Bored of the ring : Students have right to sell college rings to others (Opinion)  
By George Deutsch

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The recent actions by members of the Georgia football team have done little to quell a debate that raged on in the Texas A&M community last semester: do students have the right to sell rings and other merchandise earned through personal college achievements?

Last month, nine Georgia football players sold their 2002 Southeastern Conference championship rings, Sugar Bowl rings and Sugar Bowl jerseys to a private buyer who then sold the items on eBay, according to The Associated Press. The players were given these items based on their remarkable athletic success. But disappointingly, the players were declared ineligible by the NCAA pending an investigation and attempts to reacquire the merchandise, a decision that undermines the entire capitalist system on which this country is based. Georgia is appealing the NCAA's decision, and rightfully so, as these young men had every right to sell possessions that were legally their own.

Even more alarming, though, is the fact that the NCAA is citing an ambiguous rule in declaring the players ineligible. NCAA rules don't prohibit student athletes from selling rings as long as those athletes get no more than "fair market value" for their merchandise, according to the AP. But defining "fair market value" is hopelessly subjective. While critics say the rings are worth no more than $350 apiece, diehard Georgia football fans clearly attach much greater significance to an SEC championship ring, the first of which Georgia fans have seen in 20 years. For example, defensive tackle Kedric Golston received $3,500 for his ring and jerseys. So clearly, determining "fair market value" can be hugely problematic. The NCAA is interpreting its rules in a strict, even unreasonable, manner and is quick to take action if there is even a hint of wrongdoing. It should come as no surprise, then, that six of the SEC's 12 teams are under NCAA investigation, though not all for selling athletic merchandise. So if the NCAA's actions are not fair, at least they are equitable.

But in truth, those nine Georgia players had every right to do what they did. Did their decision to sell their rings fail to show integrity and team unity? Perhaps, but the issue shouldn't simply be reduced to an ethical dilemma. Fortunately for those who aren't student athletes, the NCAA cannot restrict free trade between average college students. Still, when A&M student Matt Shomer attempted selling his Aggie ring on eBay in April, he was met with unwarranted criticism and harassment from members of the student body, as was evident in an April 9 Battalion mail call. Shomer was singled out, embarrassed and called "disgraceful" in print by another Aggie. It was this Aggie who did a disservice to the A&M community through needless harassment; Shomer was just a victim of others' overzealous criticism and his own ambition.

Shomer and Georgia football coach Mark Richt have apologized, but apologies really aren't in order. The decision was made to exchange money for merchandise, and in the real world, transactions such as this happen by the thousands every day. If a ring's owner cannot sell it, who can? The achievement and emotion associated with these rings, whether an SEC ring or an Aggie ring, doesn't somehow make them sacred or priceless, it only makes them valuable. These students were aware of the value their belongings held and simply wanted to capitalize off of it. Really, what is more American than that?

Published Comments:
The ring is indeed an object. While objects can be bought and sold, there are objects that symbolize a greater thing, and these objects (Aggie rings, SEC rings) are examples of that.

A person who sells a symbol such as an Aggie ring has not just sold an object; he has sold what many view as a symbol of the hard work that goes into becoming an Aggie. As was stated in Mr. Deutsch's article, the rings were allowed to be sold if the seller received no more than market value for the ring. I would imagine that those rings are worth far more sentimentally than the amount of the gold. I certainly value my Aggie Ring, and what it stands for, far more than the 400-some dollars of gold in it.

I would also hope that the sheer capitalistic greed exhibited by their actions isn't representative of America, as Mr. Deutsch implies.

John Spurlin, Class of 2003

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The Aggie Ring is valuable because of the personal effort that is required to get it. Selling it is an insult to the university and all Aggies in general. I doubt very much that Mr. Deutsch disagrees with me. It is typical of the opinion writers for The Battalion to take a stance on an issue that will make everyone mad.

Brandon Byrne '06

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I think it was stated in that Mail Call that it was Shomer's account, not Shomer's ring. What was disgraceful was not so much that it was being sold, which I am strongly against, but the manner in which it was being sold. The description spoke of fooling others into thinking you're an Aggie and how it was better than a diploma. That was disgraceful and in extremely poor taste. The same goes for these nine players although the punishment is unwarranted. Oh, and the SEC has so many teams being investigated because it is the most crooked conference in the country, not because the NCAA is unfair.

Joshua Wager, Class of 2004

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The author's argument that owners should be able to sell whatever they want for a fair price, ethics be damned, is a misunderstanding of free market principles. The fact is, some goods are regulated, rightly so, because selling them causes a greater disservice to public good than the benefit gained by the seller.

For example, by selling their rings the Georgia football players cheapened the name and respect of their football program, the NCAA, and their school. This loss to the University's prestige is an economic good too, and the university and the NCAA has every right to protect it. This is also the case with the unfortunate incident in which the Aggie ring was put up for sale.

Free markets have to be regulated and ethics should always be a primary concern. Moreover, contrary to the author's bizarre attempt to associate his argument with being patriotic, I submit that there is nothing more French than ignoring ethics and selling a good just because someone else, whether a person or a regime, wants to buy it.