

Editorial opinion:

Next time, do it right

What's your excuse?

During Registration last week, the Undergraduate Student Government furnished rides to Bellefonte for students who wanted to register to vote. On Wednesday, six students took them up on the offer. On Thursday, the car sat in the sun outside Rec Hall.

Almost every student in the University went through Rec Hall, saw the sign on the exit door and made his choice. During the long, empty days, nearly every student decided not to register to vote. Classes had not started yet and buying books did not involve an undue amount of comparative shopping.

It is all very simple. Ride out to the Bellefonte Courthouse and sign

your name. No one is after your driver's license or birth certificate or credit cards or telephone bill.

USG officials had expected a poor response, but they were still disappointed. They are extremely aware that the fall elections are vital to students. At stake are the offices of State College mayor, borough councilmen, tax collector and Center County district attorney.

By not registering, students are losing their chance to decide whether State College needs an effective consumer protection agency, whether building codes are enforced adequately, whether the area transportation system is satisfactory and whether increased social services are needed.

Maybe you realized this when you registered for classes last week. Maybe you intended to register to vote later. It isn't like last spring.

The State College chapter of the League of Women Voters have ruled out registering voters once a week. Last spring, the response was so poor they considered dropping the effort before its scheduled end.

But there is one more chance. If you intend to register, circle these dates on your calendar: Oct. 1 to 5. That week, the League will be registering new voters between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. in the council chambers of the Borough Municipal Building.

Next time, do it right.



Nicholas Von Hoffman:

Say it ain't so

The National Soapbox Derby, an All-American ritual held every year in Akron, Ohio, is a 45-second "must" to be inserted toward the end of the network news shows. A red, white and blue winner. Not only do you have a reason for showing some nice, white, freckle-faced kids — and they're almost as heart melting as the Hush Puppy pup — but there is something vaguely patriotic about the story. Shades of Gasoline Alley and other forms of a Simpler-America-in-a-More-Innocent-Time; run the piece as one more proof that television's executives aren't the liberal, cerebral Manhattanites they're accused of being.

This year, though, the winner, a 14-year-old freckle-facer from Boulder, Colo., had his title and his \$7,500 college scholarship taken away from him on the grounds that his motorless racer was rigged in violation of the rules. A couple of days later his uncle and legal guardian stepped forward and said that while he admitted no wrongdoing, he was responsible for what happened, that it was done under the pressure of competition, and that anyway others have done the same.

From the freckle-faced kid's hometown, the District Attorney's office emitted some kind of blige about a "little Watergate," but the predictable waters of editorial lamentation about the violation of this sacred rite of American boyhood mercifully did not flow.

Why? Possibly we're learning not to get upset over trifles; possibly we have given way to a resigned cynicism or maybe we've gained a degree of self-knowledge, which could be the same thing.

It could be that a lot of people had read a recent Sports Illustrated cover story about the 10,000-plus children who now race around tracks all over the country on undersized motorcycles or minicycles. Children? Babies, infants might be better words to describe the two-and-a-half and three-year-olds whose parents put them on these powered racing machines. In the light of that, it's surprising there are any kids around to compete in soapbox racers, according to the rules or not.

You'll be surprised to learn that Sports Illustrated reports there is mass cheating at the minicycle races too, or is there? The father of one diapered A.J. Foyt was quoted remarking, "Well, as the old saying goes, it isn't really cheating unless you get caught, now is it?" Another parent estimates a quarter or more of the minicycle competitors cheat.

The minicyclists' parents seem even more driven to win than the most maniacal of the Little League daddies. One of the small losers at the miniature bike races had Pops reward him for a losing effort with a clonk over the head with a wrench.

The rest of us hear about such behavior and inveigh against the devils of limitless competition that take hold of our souls and haunt our culture. It does no good, naturally. Nothing dissuades us from our raging need to win contests made meaningless and without purpose by our own breaking of the rules. What honor comes to the victor of a game played by cheats?

Yet it was just a couple of years ago that some of us were proclaiming, if not a hippie ethic, then at least the gentle

Greening of America. We thought we foresaw the replacement of competition with cooperation, but it didn't pan out. Instead, we got hard-hat-ism, and Nixon in Washington celebrating a local pro-football coach whose need to win verges on the barbaric. "Nice guys finish last" has now given way to "only rats finish first."

But there are countervailing forces. Such savage and competitive winning and losing can only rule a society that is either hierarchical or believes only in merit. We are far too egalitarian to rank ourselves up and down strictly according to who wins and who loses. There is too much featherbedding, too many people of inherited wealth and power, too many people on relief to arrange our places simply according to the merit of surviving competition.

If we have a need to compete so wildly, that we will even teach our children to break the rules, we have an equal need to make sure that most of our competitors are shams. The egalitarian society is populated only by winners.

And by Jove, that's what they have at the minicycle races! "We got our son his first bike when he was six one father," says, "but he just didn't get anywhere." He was never even close to the leaders. Then we heard about a track where they give 100 per cent trophies, a trophy for every kid who entered. Now my son is nine and he's got 72 trophies.

Not the Greening of America, perhaps, but next time at the Soapbox Derby it might be more in keeping with our national expectations to let the little freckler bend the rules and keep the title, and award everybody else a trophy too.

At the Rijksmuseum

By ARTHUR TURFA
Fine Arts Director WDFM

The warm summer days brought little change from previous times. Hordes of young tourists, Americans forming the vanguard, converged upon Amsterdam, a city set in the midst of countryside that still very much resembles a van Ruysdael, with the additions of present-day technology. On the steps of Dam Square's National Monument, in the night clubs, in Vondel Park or in the Central Station between brightly-colored trains they congregated, finding security in numbers.

Along the canals, several of the narrow, high-gabled houses served as student hotels and head shops. However, the builders comprised a totally different class. They were the newly-rich burghers of three centuries ago, whose faces have been placed on canvas by Frans Hals or painters of lesser merit. During their time, the tricolor of Oranje was carried to all corners of the globe by Dutch ships which finally surrendered to the English in the contest for colonial supremacy.

Gradually, the Netherlands grew accustomed to a secondary role in the world. Amsterdam itself has changed drastically, especially after it received the unofficial designation of "the place to be."

So the rush to the Netherlands begins. The dikes that protect the land from the North Sea fail to stem the tide of vacationers. The nomads weary of Amsterdam after awhile, and the feeling is returned by the natives. The "dying

generations" that W.B. Yeats wrote about in his poem "Sailing to Byzantium" currently find boredom putting them out of their misery here. They content themselves by passively sitting down while the hashish peddlers move through the crowd in a manner similar to a priest dispensing the Eucharist. Most of the time, the police look the other way.

Standing to one side, I observed the entire scene as if it were being presented on a stage. Oddly, I didn't feel at all compelled to participate as a bit player in a cast of thousands. If outward appearances meant anything, I should have assumed a leading part in this production. But I realized that outward appearances are meaningless when viewed from another perspective. This perspective I found in the Rijksmuseum.

On my first morning in Amsterdam, exhausted as I was from a night on the train, I walked to the Rijksmuseum. Outside of the building a calliope played, intensifying the circus atmosphere. However, I was in no mood for acrobats and clowns. Instead, I paid my guilden and entered the museum.

There were long-haired students in the museum, grandparents with white hair, wrinkled faces and slow steps, middle-aged people from the bourgeoisie and wide-eyed children. No tension existed between the generations, as it had on the streets.

Most of the chambers were painted a muted yellow or a medium brown. Silence hung heavy in the air, broken only by exclamations of praise for Rembrandt's Night Watch or a Vermeer.

In each chamber stood graying men in matching uniforms, who served as watchmen — a day watch that remained unpaired.

The only sound to speak of came from shoes on the highly-polished floors, whenever people walked briskly. But mostly the pace was slow. Not only walking, but time appeared to have slowed down, a virtual cessation.

The visitors sensed this. For as long as we remained in the Rijksmuseum, we roamed about in an entirely different world. This new world was a beautiful one. As we walked through it, we would meet each other from time to time. All of us, with the exception of the aesthetic dilettantes, had a valid reason for being there and benefited from the visit. After all, no one really was forced to enter.

In this respect, museums are healthy stimulators. The peer pressure one encounters to smoke dope, drink martinis, turn on to Jesus or wear the latest fashions doesn't exist in museums. In Amsterdam, because of the painfully obvious generational clashes, this was easily seen.

I do not intend to moralize. It is impossible for me to condemn someone's avenue of escape as it is for a drunkard to condemn a junkie or an impressionist a Baroque portrait painter.

I, like other young people, will be confronted by our children. They will show us our shortcomings by holding up a mirror to our middle-aged faces, and we will realize how ugly our lives have been. If I am fortunate, I will be spared a brutal, agonizing catharsis due in part to the perceptions I had in Amsterdam.

the Collegian

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