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Spanier Overreacts To Press Coverage of Casey Decision

By Barbara Gertzen

Capital Times Assistant News Editor

At the Oct. 31 press conference announcing the N.J. grand jury decision not to prosecute Rashard Casey, PSU President Graham Spanier blasted the press for reporting Casey's indictment a week earlier. He called it "one of the great blunders in Pennsylvania journalism." Spanier demanded apologies from the press for their erroneous reports.

The Patriot News supported its reporters and stories, contending they quoted public officials, including a Hudson County, N. J. assistant prosecutor closely connected with the case. The reporters and editors had no reason to question their

source's integrity or input. In addition to *The Patriot*, *the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *the Philadelphia Daily News*, *the Centre Daily News*, and *USA Today* quoted the same source.

Accuracy is essential to responsible journalists who strive for and value their credibility, objectivity, and impartiality. It is obvious that in the Casey legal case, facts changed from one week to the next. According to a Nov. 1 *Patriot News* article, a second grand jury vote, one week after the first, reversed the jury's original decision (for reasons that were undisclosed,) absolving Casey of all charges in the criminal case. Casey still faces civil charges from the May 1999 incident.

While the story changed, the journalists covering the story reported the facts given them from the best possible source they had. They should not be condemned for doing their jobs or be expected to soft-pedal the news because it is unpleasant.

I hope President Spanier takes to heart the insights offered in a Nov. 5 editorial by *Patriot News* editor Dale Davenport. He writes that racial profiling by N.J. police swept Rashard Casey into a legal maelstrom. Davenports adds that "[N.J. officials] had to know from day one there was insufficient evidence [to charge Casey]. If

there is anger to be vented, I'd direct it there." Davenport aptly concludes that "we all ought to worry that for other young black men, less known and with less support, similar circumstances probably turn out less satisfactorily."

I admit I felt torn over Joe Paterno's risky decision to keep Casey as starting quarterback. Whether Paterno was right or wrong in his decision, I admire his conviction in keeping the promise he'd made to Casey. Paterno's resolve displays much about his character, as well as the faith he placed in his quarterback's character. I agree, however, with

several articles I read that suggested that PSU, like other leading football schools such as Florida State and Nebraska, should develop university-wide, published policy governing the status of athletes who commit infractions of the rules or law. Certainly Joe Paterno would've encountered less stress, and taken a lot less flak, if the decision regarding Casey's status had been taken out of his hands. In addition, Casey might have given a bit more thought to his own actions in Hoboken last May if he'd known the outcome would impact his status as a starter.

Of course, it is impossible to know whether Casey's legal difficulties affected PSU's football season. Undoubtedly, the Lions' abysmal season resulted from numerous factors. The rhythm of life is cyclical, and so it should be with football. As the song goes: "To everything, there is a season," and apparently, this season did not belong to Penn State.

So relax, President Spanier, PSU will rebound from this incident, and there will probably be little drop-off in enrollment due to the Casey debacle (except, perhaps, in the recruitment of athletes). I've been told that PSU is about much more than just athletics; it's also about quality education. So let's get back to focusing on education.

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**"... when you have eliminated the
impossible, whatever remains, however
improbable, must be the truth."**

-Sherlock Holmes