Scandals and elitism feed the prejudice that competitive athletics are an unworthy pursuit in ‘higher’ education.

By RUSS GOUGH

With a long college football weekend end at hand, we would do well to remember these wise words written by Arthur Ashe in the last days of his life to his young daughter, Camera.

His words, penned just 13 days before his death, are particularly poignant to this professor and college sports fan. They are part of an eloquent attempt by an athletically gifted sage to breathe new life into a woefully tired cliché: “Sports build character.”

Ashe’s sentiments are soberingly apropos, especially in light of the news early this season of yet three more prestigious educational institutions—Auburn and Texas A&M universities and the University of Washington—being pilloried for football programs that ran out of bounds.

Unfortunately, these eye-blackening blemishes mar the face of what is otherwise a truly marvelous learning experience—specifically, an education of character—from which thousands of young men and women benefit.

Big-time college athletics, like many other high-stakes societal practices, certainly has its share of ethical wanderings. Some athletic programs seem to lack any kind of moral compass; a few are morally bankrupt.

We should remember, however, that there are many thousands of student-athletes and coaches who are not involved in the ethical morass of big-money, big-time college athletics. Further, despite assumptions to the contrary, there still exist prestigious institutions with big-time athletic programs whose successes have been paved by the road of academic integrity.