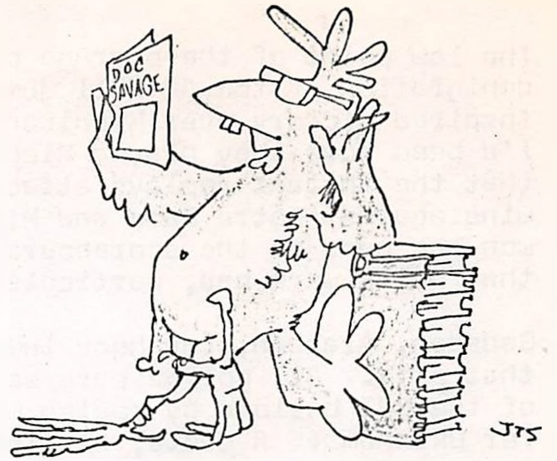


MELIKAPHKHAZ #68

This issue of Mel is dedicated to Paul "Bear" Bryant, coach of the nation's #1 college football team. Coach Bryant's insight into the true nature of the popular selection mechanism is truly astonishing. The editor of this fine fanzine is Lon Atkins, 9942 Voyager Circle, Huntington Beach, CA 92646. January 1979. A Zugzwang Publication...



PICK-A-POLL: While California was lining up behind the UPI Poll, Alabama was lining up in favor of the AP Poll, and Guy Lillian was cackling insanely over the Egoboo Poll, a question was being formulated all over the country: "Why have Polls at all?" The number of sports writers and coaches favoring playoffs to decide the national collegiate football title was gratifying. The hide-bound NCAA football committee was even considering a proposal. Deciding the championship on the field of combat, it was declared, would be a giant step into the future. Such a practice was already common with lesser sports, such as lacrosse, fencing, cross country and basketball.

A few bold souls ventured that the best team might win in such a contest. They wondered about the infallibility of a system which produces two different national champions. Neither the coaches nor the media could be wrong -- this much was for certain. There remained, however, some doubt that the two could disagree and still be both right.

While Joe Paterno sadly shook his head in admission that he'd lost his number one ranking on the field of honor; while the Rose Bowl officiating team repeated protestations of papal infallibility; and while Oklahoma shouted in vain to attract someone's attention, the mood of the nation was solidifying --- there'll be playoffs.

This approach seems so rational that few are disputing it, but I wonder if the public has yet realized what it stands to lose. First of all, a championship decided purely on the gridiron will be less controversial. All America loves a good debate, and our Poll system has for years provided that.

The politicking begins long before the bowls are played. I was fortunate enough to see newspapers in both Southern California and Alabama during the critical period of time. Both were pushing their boys. In the B'ham papers it was simple: #1 was playing #2 for the championship. For the California media a more difficult problem existed: the only hope was assassination of the opposition's credentials. I grew weary of articles telling me how no team could be champion above a team that had beaten them (-- and I wondered why Arizona State wasn't then superior to USC). Articles saying how weak Penn State's opposition had been. Disguised editorials touting the Rose Bowl as the ONLY vehicle for determination of the national numero uno.

When the UPI Poll burst upon an eager football world the Ellay area press erupted in howls of triumph. Mutterings of the potential unfairness of polls were silenced. The sagacity of football coaches was verified. On the other side of the continent, Bear Bryant was saying that he'd won more football games than popularity contests in recent years. He was in for a surprise.

The next day the AP Poll announced Alabama as national champion. The Bear was proud and humble while the west coast went beserk with indignation. In a scathing attack against the AP conclusion the LA Times blasted the AP as a regionalist instrument ("all Southern votes went to Alabama"). What's more, "sportswriters aren't qualified to judge these things" wrote an Ellay sports-writer.

The low point of the barrage came from an Orange County paper. Its impassioned denigration of the AP Poll jumped all bounds of rationality. USC had scored "an inspired victory over Michigan State in the Rose Bowl." This disturbed me, as I'd been sure they played Michigan, not Michigan State. Furthermore I discovered that the instant replays attaching stigmas big as transfer trucks to the USC wins against Notre Dame and Michigan "shouldn't be counted because the Trojans won the game on the scoreboard where it counts." The writer went on to conclude that polls were bad, particularly the AP.

Counterattacking, the city council of Gadsden, Alabama, (my home town) voted the UPI Poll legally out of existence in that city. All police cars were issued "Alabama #1" bumper stickers. Breakdown of the UPI ballots by region was published, showing that one western dude went for Oklahoma. A quote, attributed to a Big Ten coach, said: "I'll never vote for any Southern team higher than third." Indeed, it was pointed out that the UPI Poll was lost for Alabama by a very few voters placing them far down in the ranking. USC did not meet a similar fate from Southern voters.

The polls themselves generated enough controversy to fill two days of sports pages and ignite endless debates.

The second thing we would surrender if playoffs were instituted is freedom of choice. In today's world the best team is chosen. By curious good fortune the #1 team always is the team with the most current political influence. This means that those who choose are best pleased, a most excellent situation.

Were we to allow a mere football team to select itself via a competitive mechanism that allowed it to beat the crap out of its rivals, we would be surrendering the ability to see that the "proper" team got the glory. Why, with a playoff series some unknown and unlikely group of turkeys could win. That would disappoint everybody.

I suggest that the NFL should investigate the current collegiate system. If instituted professionally, voting could be an exciting addition to the season. For example, the Super Bowl would be played as usual but it would no longer determine the NFL champion, merely the winner of the game.

One week later a superbly qualified bunch of judges would gather and vote for the NFL team they'd like to be champion. Think of the excitement! Every team would be qualified, as there'd be no need to win many games in order to be the best. Some other standard, like wild party throwing or inspired bribery would make a better standard.

And the third and last thing that we'd be giving up is the ability to know in our heart of hearts that our team was the best, regardless of what those SOB's said, because it's all a matter of opinion.

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"In Alabama, you better be for football or you might as well leave." --Bear
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HONOR ROLL: Even the best planning of corporate entities sometimes founders on the perversity of individuals. Sometimes the corporation has gone so far as to flex its collective muscle for the benefit of the very individuals who flush the idea. I've got a little story that tells it all.

Once upon a time a major department inside a vigorous young electronics corporation discovered that it had an employee morale problem. Word was passed upward from one manager to another until the message reached the Vice President. It seemed that stalls in the restrooms were equipped with but a single spindle for toilet paper. Each stall had a limited supply.

Rolls were renewed nightly, when depleted, but by the time a roll was exhausted the Problem had set in. The Problem was considered

rather serious by employees. First one stall would run out, then another. The most favorably situated restroom was soon in Technical Difficulties. The search for less popular facilities would begin. Pressure would build as employees scurried about, strained expressions manifest, looking for the magic stall which still retained its postoperative supplies.

On certain days, the situation got grim. As one employee put it, "When it's time, it's time." Comments on the grainy quality of paper towels were heard in the halls. Snide comments. It got so that nobody could safely leave out a box of Kleenex. The moment for management action had arrived.

The first proposal was to spare the stalls with extra rolls. The idea had merit, but needed fine tuning. As the Facilities Crew correctly noticed, leaving one spare roll per stall was poor asset management, not to mention a security breach. (Remember, each stall had a single spindle -- how could the extra rolls be fastened securely?)

The solution was to leave one extra roll on the corner of the washbasin shelf. In theory, it could replace the first empty roll and hold the fort until evening.

A flaw was uncovered one Monday when a purple-faced employee staggered from the restroom. Careful questioning uncovered his predicament. He said: "What do you do when you don't notice the roll's empty until after?!?"

Back to the drawing board. Solution One may have been wiped out, but Solution Two was soon to follow. Of course, a bit of justification was necessary. Studies were performed. The median time of roll exhaustion was ascertained. The distance between available restrooms was computed and translated into Man Minutes, a measure of employee productivity. Estimates of the probable number and classification (salary grade) of employees afflicted with the Problem as opposed to those who very likely went at home were generated. The results were multiplied together and presented as a dollar estimate of the monies lost to the company on an annualized basis. It was an impressive number.

Next, two alternatives were offered. The first was a shill, being a proposal to have the Facilities Crew replenish rolls on a twice-daily basis. At union scale, this was financially prohibitive. The second, a bold elaboration of the original idea, was to install a second spindle in each stall and stock it with paper nightly. The incremental labor cost was minor; the capital outlay was modest.

This proposal travelled up the line. After due consideration it was in turn approved by the General Manager of the Division, the Chief Executive Officer and the Chairman of the Board. The latter's only caveat was that the hardware award go to the lowest bidder. A sound fiscal conception.

In due time this operation was scheduled into the heavy work load of the Facilities Crew. Within a month following the due date the extra spindles were installed and operative. Rejoicing was heard in the halls (not to mention the restrooms).

Thus it was that corporate concern for the humanity of its employees overcame all adversity to provide the necessary paperwork. The company was pleased. The employees were moved. All appeared regular again.

Then disaster struck, in the form of human perversity. There were now two spindles in every stall, true. The supply of toilet paper was apparently doubled. But there was one small fact overlooked by the planners. Both spindles were open and available.

Call it the status reflex. Call it the need to equalize. Even call it the human instinct to overturn establishments. You won't find a better word than perversity.

Examine those two virgin rolls.

One is used to take care of business. It diminishes. It shrinks. Soon it is clearly the smaller roll. The roll of least status.

Nobody wants to use the little roll. Nobody wants less than the biggest, fattest, most prosperous roll of all. As the two rolls jockey for position they diminish at remarkably similar rates.

Probability is firm about such circumstances. Empty rolls are replaced nightly. The day is long. Not too many days after the installation of the blessed twin spindles, a Problem developed in the restrooms of this energetic young corporation.

Management heard. Management investigated. Management explained. There were two alternate proposals. Use the rolls in proper fashion, to reduce the smallest roll so as to hasten its replacement. Or take the two near-empty rolls. And shove them.

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"A state is a situation which can be recognized if it occurs again." --Anon
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HOMILY: The most basic elements of our culture are contained in children's literature and popular music. These fundamentals are taken up first in life. They are a mixture of simple and complex. They are, to a large extent, the unmasked announcement of our basic needs and aspirations. In later years we learn to disguise and rationalize such things, yet the core of the animal remains unchanged.

It is a human curiosity that those things which we teach children are the most fundamental of all principles in our lives, yet the expression of these unsculpted thoughts is considered a simple province. As adults, we have no need to examine them again.

Yet any principle so fundamental to motivation should be reexamined regularly. It may have changed.

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"Pay heed to the providing of nourishment..." --I CHING
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DRIVEL: If the inveterate fanwriter has one chronic disease, it is drivel. This infection is a chronic malady of the industry. Left with a third of an effin' page to fill, the crafty old'n'tired apaddict will resort to a good old'n'tired ploy like inventing a new term of fanspeak. Or perhaps make a try at launching some faintly promising sentence barrage in hope of catching fire with an idea or half to fabricate credit. (Is it, in SFPA, four pages every two consecutive mailings or consecutive pages every four mailings?) Such plays are usually good for a loosely-connected series of one-liners.

More than likely the luckiest apaddict of them all is he born innocently and panegyricly into the world of hey hey your fanzines great. The use of words being a form of solitaire admissable into mixed company, how can fanzine publishing lack this virtue? Such is the composition of. Drivel. Such that the fecund typewriter feeds upon the fibrous paper there in.

Just put that straight for a moment. Drivel is a typewriter consuming paper. Save it for a lino in two years. Change factual topics frequently but keep the quarry in sight. The quality of drivel derives as much from the quarry as from the quality. This being a true drivel sentence preceding (notice the artful last minute logic escape), it is context alone rescuing a continuity of thought from nonsense.

The particular brand of drivel being espoused presently is first draft. Score on one-third page. 5% of drivel is non-shit. Yes, Theodore....??