

OUR VIEW

NBA means No Blacks Allowed

Whether or not Andrew Bogut, the No. 1 pick in this week's National Basketball Association draft, becomes a superstar center along the lines of a Shaquille O'Neal (Miami Heat) or a Tim Duncan (NBA champion San Antonio Spurs) remains to be seen; Bogut, the first foreign-born player selected as the top NBA draft pick, is from Utah (where he played in college and won the 2005 player of the year award) by way of Australia (where he was born). But what is clear is that the tide has shifted. No longer do Blacks dominate NBA rosters; nearly one-fourth of the league is now comprised of foreign players. The February 2001 issue of Esquire magazine contained a prescient article titled "The New Black Guys," which highlighted what is no longer a phenomenon: the ongoing European infusion in American pro basketball.

One byproduct of allowing NBA players to compete in the Olympics has been a narrowing of the talent margin between America and the rest of the world. Foreign basketball has also benefited from a slew of former NBAers both coaching and playing (sometimes resuscitating careers) overseas. And with the global exporting—via television, movies, video games, etc.—of the streetball ethos, you're just as likely to see a crossover dribble in a pick-up game in Yugoslavia as you are at the famous Rucker courts in Harlem.

This Euro-invasion, combined with a new age requirement prohibiting anyone under 18 from playing in the NBA, means that young Black athletes can no longer expect to forgo college and become insta-millionaires in the NBA. It also means they'll have to be better than their predecessors had to be because there's some guy on the opposite side of the world who can run as fast, jump as high, is probably more fundamentally sound and likely a more consistent shooter (the last two have been hallmarks of foreign players, especially Europeans; the knock against foreign players—whether warranted or not—is that they're soft, shying away from physical play and rugged defense).

This new reality for African-American players has the potential to be both good and bad. The bad first. Besides limiting the number of Black professionals—in many cases, the mega-rich contracts not only lift the player and his family out of dire socio-economic circumstances, but lift entire neighborhoods and communities out of economic doldrums—this "whitening" of the NBA could stall the effort to diversify the coaching ranks and front offices.

Many of the Black executives in front offices around the league got their gigs after—and largely because of—playing and/or coaching. Though the NBA is the best of the pro sports in terms of embracing diversity at the coaching and administrative ranks, it too can improve. Fewer Black players could mean fewer Black agents, financial investors and business partners for them to rely on.

But there is a silver lining. Or rather, there can be a silver lining. With the lure of a career in the NBA a bit of a dream deferred now due to the new age minimum and burgeoning foreign recruitment, more prep athletes will be forced to consider college, either as their main—or only—option. That's a good thing.

Exposure to higher education would benefit most of these young athletes, hopefully sparking a fire for knowledge and a desire to diversify themselves as human beings. After all, a financially lucrative athletic career is a truncated career at best (with golf as the major exception). But college degrees are tickets to long-term futures. With degrees in accounting, finance or business administration, these athletes could handle their own affairs, removing the need for middlemen and giving them the ultimate gift of individual empowerment.



Black image in the White mind

Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

A book written by Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki, "The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America," presents some startling facts on how mainstream media treat racial differences. There's a great deal of data showing that daily newspapers have a general tendency to devalue Blacks or force them into a stock category.

I find it particularly suspect when Black leaders—political, civic and others—are unfavorably spotlighted beyond reason.

As we locals are aware, readers would be very hard pressed to find many positive news stories about Blacks in the daily papers. When there are images and stories focused on Blacks, it is too often about something negative—and those stories tend to run more often. There is rarely a balance of reporting about Blacks between stories about something negative and those about something positive.

For example, many readers will likely recall the hundreds of articles and mentions written about then-City Councilman Frank Hawkins, who served one term, and more recently the barrage of articles on former Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams, who was not re-elected in his district shortly thereafter.

The Review-Journal, in particular, was way over the top—on a quest to destroy, devalue, and demean some of the Black leadership here in Las Vegas.

Compare the coverage they ran in those cases of recent coverage of several non-Black County Commission-



ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

ers who were accused—some indicted—of violating ethics and laws. I saw a far lower frequency of articles about them than the repeated flurry of stories on the Black leaders.

It seems that some dailies and other local non-Black run news media outlets consistently act out the old adage, "Cut off the head, and you kill the body." If the media continues to sensationalize our Black leaders, others begin to buy into the hype, and before you know it, we are spouting their message and tearing our own leaders down. Hence, the subtlety in the way news is presented can be designed to discredit any organization, individual or entity that will advocate for Blacks. Unfortunately, in turn, this causes other Blacks to shy away or turn their heads from our own leadership. And it affects the way Whites and others view those leaders, causing many to overreact with a negative bias.

The mass media has great power to influence what most of America thinks. And Blacks, as a whole, have not proven themselves astute enough to look behind and beyond the print and television media to search for the truth in most cases.

The range of White racial thinking stretches from racial harmony on one end, through ambivalence and animosity, to outright racism on the other end. The media, while

reflecting this complexity, has made progress in portraying Blacks. Nevertheless, some media outlets, as a whole, use negative news reporting about Blacks as a means of keeping their feet on our necks.

By no means do I want you to believe that the Review Journal is the only media outlet that subscribes to the demeaning, devaluing, and stereotyping of Blacks. Other local and national news coverage, advertising, television shows and films still reinforce—maybe unintentionally—traditional hierarchies, stereotypes and feelings of racial distance and disengagement.

In Entman and Rojecki's book, they show how television news uses the tactic of how Blacks are shown on the screen, and for how long, during crime stories to aid in fueling negative images. For instance, the authors say that when a suspect in a crime is

Black, he will be twice as likely to be shown in an on-camera mug shot as a White suspect; the same goes for showing criminal defendants on camera—Blacks are twice as likely to be shown in restraints during on-camera court appearances.

These are just a few examples, but there are countless others that show how, overall, various types of media can influence and create greater negative attitudes and bias toward Blacks—even by Blacks themselves.

Just last week, an article about a survey appeared in the Las Vegas Review Journal titled "Grading the Legislators." And while William Horne was rated one of the best assembly members, Steven Horsford, our newest State Senator who represents the predominantly minority neighborhood, was rated one of the worst.

Why is this? Is it because Steven advocated for more legislation dealing with African-American issues than anyone in the legislature? Is it because Steven had the unmitigated gall to go against the establishment in pursuit of his legislative agenda? Is

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