

SIMMONS SAYS

**JEFFERY
SIMMONS**

Just pay college athletes

A shock wave ran through the world of NCAA basketball last week. The tremors are still being felt, and nobody knows the full extent of the damage yet.

According to a Yahoo! Report released, the FBI probe that led to 10 arrests and the very public firing of two-time national champion coach Rick Pitino (well, used to be two-time champion – his 2013 title will be vacated based on recent reports) last fall will claim more coaches and programs at some point.

Pete Tramel cited a source who believes nearly 50 NCAA programs could be affected, as well as Hall of Fame coaches and future lottery picks. Nobody is safe so it seems.

The questions from this are abundant. Will 50 programs really face punishment when the full scope of the reports surfaces? Will revered coaches really be fired? Will news break in time to affect this year's March Madness? Which players are included, and if released soon, how many of them will be benched during the most pivotal part of the season?

Nobody really knows the answers.

Maybe there's only one real question that needs to be answered though. And that is, does anybody really care if players are being paid under the table?

I know I don't.

One of my favorite reactions to the FBI probe potentially hitting 50 schools wasn't one of shock and awe. It was when many people said, "Duh!"

That's where college sports' perception is at the moment. Most just assume the top athletes are being paid anyway. Whether it's straight cash, better living for family members or lavish vehicles, fans feel like it's happening in some way.

It's not like this came out of nowhere either. "Blue Chips" came out 24 years ago! This is not a new phenomenon.

Many diehard fans, myself included, subscribe the old NASCAR adage – if you ain't cheatin', you ain't tryin'.

I don't particularly care how the sausage is made. It'd be great knowing that a clean program can claim championships – that would be my preference. I'm just not naïve enough to think that is the case.

There's a reason why stories like last year's "Cheat or Go Home: Inside the 'Dysfunctional Hell' of Becoming a CFB coach" come out every so often. It's because people know coaches have to decide whether they want to be clean and get fired, or cheat and keep their jobs.

Personally, I just want to see a winning team on the court, or on the field, so I can trash talk rival fans about inferior squads. Overturning a title five years later won't change the fun I'd have in the moment watching Tennessee march to a championship.

So just go ahead and pay players. Or better yet, just keep paying them.

District champs



Jacob Dodd photos

The Van Buren Eagles won the District 5A championship Saturday. Members of the Eagles are, front row, from left, Zack Bennett, Hunter Evans, Axel Rodriguez, Dillon Young, Jacob Guy, Hootie Huerta, Logan Young and Brad Burke. Back row, Simon Boyd, John Graham, Will Wrisner, Dakota Simmons, Gavin Jaffre, Steven England, Bo Walker, coach William Holland, Caden Mills, Jared Binkley, Austin Miller, Jacob Crain, Sawyer Shockley, coach Dustin Sullivan, Dakota Lancaster and Andrew Dodson.



Caden Mills slams it in the District 5A championship against Richard Hardy Memorial School on Saturday night. Mills was named tournament MVP and finished the game with 40 points.

Eagles win fourth straight 5A title

BY **JACOB DODD**
Writer for the Southern Standard
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

Call the Van Buren County boys basketball team a dynasty.

Ranked No. 2 in the state, the Eagles earned their fourth straight district championship with a victory over the Richard Hardy Memorial School Hawks on Saturday night at Whitwell High School.

Van Buren County captured a 74-54 win for the district title behind a monster, 40-point night from Mr. Basketball finalist and tournament MVP Caden Mills.

Van Buren County fans filled the stands as the Eagles came out ready to play and gained an early lead. Mills drained four 3-pointers and Bo Walker added two as the Eagles outscored the Hawks, 29-14.

By the time the first half ended, Mills had poured in 25 points, enough to outscore the Hawks on his own. Van Buren County was up 49-22 at the break.

"We came out ready to play in the first half and we kind of got a little lackadaisical in the second half and shots didn't fall," said Van Buren County coach Dustin Sullivan. "Overall they are a lot better team than many realize, but the way we came out and built the lead in the first half while playing with a lot of energy, I'm proud of them."

In the second half, the Eagles came out with a slower pace but Mills and Walker still found ways to score in the third quarter. With a 57-33 lead over the Hawks going into the fourth quarter, Van Buren County picked the pace back up by working the ball inside to post Jared Binkley, who had 6 of his 10 points in the fourth.

Mills made sure the Hawks knew he could fly by slamming two more down with a big dunk as Van Buren County won, 74-54.

Lady Eagles take second in district



Members of the Van Buren County girls team, which finished second in the District 5A tournament, are, front row, from left, Sydney Bouldin, Mayla Clendenon, Gracie Austin, Sierra Delon, Mallory Christian, Lily Fredricks, Hannah Sullivan, Emma Scoggins and Gabby Young. Back row, assistant coach Cassandra Binkley, Morgan Bouldin, Jadeah McCurry, Jessie Delong, Chloe Ragland, Chloe Hillis, Annaston McBride, Mika Davis, Kinize Johnson, head coach Tyler Sapp, assistant coach Darrin Black and Desarai Baker.

PLAY BALL!

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