

# Baseball suffers from dearth of Black players

By David Steele

Special to Sentinel-Voice

BALTIMORE (NNPA) - The bad news is that the Orioles managed to open this season without a single American-born Black player. The good news is that their rivals down the road don't have much to brag about; the Nationals only have two Black players on their roster. So there. Wait a minute. Let's try that again ...

The good news is that the Orioles are hardly worse off than any other team since the number of Black players in the majors overall is nose-diving toward levels not seen since the early days of integration. In fact, the percentage of Black managers this year (13 percent, four of 30) is higher than that of players in 2004 (9 percent).

Uh, that didn't work, either ...

The good news is that none of this should adversely affect young African-American

ballplayers because there aren't many out there to worry about it.

Ah, never mind. Forget the "good news" angle. This news stinks, about the Orioles and the entire sport. Sociologist Richard Lapchick's annual Racial and Gender Report Card lays out the facts simply. The 9 percent figure is the lowest recorded since the report was first issued in 1983, and it's down from nearly 30 percent a quarter-century ago.

The place once owned by American Blacks has been overtaken by players from Latin countries — some Black, some not, but all raised and promoted under differing circumstances and in far greater numbers than players born here. And by "here," we mean, in large part, the cities, like Baltimore, which once produced Black major leaguers, served as home to the best of them (hello, Frank Robinson,

Eddie Murray and all the rest) and supported them in person and in spirit."

Now, none of this applies. Baseball isn't Black America's national pastime, not even close. Which raises two questions for which many have searched for years for answers: Why is that? What can be done about it?

The first question is easier. "You've got to have a bat, you've got to have a ball, you've got to have a glove, you've got to have a field, you've got to have role models," legendary Patterson High coach Roger Wrenn put it. "What [Baltimore youngsters] see is NBA superstars like Allen Iverson and they see the Ravens. Then they look at baseball and say, 'Where's me?'"

Worse, Wrenn said, the kids who do want to play see diamonds in wretched states of disrepair, if they see any at all. They see that the game has moved to the suburbs.

Baltimore has been fortunate not to have its high school varsity programs close en masse, but none of the schools has a JV this year, not even Patterson, which until this season was able to find outside financing for one. Thus, baseball is lucky to be an afterthought to kids growing up in places like Baltimore, D.C., New York, Atlanta, L.A., and Oakland.

Generations of great athletes have funneled their skills and desires into sports that are, far more accessible and culturally relevant. Now, said Wrenn, there's a "disdain for baseball in the community."

Great, that's all baseball needs. Disdain from Congress at one end, disdain from a formerly rich source of talent and support from another. No wonder athletes from Latin America and Black America are passing each other on opposite escalators. Speaking of which,

Black baseball lovers here — while straining not to begrudge the success of their Latin brothers — have howled for years that baseball's sheer greed has created this situation.

Building baseball academies in nations like the Dominican Republic, fully-equipped facilities to, literally, grow prospects, has fed the Latin boom. But the game is driven to do so by economics: Players can be signed younger, cheaper and without subjecting them to the draft, as players are in the United States. Which brings us to the answer to the second question. Baseball no longer seems tone-deaf to these complaints, and the proof is rising in Southern California. MLB is building an academy modeled on the ones in Latin countries, in Compton (yup, the one made famous by NWA), due to open late this summer. Ground was recently broken

for one in Atlanta.

"My dream," said MLB senior vice president of baseball operations Jimmie Lee Solomon, "is to have baseball academies spring up in the shadows of every major league ballpark in the country." That includes, he said, Camden Yards and the Nationals' future home on the Anacostia waterfront.

"I think ultimately we'll have one in both cities," Solomon said, "especially if Baltimore and D.C. start competing. If Baltimore puts one in, D.C. will want one, and vice versa."

The ideal result of this, of course, would be home-grown players on both teams, playing before crowds that have the diversity lacking today. "This ultimately is going to do good for our industry," Solomon said. Well, what do you know? There's good news after all.

David Steele writes for BlackAthlete.net.

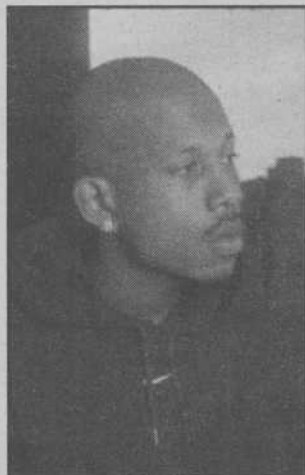
## Crime

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who was charged along with mentor P. Diddy in a 1999 nightclub shooting. While Diddy was acquitted, Shyne — who had impressive success as a debut artist before his criminal troubles — was sentenced to 10 years for wounding two people in the disturbance.

Last year, Island Def Jam signed the incarcerated rapper to a reported \$3 million record deal, and he released the album "Godfather Buried Alive," which contained some raps he recorded from prison over the telephone.

Yet the album didn't even go gold, and was considered a major disappointment. In March, a judge froze Shyne's assets until lawsuits filed by



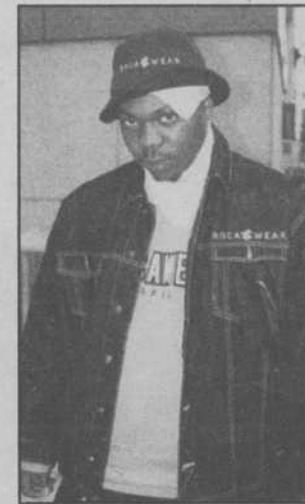
SHYNE

victims in the case are resolved.

"These rappers, they somehow have it twisted, they think that if they go to prison, we're going to love them more," said Clark. "It doesn't really happen like that."

Another penitentiary release, on Koch Records, is the latest album from C-Murder, the brother of Master P, who was convicted in 2003 of second-degree murder in the killing of a 16-year-old boy. C-Murder (born Corey Miller) has maintained his innocence and is appealing the verdict. On Tuesday he changed his stage name to C-Miller.

In a phone interview with The Associated Press shortly after his album was released in late March, Miller said he thought his time behind bars would help his career: "I think that fans will relate to me more because I've been through a struggle ... I think they'll respect the fact that I was put in a bad situation."



BEANIE SIGEL

However, "If I was out of prison, I would be able to promote my album more, I can go on the road and tour," he said. "Actually being in here is a setback."

Still, a source at Koch

Records who did not want his name used for fear of hurting Miller's case said executives there considered his incarceration more of a positive.

"Clearly, from a P.R. marketing point of view, I would be lying to you to say the prison controversy didn't help sell records," said the executive. "There's been a tremendous amount of television coverage about the making of the video," which was filmed behind bars and later outraged the sheriff. It has sold just 43,000 copies in its first two weeks of release.

Dash is hoping the notori-

ety from Sigel's case will help the respectable-selling rapper go platinum. Although he certainly doesn't want his star rapper in prison, Dash is shrewd enough to see that Sigel's time behind bars can only solidify his street cred — which Dash can't help but play up.

"Where some rappers glorify things they've never done, or speak about things that they never done, when Beanie speaks he's talking about his emotions, his opinions on things that are going on directly in his life," said Dash. "It would be like, what if John Gotti could sing?"

## Iraq

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in the insurgency, are also wary of too much religious influence, particularly if it is seen to be linked to Iran. The Baath party which is still popular among many Sunnis was mainly secular, although Saddam Hussein tried to rope in religious support in his last years.

Apart from all the political and sectarian issues that will have to be settled, the new government's priority will be to battle the insurgency that shows no sign of waning.

Sunni political and religious leaders who called for a boycott of the January elec-

tions have recently shown signs they are willing to denounce the violence and to call on their followers to join the political process.

Ahmed Abdul Ghafour al-Samarrai of the influential Association of Muslim Scholars called on his followers in a sermon last Friday to join the security forces.

He did warn them not to assist foreign troops, but this is a big step compared to the earlier calls for resistance and warnings against cooperating with the new Iraqi authorities.

The Sunnis may feel they have made a mistake isolat-

ing themselves from the political process, which now seems to forge ahead regardless, though slowly and painfully.

There are two other elements that may help determine the success of the new

government. The reconstruction of the country has been almost as slow as the political process until now. Both for the Iraqis to see the benefits of democracy and to fight the insurgency, more progress must be made.

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Consultants not currently prequalified in the identified discipline will first be reviewed to determine prequalification status. Any proposals submitted that do not meet the prequalification requirements will be returned to the Consultant without further review.

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