinion? Sometimes nothing. Sometimes a great deal. Especially when it is perceived that you are an “insider” or an expert.

But the real issue to me is how our world has evolved to the point where every decision and every decision-maker is over-analyzed and dissected and criticized at every level.

In two years Steve Mariucci has gone from one of the greatest young football minds in the game to drawing comparisons to his predecessor, Marty Morninweig, who couldn't get it done with the Lions. Larry Brown led the Pistons to the NBA championship last spring and less than one year later he doesn't know what he is doing? Could the “right way” have turned to the wrong way that quickly?

Prior to replacing the legendary Ron Mason as the MSU hockey coach, Rick Comley had enjoyed a long and successful collegiate coaching career including winning a national championship in 1991. This season the Spartans have struggled to get to and stay over the .500 mark and now suddenly he doesn't know how to coach anymore?

I know these guys are paid in some instances huge amounts of money, so to a certain degree they should be expected to win and should be open to criticism and second-guessing when they don't. Maybe. It depends on whom it is coming from.

But what about youth sport coaches, the majority of whom are not paid? They volunteer their time and effort. Some of them have strong backgrounds in hockey and bring plenty of knowledge to the table. Some of these coaches are great. Some are not. Other coaches might have minimal experience in playing or coaching the game but love to work with kids and their heart is in the right place. Some of these coaches are great. Some are not.

In either scenario, as soon as they step on the ice for practice or behind the bench for the game they open themselves up for all sorts of criticism and second-guessing. And for that alone they should be commended. Not to mention their commitment and dedication in trying to make the experience a positive one for the players on their teams.

But for some reason in today's culture, maybe partly because of the sights and sounds we are constantly bombarded with everyday, where virtually everything and everyone is analyzed and over-analyzed by experts and panels of experts, many parents find it not only acceptable, but seemingly necessary, to critique the coaches who are overseeing a recreational sport for their children.

And if you don't believe me, just walk around the stands during a game or practice, or through the lobby immediately afterward. And it is even worse when a team is losing!

Worse yet is that more often than not, many of the people who are doing the criticizing and second-guessing of the coaches have little or no idea what they are talking about in the first place. It really is amazing what people say at times. As the old saying goes, it is better to say nothing and to be thought to be an idiot, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.

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