

OPINION

Wednesday, September 13, 1995

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Daily
Nebraskan
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University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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From the Lincoln Journal-Star

James Mehsling is making a name for himself as a student cartoonist at the University of Nebraska. Unfortunately, he is doing it — and the editors of the Daily Nebraskan are allowing him to do it — by taking irreverence to the point of irresponsibility.

He did it a few weeks ago with his Daily Nebraskan depiction of Lincoln Police officers beating Francisco Renteria with nightsticks. That is complete fabrication of any witness's description of the events that led to Renteria's death last year.

Now Mehsling is doing it again with his skewed cartoon perception of Cornhusker football player Riley Washington, a suspect in an attempted-murder investigation, dragging a ball and chain at practice. Readers could easily carry away a message that Washington has already been found guilty. The drawing is wide open to misinterpretation.

The Lincoln Police Department compounded the error in the first incident when an officer arrested Mehsling by putting a slow-moving misdemeanor warrant into the fast lane. Now error has been compounded again by the decision of Head Football Coach Tom Osborne to punish reporters from the UNL student paper by refusing to speak to them or give them information. Student reporters can come to practice, but they're to be given the royal cold shoulder.

Osborne has every right to be angry with both the cartoonist and with the student journalists who are supposedly vested with veto power over his work. He has every right to point out that exaggerating the truth for the sake of making an important point is one thing. Completely misrepresenting the truth, under the guise of artistic license, is another.

But disagreement does not give the coach the right to inflict punishment when he disagrees with somebody's media coverage.

Both cartoonist and coach have gone too far.

From the Chicago Tribune

When you've been as successful as Tom Osborne has been for as long as he has been at a football hotbed like the University of Nebraska, you can start to get a pretty high opinion of yourself. If being coach of the reigning National Champions doesn't make you God, it at least makes you a god.

Last week, angered by two cartoons in the Nebraska campus newspaper, Osborne hurled a thunderbolt. He said he would ban the paper's reporters from practices of his Cornhuskers football team. "Attending our practices is a privilege, not a right," he declared.

A short time later, threatened with a very un-divine form of retaliation — a lawsuit — Osborne rescinded the ban, but said he would not give interviews to the Daily Nebraskan.

What got Osborne upset were two cartoons in the campus paper. One depicted a player who has been charged with attempted second-degree murder working out in a prison jumpsuit. The other showed another player driving a car with dollar bills spilling out the back — reference to the circumstances under which he supposedly obtained the car.

Neither cartoon may have been great journalism, but that's not the point. They were legitimate forms of commentary on issues of public importance to the Nebraska campus community.

What's interesting is how coaches like Osborne, whose sports depend for their popularity on the free publicity given by newspapers and other media, are happy to be open when the news is favorable but ready to clam up defensively when criticism comes.

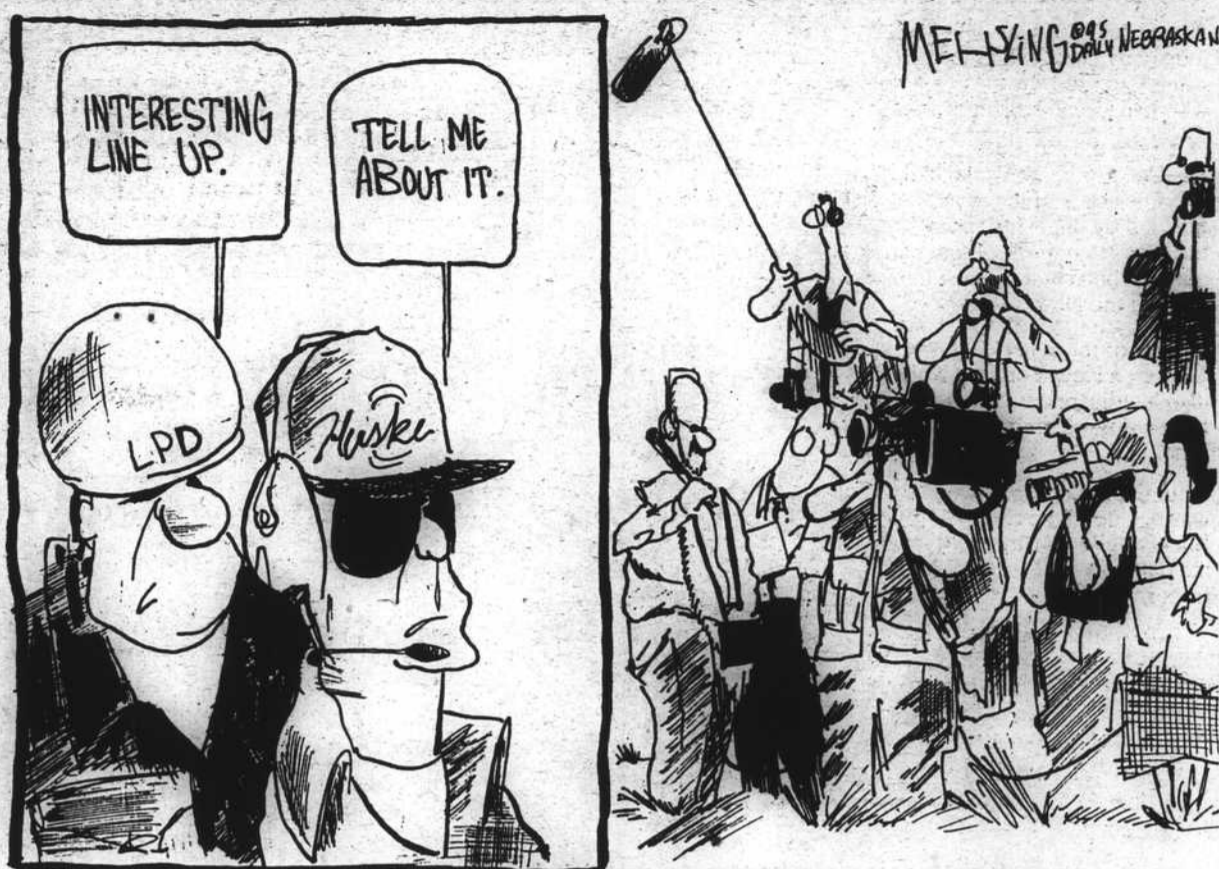
Sorry, Tom, only God gets a pass.

Editorial policy

Staff editorials represent the official policy of the Fall 1995 Daily Nebraskan. Policy is set by the Daily Nebraskan Editorial Board. Editorials do not necessarily reflect the views of the university, its employees, the students or the NU Board of Regents. Editorial columns represent the opinion of the author. The regents publish the Daily Nebraskan. They establish the UNL Publications Board to supervise the daily production of the paper. According to policy set by the regents, responsibility for the editorial content of the newspaper lies solely in the hands of its students.

Letter policy

The Daily Nebraskan welcomes brief letters to the editor from all readers and interested others. Letters will be selected for publication on the basis of clarity, originality, timeliness and space available. The Daily Nebraskan retains the right to edit or reject all material submitted. Readers also are welcome to submit material as guest opinions. The editor decides whether material should run as a guest opinion. Letters and guest opinions sent to the newspaper become the property of the Daily Nebraskan and cannot be returned. Anonymous submissions will not be published. Letters should include the author's name, year in school, major and group affiliation, if any. Requests to withhold names will not be granted. Submit material to: Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St. Lincoln, Neb. 68588-0448.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

People's court

Let's take a look at two things that have appeared to be on trial over the past week: Tom Osborne and the Daily Nebraskan.

We have coach Osborne who, in an effort to show support to his players, banned the Daily Nebraskan from Husker practices. A man of integrity, who volunteers his time in the Lincoln community, teaches Sunday School and withstands constant criticism from members of the media, boosters and various other people.

Now let's look at the other involved party, the Daily Nebraskan.

Over the past few years, the Daily Nebraskan has turned into a tabloid paper. If the information seems a little risqué or controversial, it will appear in the newspaper.

If it seems too conservative or won't raise eyebrows, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln won't hear about it.

At least not through the Daily Nebraskan. The Daily Nebraskan has taken news to the border of indecency and steps across the line as often as possible.

Luckily, for the Daily Nebraskan, Tom allowed them back into practices.

But isn't it ironic that Coach Osborne banned only the Daily Nebraskan from practices and not OTHER members of the media? Think about it!

Kiersten Lockie
Senior
Deaf Education

Victim's rights

I believe staff reporter Jeff Zeleny crossed the line of good reporting when he identified the victim of Lawrence Phillips' alleged assault.

The fact that the Lincoln Police Department and coach Angela Beck declined to identify McEwen as the

victim, not to mention that McEwen's roommate said that she (McEwen) didn't want to speak to the media, should indicate to an intelligent person that she didn't want her name published.

As the victim of a crime and not the perpetrator, I believe that she had every right to remain anonymous. Don't you?

Daniel Brox
Junior
Political Science/ Mathematics/
Economics
via e-mail

Disappointment

I was very disappointed in the DN's decision to publish the name of the victim of a recent assault incident. I understand that you, no doubt, feel the "professional" obligation to give ALL the facts.

However, I hope each of you involved in this editorial decision will now feel the moral obligation to field the threatening phone calls and respond to the disparaging mail this poor young woman will be receiving from every Husker FAN-ATIC with an axe to grind over a national title defense. Sometimes professional discretion isn't a violation of FIRST AMENDMENT rights, sometimes it's common humanity.

Maryanne Mellor
Lincoln

Dignity

I wish to say that Doug Peters is correct in the fact that it is a tragedy about what happened to the young woman Lawrence Phillips allegedly assaulted.

I do find, though, that he is quick to judge the entire program on a few incidents that have been unfortunate and are still pending.

These young men are innocent until proven guilty, and he is not only talking bad of them, but of all the players, many of which have not

done anything to deserve to be told that they have no dignity in their program.

Tom Osborne has shown dignity, I believe, in kicking Phillips off the team. It wasn't the most popular thing for him to do, or the easiest, but it was the right thing to do, and I have much respect for the program because of that.

Also, I feel that it should be noted that the Daily Nebraskan has not helped matters any by its coverage of the situation.

I feel this way because on Monday morning I awoke to read the Lincoln Journal Star articles on Phillips' dismissal, and it was said in their article that the police were not releasing the name of the young woman, by her request, because she was scared.

I then head to class and read the DN and see the young woman's name, which shows no decency on your part.

Not only that, but in the Tuesday edition, you have her picture!

I would like to know how this is necessary information!

Now, when this young woman goes to class, people will know all this about her, and it's none of their business. I don't think that is what she wanted, and the police were willing to withhold, so why weren't you?

The DN should practice what it preaches if it's going to talk about dignity of a program.

Jim Vance
Sophomore
Math Education
via e-mail

Editor's Note: The Daily Nebraskan does not, as a matter of policy, print the names of victims of alleged assault.

In this case an editorial decision was made that all concerned were public figures and that all names were newsworthy.

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