

Misdirection play - *Sunday News* editorial – September 9, 2012

Blow the whistle on those at Penn State who trash the Freeh report on the Sandusky scandal. Keep the blame where, and on whom, it belongs.

Why would a former FBI director conduct a witch hunt at Penn State University?

Conspiracy theorists keep claiming that the "Freeh report" -- the findings of ex-FBI head Louis Freeh's consulting firm on the way Penn State handled allegations of child sex abuse by Jerry Sandusky -- is biased, prosecutorial rather than investigative, lacking in interviews with key witnesses, full of speculation rather than facts, and just plain wrong.

The conspiracy theorists seem to think that the Penn State trustees, who hired Mr. Freeh's firm, commissioned the report to cover their own posteriors, rather than to find the truth.

Perhaps this argument arises because the Freeh report doesn't excuse the university or its late football coach, Joe Paterno, but spells out in painful detail how people at the top of the Penn State hierarchy chose to close their eyes to clear evidence that a former football defensive coordinator was using the football program and football property to molest young boys.

In the wake of criminal charges against Mr. Sandusky, Athletic Director Tim Curley and Senior Vice President Gary Schultz, trustees hired Mr. Freeh to probe what happened when allegations against Mr. Sandusky first came to the attention of university officials in 1998 and 2001.

Mr. Sandusky has been convicted of abuse, while Mr. Curley and Mr. Schultz still face trial on charges that they failed to report the abuse and lied to the grand jury investigating the case.

The latest whining comes from lawyers for Graham Spanier, who was Penn State's president as the Sandusky scandal unfolded, and from 29 former chairmen of Penn State's Faculty Senate. In a statement in late August, the senate leaders griped, "On a foundation of scant evidence, the [Freeh] report adds layers of conjecture and supposition to create a portrait of fault, complicity and malfeasance that could well be at odds with the truth."

Around the same time, Mr. Spanier's attorneys blasted the Freeh report as a "myth." Conveniently, this shot

across the bow comes as prosecutors are mulling whether to charge the ex-president with the same kinds of crimes that his one-time subordinates are facing.

A few dissident Penn State trustees also attacked the Freeh report -- we suspect because the report is the basis for the NCAA's tough penalties against Penn State's football program.

First, considering the Freeh report blasted the trustees for leadership and oversight failures in the Sandusky debacle, how can the report constitute a coverup for the board?

Second, would a consultant like Mr. Freeh, with a reputation to protect, destroy that reputation with a slipshod or faulty investigation? No, he did not interview a few witnesses. He told The Associated Press that state prosecutors asked him to use their grand jury testimony instead.

Third, even Mr. Spanier's lawyers ducked a question at their own press conference on how they explain the emails quoted in the Freeh report among Mr. Spanier and his underlings, referring to the 1998 and 2001 incidents. We'd like to know how anyone could explain away those damning emails. They validate Mr. Freeh's conclusions.

We understand, to a degree, the anguish that Penn State supporters are feeling now that everything they thought the university stood for -- Mr. Paterno's motto "Success With Honor" comes to mind -- has been revealed to be hollow. The NCAA's penalties make the anguish worse. The Nittany Lion football program will need years to rebuild once the sanctions are lifted.

But Mr. Freeh is the wrong person to blame.

The Freeh report implicates Mr. Paterno in the crucial decision-making process that swept the Sandusky mess under various rugs for more than a decade. And it exposes a Happy Valley culture that did indeed come to value football success over just about anything.

Even the safety and well-being of children.

The overreaction against the Freeh report is a case of wanting to kill the messenger. You know what they say about denial not only being a river in Egypt.

