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Republican Perspective Bleacher Envy

By John Littig

At the Plymouth High School in Canton, Mich., the boys' varsity baseball diamond and the girls' softball diamond are adjacent. The U.S. Education Department's Office for Civil Rights has forced the school to tear down the bleachers at the boys' field because they provide better seating than do the bleachers at the girls' field.

Impossible? Read on.

Parents were unhappy with viewing the boys' games through a chain link fence. So six years ago a group of them got together and chipped in money to raise the seating for a better view. They contributed their own labor to build the raised bleachers. They also added a new scoreboard to the field. No cost to the school or the Canton taxpayers or - for that matter- the U.S. Education Department. So far, so good.

Well, an anonymous complaint was filed and, after an investigation, the U.S. Education Department issued a citation. Lacking the money to provide equal seating for the girls' field, the school agreed to tear down the boys' bleachers. The school will store the bleachers until they can come up with a plan that is "fair to everyone."

Now, bear in mind that the boys' parents paid for and built the bleachers. They didn't seek public money or help. They saw a problem and pitched in to fix it.

Somehow, this ran afoul of the federal requirement that the school provide equal opportunity for both boys' and girls' sports. It is a bafflement how the baseball parents' initiative and beneficence hindered the girls' opportunity to play softball.

Now, since the complaint was anonymous, we don't really know for sure who filed it. But it's a pretty good bet that it was someone who was envious of the seating for the boys' field.

The sad part is that, rather than try to find a way to improve the girls' bleachers, the complainer took a course that resulted in destruction of the boys' bleachers. It betrays a mentality that says: "if I can't have it, you can't either." Even worse: "you can't have it, even if you paid for it yourself."

Of course the most obvious solution to this problem, since the school could not afford to upgrade the softball seating, would have been for the girls' parents to do what the boys' parents had done. Chip in, pitch in and do it themselves.

The reader would be disappointed if I did not link this story to a larger societal issue. So here it is.

This event demonstrates a pursuit of equality run amok. Now don't get me wrong: Equality of opportunity is a good thing. But for various reasons, outcomes will not be equal.

Nevertheless, there are those among us who, abetted by the power of government coercion, seek to force equality of outcomes. To force equality not just by providing opportunity for all to improve themselves and their condition, but by bringing others down. As demonstrated in this case, by destroying that which others have created with their own hands and paid for with their own money.

If you drive a VW, should your neighbor be forced to give up his BMW? Apparently some think so. And the government is increasingly on their side.

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