

Many experts believe that Magic's marketability limited

LOS ANGELES -- Magic Johnson has always been among the most popular superstars, but the stigma of the AIDS virus made him an advertising outcast. As he returns to the Lakers four years later, have times changed?

Spalding Sports Worldwide, which has had Johnson under contract since 1980, stopped

selling inexpensive rubber basketballs with his name a year after he retired.

It's considering making a \$100-plus Johnson commemorative ball, like those from All-Star Games, said John Doleva, Spalding's managing director for leisure products.

And watch for Johnson's gleeful smile and amiable patter

to pop up in ads promoting his own line of bargain-priced sports shoes and apparel from MVP Sports. MVP, of which Johnson is part owner, will preview them at Super Show.

Roberto Muller, a former Reebok International president whose marketing firm is working for MVP, insists there's no connection between Johnson's

return and the new products. A comeback was never mentioned when work on the product launch began half a year ago, he said.

"One of the things you can absolutely count on is his honesty and credibility," Muller said, hours before Johnson was to put on his Lakers uniform to play the Golden State Warriors.

Muller added, though, "He should be wearing the shoes tonight."

Given the tremendous goodwill in Los Angeles among fans who remember the Lakers' "Showtime" glory days, regional advertisers might find a Johnson tie-in to be, well, magic, marketing executives say.

But regional ads, "tools of the trade" ads for basketballs and self-promotion are quite different from major campaigns for mainline companies.

And while Johnson's agent, Lon Rosen, says some such offers are still coming in—he says Kodak wants to use Johnson in ads tied to the Olympics—most experts are skeptical about the prospects.

"All except the most aggressive advertisers will stay away," says Marty Blackman at New York's Blackman & Raber, longtime consultants to advertising agencies and corporations on sports

personalities. "And certainly with the season so late we're not talking about anything soon."

When Michael Jordan returned to the National Basketball Association, he was as good as before, Blackman notes. But at age 36, 27 pounds over his old playing weight, and switching from guard to power forward, there are huge questions remaining about Johnson's abilities.

And unless he returns to superstardom, count on corporate America to figure there are plenty of other players—the Michaels, Hakeems and Shaquilles of the world—who make better endorsers without the prospect of offending middle America.

"It's not so much the issue of HIV and AIDS," said Stephen L. Disson, whose D&F Group in Washington, D.C., arranges sports tie-ins for clients like AT&T, Visa, Kodak and Marriott. "It's how Magic was so outspoken about how promiscuous he was and all of his escapades. That just opens up a whole can of worms."

Blackman agrees, saying, "He didn't get this by falling down on a Boy Scout expedition. There are going to be people who say, 'Hold on here—how did he obtain this horrible disease?'"



Though some advertisers may only be interested in using Magic in quick campaigns, he is said to show little interest in anything except long-term promotional deals

He allows that some advertisers might get aggressive and break up their normal campaigns with a one-shot spot.

"If I was going to use Magic Johnson I would do it with a short, quick campaign—maybe use him with another player welcoming him back," Blackman said. "I'd run it for 30 days. That way, I minimize my risk."

Magic shows little interest in anything except longer-term promotional deals, though. "He won't do the one-shot things," Rosen says.

If big advertisers get spooked, it won't be nothing new.

National Sports Briefs

★★★

Winfield reportedly to hang up spikes

NEW YORK — Dave Winfield, the major league leader in hits and RBIs among active players, retired last Thursday.

The 44-year-old outfielder, who had been the oldest player in the majors, was a 12-time All-Star, and spent 23 seasons in the major leagues with San Diego, The New York Yankees, California, Toronto, Minnesota and the Indians.

Parker fired by Southern California

LOS ANGELES—With more victories than last season and recent encouragement from university president, Charlie Parker thought he had Southern California's basketball program headed in the right direction.

Parker was stunned to find out otherwise when he was fired as coach and replaced on an interim basis by assistant coach Henry Bibby.

"No reasons were given to me," Parker said. "My surprise stems from the fact that I received high compliments from several of my colleagues in the Pac-10 about the performance of the Trojan basketball team so far this season."

The Trojans have an 11-10 record, but have lost nine of the last 14. They are sixth in the Pac-10 Conference with a 4-5 record.

Pernell Whitaker jailed briefly at all-star game

SAN ANTONIO — WBC welterweight champion Pernell Whitaker was arrested and briefly jailed after scuffling with three off-duty officers during a party held for the NBA's All-Star Weekend.

Whitaker, 32, was booked on two misdemeanor charges of resisting arrest and assaulting an officer. He was released on two bonds of \$800 each. He left the incident with a swollen mouth.

Police say Whitaker and several others were blocking an exit at an All-Star Weekend event in downtown San Antonio when they were told to move along.

Pushes led to shoves and eventually to jabs as Whitaker and an officer fell to the ground and began wrestling.

NFL reportedly offered Modell expansion club

CLEVELAND — The deal struck between Art Modell and city officials almost took on an entirely different look during negotiations — the NFL asked Modell to take an expansion team and Cleveland to keep the current team.

The proposal was that the Browns would be put into an NFL-operated trust until the team could be sold to a Cleveland owner, and Modell would be awarded an expansion team in Baltimore.

Frederick Nance, a lawyer working with the city, said that Modell quickly shot down the idea.

Nance said Modell responded by saying: "If I wait three years, I may never see that team play."

Moon rejects offers from prosecutors

RICHMOND, Texas — Warren Moon has rejected several plea offers from

prosecutors in a spousal abuse case set for trial next week, the player's lawyer said.

Moon faces a Class A misdemeanor assault charge accusing him of striking and choking his wife, Felicia, last summer at their Missouri City home.

Sprinter sets indoor 100 mark

TAMPERE, Finland — Frankie Fredericks of Namibia set a world indoor record of 10.05 seconds in the 100 meters Monday.

Fredericks, the 1992 Olympic silver medalist, broke the mark of 10.13 set last year by Olapade Adeniken of Nigeria.

"This raised my confidence for the season," Fredericks said. "As the race was arranged for me, and I knew about it for two weeks it showed that I could take the pressure put on me."

"I had a good feeling since I did the 60 meter in 6.52 and the 200 in 20.38 in Belgium a week ago."

Cultural & Community Affairs Division
City of Las Vegas Department of Parks & Leisure Activities

Black History Month Pays Tribute to Swing with legendary swing dancer

Frankie Manning



Meet the man who created the first air step and the first ensemble Lindy Hop routine. Manning won a Tony Award for Best Choreographing for the Broadway hit musical "Black and Blue."

Friday, February 23, 7-9 p.m.

Learn to do the
Lindy Hop & Jitterbug Swing

Saturday, February 24, 1-2:30 p.m.
Saturday Matinee Swing Things

Hosted by Norma Miller

Events are free; however, prior reservations are required due to limited space. ♣

West Las Vegas Arts Center
947 W. Lake Mead Blvd. 229-4800

Coming Event: Lindy Hop & Jitterbug Swing Dance Contest Saturday, April 6, 8 p.m. Register by April 2.

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General
Colin Powell
Soldier, Statesman,
Leader

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