

EDITORIALS

Future shock for athletic officials

In 1970, futurist Alvin Toffler wrote an intriguing book entitled *Future Shock*. In part, it is a book that describes how people have been overwhelmed by change. Toffler's projections for the future were often sobering. The concept of "future shock" was defined by Toffler as

"... the distress, both physical and psychological, that arises from an overload of the human organism's physical adaptive systems and its decision-making processes. Put more simply, future shock is the human response to overstimulation...." [I]t is impossible to produce future shock in large numbers of individuals without affecting the rationality of the society as a whole.... [T]he cumulative impact of ... overstimulation ... creates sickness in our midst. This sickness is increasingly mirrored in our culture, our philosophy, our attitude toward reality."

In short, it is a loss of the ability to maintain perspective. The fact that people are unable to cope is a disturbing premise and one that an apparently increasing number of people are coming to appreciate. People witness this loss of perspective as a result of their experiences and as a result of the news that they are bombarded with each day. The news is often grim and, sometimes, a pattern of aberrant conduct emerges.

Witness the recent attention that has been focused upon athletic officiating. Within the past six months, five states, including New Jersey, have considered new legislation to strengthen the criminal penalties that may be imposed upon people who assault officials at athletic contests. Referees and umpires are actually being physically assaulted because fans are unhappy with their performance. The problem has become so acute that, according to a recent report in the *Wall Street Journal*, some officials arrive at interscholastic athletic contests early so that they can position their automobiles at strategic places that will optimize their prospects

for a speedy and safe retreat after the game. Their cause for concern is real. There have been a disturbing number of incidents in which even little league and church league officials have been seriously injured by fan, coach or player.

On February 17, 1994, the New Jersey Assembly passed Bill No. 550, which seeks to amend N.J.S. 2C:12-1 "to upgrade the simple assault of threatening or harassing certain persons while they are performing their duties to aggravated assault...." Threatening or harassing sports officials would be so upgraded. The bill is currently pending before the Senate Judiciary Committee as Senate Bill No. S-164. The bills are a step forward, and we endorse their passage. The legislation seeks to deal with the problem and stiffen criminal penalties.

However, the issue also underscores an interesting question. Can our society successfully legislate against rage and dysfunction or are we applying a band-aid to a severed artery? What else but rage, dysfunction, or a lack of perspective can explain what would propel a person to assault someone who assists children to learn and play our national pastime simply because it was perceived that the official had made a bad call? If we believe that we have solved the problem merely by enacting legislation, then we are deluding ourselves, and it is a dangerous delusion. Legislation is a step in dealing with many problems, but it is usually not a solution in and of itself. Legislation is no panacea and many of our citizens must stop seeing it as such. If they do not, their dissatisfaction with the law and lawyers will intensify and further distort their focus. The creation of new laws simply cannot solve many of our problems, and the causes of those problems loom.

People often claim that there is nothing new under the sun. Toffler made his observations in 1970. Almost 370 years before, The Bard had Cassius observe that "the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves." It is neither stars nor laws. If we are to endure, we must look to the causes of our problems and to ourselves for solutions.