

# PSU studies in character

By William C. Kashatus

**P**enn State's efforts to restore its integrity got a boost last week from Bill O'Brien, who announced his intention to return as the Nittany Lions' head football coach next season. O'Brien had reportedly heard overtures from several NFL teams, including the Eagles.

But O'Brien's announcement came just as Gov. Corbett was giving Penn State another black eye by suing the NCAA over its harsh sanctions against the university.

Corbett and O'Brien's respective decisions say much about the character of each man, as well as the difficulty of restoring Penn State's tarnished reputation.

Bill O'Brien could have taken his pick of NFL head coach openings given his remarkable success at the collegiate and professional levels. He spent 13 years at the college level as a Division I offensive coach and coordinator before joining the NFL's New England Patriots, teaming up with quarterback Tom Brady to build an offense that went all the way to the Super Bowl last year.

When O'Brien agreed to become head coach at Penn State after that season, he inherited a nightmarish situation amid the fallout of the Jerry Sandusky sexual-abuse scandal. But despite crippling NCAA sanctions that included a four-year postseason ban, a loss of 40 scholarships, and a \$60 million fine, O'Brien was a stunning success, leading the Nittany Lions to an 8-4 record.

## Refreshing example

Given that, attractive offers from the NFL were predictable. But O'Brien's moral compass prevailed. He knew it would be wrong to leave Penn State after he had asked the players to commit to his decimated program instead of leaving for teams that weren't playing under a cloud. Last week, when he renewed his commitment to the Nittany Lions, O'Brien set a refreshing example of personal integrity.

"I'm not a one-and-done guy," he said. "I made a commitment to these players at Penn State, and that's what I am going to do. I'm not going to cut and run after one year."

Corbett, on the other hand, filed a meritless lawsuit against the NCAA for sanctions he originally accepted while urging Penn State to do the same. The inconsistency and timing of Corbett's challenge, which is bound to be popular among Penn State boosters, suggest he is more concerned about his political survival than he is about the university's welfare.

Instead of filing suit in July, immediately after the NCAA imposed the sanctions, Corbett did it just weeks before Attorney General-elect Kathleen Kane is to take office. Not coincidentally, Kane has vowed to investigate whether Corbett dragged his feet as attorney general in charging and exposing Sandusky as a sexual predator.

## Weak argument

The complaint contends that the NCAA "cynically and hypocritically exploited the [sexual abuse] tragedy to gain leverage in the court of public opinion" and "boost the reputation and power of the NCAA's president." It's a weak argument, and one that suggests a failure to understand the gravity of what happened at Penn State.

Fortunately, the governor, who is also a Penn State trustee, doesn't appear to have much company among university leaders. Penn State officials say they are not participating in the lawsuit and, along with O'Brien, insist they will comply with the NCAA sanctions. Perhaps they understand that their institution is being justly penalized for allowing football to take precedence over education, and that the sanctions may encourage other Division I schools to act with greater integrity in the future.

For all the national interest and money generated by its football program, Penn State is first and foremost an educational institution entrusted with a duty to teach young people to become morally sound and constructive citizens.

Some of the most important life lessons can come from teacher-coaches like O'Brien, who serve as role models for their student-athletes. Other, less instructive lessons can be learned from self-centered politicians like Corbett, who do not always provide such exemplary leadership of their institutions.

Let's hope the governor can learn from O'Brien's example and start serving Penn State's interests over his own.

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