

VIEWPOINTS

Basketball players have gone mad

March madness time – it is a good name for the end of basketball season.

Everyone associated with the game, that is those who take it seriously, acts like someone gone mad.

In the Duke-Carolina game it was a broken nose, one player thrown out and the fans on opposite sides ready to fight. The two coaches were gazing in the blue sky, trying to make sense of the sad situation. The sports columns had a field day, most of them guessing, not knowing, what they are talking about. The broken nose player bleeding like a stuck hog and ready to fight the player who did this to him.

Those two were born in the wrong time zone. They should have come along in my area. We had several broken noses on my football teams. No one wore a face guard, except one man and the rest of the team didn't take too kindly to him.

Those loose elbows can work on a nose. Mine was broken two times. I had it operated on twice, the last time by the doctor who operated on Bob Hope. He charged me \$500. Bob Hope didn't tell me

A View from the Country

Raz Autry



what he charged him. The doc put two tubes up my nose and I had to suffer for 24 hours. The first doctor I had wasn't too kind. He put gauze up my nose and it was there for 24 hours. Neither was too pleasant. I didn't get any pain pills, only a nurse who was flat-chested.

I told you it wasn't one of my finest days.

Those of us who graduated from East Carolina don't get too excited about basketball. I have been associated with the University since 1946 and I can't ever remember having a winning basketball season. Perhaps one time, but I couldn't name the time.

We are sorta like the five churches who were having a hard time with squirrels running wild in their church. All of them had a solution on how to get rid of them, but none worked except the one from the Jewish Synagogue.

They took one squirrel and had a short service with him called

circumcision and they haven't seen a squirrel on their property since. We didn't circumcise the basketball coaches – we just patted the coach on the back, got another one – who will be with us about four years – and we'll move on to the next. We have had only one coach who went on to fame. We paid him \$4,000 a year and he left us for five. Needless to say I shall leave him nameless.

On to another subject, which shall be short and to the point. If you have a telephone every night you will get several calls wanting to sell you something or telling you why it is better to use their service than the one you are using. If you don't get one you are smarter than me. If you do get them I suggest this message to you: "I am not available right now, but thank you for caring enough to call. I am making some changes in my life. Please leave a message after the beep. If I do not return your call, you are one of the changes."

My parting thoughts: The irony of life is that, by the time you're old enough to know your way around, you're not going anywhere.

My wife and I had words, but I didn't get to use mine.

Easley Teflon not sticking

Gov. Mike Easley's popularity among North Carolinians can largely be traced to his image as the anti-politician.

Whether it's climbing inside a race car or that aw-shucks demeanor, Easley isn't seen as the typical politician.

And it's not all image.

In private, Easley is personable and funny. Sometimes he seems as if he doesn't have a care in the world.

Until recently, the Easley administration had also been able to avoid any of the meaty scandals that often dog multi-term governors.

But two land deals in his second term ended the scandal-free run. One, in Caldwell County, involved the state purchase of property in which campaign donations from the former owners followed; the other involved the personal purchase of a sound-front lot in Carteret County that many saw as a sweetheart deal that only came about because of his office.

Now a published report from The Charlotte Observer has put another chink in the Easley armor.

The article, written by reporter

David Ingram, outlines how two top Easley staffers helped Jo Ann Sanford, the former chair of the state Utilities Commission, line up private consulting work. The piece said the two aides – Alan Hirsch and Hawley Truax – even suggested changes to consulting contracts that Sanford entered into with Duke Energy and four other companies. They also tried to line up state-owned office space for Sanford.

An Easley spokeswoman said her boss didn't know about the contract arrangements until afterward. She called the actions "inappropriate."

Inappropriate? Kind of like calling global warming or nuclear war a "concern."

Hirsch and Truax should be fired.

And the public ought to question why Easley, if his claim is true that he didn't know about the arrangement, has no better handle on what his top aides are up to. The claim suggests a disturbing lack of involvement with the day-to-day operations of his office.

A few months back, an audience of reporters and others listened for several days in federal court while the business dealings

of former lottery commissioner Kevin Geddings were revealed.

The revelations suggested that Geddings, who was convicted of fraud, improperly benefited as a South Carolina political consultant because of his ties to the administration of that state's former governor, Jim Hodges. Testimony also showed ties between Geddings and Easley political consultants, perhaps explaining why he decided to seek greener pastures here after Hodges lost a bid for a second term.

According to my own sources, Geddings, prior to his lottery commission appointment, called around looking for consulting business associated with major telecommunications legislation passed by the General Assembly last year. He was doing so during a period when the plans were still on BellSouth's drawing board and the only public entity notified that legislation might be coming was the governor's office.

These are the kinds of the shenanigans that a governor must stop, or his public will only conclude that he is a part of them.

And the Easley Teflon will quickly peel away.



Another actor has presidential promise

Last Sunday was a bad day for Democrats, and they hardly noticed.

Why? Democrats avoid Fox News. (Hard core Democrats don't even like their candidates to debate on that network.)

So they missed the "bad news" in former Tennessee Senator Fred Thompson's Sunday morning interview with Fox's Chris Wallace. Thompson told Fox that he is considering a run for the presidency. He did not make a formal announcement, but I am betting that he is going to be the answer to the Republicans' dilemma.

Their dilemma, of course, is that their three leading candidates have big problems with the Republican's conservative religious base. These folks don't trust John McCain because he did battle with them in the 2000 primary season. They don't like Rudolph Giuliani's positions on issues like abortion rights and gun control. They worry about Nick Romney's Mormon faith and his "too-recent" recanting of former positions on gay rights and reproductive rights.

Each of these three presidential hopefuls has demonstrated the ability to win Democratic votes in general elections. This strength should make all of them attractive candidates for the Republicans. But conservative Republicans do not want to nominate someone who does not share their values. And, if their party should nominate such a person, many of them will not, in good conscience, work to get such a candidate elected.

On the other hand, if these three rush too far into the conservative camp, they will lose some of the crossover appeal that would make them possible winners in next year's fall election.

Just to summarize, Democrats have been optimistic because they thought that McCain, Giuliani, and Romney would destroy their general election chances by pandering to the religious right in order to have a chance to win the Republican nomination.

What the Republicans have needed is a Ronald Reagan type candidate – someone with a solid conservative record and values, and someone who can explain those values in such a moderate way that it does not scare off every middle-of-the-road voter.

It would be icing on the cake if the candidate had Reagan acting experience so he could talk "sincerely" and touch the emotional core of the American electorate the way Reagan did.

Such a person would be the Republicans' dream – and the Democrats' nightmare.

Enter Fred Thompson from stage right.

The former U.S. Senator is, like Reagan, an experienced actor – appearing in important roles in the movies and on television. And he has been successful as a political operative and as a candidate. As a young lawyer in the Watergate Congressional hearings he showed a national audience that he is skillful, fair, and articulate.

Is he conservative enough to win the enough support from the "religious right" to get the Republican nomination?

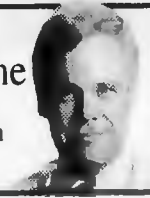
In his conversation with Chris Wallace, he ticked off conservative responses to the current hot button issues without ambiguity. He is pro-life, anti-gun control, and anti-gay marriage.

If he runs, I predict that he will be the nominee.

If he wins the nomination, is he

One on One

D. G. Martin



something about working with the other side.

And, whatever your politics, you have to concede that he is a pretty good actor.

Like every other possible presidential candidate, Thompson has problems.

He has been an ardent supporter of his friend Scooter Libby, saying that he would favor pardoning him right now. His opponents will also criticize his abandonment of his work in the U.S. Senate before the end of his term in order to renew his acting career.

There will be other problems should he decide to run.

But right now, of all the Republican possibilities, he is the Democrats' worst nightmare.

Here's how to contact state lawmakers

This information on state elected officials is printed at the request of our readers:

Governor's Office
MIKE EASLEY
 State Capitol
 Raleigh, NC 27603-8001
 (919)-733-5612
 Toll-free: 1-800-662-7952
 (919)-733-5166
N.C. Senate
SEN. WILLIAM PURCELL (17th)
 2117 Legislative Building
 Raleigh, NC 27601-2808
 (919)-715-0690
 (919)-733-2559 Fax
 e-mail: william_p@ms.ncga.state.nc.us
 Home address:
 1301 Dunbar Drive
 Laurinburg, NC 28352
 (910)-276-7328
SEN. AARON W. PLYLER (17th)
 627 Legislative Office Bldg.
 Raleigh, NC 27601-2808
 (919)-733-5739
 e-mail: aaronp@ms.ncga.state.nc.us
SEN. DAVID F. WEINSTEIN
 Room 2108 Legislative Building

Raleigh, NC 27601-2808
 (919)-733-5651
 (919)-733-2599 Fax
 e-mail: davidw@ms.ncga.state.nc.us
 Home address:
 206 W. 31st Street
 Lumberton, NC 28358
N.C. House
REP. GARLAND E. PIERCE
 1313 Legislative Bldg.
 Raleigh NC 27601-1090
 e-mail: garlandp@ncleg.net
 ph: (919) 733-5803
REP. DOUG Y. YONGUE
 Room 1305 Legislative Bldg.
 Raleigh, NC 27601-1096
 (919) 733-5821
 e-mail: douglasy@ms.ncga.state.nc.us
 Home address:
 604 Prince Street
 Laurinburg, NC 28352
 (910)-276-1727

Citizens interested in the who, what, when, where and why of the N.C. General Assembly may now find out information online at "www.ncga.state.nc.us."

We Get Letters

American Legion at forefront in efforts to help Veterans

To the Editor:

March 15 will mark the 88th year that The American Legion has been leading the fight for our Country's Veterans. Since its beginning in 1919, it has been lobbying Congress and the Senate for improved Veteran benefits.

In 1943, The American Legion was responsible for the creation of the "GI Bill of Rights," one of the Nation's single greatest pieces of legislation, which has been used by millions of veterans to obtain assistance in education and home loans.

The American Legion also is a champion for children and youth programs, as well as a strong National Security policy and constantly promotes one-hundred percent Americanism through its many different programs.

Citizens and Veterans alike can take pride in knowing that The American Legion is still at the forefront of efforts to improve benefits for our Nation's Veterans.

From the Great Wars to the ongoing Global War on Terrorism, the Legion is taking care of those who answered the call and volunteered to serve this great nation.

The American Legion is currently fighting for a constitutional amendment to protect the American flag from desecration as well as securing mandatory funding for adequate operation of the Veterans Affairs Medical facilities.

Additionally, the work of The American Legion to support the Nation's youth continues to expand, as more young people are involved in Legion sponsored programs. The Boy Scouts

of America, American Legion Baseball, Junior Shooting Sports and the National High School Oratorical Contest are just a few examples of how The American Legion continues to strive to provide a solid foundation in local communities on which the youth of America may grow.

Through their latest program, "Heroes to Hometowns," The American Legion provides direct assistance to severely injured service members when they return to their hometowns.

Legion posts do this by working with the community to set up a support network and coordinating resources – such as child care, temporary housing, adapting homes or vehicles and financial aid – before a service member returns home.

Perhaps, one of the biggest challenges is the same one they faced 88 years ago – too much red tape when it comes to the Veterans health care budget.

Veterans Affairs and rehabilitation, National Security, children's welfare and Americanism are the 4 pillars of the American Legion, and in keeping with them, the American Legion continues to fulfill President Abraham Lincoln's promise "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan."

Post 20 of The American Legion holds its monthly meeting on the third Tuesday of each month at the National Guard Armory (305 Teal Dr) at 7 p.m. They invite all eligible Veterans to come and join this wonderful organization. Happy Birthday American Legion! Keep up the Great Work!

By **Ellis B. Williamson**,
 American Legion Post 20,
 Raeford

Treated well

To the Editor:

On Thursday, 03/08/2007 I visited the offices of Dr. Karen Smith. Her staff was absolutely polite and very efficient. There were at least a dozen patients waiting, but the kind lady in the front office noticed the distress on my son's face and obviously heard his whimpering and cries and she immediately admitted him. He was treated at that moment.

My son Sashin Beharie (6) was the patient. He was treated with utmost care and kindness. He came in crying and left SMILING.....

Thank you very much, for a wonderful service in Hoke Co.
Kiran Beharie

Letters policy

The News-Journal welcomes letters to the editor and encourages readers to express their opinions.

Letters must be signed and include an address and phone number. The street address and phone number will not be published, but are required so we may verify authenticity. The name of the writer and, in some cases, the town the writer is from will be published at the end of the letter.

We reserve the right to edit letters for grammar, as well as those that exceed 300 words. We will not publish letters that we consider to be in poor taste or libelous. In some cases we may add an editor's note as a postscript when we believe a correction, explanation or amplification is warranted. We may also, at our discretion, limit the number of times an individual writer may submit a letter for publication.