

**By JOE BIDDLE**

The NCAA dropped the hammer on Penn State football this week.

The sanctions will cripple the football program for at least 10 years.

Everything the late Joe Paterno built came crumbling down. His statue at Beaver Stadium was dismantled and hauled away.

If only Paterno and those above him had taken a stand. If only they had moved to stop former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky, a convicted sexual predator whose victims were young boys from broken homes.

While the 68-year-old Sandusky will live out his life in prison, his victims are burdened with the stigma he caused forever.

Hindsight being 20/20, Paterno should have acted on evidence that Sandusky was involved in a sordid world of child sexual abuse.

Instead, he ignored it as he and Penn State administrators tried to cover it up. Their wrongful decisions cost the university dearly. They will spend years digging out from under the NCAA punishment.

So how will Paterno be remembered? Those close to Penn State will look at all the good things

Paterno did while becoming an icon who grew larger than the university.

Paterno wielded more power than anyone on campus and arguably anyone in the state. What Joe said was the final word.

Few will now recognize him as college football's winningest coach. The NCAA stripped the school and thus Paterno of all football victories compiled from 1988 through 2011.

For Paterno, that meant striking 111 of his wins from the record. It dropped him to fifth on the FBS list, eighth overall – from 409 wins to 298. It put retired Florida State football coach Bobby Bowden atop FBS coaches.

Paterno's legacy has been damaged forever. All the good he did was negated by what he refused to do to -- stop a heinous assistant coach on his staff from molesting young boys on the Penn State campus and in his home.

Blind loyalty, that old school male bonding between football coaches, cost Paterno his place in college football history.

South Carolina football coach Steve Spurrier got to know Paterno when their teams met in a bowl game. Before the game, Spurrier asked Paterno if he would have his picture taken with him. Paterno readily agreed.

Spurrier placed that picture in his den. Paterno was the first person Spurrier has ever asked to pose for a picture.

Paterno influenced hundreds of coaches in the profession. He ran a clean program. He disciplined his players when they crossed a line. He was for everything decent in college athletics. But when it came to making the most difficult decision of his life, Joe Paterno went against all he believed in. He tried to hide from the truth, hoping it would all go away.

In doing so, Paterno ruined his reputation. He helped put his beloved football program and his school in NCAA hell.

Football at Penn State will never be the same, and maybe that's a good thing. As NCAA President Dr. Mark Emmert said Monday, the culture surrounding elite college football programs has to be changed.

It's too late for Joe Paterno and Penn State. Years of civil and criminal trials are on the horizon. Yes, some of the victims who face NCAA sanctions are blameless.

The players weren't aware of Sandusky and his demented acts.

But Joe Paterno knew enough to act on what he had been told. Alas, he chose not to.

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