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The Paternos' quest for redemption

By Ivan Maisel
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Here is what the settlement of the lawsuit by Pennsylvania state officials against against the NCAA means for Penn State:

- The NCAA has undone nearly all of the penalties it placed on the Nittany Lion football program in July 2012. (Of course, this is not an admission that the NCAA was wrong. Heavens, no.)
- The NCAA returned ownership of 112 victories that it once demanded that Penn State renounce.
- Head coach James Franklin still must restock a roster withered by scholarship reductions, but he has a full larder of 25 grant-in-aids in hand.

And here is what the settlement means for the state of mind of the Nittany Lions fan base, that enormous blob of blue-and-white that has lived under the cloud of scandal for three seasons.

"Come next fall," Scott Paterno said, "they're just going to go to the game. All your fan base [is] having that cathartic moment, like, 'We're done with this.'"

Scott Paterno is the youngest of Joe Paterno's five children. He is an attorney in Harrisburg, the state capital. While his older brother, Jay, who worked as an assistant coach for their father for 17 years, has been the public face of the Paterno family, Scott has been at the heart of the battles, legal and otherwise, to separate truth from fiction regarding their father.

The family is not, as he put it, done with this.

As the third anniversary of Joe Paterno's death arrives Thursday, there are signs that the fullness of his life is no longer subsumed by the tragedy of his final months. Jay Paterno wrote a memoir of his father, published last year, that is in its fourth printing. He said sales spiked Friday with the announcement of the settlement.

Joe Paterno, who coached 111 of the recaptured victories, returned to the top of the FBS career victories list after two-and-a-half years of forced vacation with 409. He will be there a while. The leader in victories among active coaches, Frank Beamer of Virginia Tech, has 272.

All that is nice, but it is symbol, not substance. The settlement, Scott Paterno said, is "the façade of the building. What's inside it now, that's going to be a constant discussion."

You can't exactly pull out the GPS to locate JoePa's



legacy on the road to redemption. It's not that simple. His family has been dogged in its effort to scrub the mud splattered by the Freeh report in that feverish summer of 2012. When Penn State released the report, a public that was searching for an explanation bought into it.

Sue Paterno underwrote a program to train university employees who work with minors on campus on how to create safer conditions for children and prevent them from being victimized.

The Freeh report, as it turned out, carried all the factual gravitas of a high school term paper. The report served as the basis of the NCAA's punishment of Penn State, the punishment that the organization backed away from last week. But the Paterno family didn't undertake the task of restoring Joe's legacy to regain 111 victories.

"The interesting point I've been trying to make, and it gets lost because everybody wants to focus on the wins," Scott Paterno said, "is my dad's life becomes a really useful tool to have a broader discussion of both how we address these types of problems, how we train people to see them and everything else."

"These types of problems," in this case, are the Jerry Sanduskys of the world.

Last spring, Stop It Now!, a Massachusetts-based non-profit that works to prevent child sexual abuse, began a pilot program with the 14 state universities in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) to train university employees who work with minors on campus on how to create safer conditions for children and prevent them from being victimized.

The 149 employees included administrators, faculty, counselors, athletic directors, legal counsel, communication director, students -- basically, anyone who might deal with the summer camps that many schools host. They are trained to look for the signs of "nice-guy predators," because that is the profile of the Sanduskys who prey on children. They appear to be respectable members of the community. They mentally seduce their peer adults. Then they seduce the children around them.

The news release said that Stop It Now! created the pilot program "through the generosity of a donor." That donor is underwriting the \$240,000 to fund the pilot program. That donor is Sue Paterno, Joe's widow and the one-time matriarch of the entire Penn State community.

"You can look at it," Scott Paterno said, "and say, hey, look, here's a guy who tried to do in every other instance, every other documented instance, tried to do the right thing to the best of his ability," Scott said. "And here's this one situation, we can debate whether or not he could have done more. But let's not debate the fact that had he been equipped with better understanding, had he known exactly what he was dealing with, had he been trained to see what he was dealing with, had he been told how to handle this particular problem, would have dealt with it."

This spring, Stop It Now! and the PASSHE system will hear assessments of the pilot program, both from participants and an independent evaluator based at the University of New Hampshire. The hope is to expand the program beyond the borders of Pennsylvania.

"Our evaluations are showing that it's an effective program," said Deb Donovan Rice, executive director of Stop It Now! "We're real happy with what's being accomplished. It wouldn't have ever happened without Scott and Sue and the whole Paterno family."

To the people who look at what happened at Penn State and are sure they would have been able to see what Jerry Sandusky hid in plain sight for 35 years, the pilot program may look like an attempt at penance -- too little, too late. As if the motivation to stop child sexual abuse, to prevent another college community from enduring what Penn State has endured, isn't enough.

Call it what you will. But while the rest of us pointed fingers and debated and dithered and pulled out our

righteous indignation, Sue Paterno tried to solve the problem. As it turns out, locating the legacy of Joe Paterno on the road to redemption isn't hard at all.
