

Of Orange Pride and Prejudice: An Examination of Host/Hostess Groups in College Recruiting

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In December of 2009, sports news outlets were abuzz with a story that the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) had initiated an inquiry into football recruiting practices at the University of Tennessee (UT) (Bennett, 2009; DiSalvo, 2009; Rand, 2009; Thamel & Evans, 2009; Whiteside & Halley, 2009). Allegations that two female members of Orange Pride, a group of paid student hosts and hostesses run by the Office of Admissions, had traveled out of state to attend a high school game played by a top prospect raised questions regarding whether UT officials were potentially using pretty coeds as an incentive to persuade football recruits to sign with the Volunteers. For decades, the college sport community has periodically confronted issues regarding the array of inducements employed in the recruitment of top talent, including at times wild parties, trips to strip clubs, and the subtle suggestion or implied promise of sex. In 2004, substantial changes in approaches to recruiting designed to curtail such activities was expected to have been done after a scandal at the University of Colorado resulted in public revelations that football recruits allegedly sexually assaulted and raped three female students (Associated Press). Despite these efforts, female students remain a fixture in the recruiting apparatus for some big time men's athletic programs (Feldman, 2007; King, 2003; Mosely, 2002). Using the case of the Orange Pride as a starting point, this presentation will provide an overview of the phenomenon of hostess groups on college campuses, examine the motivations of the female students who serve as hostesses as well as attitudes and perspectives of other constituencies, analyze the way in which female hostesses are described in media and on blogs, and explore the ethical issues associated with this practice.