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NOTED COLUMNIST TELLS NCAA THAT UGA'S ADAMS WOULD BE A 'COLOSSAL MISTAKE'

Bob Ryan, noted sports columnist for the Boston Globe recently ripped the National Collegiate Athletic Association for considering University of Georgia president Michael Adams as CEO of that organization to succeed the late Myles Brand, saying it would be a "colossal mistake." The NCAA search is being conducted by Parker Executive Search of Atlanta, the same firm that recommended Adams for the UGA job.

"Start with the idea that he (Adams) is not an academic," Ryan opines, "Michael Adams is a spinmeister. He is a clever and ruthless politician. He knows how to amass allies — a power-seeking liquor magnate named Donald Leeburn being the most prominent — and he knows how to wield power. He is not a leader. He is a schemer and an intimidator."

Ryan cites examples from the late investigative reporter Richard Whitt's book, "Behind the Hedges: Big Money and Power Politics at the University of Georgia (NewSouth Books, Montgomery, Ala.), which has been roundly pooh-poohed by the university and generally ignored by the state's media.

The book delves into issues involving Adams' controversial (my understatement of the year) reign as president and contains a copy of a DeLoitte & Touche audit alleging financial misdeeds and other assorted egregious activities. The audit was commissioned by the University of Georgia Foundation, the university's private fund-raising arm.

The release of the audit findings was poorly managed by those trying to get the word out. The UGA Foundation naively thought the Board of Regents would find the audit of material interest. Enter political reality. The regents, a bunch of political appointees including the aforementioned Donald Leeburn who jealously guard their power, gave the foundation the back of its hand and summarily dismissed the report and severed the university's ties with the half-billion dollar organization.

Why did Ryan feel it necessary to hammer Michael Adams and his candidacy from faraway Boston? "I have always had a passion for college sports," he told me from Augusta, where he was covering the Masters Golf Tournament. "I felt I had an obligation to alert my readers about this guy." Ryan quotes a 2004 poll of the university's largest college, the Franklin College of Arts and Science which gave Adams a 70 percent vote of "no confidence" and includes comments like this, "Specifically, he readily compromises both ethical and moral standards. He blames others for his own misdeeds and never admits personal error or responsibility."

Ryan said his boss Globe Sports Editor Joe Sullivan fully supports his views. The newspaper editorialized that the NCAA should look at people like Graham Spanier, president of Penn State, whose football team has an 85 percent graduation rate and "cross out" Adams whose basketball team graduates "a paltry 18 percent."

There is an understanding among the media that one doesn't criticize their brethren lest they be criticized in return. This doesn't seem to faze Bob Ryan. Of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution he says, "He (Adams) pushed out athletic director Vince Dooley, a much-beloved figure in Georgia, a year early and sold a surprisingly compliant Atlanta Journal-Constitution the entirely misleading premise that it was a matter of academics vs. athletics, which simply was not the case. The idea that the newspaper of Ralph McGill would buy into such a phony act is truly sad."

AJC Sports Columnist Mark Bradley ran Ryan's column and the Globe editorial on his blog with a strangely tepid defense of Adams. He says why not also blame former basketball coach Dennis Felton and current AD Damon Evans for the low graduation rates? I guess Bradley has never heard of CEOs. That is where the buck stops.

Has Ryan gotten a lot of reaction to his column? "Yes, I have. Mostly from down your way. Almost all of them agree with me, but," he laughs, "some of the letters say, 'Thanks to you, now we will never get rid of this guy.'"

Adams has been quoted as saying he is not a serious candidate for the NCAA job and plans to stay at UGA until his retirement. If that is so — and with Michael Adams you never know — Bob Ryan just made that decision much easier for him and for the NCAA.