

SPORTS BOARD

SPORTS, GAMING, HORSE RACING

October 20, 1988



SPORTLIGHT

By R.L. Greene

NEW YORK — The news comes fast and furious these days. Almost every day, it seems, there is another shocking, sickening story unfolding.

Former National Basketball Association star Spencer Haywood reveals he was addicted to cocaine during the 1979-80 season and actually hired a Detroit hit man to kill Paul Westhead when the then-Los Angeles Lakers coach suspended him.

In Osaka, Japan, Dick Davis, who played with the Milwaukee Brewers, Philadelphia Phillies, Toronto Blue Jays and Pittsburgh Pirates before joining the Japanese league, was arrested after drug officials found 14 grams of marijuana in his home.

In Detroit, Baynard Dinkens of the Southeast Little

League estimates that 20 former players from several East Side teams have quit playing baseball and begun dealing drugs.

"We're losing kids between 13 and 16 years old," Dinkens says. "We're saying, 'I can offer you baseball.' But the streets can offer money."

Just one person's life being ruined by drugs is one too many. But we're getting so used to hearing and reading about drug use among athletes that it no longer shocks sports fans and the general public; they now just shake their heads in dismay.

The Phoenix Suns were rocked last year by a drug scandal. The Pittsburgh Pirates went en masse to court, testifying on the prevalence of drugs among team members and other players in baseball. And several NFL

stars, including New York Giants super linebacker Lawrence Taylor, have undergone drug rehabilitation.

In June, Dweight Gooden tossed a no-hitter for seven innings and hit a home run to lead the New York Mets to victory. It was Gooden's ninth win of the season. Ironically, it came exactly one year after he rejoined the National League team after undergoing drug rehabilitation.

Is it, as some are quick to say, that the athletes make too much money?

I disagree. As far as I'm concerned, there is no athlete playing a team sport who is overpaid, regardless of the amount he gets. If the team is willing to pay it, the player is not overpaid.

The fact the players have a lot of money, however, is one of the reasons they can

become involved with drugs. Let's face it. If you can't afford to buy it, not too many drug dealers just go around giving it away.

There are always leeches around, waiting to suck blood or money from anyone willing and ready to succumb. While the almost daily airplane trips, hotel rooms and airports is a big part of an NBA player's career, thereby making him an easy target for the dealer, the same is not true of football players, who travel at the most just two days a week—flying to an away game the day before the contest, then returning home immediately after the game.

Baseball players, who are away from home for longer periods of time, spend several days in the same city. Many have friends in each city. Others take the time to go sightseeing.

But what's really scary is the Detroit situation.

Chancy Davis, who has been a Little League coach for 24 years, purchased new uniforms this year: black trimmed with bright gold stripes. And he spent \$200 registering his Warriors and Braves with the Renaissance Little League.

But Davis can't find enough players to fill out the rosters on his two teams.

"One kid asked how much I paid," Davis remembers. "When I told him we didn't, he said, 'If you can't pay me as much as I can make on the streets, I'm not playing.'"

Times have changed, and this writer may be living too much in the past. But something is vastly wrong when fun and games are being ruled out by our children and, instead, money is in.

Given that background, it's no wonder we are seeing college football and basketball players willing to sign illegal contracts with agents and take money from anyone who offers it.

How many tragedies do we have to endure before we—parents and communities—wake up and do something



AARON AT BAT

Trainers

One of the advances in baseball and in all sports is the increased professionalism of trainers. It is now a full-time job with a year-round program. In professional baseball, every trainer all the way down to the lowest minor league has to be certified.

A trainer used to have the same problem that faced many of the athletes. When the season was over, he had to find another job to support his family. Trainers now make a decent salary and work at their profession full time. They develop rehabilitation programs for injured players and work with players who want to build up their arms, increase their strength or simply lose weight.

Trainers work closely with the team doctors on treating injuries. Sports medicine in general has made tremendous advancements. Not long ago, when a pitcher got a rotator cuff injury, his career was finished. Now, with the improvements in both medical treatment and in rehabilitative programs, the chances of getting a kid back to playing baseball are pretty good. The same is true of an injury to the Achilles tendon.

What used to be considered serious, career-threatening surgery is now handled routinely. Doctors can get in and do what they have to do and the next day the scar won't be any bigger than a mosquito bite.

Every major league club has at least two trainers. One stays on the field (usually in the dugout or bullpen) with the team, and the other is in the clubhouse, able to work on players who come in for help while their team is at bat.

Of course all of this means the baseball organizations are spending a lot more money on trainers and their programs than they did a few years ago. Why? Well, it makes a great deal of business sense. Players now make enormous salaries. To a team, these player contracts are investments and as with any business, investments must be safeguarded. It would be foolish for a team to sign million dollar contracts with players and not have training programs designed to keep them on the field and at full strength. It is all to a team's advantage to keep players off the injured list and on the playing field for every game. **ll**

Hank Aaron is the top home run hitter of all time with 755 homers. A member of baseball's Hall of Fame, Hank is vice president of the Atlanta Braves.

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\$50 TICKETS FOR CHAMPIONSHIP TRIPLEHEADER SOLD OUT

Tickets priced at \$50 for the world championship tripleheader boxing card Friday, Nov. 4, at the Las Vegas Hilton are sold out.

The card features Thomas Hearns going for an unprecedented fifth world title against World Boxing Association super middleweight champion Fulgencio Obelmejias, undefeated International Boxing Federation middleweight champ Michael Nunn defending against Juan Domingo Roldan and unbeaten IBF junior middleweight king Matthew Hilton defending against No. 1 contender Robert Hines.

Tickets still remain in the \$100, \$150, \$250 and \$400 price categories.

Tickets for the card, pro-

moted by the Las Vegas Hilton and Bob Arum's Top Rank Inc., are on sale from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. seven days a week at the Las Vegas Hilton Tickets and Tours Booth located in the hotel lobby. Tickets also may be ordered from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. seven days a week by calling 732-5320, or 1-800-222-5361.

The championship card will be held in the indoor Hilton Center with doors opening at 4 p.m. and the first bout beginning at 5.

These will be the 22nd, 23rd and 24th world championship fights held at the Las Vegas Hilton since December, 1985, more than at any site in the world during this 35-month period.

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