

UCF's Dr. Bill Sutton sees hope for spectator sports amid economic crunch

Jerry Greene | FROM THE CHEAP SEATS
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After a pleasant hour on the UCF campus of realistic but basically optimistic talk about spectator sports during the current economic woes, Dr. *Bill Sutton* admitted what he does when things really get bad.

"I watch *The Waltons*," he said. "When I'm depressed, I watch *The Waltons*, and they remind me that we are all in this together and all can get through it together."

WWJ-BD — What Would John-Boy Do?

Sutton is a professor on the faculty of the DeVos Sport Business Management graduate program at UCF after coming here at the start of 2004. Prior to that, he was the [NBA's](#) vice president of marketing. The co-author of two text books on sports marketing and management, he knows of what he speaks.



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We only have room for "sound bites," so here is Sutton on various topics:

•The overall picture of spectator sports in the current marketplace? — "People don't realize how bad it is, although there are solutions. In most cases, teams will have to go to variable pricing. You will pay more to see the Yankees. Sell your product in bite-sized projects."

•Who may suffer the most? — "Logic would say the [NHL](#) because it is almost totally dependent on its live gate. The NBA may be in the best shape because of its global movement. But the [NFL](#) is the one to watch — will it restore a semblance of reality with its salaries?"

•The Magic? — "The best it has been because they have reconnected with the community. And all their games are on local TV again, too."

•UCF? — "People locally don't realize it has the model ticket-sales department. [Matt DiFebo](#) [Associate AD in charge of ticket and group sales] is doing a phenomenal job reaching the fan base to put a ticket in their hands."

•High school spectator sports? — "It's good they are talking publicly about taking it away because that gets people's attention. Why not introduce corporate sponsorships? A Little Leaguer can wear '[McDonald's](#)' on his shirt, so why not a high school player?"

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What do you think? Has Dr. Sutton been watching too many old episodes of The Waltons, or is his cautious optimism appropriate for the times?

Predators coming back?

Dr. Sutton thinks the Arena League will be back in 2010. The key is for the league to accept it is a niche sport and produce an entertaining product at a realistic price. The owners met in the Chicago area last week and this is what I heard about those meetings:

- The AFL will go to a united "one for all" concept of sharing the expenses and profits. It will be a smaller league, but the Predators will be back.
•The season probably will return to its March-to-August schedule.
•Most salaries will be reduced by about 40-50 percent and the six-figure salaries for stars will disappear.

Top sports state: Illinois?

That's what ESPN thinks. At least it was Illinois' "four greatest athletes" that were voted by ESPN viewers to be the faces on the SportsCenter Mt. Rushmore of Sports — Michael Jordan, Walter Payton, Ernie Banks and Mike Ditka.

There was no special vote to put Tim Tebow on there because he once flew over Illinois.

Illinois got 28.6 percent of the vote in the finals. Second at 25.5 percent was Pennsylvania — Joe Paterno, Mario Lemieux, Roberto Clemente and Wilt Chamberlain.

Nobody asked but ...

- I was really hoping Tiger Woods would have grimaced and clutched his knee after his first drive. No telling how many Tour executives would have fainted.
•Hey, SEC fans, you know where Las Vegas ranks your conference for winning the NCAA men's basketball title? Seventh! That's embarrassing. You can get 20-1. Conference USA is fifth at 15-1, thanks to Memphis.
•Jon Gruden did a good job working the combine for the NFL Network. One Gruden quote: "We tried to replace Warren Sapp with first-round draft choices and free agents, and now I'm sitting here with Warren Sapp."
•Kyle Busch has his own "signature can" of NOS Energy Drink — the 16-ounce mango passion. Yep, when I think NASCAR, I'm thinking mango passion.
•Please go to entertonement.com (note the spelling), a collection of sound clips. And click on "Woman calls cops on Burger King." Listen to her 9-1-1 call to hear: "I ask them four times to make me a western barbecue burger, OK. They keep giving me a hamburger with lettuce, tomatoes, cheese and onions! I want a western burger!" — I love this lady.

The Seats return Sunday. Send your suggestions for a sports economic revival to Jgreene@orlandosentinel.com and have a nice day.

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