

Crime and volleyball

A Toronto newspaper recently revealed that criminals sentenced to do community work in that city have been playing volleyball as their form of punishment. About 350 such criminals have participated in the volleyball program at Hillcrest Volleyball Club in North York over the past seven years.

Some people are outraged, particularly white-collar criminals serving time in minimum security institutions which only offer golf and tennis.

The program was cancelled abruptly last week when the details were raised in the Ontario legislature and a second news article revealed spectator attendance at these volleyball games was rivalling the Toronto Argonauts home games at the Dome. (A late offer to purchase the volleyball criminals by Bruce McNall of Los Angeles was turned down by the Ministry of Correctional Services).

Most people were stunned by the revelations that convicted sex offenders and burglars were being punished by participating in regular weekly volleyball games.

No one was more upset than the team captain of the Unshackled Six who said: "Until they killed the program I really felt we were going to make the playoffs this year."

The question at the very core of this controversy remains: "Does volleyball qualify as community work?" Well, volleyball as played by ex-cons is no day at the beach.

Take the serve for instance. Often during a play-for-punishment match at the Hillcrest Club, the server would use up more than his allotted time to put the ball in play and a con on the

opposing team would yell: "Hey, you're serving too much time!" This remark would cause both squads (six players a side) to fall to the court in convulsive fits of laughter resulting in career-threatening splinters in the knees from the hardwood floor.

And these cons did not have the luxury of playing by normal rules.



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For instance, noting the participation of convicted sex offenders, the Hillcrest Club changed *RULE #3 RECEPTION* to read: "In receiving the serve, a player may not catch, lift, scoop, throw or offer the ball candy."

Likewise, in deference to the convicted burglars in the line-up, the term for taking possession of the ball in a scramble over the net was changed from a "steal" to "an alleged misappropriation."

And of course in all disputes of rules and line calls, legal aid lawyers were called in to advise the convicts according to The Charter of Rights and Serving Rotation.

So it wasn't all fun and games at the North York Club. No sir. Many games actually ended prematurely when one of the convicts electronic ankle bracelets would go off and everybody assumed it was the final buzzer and went home.

And there were some serious injuries too. Early in the program, rookie convicts had to be taken aside time -after-time and warned that spiking at the net with real spikes would not be tolerated.

But it all came to a screeching halt when the Toronto newspaper blew the whistle on convict volleyball.

I for one believe they'd have never been discovered if it wasn't for the

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The desire for money

It's true, you know. All of us harbour a secret desire for money, pots and pots of it. Why else do some of us play the horses, buy lottery tickets, enter sweepstakes, go to Los Vegas, or even just play bingo? People justify all, or some, of these activities on dire necessity, but if that is the case, then they have no business spending either their welfare cheques or hard-earned pay cheques on such short-term hopeful dreams.

I suppose most would not consider lots of money a necessary evil but a real need, but, apart from the amount necessary for basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothing and education, anything else above and beyond is just an unnecessary frill to our frivolous lives, and not prerequisites to the Good Life.

Of course, on this continent and in most industrialized countries, people have been brain-washed to think that the Good - and only - Life is that which is luxurious and jet-setty. Promos and ads urge us to buy, buy, buy, spend, spend, spend and put on credit, credit, credit. No one advocates saving or doing without.

That's too old-fashioned for the materialistic-mad world of today. Everybody wants EVERYTHING, like yesterday. Most of all they want money with which to purchase this Everything. It isn't the money itself which is evil - after all, responsible people handle it very well - but the LOVE of the damn stuff that is. This is the worst evil of all. It drives people to cheat, steal, double-deal, embezzle, and even murder. It is the root cause of most of the miseries of this world.

People spend an inordinate amount of time envying those 'fortunates' who are pulling down the mega-bucks. If

they got any more jealous they would turn into little green people, and not necessarily from Mars. What's to envy? Most of the people enjoying the moneyed fruits of their labour, have worked darn hard one way or another to achieve it. (We discount the dubious 'talents' of some over-priced, over-promoted stage, screen,



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music, sports or literary figures). So, if the envious have been drinking beer, watching T.V. and generally goofing off while their counterparts have been studying day and night, beating their brains out, and giving up many of the 'fun' things of life along the way, then why should they be bad-mouthed as rich, plutocratic, capitalistic

blood-suckers. The old Communist line of 'Share the Wealth' has always appealed to the lazy, the ignorant, the brainless jealous ones who haven't the initiative or the self-discipline to work hard, long and endlessly.

If one equates money and the power it has to purchase only materialistic things, with happiness, then bully for you. Most people are idiots about money anyway, and there are too many recorded cases of lottery big winners who have blown their winnings in a year and reverted back to the poverty or semi-poverty from which they began. So, what good did it do them in the first place?

One has to keep a perspective about this money business. How much does one really need or want to make one really happy? To quote, "Needs, unlike wants, are finite, so there is a point where enough is enough." The problem is, most of us do not have the courage, or the will, to clearly define that point until we have run into some

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Freedom of information is not free

Municipalities, school boards and other local government bodies have been operating under a new piece of provincial legislation for three months now, called the "Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act". Have you noticed any difference?

If you have kids attending school, you might have noticed you've had to sign special waiver forms, allowing the school to publicize your kid's academic accomplishments. If you refuse, the board must not release your child's marks to anyone.

That's only one example of several changes in government procedures now in effect. The Act requires the government to tell you what records they have about you. You have the right to correct any information you consider incorrect. If the government agency decides they won't correct your file, you have the right to place a letter on the file, indicating your objection.

On the surface, it sounds like our

right to privacy is protected. But there are several loopholes and grey areas. If you apply for a building permit, is the information public or confidential? Presumably the public has a right to know what you're up to, particularly if they want to appear at a public meeting to object to your proposed development.

Or, if you write a letter to your mayor or reeve, and the clerk makes your letter public by putting your letter in the agenda for the next council meeting, does that violate our privacy? Are elected officials subject to the act in the same way as civil servants? The legislation doesn't answer these questions - only future rulings of the provincial Information and Privacy Commissioner will.

The other loophole in the legislation is that it requires government agencies to let you know when they are collecting information on you, but

provides no penalties if they fail to do that. The only watchdog is the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Commissioner, who performs spot audits on government departments. But these audits will not be frequent, so it could be years before you find out that some

agency has been collecting information on you without your knowledge and consent.

From the media's point of view, the Freedom of Information requirements in the Act are anything but "free". At a recent seminar on this legislation held by the Thunder Bay Press Club, the city's co-ordinator of Information and Privacy, Mary Lynn Sydell, made it clear that queries from reporters will not be treated any differently than other members of the public. If the request will require more than 2 hours of staff time to fulfil, then you can be charged

\$7.50 for every 15 minutes of staff search time. So, for example, if you ask for the travel expense account records of your local school trustees and municipal councillors, file a separate request for each trustee or councillor. Don't ask for the whole list all at once. It will likely take more than two hours to complete the whole list, but under two hours to find one person's record. Don't be surprised as well if you get a bill for photocopying, at the rate of at least 10 cents a page.

Sydell is in a unique position compared to other municipalities in northeastern Ontario. She told the seminar that "other municipalities dumped the responsibility for all this on staff that were already overworked with many other things. Our city recognized a long time ago that this Act was coming in January first, and someone would be getting ready for it." So she's been retained full time, to organize training seminars for heads of

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NORTHERN INSIGHTS

by Larry Sanders

