



Un-Sportsmanlike Conduct

October 19, 2023

Tonight, the undefeated Dukes of James Madison University will travel [to play](#) the Thundering Herd of Marshall University in a Sun Belt Conference college football game. My youngest graduated from JMU, so I feel *heavily invested* in the team.

Duuuuukes!

One might think this sport and spectacle a welcome relief from politics — and surely it is — but not entirely. Because, of course, these great college football programs are attached to public universities financed by us, by our tax dollars.

The problem? As *The Athletic* [put it](#) recently: “For the second consecutive year, James Madison looks like one of the best teams in the Group of 5. And for the second consecutive year, the Dukes are ineligible for the postseason.”

The Group of 5 are the five best football-playing conferences *after* the best five conferences known as the Power-5. That’s pretty impressive — especially considering this is only the second year since James

Madison made the jump from the second division into the first division of football-playing schools of higher yearning and earning.

JMU is in the big leagues; it can now play for the national championship. Well, not now. Again, this year, like last year, JMU’s football team is banned from playing in a bowl game or being declared the champion of the conference . . . even though last year they did win the conference . . . except for the rule that says they cannot win the conference.

This year, the Dukes are 6-0 and could perhaps go undefeated. What if College Football’s Magic Computers pick them as among the best? They would *still* be denied a chance to compete.

Why? Well, those are the rules the colleges and conferences have agreed on. The rationales don’t hold much water. It seems like a hazing ritual holdover to me.

But, of course, the universities can do whatever they want.

And suffering the harsh two-year punishment is not so terrible for the coach who will possibly have a decade-long career, or the university that will play on in perpetuity.

All the unfairness is placed on the shoulders of the student athletes. Denied the conference honors and the post-season play they deserve, these unpaid players who’ve earned millions for their schools have at least learned a lesson. When it comes to sports and money, the kids come last.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.