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Decline of the American Black Athlete in Sports

By Gary Whittaker

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It has been almost 60 years since Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color barrier, and now blacks dominate Major League Baseball. Even so, blacks were kept out of the more "intellectual" positions or sports. In the NFL, Quarterback was a tough position to crack. Willie Thrower is on record as the first black to start an NFL game, but it was one time only. It took 15 years before history repeated itself in the AFL, and Warren Moon to path the way for McNabb, McNair and Vick who are built in the same mold.

In the NBA, Blacks began to take over the league at around the same time ratings and attendance figures dropped. While it was very politically correct to credit Johnson along with Larry Bird for the league's revival, Magic would have been just another line in the long list of talented black ball player had he not had a white rival. When the Olympics opened the door for professional athletes in 1992, the US sent over THE DREAM TEAM. On that team you had 11 of the best NBA players (only Mullin and Stockton where white), and 1 college throw in. That team, and the next 2 won gold easily. The US became so cocky, that it thought it could send of a rooster of any black kid, and win gold just as easily. Maybe white men can't jump, but they can damn sure reach gold with their shooting, so the Americans had to settle for Bronze. And they were lucky to get away with anything. They took such a beating that they will have to redo their entire image. If there is one thing I can guarantee, it is that they will not be called the Dream Team for the 2008 Olympics and that they will go back to having a few white players.

The 90's continued to be great for the black athletes as Tiger Woods emerged to become the most dominant golfer of the modern age. Considering that at the time Tiger had emerged as a professional, many black Americans were still not even allowed to play at the courses he was wining on. From 1997 to 2002 (okay, 98 was an off year), people were not asking if he was going to break all of Hogan's and Nicklaus' records, but when, or what could stop him. According to the movie, "Undercover Brother", white women are the black man's kryptonite. That appears to be what happened to Tiger since his career tanked after he married his Swedish bombshell girlfriend. If Tiger cannot recover his old form, he may in fact be remembered as more of an Arthur Ashe, as a great player who broke a barrier, rather than broke records.

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Obviously, we cannot mention Ashe without getting into Tennis and the Williams sisters. Venus was the first to spring forward and start winning on the WTA tour. She even bested her sister when they first played against each other. However, after dominated in the pairs together, Serena came into her own, beat her sister and took the number 1 ranking. Both Serena Williams and Tiger Woods at one point won four majors in a row in their respective sports, but neither are recognized as they did not happen in a calendar year. While both Venus and Serena have faced injuries (Venus more so), it is more their concentration to other business ventures that may be accounting for their poor showing over the last 2 years.

In baseball, the black American is in shorter and shorter demand. They are temper mental, arrogant, and self-centered (Hello Barry Bonds, Milton Bradley). In football, they cannot seem to guide their team to a championship. Black people today seem to be attracted to the BLING BLING, to SHOWTIME and

HIGHLIGHT REELS. They make cell-phone calls after touchdowns, fight with their teammates in the dugouts, or fans in their seats. They would rather push through two defenders than hit their teammate for an open shot. There may be no "I" in team, but there is apparently no \$ in unselfish. Magic Johnson played all 5 positions. Michael Jordan passed to Steve Kerr to win a championship. Warren Moon played in the CFL!! This is not a Bill Cosby cheap shot, this is a warning. Get your game together, or face getting played out by people that put the team ahead of points.

Gary Whittaker is the editor of T.E.N Magazine, a webzine with balls! Check out more at <http://www.tenwebzine.com>

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