OUR VIEW

Numbers Game

Professional sports is a numbers game. The numbers we're most familiar with are the wins and losses of our favorite teams. The higher the number of victories, the better the winning percentage and the better the team. When our teams do well, we feel a lot better. Flip the script to losing and the inverse happens.

For the bettors among us, the number of wins and losses isn't as important as the score. Important are the over and the under, the spread. These numbers directly affect their numbers, i.e., the amount of money they will win or lose. Call it the numbers game within the numbers game.

Then there are the numbers we tend to get in a tiff about, particularly when comparing them to our numbers. You guessed it: salaries. These numbers are outrageous. Is New York Yankee Alex Rodriguez really worth $250 million? Is any baseball player worth a quarter of a billion dollars? Kobe Bryant is good, sure, but is he $135 million-over-seven-years good? Top-flight NFL quarterbacks can pull in more than $10 million annually with bonuses for fulfilling goals. Of the courts and fields, athletes are inking $20 million-plus deals to sell apparel, further adding to the numbers gulf between them and us.

Las Vegas lives on and by numbers, too. More than 40 million annual visitors; 130,000-plus hotel rooms; billions in gaming revenue; the largest share of major of conventions of all U.S. cities. So the marriage of All-Star Weekend and Las Vegas—the event's first time in a non-NBA city—figured to be a bonanza of numbers.

The event's estimated nongaming impact was $91 million—though some contend it's much higher given that All-Star festivities lasted nearly a week. (There's also a dispute over official visitor numbers, with a contingent of folks claiming the visitor surge tripled official tourism estimates. At play could be incidental or deliberate obfuscation about All-Star's impact. Because the visitors were primarily Black and firmly ensconced in the hip-hop generation and, some theorize, reporting on this group's economic prowess legitimizes the negative lifestyles often associated hip-hop.)

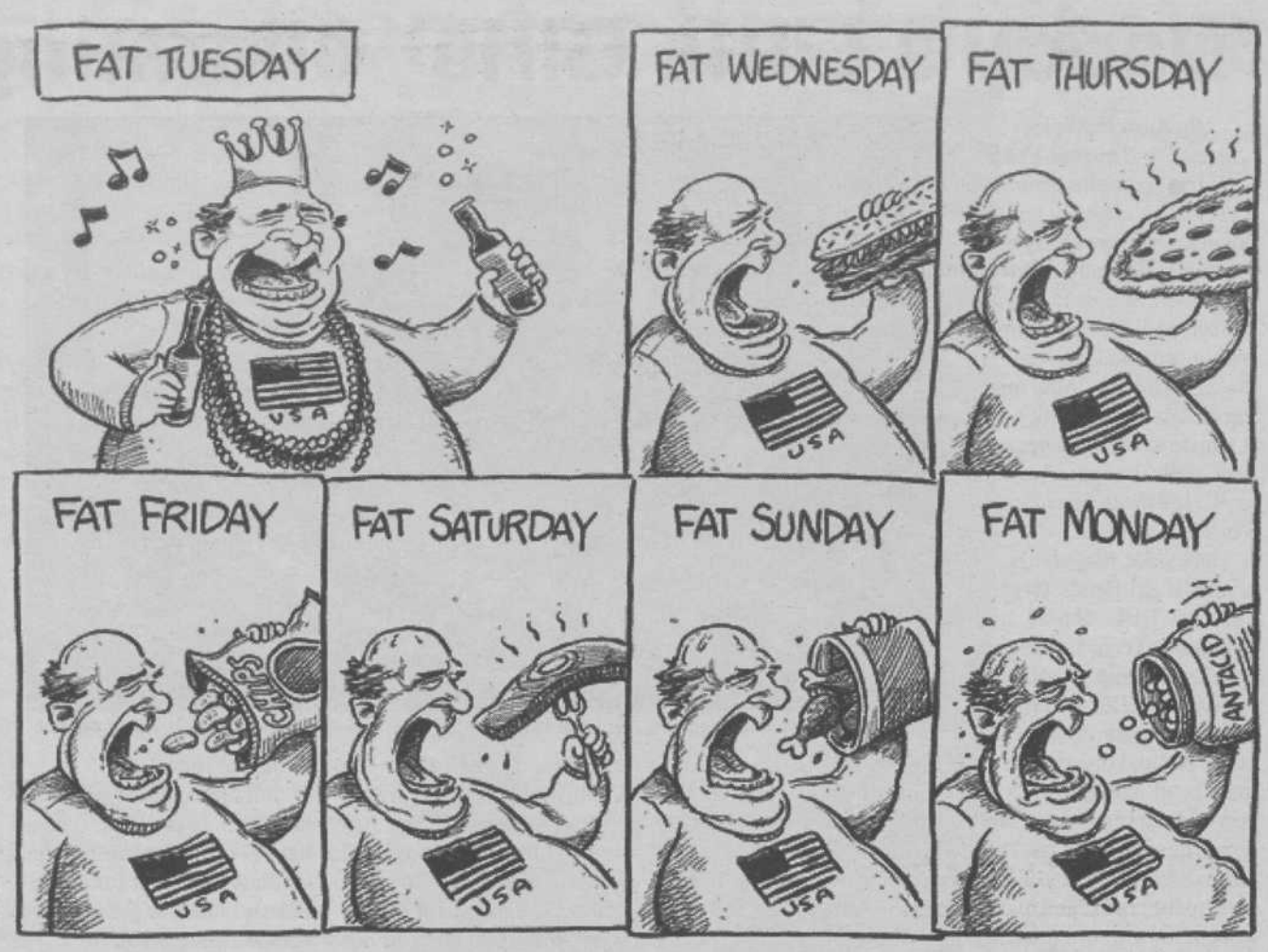
Whatever the final numbers say, it must be said All-Star's economic impact didn't trickle down to the communities that needed it most. While last week's editorial broached this issue—all these Black people here and only a handful of plugged-in, connected Black entrepreneurs and movers and shakers benefited—it did not focus on the human side of the numbers game.

How great would it have been for the NBA to use its platform to create something meaningful for predominantly Black West Las Vegas?

Creating something meaningful doesn't always involve money—though it helps. The league could've renovated a park, built or repaired basketball courts, donated equipment to organizations or made monetary gifts to civic organizations like the Dog Catchers who've subsisted on the generosity of its backers and the support of caring citizens. It's all great and good to donate to the Agassi Boys & Girls Club, but there are a number of lesser known groups that do similarly good/great civic work but don't have the know-how to score tens of thousands in grants or the connections to raise tens of millions via events.

How great would it have been for league officials to encourage players—many of whom have foundations and contribute millions to "safe" charities like Easter Seals—to redirect their funds into programs and people with proven track records of making a difference? How great would it have been for best players in the world to have made West Las Vegas the base of civic operations?

Instead of having church in a hotel convention center, they could've come to the West Side. They could've read to kids in West Side schools, got their hair cut in West Side barbershops—and the women, their nails done in West Side salons—eaten in West Side restaurants, bought gas in West Side convenience stores. The opportunities were plentiful. Black athletes had a stellar opportunity to make Las Vegas respect the Black dollar. Now, for some, All-Star will mostly be remembered for the numbers of arrests, the number of uncivil (read: Black) visitors and the trouble caused by a small number of bad apples.



The enduring Black family

By Marian Wright Edelman
Special to Sentinel-Voice


Marian Wright Edelman

The distinguished theologian Howard Thurman once described an oak tree in his childhood yard with leaves that each autumn turned yellow and died but stayed on the branches all winter. Nothing — not wind, storm, sleet nor snow — dislodged these dead leaves from the apparently lifeless branches. Thurman came to understand that the business of the oak tree during the long winter was to hold on to the dead leaves before turning them loose in spring so that new buds — the growing edge — could begin to unfold. At winter's end, what wind, storm, sleet or snow could not force off passed quietly away to become the tree's nourishment.

Throughout most of our history, Black families have been like that oak tree. Despite enormous assaults and pressures, Black parents and elders remained determined to hold on and persevere long enough to prepare the next generation and give them a better life. During Black History Month, many Americans take time to remember the achievements of amazing Black individuals. But Black families deserve their own praise for all we've accomplished.

Black people devoted to family saw us through the unspeakable assault of slavery. Beloved historian John Hope Franklin and others have reminded us that traditional myths about slavery destroying Black families are a lie: the slavery system and individual slave owners may have done their very best to try to destroy the families in their control, but it didn't work.

When slave owners tried to mate us for childbearing, we made our own systems of traditional marriages and commitments. When they tried to treat parents and children as nothing more than disposable and interchangeable property, we learned to honor and revere our mothers, fathers, and our ancestors, and to see our children as children of God.

We all know stories of the lengths newly freed slaves went through after Emancipation to try to be reunited with one another, sometimes traveling for hundreds of miles in desperate attempts to find loved ones.

From slavery on, our people always fought to preserve our nuclear families. At the same time, we also learned to create other networks of extended family and near-family that laid the foundation for strong Black communities and nurturing Black children. Families saw us through Reconstruction and did their best to shield and protect children during the dark days of Jim Crow, mob rule and lynchings.

Throughout segregation, many Black families and communities reminded children they had dignity and worth. Long before the phrase was popular, our mothers and grandmothers took their time braiding our hair, neatly pressing our clothes and reminding us every day that Black was beautiful.

During the Civil Rights Movement, many Black families fought together every step of the way. Many parents participated in the struggle for an end to segregated schools and facilities because they knew they wanted a better world for their children. In Birmingham, Ala.; Jackson, Miss.; and across the South, Black children marched and were attacked right along with, and often without, their parents.

Black families have seen us through many crises, and there have been threats to their stability and rumors of Black family breakdown throughout our history. Drugs, poverty, violence and unequal opportunity have battered our families mightily.

Many who are committed to strengthening Black families feel that now the forces undermining Black family life are turning in a dangerous way with so many Black children treading through treacherous new territory. Those of us who see the threads of our families and neighborhoods and social networks fraying know we need to reweave the fabric of family and community that has supported us and brought

(See Edelman, Page 11)

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