The discouraging spectre of a gradual black withdrawal

By Alex Makowski

There is much that could be said about the enforced participation by the BSU in "A" league football this year. Although there is a very real danger of reading too much into the situation, it is still worth looking carefully to see what can be done to meet both the BSU and the referees. The relationship between the black undergraduates and the rest of the campus is natural to begin by considering the football game two weeks ago between the BSU and Lambda Chi Alpha. I arrived in the first quarter, but witnessed all of the rest of the game as well as the tension and violence afterwards. The refereeing was poor — no worse, perhaps, than the officiating at any other of that first weekend's games, but still poor. The BSUscored vehemently on a play in the first quarter when their secondary seemingly tagged a pun receiver (the receiver just about stopped on the sidelines), only to see him turn off and score a touchdown when there was no whistle. The following quarter a fine touchdown run by that quarterback was called back by an official well behind the play who claimed the ballcarrier had fumbled. Several Lambda Chi's commented along the sideline that there were BSU players out for nothing more than a good game of football.

But the BSU decided to withdraw from "A" league competition. An important factor seems to be the frustration with the refereeing Moutrey spoke of. Once their protest of the game was rejected, the blacks had to ask themselves whether it was worth their effort to play with the kind of officiating they were getting. The season had been rough. Whether they attributed the officials' prejudice, the frustration was still more than they were willing to bear. Deciding that they couldn't get even-handed treatment that benefited the time and work they were putting into the game, the BSU players left football.

The decision obviously touched the core of the IM sports program. As IM Council Chairman Ken Weishar pointed out, there are limitations to what the IM program can provide for officiating. It would be foolish and financially impossible to hire outside referees for touch football games. Other teams besides the BSU have been frustrated by the officiating they received. They usually decide that the participation, with the drawbacks of athletic competition, provides enough satisfaction. There can be no denying, however, the legitimacy of the BSU objection. If the IM program were so ill-suited to its brand of devotion to football, perhaps they would be better off in a different league.

This raises the discouraging spectre of a gradual withdrawal of blacks from the IM program. Beyond the IM sports program, what happened that Sunday afternoon revealed something fundamental about the relationship between blacks and whites on this campus. At few other times since 1969, when blacks began forming a sizable part of the incoming freshman class, has it been so apparent that students from the two races are not communicating with each other. For example, many whites were probably surprised to learn about the serious way the blacks here think about "sport, however exceptional lengths to prepare for the fall schedule (Phi Gamma Delta also surprised quite a few football fans), but it is unlikely that students from the other houses would leave the sports program because the refereeing was inadequate. Certainly more communication might have eased the tensions around that football game.

Increasingly blacks and whites have been drawing off to their own sections of the campus. Most of the few blacks who lived in fraternities have either graduated or moved out, and every fall the BSU discourages black freshmen from joining a fraternity. As one professor noted, rarely do you see blacks and whites walking together in groups on campus. And there was a particularly disturbing incident following the BSU-LCA game. The blacks to Weishar and Bergman from one of the BSU players could perhaps be dismissed as the result of overheating during the football game, but the belligerence and hostility of the black spectators to the whites on the field after the game was a bit more unsettling. If the blacks here have a legitimate reason for believing themselves the victims of the whites, perhaps both blacks and whites here had better get together to try and work the problem out. If not, students have to realize that unjustified belligerence is hardly worth the temporary personal satisfaction it may bring.

This may strike some as the same liberal hand-wringing that has been going on in this country for decades. But it is frustrating to see that on a college campus, within a community of some of this country's most intelligent young adults, such problems seem to defy solution. It is too much to ask for black and white students to somehow come together to thresh out their disagreements! Perhaps it is too much to expect that such problems can be worked out in the competitive, emotionally charged atmosphere of athletic competition.

And looking at the practicalities of the situation, it may be up to the blacks to make the first move. It would be difficult for a white to go up to a black and politely ask him what was troubling him — the expected and natural result would be hostility. The blacks must bring out for themselves a black and polite attitude toward 'sport, however much they are not communicating with each other.