

**PRESIDENT'S INITIATIVE ON RACE
Q & A's for ESPN CONVERSATION ON RACE**

Q: Why host a conversation on race with ESPN?

A: I believe that the profile and demographics of the ESPN audience is very conducive to furthering the kind of dialogue on race that I wanted. This audience broadens the reach of my initiative on race by bringing in a group of people who sometimes may never have focused on this issue.

Q: What do you hope to accomplish by using this kind of medium?

A: Sports is an example of building communities across racial lines. This town hall will allow us to examine the role of sports as an analogy to expanding access and opportunity in society. We hope that this program will encourage discussion of similar issues in the larger society.

Q: Is an all-sports cable channel in conflict with the Initiative's goal of including all Americans in the effort to build One America?

A: We are attempting to build One America, community by community. This is reflected in the corporate forums we have held, our outreach efforts with the youth of America, and our work with the religious community. Just this past week, we engaged over 550 colleges and universities around the country in an effort to encourage them to have dialogues on race on their campuses.

Q: What lessons are you looking for from the sports community to help build One America?

A: Like many communities in America, there are lessons we can learn on how to improve the state of race relations in our country. We must examine the challenges that exist within different communities in achieving racial harmony. Issues such as making diversity work in America, racial progress in sports, hiring of managers, and dispelling myths about minorities and sports are all issues that I hope we can discuss.

Q: Critics have said that your December town hall meeting in Akron lacked candor. How do you hope the ESPN meeting will be different?

A: I believe that an important step in improving race relations in America is by having honest, candid conversations among our friends, co-workers, and family members. If we can continue to ask ourselves the tough questions, then we can break through the wall that prevents many of us from forging the types of relationships we need to have across racial lines.

Q: Why does it appear that the panel participating in the ESPN town hall meeting lacks racial diversity?

A: The panelists who have been assembled represent some of the best spokes people within their field--athletes, managers, and owners. Their views can easily lend themselves to any person of color who has experienced racial discrimination. I believe that this venue lends itself to discussing many issues concerning racial diversity in the sports industry.

Q: What is your position on the Native American mascot issue with professional sports teams?

A: We need to concentrate our efforts on solutions that involve all Americans. Anything that devalues and perpetuates stereotypes of racial groups is detrimental to our efforts in building one America in the 21st century.

Q: Why was the city of Houston chosen?

A: Houston is representative of the changing face of America, given its racial diversity. The city also has strong sports teams.

Q: What is the next step in your race dialogue?

A: The work of the Advisory Board will continue to engage different communities in constructive and solution-oriented dialogues on race. My next national conversation on race will take place on July 8 on PBS. And later this year, I look forward to issuing a final report to the American public on the next steps toward building one America.



ESPN, INC.

ESPN PLAZA, BRISTOL, CT 06010

(860) 585-2000

A TOWN HALL MEETING

Race & Sports: Running in Place?

- **WHEN:** Tuesday, April 14 (Live from 7-8:30 p.m.)
- **FORMAT:** President Clinton will lead the discussion with the panelists and the audience. ESPN's Bob Ley will moderate.
- **ATTENTION:** Doors close at 6:00 p.m. We must ask that everyone please be seated by 6:15 p.m. for our broadcast of "Outside the Lines" from 6:30-7 p.m.
- **WHERE:** The Lillie & Roy Cullen Theater at the Wortham Center in downtown Houston
- **SEATS:** Approximately 950 in four seating areas -- Red (left section), White (center section), Blue (right section) tickets-holders are on the main floor; gold ticket-holders are in the balcony)
- **MICROPHONES:** 3-4

THE PANELISTS

The following is a partial list to date:

Jim Brown, former Cleveland Brown great; created Amer-I-Can, an organization based in Los Angeles that works with troubled youth

Vince Dooley, athletic director at the University of Georgia and president of the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics; currently chairman of the NCAA Football Rules and Committee

Dennis Green, head coach of the Minnesota Vikings (NFL)

Jackie Joyner-Kersey, five-time Olympic medalist, founder of the Joyner-Kersey Youth Center Foundation

John Moores, owner of the San Diego Padres (MLB)

Joe Morgan, had a Hall of Fame career playing mainly with the Cincinnati Reds and the Houston Astros; currently an ESPN analyst

Carmen Policy, president of the San Francisco 49ers (NFL)

John Thompson, Georgetown University men's basketball head coach

TOPICS WE PLAN TO EXAMINE

Please keep in mind that we will discuss dynamics inherent to sports and throughout the evening apply those dynamics to racial issues that affect all of society.

Double standard for performance? If someone is a minority and a superstar, the world "belongs" to him/her. But the middle-of-the-road positions -- the backup quarterback, the utility infielder or the city editor in a television or newspaper newsroom -- seem to fall off the table for most minorities. Why is that?

Promotion and opportunity. There appears to be a lack of minorities in GM and head coaching jobs. Many fail to even reach the interview stage. Why does the coaching merry-go-round never seem to stop for some but equal a short ride for others? Many white coaches seem to get three, four or even five chances to be head coaches of professional and major college teams. However, many minority coaches get one, maybe two chances. Hmmm.

Reaching out. How have communities used sports to bring together people of various ethnic backgrounds?

Athlete stereotyping. There are few minority quarterbacks in professional football, but there are also few white cornerbacks. What's the perception? Are whites seen as "smart or brainy" and blacks seen as "athletic?" What is the media's role in reinforcing certain perceptions? In a broader sense, because of the images on the local news or cop shows, would it seem that most criminals are minorities?

Obligation to race? How much should a minority person in a position of influence/power give back to his or her race? Should minorities in these positions give preference to other minorities because of "unfair" hiring practices in the past?

Self-segregation. Does the "team" attitude on the field continue after players go home, or is it only temporary? How is this dynamic manifested in society at large? Do certain groups sit together in the lunchroom at work?

NOTE: For those interested in the possibility of posing a question during the forum...

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

We invited people from more than 35 organizations in the Houston area to be a part of our audience. We will field as many as we can during the program.

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May, 1997 - June, 1997

SECTION: CRITICISM; State of the Debate; Pg. 95

LENGTH: 4175 words

HEADLINE: Who's Afraid of Michael Jordan?;

There's no denying that blacks dominate basketball and other professional sports. But have whites rationalized black physical prowess only by equating it with mental deficiency?

BYLINE: SCOTT STOSSEL

BODY:

One of the blackest players ever to play professional basket-ball was white.

"Even though he wasn't fast and he didn't go for fancy dunks or anything like that," Dennis Rodman writes in *Bad As I Wanna Be*, "[Boston Celtic Larry] Bird was one of the few white guys who could play what people call the 'Black Game.'" Rodman, who is black, here puts the lie to the sometimes invidious distinction between "black" and "white" basketball. According to this classification scheme, the quintessence of black playing style is Michael Jordan: spectacularly athletic, highly kinetic, and perhaps above all, very vertical. No white man can fly like Air Jordan. The quintessence of white playing style, on the other hand, is Larry Bird: relatively slow, heavily reliant on the long-range jumpshot, a good passer, and completely nonvertical -- the proverbial white man who can't jump.

This understanding is widespread even among white athletes. Scott Brooks, a white point guard who plays for the New York Knicks, says, "You have to be a realist. White people can't jump as high." African-American athletes subscribe to it: O.J. Simpson, Carl Lewis, Hall of Fame baseball player Joe Morgan, and current baseball superstar Barry Bonds have all claimed physical superiority for blacks. Sportswriters, armed with the empirical observations of years on the beat, also believe in racial athletic differences. In addition to the ignorantly racist comments of the variety that got television football analyst Jimmy "the Greek" Snyder fired from CBS in 1988 ("The black is a better athlete to begin with because he's been bred to be that way because of his thigh size and big size"), there are the more measured statements like this one from the book *48 Minutes* (1987), by two distinguished basketball columnists, Bob Ryan and Terry Pluto:

The NBA is perhaps the only arena of American life where to be white is to be immediately judged inferior. [It is] unnecessary to have a Ph.D. in kinesiology to realize that the average black player can jump higher and run faster than the average white player. . . .

People in basketball don't really care why that is. They just know it's so, and they act accordingly.

It is into this strange context, in which most major sports fans -- openly or not -- acknowledge racial difference in athletic performance while many

policy-makers and politically correct theorists do not, that Rodman's book arrives. Rodman does not deny that blacks dominate basketball. His distinction between blacks and whites, however, is not about athletic style but about attitude. "When you talk about race in basketball, the whole thing is simple: a black player knows he can go out on a court and kick a white player's ass," he writes. "What I'm talking about is attitude, and the black player has been conditioned to think he can take the white guy whenever he needs to."

By grouping Bird with black players, Rodman is attributing any racial difference in ability not to innate physical characteristics, but to a socially conditioned attitude that leads to more intensity, more practicing. This attitude -- an overweening confidence combined with a strong drive to dominate other players -- is not entirely race-specific. Bird clearly had it. All-Star Utah Jazz point guard John Stockton, who is white, has it. And so, unquestionably, does Michael Jordan. If more black players than white ones have this attitude, it is for the simple reason that they're driven to it by lack of alternative opportunities. "The black guy from a poor background . . . sees two ways out of poverty: sports or drugs. . . . The white guy from the suburbs doesn't have the same motivation to succeed in sports." In sum, Rodman says, "Blacks dominate basketball almost as much as whites dominate hockey. I don't believe in the science talk of genetics and all that. I think black dominance has more to do with black guys wanting it -- and needing it -- more than the white guy."

Of course Rodman, the flamboyantly tattooed, floridly dyed forward for the NBA's Chicago Bulls, is perhaps better known for his attention-grabbing antics off the court than his peerless rebound-grabbing ability on it. Not everyone will be inclined to take what he says about issues like race relations seriously, and indeed, much of what he has written is ridiculous or silly. But by making Bird a practitioner of the "black game" Rodman -- whether he means to or not -- deflates stereotypical racial categories of athletic performance.

In principle, there should be nothing objectionable about a sentence like this one: "There is not a white star left in the NBA, nor a white running back worth mentioning in the National Football League; the idea of a white cornerback in today's NFL has become virtually unthinkable; a high and increasing percentage of the batting stars in major league baseball are African-Americans." Allowing for some arguable qualifications, this is a true statement. Anyone who denies it either does not follow these sports or has been frightened by politically correct orthodoxy into repressing facts.

But grafting observations of this kind onto age-old racial mythology is objectionable because racism is endemic in our multicolored society. In this era of The Bell Curve, with its simplistic understanding of a trade-off between brains and brawn, the danger is that some of the free-floating racial nonsense in American culture will attach itself to the thinking of amateur racial theorists.

This age-old racial mythology is not just perpetuated by racist whites; it's obligingly bought into by many blacks. When the black Olympic gold medalist sprinter Lee Evans said in 1981, "We were simply bred for physical qualities," he was not saying anything substantively different from what Jimmy Snyder, who is white, said when he got fired from CBS. Many African-American athletes and intellectuals play up or exaggerate black athletic superiority, claiming it as a biological emblem of essential blackness or as the genetic legacy of slavery.

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In fact, the more wacked-out margins of Afrocentrism are partly built around biological explanations of superior black athletic prowess. Ironically, white supremacists and black supremacists both emphasize black athletic superiority. The only difference is that while black supremacists cite alleged black biological physical superiority as evidence of a more general superiority, white supremacists cite it as evidence of lower intelligence or of a more animal nature.

A 1991 study found that half of Americans polled believed that blacks "have more natural physical ability" than whites. Does this mean that half of all Americans are racist? My own favorite basketball player is John Stockton, the imperturbable point guard who perennially leads the NBA in assists. Is it significant that my favorite player is white? I identify with him because he plays like me (only much, much better): He's not that tall, he doesn't have great leaping ability, he relies heavily on quickness and anticipation and on the proverbial "grit and wile." His skills are manifestly the "white" ones that Rodman deconstructs in his book.

Is my identification with Stockton racial? Racist? Perhaps, at least insofar as there is a small part of me that admires Stockton's ability to compete with and even surpass blacks at the very highest level. This is something that I cannot do even at the YMCA. But if my identification with Stockton is racist, it is no more so than my identification with the Toronto Raptors' 5'10" (tiny by NBA standards) Damon Stoudamire, another of my favorite players, is heightist. I like Stoudamire, who is black, because he's short like me.

When I'm playing at the YMCA, black players dominate on the court. They are usually faster and stronger than the white players, can jump higher, and can shoot better. It is primarily black approbation I find myself seeking when I perform on the court because in the basketball universe, blacks set the terms. Blacks are the authority.

Is this racist? Indirectly, yes, because it is only in sports (and perhaps some areas of entertainment) that blacks enjoy this elevated position in the social hierarchy. The exalted status that I (and other people, white and black) accord to blacks on the basketball court does not generally extend into other realms. My own deference to black superiority on the court is not racist in the sense that I then expect blacks to be fundamentally inferior in some other area. But the limitation of blacks' privileged status to sports has obliquely racist effects because it leads to the fetishization of black athleticism. This fetishization, disseminated by the mainstream media, is then absorbed and accepted by both blacks and whites. And as blackness becomes indelibly associated in the public mind with athleticism, racial mythology (Rodman's "science talk of genetics") inevitably worms its way into the mix, leading to reductively biological explanations of phenomena such as lower black IQ scores or the predominance of blacks on the welfare rolls.

What's more, as athleticism becomes valorized as the essence of blackness, thousands of innercity kids, for whom other avenues to a middle-class existence are largely inaccessible, pour all of their energy into becoming the next Michael Jordan or Emmett Smith. Meanwhile, the probability that only one or two out of ten thousand black kids will go on to a successful professional sports career gets ignored. As a Louisiana high school coach put it in 1968, "A white kid tries to become President of the United States, and all the skills and knowledge he picks up on the way can be used in a thousand different jobs. A

black kid tries to become Willie Mays, and all the tools he picks up are useless to him if he doesn't become Willie Mays."

I've tried to locate my prejudices with such precision here not to expiate my racial guilt but to illustrate one of the main arguments of John Hoberman's *Darwin's Athletes: How Sport Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race*, the most intelligent and provocative book on race and sports since Harry Edwards's 1968 *Revolt of the Black Athlete*. Hoberman's book is also, however, energized by an angry moral fervor that occasionally borders on the maniacal. Reading *Darwin's Athletes*, its biting gladiator's prose relentlessly cutting racists down to size, one sometimes wants to grab the author by the lapels and ask him, Can't a white coach ever be just a white coach, and not a symbol of colonial oppression? But Hoberman, a professor of Germanic Languages at the University of Texas who has written extensively on sports performance, clearly has a deep knowledge of his topic. Abundantly footnoted, and with a good bibliography, the book will be useful to scholars and general readers alike.

Hoberman's book comes out at a propitious time: the fiftieth anniversary of Jackie Robinson's debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers. Over the last 50 years, people have touted professional sports as an emblem of integration and as a beacon of better race relations to come. Hoberman will have none of this. He believes that this rosy vision of sports is part of society's need to white-wash the true state of race relations in America. Hoberman notes with characteristic acidity: "The presence of large numbers of black athletes in the major sports appears to have persuaded almost everyone that the process of integration has been a success. This sense of closure is an illusion that is rooted not in the fact of racial equality but in a combination of black apathy and white public relations efforts."

Hoberman asserts, in effect, that white people need to admire black men on the playing field to justify their condescension to blacks off the field. According to Hoberman, white hyperbole extolling sports integration is really just "white auto-intoxication that is fed by the impossible dream of being rid of conflict as a factor in everyday life." Elsewhere he writes, "The Jackie Robinson story has long served white America, and liberals in particular, as a deeply satisfying combination of entertainment and civic virtue that has simultaneously permitted disengagement from less tractable and more important interracial tasks, such as the pursuit of educational and military equality." No one, not racists, not white liberals, is spared Hoberman's withering judgment.

Dennis Rodman, too, comes in for some scathing comments in *Darwin's Athletes*. Hoberman deplores the self-aggrandizing antics of the mercurial Rodman as contributing to the notion of the black athlete as racial clown. But as much as Rodman's public preening serves to reinforce the idea of black athlete as a subhuman cultural oddity, his arguments weirdly parallel Hoberman's. "I'm nothing more than a sports slave," Rodman says, making conscious reference to the plantation-like racial imbalance in the NBA between coaches and executives (who are overwhelmingly white) and players (who are overwhelmingly black).

Hoberman, who is white, makes the same analogy. The implication is that despite the huge sums of money that a black pro player like Rodman can earn in salary and endorsements, the arrangement that wins him these benefits is still part of the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow racism: Put the black players on the court and watch them perform for their white managers, owners, coaches, and fans; take them off and they still must suffer the depredations of racism and

second-class citizenship.

The mission of Kenneth Shropshire's *In Black and White: Race and Sports in America* is to ask why this arrangement exists. Shropshire, a business school professor and former college football player, takes a less sinister view than Hoberman of the racial imbalance between the front office and the playing field. For this reason, *In Black and White* is less interesting than Darwin's *Athletes*. For the same reason, it may be more useful.

Shropshire begins by citing a 1995 study. Blacks comprise 12 percent of the U.S. population, but they make up 19 percent of the players in professional baseball, 68 percent in football, and 80 percent in basketball. There are however, no African-American majority owners or league commissioners, and African Americans make up only 7 percent of team presidents in the NBA, and zero percent in both the NFL and major-league baseball (MLB). In 1995, blacks comprised 19 percent of NBA coaches, 7 percent of NFL coaches, and 1 percent of MLB coaches. Between 1990 and 1992, a period during which pro basketball was 75 percent black, the NBA hired 25 head coaches. None was black. And the first black NFL head coach, Art Shell, was not hired until 1989, more than 40 years after Kenny Washington, a roommate of Jackie Robinson at UCLA, signed with the Los Angeles Rams in 1946.

A variety of factors, including bald racism, have led to white dominance of front-office jobs. Charles Murray would likely say that it's a simple case of whites being better suited for more cerebral tasks, but Shropshire argues that the main reason for the imbalance is straightforward. People in the sports industry work long hours. If you're going to be working long hours along-side other people, you're going to want those people to be your friends. And people tend to have friends of the same race. Shropshire quotes former San Francisco Forty-Niners coach Bill Walsh: "[Hiring is] a very fraternal thing. You end up calling friends, and the typical coach hasn't been exposed to many black coaches."

According to this argument, the real problem is that deeply entrenched "networks of recruitment" don't extend to include black people and the solution is to open the hiring networks to minorities. But how best to do this? Operating from the premise that completely color-blind policies do not work, Shropshire's view echoes Justice Harry Blackmun's famous dissent in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1974): "In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way. And in order to treat some persons equally, we must treat them differently." Yet Shropshire stops just short of advocating standard affirmative action. This is because the situation in pro sports is unique.

One of the stronger arguments against affirmative action is that it elevates some blacks to positions that they are not qualified for. This hurts the company doing the hiring, as well as the more qualified white person who did not get the job, not to mention the black person (and black people in general) who must shoulder the resentments and suspicion of the other two parties. In short, the problem with affirmative action in corporate America is that it is not clear that there are currently enough qualified blacks to make the policy more effective than it is harmful. This is unequivocally not the case in professional sports, where the applicant pool of very qualified blacks is large. Most NBA coaches, for example, are former pro players. Thus African-American applicants for coaching or management positions have had the same skill and leadership

training as the whites who get hired. So if we are to deploy affirmative action policies in pursuit of equality in the coaching ranks, it will be to correct not lack of merit but rather lack of opportunity. And the choice of Ray Rhodes, the Philadelphia Eagles black head coach, as NFL Coach of the Year in 1995, his first year at the helm, nicely illustrates that when the opportunity is available, an African American can take full advantage of it. Shropshire's prescription for broadening opportunity is a combination of remedies: enforcement of antidiscrimination laws; executive actions by the league presidents to encourage minority hiring; player union lobbying, including strike tactics; and white acceptance of black leadership.

Shropshire, who is black, is much less critical of American society than Hoberman is. Shropshire's book is generally free of rancor; Hoberman's is obstreperously bitter. Hoberman says, for example, that there is something emasculating about the packaging of black athletes in professional sports marketing. They're not supposed to be scary. Peter de Jonge points out that the NBA has improved its image among the white middle class with "a series of unthreatening yet bigger-than-life cartoon superheroes called Magic, Michael, Charles, and Shaquille." NBA commissioner David Stern has even compared Magic Johnson and Michael Jordan (whose co-stars in the recent movie Space Jam were Warner Bros. cartoon characters) to Walt Disney's Mickey and Goofy, and Nike promotes Orlando Magic guard Anfernee Hardaway's shoes with a street-talking, anthropomorphic puppet named Li'l Penny. Yet, paradoxically, promotions for the NBA and many advertisements that feature black athletes emphasize such conventions of black street culture as brazen trashtalking and threatening poses, which reinforce the image of the black male as violent criminal. NBA players exhibit all the accoutrements and attitudes of ghetto drug culture and thus glorify them in the eyes of black and white youth (hip-hop style is as in vogue in white mall culture as it is in the inner city); but at the same time, black players are presented to the white audience as unthreatening. Whites can love the NBA because it presents blacks as loud and athletic without being dangerous.

So how did we arrive at the point where the pinnacle of black accomplishment is a man who puts a ball through a hoop for a living? In 1897, when W.E.B. Du Bois addressed black athleticism, it was to warn against blacks' lack of physical fitness, which was thought to reflect badly on the race. Hoberman demonstrates via numerous historical examples that the black superathlete is not an ineluctable biological phenomenon but rather a product of cultural circumstances. Whether blacks are perceived as superior or inferior in physical abilities -- and at different times in American history they have been seen as both -- doesn't matter: Whites always interpret black physicality as a sign of weak character, low intelligence, and moral slackness. Both the deficient black organism of the nine-teenth century and the superior black organism of the twentieth, Hoberman demonstrates, have signified lower status for blacks.

Blacks too have fixated on the black body as a symbol of black pride, doubly reinforcing its highly charged racial symbolism. Black sports superiority, or the black body, is meant to stand in for all the areas in which African Americans perceive themselves to be inferior. Shelby Steele calls this overvalorizing of sports achievement "compensatory grandiosity." Black intelligence, in this imagining, is not inferior; it is simply part of a different "cognitive style," more effectively directed toward physical expression (music, dancing, sports) than toward academic pursuits, which are the province of white people. It is not hard to see how this thinking can damage

both black people as individuals and society as a whole.

But is it possible that "natural" or genetic factors do contribute to black dominance of certain sports? Even though Hoberman advances powerful arguments for the preponderance of social and cultural factors in establishing black athletic dominance, he does leave open the possibility that some biological or physiological component might contribute to black superiority in some sports. For example, he points to differences in the way that people of different ethnicities metabolize drugs and racial differences in bone density that might wrongly be interpreted as signs of disease. Politically correct blindness to these facts serves no purpose. But most of what passes for science on the subject of race -- about length of heel bones or amounts of subcutaneous fat -- is absolute bunk. The boldest he says anyone can confidently venture is that there may be bioracial components of athletic significance but that such hypotheses "are not even close to scientific confirmation, and there is no scientifically justified reason to tie such plausible athletic traits to mental aptitudes." It's harder to determine what Hoberman thinks we should be doing. Outlawing professional sports? Being more assiduously truthful about physiological differences between the races? Educating people better? Making sure blacks have more and better opportunities than a 1-in-5,000 shot at the NBA?

Hoberman contends that the growing belief in black athletic superiority has led to profound anxiety for whites in the West, for whom white European preeminence has always included presumption of physical, as well as moral and intellectual, superiority. For example, cricket matches in the nineteenth century were seen as symbolic racial competitions in which colonial masters asserted their dominance over native subjects. In the twentieth century, with former colonies dominating England between the wickets, international cricket has come to serve as a "dramatic and often politicized theater of white athletic decline." Today, Hoberman writes,

White fatalism about racial athletic aptitude marks the end of a certain kind of racial prestige that was originally vested in the colonial male. In the United States, the slogan "white men can't jump" . . . exemplifies a gallows humor that acknowledges the twilight of white athleticism and whatever this portends for the supposedly beleaguered Caucasian male. The scenario for white decline can have a seductive appeal for those of liberal temperament, because it seems to present at least a minimal redistribution of status amounting to compensation for centuries of racial oppression.

Hoberman's book is fascinating and damning. But his view of professional sports is so unrelentingly critical that it obscures the fact that sports can be a benign, even democratic force. In the preface to *In Black and White in America*, former San Diego Charger tight end Kellen Winslow writes: "On the field of play the rules are clear, defined, fair, and unambiguous." The playing field is the ultimate meritocracy: Two points by Michael Jordan count no less than two points by Larry Bird; a home run by Babe Ruth has no more value than a home run by Hank Aaron.

Even if professional sports do contribute heavily to the overvaluing of black athleticism, it remains the case that professional sports leagues are among the few places where blacks and whites interact consistently and successfully on a prominent stage. And, speaking from personal experience, nothing establishes a (superficial, anyway) transracial bond more quickly than a backdoor pass to a

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man cutting to the hoop for a lay-up. The sporting arena remains one of our few (flawed, to be sure) models of racial cooperation.

But if the playing field is a meritocracy, it is also a place where we project our misunderstandings and stereotypes onto the players. Unless we take race into account, racial delusions may take us in.

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HEADLINE: IS IT IN THE GENES?;
STUDIES HAVE FOUND PHYSICAL DIFFERENCES THAT MIGHT HELP EXPLAIN WHY BLACKS
OUTPERFORM WHITES IN CERTAIN SPORTS--BUT SCIENTISTS ARE WARY OF JUMPING TO
CONCLUSIONS

BYLINE: S.L. PRICE

BODY:

The best athletes on the planet are black. Stop the conversation right there and few will argue the point. It's always the next comment that burns down the house. For if there were no want or need to decide why blacks have come to dominate the sporting scene, a lot of old white men would not have disgraced themselves. Jimmy (the Greek) Snyder wouldn't have been fired by CBS in 1988 for proffering a half-baked theory based on the breeding practices of slave owners. Dale Lick, whose hope for the presidency of Michigan State sank in 1993, might be in East Lansing today had he not once said, "The muscle structure of the black athlete typically is more suited for certain positions in football and basketball." And Jack Nicklaus, who dismissed the absence of blacks in golf by saying, "Blacks have different muscles that react in different ways," wouldn't cringe each time he sees Tiger Woods tee off.

The urge to explain the black domination of sports has stained so many careers that it's a topic few want to touch. "Most people are afraid of dealing with the subject, afraid of being labeled," says David Hunter, an exercise physiologist and head of the department of health and physical education at Hampton (Va.) University, who recently completed a survey of studies of race and sports in this century. But, Hunter notes, "if we say, 'This might cause problems, let's not study it,' we simply perpetuate whatever thoughts we've had."

The "problems" Hunter speaks of stem from the longstanding fear that casual theorizing about black physical superiority will inevitably--if illogically--lead to the kind of negative stereotyping found in the 1994 book *The Bell Curve*, by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, which suggested that blacks aren't as smart as whites. But scientists such as Hunter argue that if we're willing to concede a genetic predisposition to sickle-cell anemia or the early onset of adolescence among black girls, then we should at least discuss the possibility that blacks have physical traits that give them an advantage over whites in sports.

As blacks, who constitute 13% of the U.S. population, have become the overwhelming majority in the NBA and the NFL and at the elite levels of some other sports, the issue has reached the mainstream press. In 1992 *Runner's World* magazine printed a story titled "White Men Can't Run" that cited a variety of scientific studies--most of which found physiological differences between racial groups--that may explain why blacks dominate both sprinting and long-distance

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running. In 1995 Roger Bannister, a respected physician and the first man to run a sub-four-minute mile, helped bring the debate further into the open. "As a scientist rather than a sociologist," Bannister said, "I am prepared to risk political incorrectness by drawing attention to the seemingly obvious but understressed fact that black sprinters and black athletes in general all seem to have certain natural anatomical advantages. Perhaps there are anatomical advantages in the length of the Achilles' tendon, the longest tendon in the body." He also mentioned blacks' "relative lack of subcutaneous fatty insulating tissue in the skin" as a possible physiological advantage. Then last May, in *The New Yorker*, writer Malcolm Gladwell advanced a genetic argument in support of the notion that blacks are athletically superior. Clearly, the genie is out of the bottle.

Most scientists who study the subject, however, reject the simplistic reasoning that if blacks dominate sports, they must inherently be better athletes. "You've got to be very careful generalizing from the athletic population to the broader population," says Robert Malina, director of the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports at Michigan State. "Athletes are probably the most rigorously selected segment of our population, the cream of the crop. They are statistically aberrant."

Hunter, who is black, is a practitioner of hard science who believes what social scientists believe: that social forces--the emphasis on certain sports in black communities, the conviction that sports offer one of the few avenues to success for America's racial underclass--play the major role in the development of athletic excellence. But Hunter also has one foot planted in the other, more controversial camp. He knows that there are observable and quantifiable physical differences between black and white Americans, and he wonders if they provide an advantage in sports.

Generally accepted research has shown that African-American children tend to have denser bones, narrower hips, bigger thighs, lower percentages of body fat, and longer legs in relation to their upper bodies than white kids, and tests have also shown that they run faster and jump higher. That a combination of narrow hips, powerful thighs, low body fat and long legs seems perfect for sprinting and jumping has been lost on no one looking to explain black excellence at those skills.

Top athletes, however, don't always conform to laboratory theories. The physical differences found between black and white Americans are interesting--and perhaps telling--but until large numbers of elite athletes are studied, it is irresponsible to declare that one physical trait accounts for the minute margin that separates the sprinter who sets a world record from the one who finishes 10th. Carl Lewis may be tall, long-legged and narrow-hipped, but in his prime he was beaten four times by Ron Brown, who was noticeably shorter and stockier.

"It's that logic--Aha! We found a difference! African-Americans have narrower pelvic girdles!--that most people fall into," Hunter says. "But if you test whether, independent of race, a narrower pelvic girdle is a predictor of speed, even though it's a tremendous theoretical model, it doesn't hold true. Not everyone in the NBA, whether he's African-American or Caucasian, is 6'6", and not everyone has a certain percentage of fat. There's not a single characteristic that is unique and always present and responsible for the performance. If there were, I'd be able to predict at an early age who should

Sports Illustrated, December 8, 1997

go into certain [sports]. I'd be a billionaire." At the same time, Hunter acknowledges that a variety of physiological factors contribute to an athlete's success, and that the lack of one of those characteristics in a successful athlete does not disprove its importance.

The study of race and athletic performance is best described as intriguing but immature. Geneticist Claude Bouchard of Laval University in Quebec has determined that certain human athletic traits, such as anaerobic power and training capacity, have a powerful genetic component, suggesting that, to a significant extent, athletes are born, not made. One Bouchard study that compared black West Africans with white French Canadians found a higher percentage of fast-twitch muscle fibers and anaerobic enzymes--both thought to be essential to explosive sprinting--in the West Africans, but Bouchard is the first to point out that he was not studying athletes. Until he does, he can only speculate about how the differences he found relate to athletic performance.

Others who have performed studies have come away convinced that there is a marked difference in performance between the black and white groups they examined. They just can't say why. Gladwell's New Yorker essay used as its foundation the work of Yale geneticist Kenneth Kidd, which found that the DNA of black Africans contains more genetic variation than is present in the peoples of all the other continents combined; from this finding Kidd theorized that a higher than expected percentage of black Africans--and their descendants in the Americas--would have rare genetic combinations of one sort or another, including the combinations that would endow them with exceptional athletic talent (or an exceptional lack of athletic talent). Swedish scientist Bengt Saltin, whose comparison of Kenyan and Swedish distance runners found the Kenyans' muscles better suited to that athletic test, believes the difference could be caused as much by the Kenyans' high-altitude environment as by genetic factors. Tim Noakes, the South African sports physician whose testing of black and white South African marathoners showed that the blacks possessed higher levels of energy-producing enzymes in their muscles, allowing them to train harder longer, isn't sure whether the cause of that difference is genetic or environmental.

Hunter performed studies that, in lab testing, showed no difference in anaerobic power between black and white children. His field testing of the same group showed that the black children jumped higher than the whites by an average of some 10%. "The phenomenon of African-Americans performing better than whites in certain areas does exist, and it is worth studying," Hunter says. "But we don't have the answers yet, and it would be irresponsible for us to make them up."

Sums up Malina: "The scientific basis is just not that extensive." Especially when you consider that black may be the most slippery term in the debate. West Africans and Kenyans are both black, yet the first are thought to have bodies perfect for sprinting, while the Kenyans are distance legends. That the African continent may hold more genetic variants than anywhere else in the world would help explain this divergence. But what about the differences between either of those groups and African-Americans?

Though most black Americans descend from slaves taken from western Africa, 90% have some white ancestry, which renders the terms black and white particularly imprecise when applied to African-Americans. Does the fact that an NBA player like the very light-skinned Doug Christie, who may well be more white than black, can leap just as high and with as much body control as the

dark-skinned Dominique Wilkins prove that it's wrong to assume that blacks are inherently better jumpers than whites? Or does it suggest that even a small degree of black ancestry confers upon someone the genetic variation that can lead to exceptional athletic ability?

As is the case with so many other questions about race and athletic performance, scientists do not yet have definitive answers. Given the logistical difficulty of testing large groups of top athletes under laboratory conditions, and the complexity held within the 100,000 genes that shape a person's characteristics, the only safe conclusion is this: Sports' nature-versus-nurture debate is a long way from being resolved.

GRAPHIC: B/W PHOTO: PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN W. MCDONOUGH, Credit nature or nurture--or both--but 95% of the starters in the last two NBA All-Star Games were black. [Overhead view of four basketball players in game]; B/W PHOTO: BOB MARTIN, One theory suggests that black Africans' genetic diversity could be a key to their running talent--and to the athleticism of so many African-Americans. [Three Kenyan runners]; B/W PHOTO: DUOMO/WILLIAM R. SALLAZ, Studies have found black children to have longer legs, narrower hips and greater jumping ability than whites. [Four basketball players]; B/W PHOTO: JOHN HUET, [See caption above--children on soccer field]

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: December 17, 1997

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April 26, 1997, U.S. Edition

SECTION: Arts, Books and Sport; Pg. 86

LENGTH: 601 words

HEADLINE: Black sportsmen. Superiority complex

BODY:

DARWIN'S ATHLETES. By John Hoberman. Houghton Mifflin; 341 pages; \$ 22.95

THIS study of race, sport, biology and psychology begins promisingly with the provocative thesis that the athletic superiority of black Americans--a superiority which is broadly assumed by their white counterparts--causes them more harm than good. "Ideas about the 'natural' physical talents of dark-skinned peoples, and the media-generated images that sustain them, probably do more than anything else in our public life to encourage the idea that blacks and whites are biologically different in a meaningful way."

John Hoberman goes on to argue that violent stereotypes from the boxing ring, the football field and the basketball court reinforce (and are reinforced by) the words and body language of "gangsta" rappers, and serve to alienate black boys from comparatively "effeminate" middle-class norms. As a result, too many of them, lured by dreams of riches, spend more time in the schoolyard than in the classroom. (Some whites, too, have fallen prey to ghetto chic: "They want to dress like them, talk like them, everything except live in the same neighbourhood," says one basketball pro.)

The popular belief that games serve as a great equaliser is, Mr Hoberman argues, a myth. He gathers evidence to show that racial integration does not occur comfortably in sport. (Golf's country-club exclusiveness is a notorious case in point, and helps explain why the victory this month of a black American, Tiger Woods, in the Masters in Augusta, Georgia, created such excitement.)

Mr Hoberman even devalues such icons as Joe Louis, the world heavyweight boxing champion customarily described by patronising white sports writers as "a credit to his race", and Jackie Robinson, who broke the colour bar in major-league baseball: "The enormous amount of attention that blacks and their liberal white sympathisers have paid to the Robinson saga and negro-league baseball has long served as a distraction that has obscured racial struggles directly affecting the rights and dignity of far larger numbers of black Americans."

Mr Hoberman--a scholar, oddly enough, of Germanic languages--reviews the long (and often embarrassing) history of racially tinged scientific investigations and boldly concludes that today's scientists should stop avoiding the subject of race. Serious research, he says, would discredit the quackery that otherwise flourishes and with it the idea that brawn comes at the expense of brain.

The Economist, April 26, 1997

The chapters leading up to this recommendation are thoroughly researched, and Mr Hoberman covers unfamiliar territory admirably. (For an American, he is unusually well versed in the sports world of Europe and elsewhere.) It is interesting to note, for instance, that contrary to today's stereotypes, American blacks were once considered less robust than whites.

But, like the scientists he puts in the dock, Mr Hoberman himself is guilty of avoiding or fudging some of the really hard questions. What biological differences between the races have serious scientists already confirmed? What, if anything, is the larger significance of these differences? Did the forced migration of captured blacks from Africa ("unnatural selection"), followed by slavery and segregation, have any scientifically-provable impact on the biology of black Americans? And, assuming that their superiority is not illusory, what accounts for the dominance of black athletes in so many sports? "Darwin's Athletes" is too timid to say.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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January 31, 1998, Saturday, Late Edition - Final

SECTION: Section C; Page 1; Column 1; Sports Desk

LENGTH: 761 words

HEADLINE: Sports of The Times;
In the N.F.L., Justice Is Still Denied

BYLINE: By WILLIAM C. RHODEN

BODY:

IN THE fall of 1980, Jomills Braddock, a research scientist for the Center of Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, volunteered to conduct a study for the National Football League Players Association. The association was engaged in a frustrating wrestling match with the N.F.L. over league owners' resistance to hiring African-Americans for coaching and upper-management positions.

Braddock's specialization was institutional discrimination. The result of his effort was a 62-page study titled "Institutional Discrimination: A Study of Managerial Recruitment in Professional Football." Eighteen years later, the most striking -- and demoralizing -- aspect of the work is the continued relevance of his concerns.

Braddock's primary conclusion in 1980 was that horizontal discrimination in the N.F.L. had subsided as more African-Americans were allowed to play professional football. However, vertical, or hierarchical racism, remained, with many barriers preventing players from climbing the organizational ladder.

Braddock is now the chairman of the department of sociology at the University of Miami. He is also founder and director of the university's Center for Research on Sports in Society. The rosters of N.F.L. teams are about 70 percent African-American; many of the starting offensive and defensive units are 80 to 95 percent African-American. But climbing Jacob's vertical ladder is as difficult as it was in 1980.

"Obviously things have changed," Braddock said. "There are now black head coaches, although the number is small. But it's very disappointing, primarily because the barriers to getting head coaching positions had been broken. Art Shell had a winning record -- even though he was pushed out and has never got another opportunity. It's like getting in and being successful isn't enough."

The process through which coaches are selected is the same as it was in 1980. The network referral system that excludes blacks from becoming serious candidates is still intact.

"If they make it to the interview, the chances of consideration are reasonably good," Braddock said. "It's getting the interview that seems to be problematic. The coaches will talk among themselves, owners talk among themselves or talk to their coaches, and the people that they talk about are the people that they know well. Not everybody that's qualified, but the people

The New York Times, January 31, 1998

that they interact with on a personal level."

National response to Braddock's 1980 study was encouraging. A blue-ribbon committee was formed and an oversight hearing was held. The N.F.L.'s response to the study was denial. Pete Rozelle, who was then the league's commissioner, said the N.F.L. was no worse than the newspapers and networks covering the league with respect to hiring blacks. There were meetings and conferences.

In 1998, we're still meeting.

Fifteen head-coaching vacancies in the last two seasons. No blacks have been hired. But there have been plenty of meetings. The only thing more remarkable than the owners' steadfast resistance to hiring African-Americans is the players' accommodation to that attitude.

Surely if players like Neil Smith, Terrell Davis, Marcus Allen and Barry Sanders raised their voices, black assistant coaches might get beyond lunch. And one does sense a growing resentment among some players of the implicit message that black muscle is fine, but black judgment and leadership are somehow lacking.

Braddock senses that what the owners really fear is intimate social contact with "the help." The runners. The jumpers. The sweat-givers.

"The element of control and the degree of interaction that is required at the higher levels makes white resistance to black access to those levels stronger," he said. "Owners have to interact more with head coaches than they do with assistant coaches or with players -- and in a more informal manner."

White players retire and snatch the plum jobs, becoming general managers, partners and vice presidents. Black stars get reasons. "In 1980 owners said they were afraid that if they hired a black coach and he wasn't successful, then they couldn't get rid of him," Braddock recalled.

Owners continue to balk. There will be meetings in Indianapolis. There will be lunches and banquets. And the formality of an interview. All this conjures up images of the boy in "Invisible Man" who had a nightmare in which he tears open an envelope containing what he thought was a letter of commendation. What it really said was "To Whom It May Concern: Keep This Nigger Boy Running."

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January 20, 1998, Tuesday, Late Edition - Final

SECTION: Section C; Page 1; Column 2; Sports Desk

LENGTH: 1044 words

HEADLINE: SUPER BOWL XXXII;
Black Coaches Are Angry With N.F.L. Over Hiring

BYLINE: By MIKE FREEMAN

DATELINE: SAN DIEGO, Jan. 19

BODY:

As Super Bowl XXXII descends on this city, Sherman Lewis, the scholarly offensive coordinator of the Green Bay Packers, is trying to keep a low profile. But that's impossible.

Lewis is at the center of a racially charged and increasingly bitter debate over the way head-coaching vacancies are filled in the National Football League. Despite an impeccable resume that includes Super Bowl rings earned as an assistant with both the San Francisco 49ers and the Packers, Lewis did not get an interview for any of the 11 vacant head-coaching jobs before the regular season.

The question being asked by some of the league's 100 or so black assistant coaches is whether Lewis did not get interviews because he is black. With the 11 changes before the season and 2 more afterward, in Buffalo and Indianapolis, 13 head coaches have been named in the last two years, almost a 50 percent turnover in the 30-team league. But none of the replacements have been black. There are currently three black head coaches: Tony Dungy in Tampa Bay, Dennis Green in Minnesota and Ray Rhodes in Philadelphia. Oakland and Dallas also have head-coaching vacancies, but have yet to fill them.

Angry about those numbers, a small group of black assistants has privately talked about the possibility of filing a class-action discrimination lawsuit against the N.F.L. The assistants have gone so far as to speak to civil rights lawyers about their chances and options.

The chance of filing such a lawsuit, some of these assistants said, was extremely small. "Right now," one of them said, "it's just talk." The reason, another assistant said, is that a lawsuit could prove to be more detrimental than helpful and that any assistant coach who became part of it would "end up like Curt Flood." Flood, who challenged major league baseball's reserve system in court, was treated as an outcast by ownership.

The second assistant said a discrimination lawsuit would set back relations between ownership and black coaches two decades.

"I would hope to God something like that would never happen," said Art Modell, owner of the Baltimore Ravens, who have more blacks in the front office and on the coaching staff than any other N.F.L. team. "You can't make someone

The New York Times, January 20, 1998

hire someone. Frankly, there are some black assistants who say a lot of things but just aren't qualified to be head coaches, just like there are white assistants who aren't qualified."

Bob Lamonte, who represents Lewis, said that he has heard nothing of such a lawsuit but that it would not surprise him. "I do know this," he said. "There was a very strong group of black assistants livid over the fact Sherman never got an interview. They are still livid."

The N.F.L. says it is trying hard to make the playing field more level for black assistants. During meetings with a group of black coaches over the last year, Commissioner Paul Tagliabue, as well as several teams' general managers, stressed their commitment to improve minority-group hiring. Tagliabue, in particular, has been outspoken in this regard.

N.F.L. officials say the lack of black head coaches hired in the past two years is a matter of experience. Most coaches are hired after being either head coaches in college or coordinators in the pros. There are only a handful of black head coaches in major college football as well as a small number of black coordinators in the N.F.L., even though more than 60 percent of the league's 1,500 players are black. But in interviews over the past month, a handful of black assistants made it clear they are tired of the dialogue. The reason there is a lack of black head coaches is pure racism, they said, not a small talent pool or anything else. And they said that if a black head coach is not hired before next season, drastic action needs to be taken. The only question for them was what kind of action to take.

Several recent developments in particular have angered black assistants:

RECYCLED COACHES The rapid hiring of Jim Mora to coach the Colts and Wade Phillips to lead the Bills was seen as an insult by a number of black assistants. "What amazes me about those hirings," said one black American Conference assistant, "is why couldn't those teams wait until the end of the season to interview a Sherman Lewis? Is Jim Mora going anywhere? Is Wade going anywhere? What was the hurry?"

UNTESTED COACHES Many black assistants said they felt that Lewis was definitely going to get the San Francisco job when George Seifert retired before last season. Lewis had spent many years with the 49ers and came highly recommended by another 49ers alumnus, Mike Holmgren, head coach of Green Bay. But Steve Mariucci, a college coach, was hired without Lewis's being interviewed. "That was an insult to all of us," said one prominent black assistant coach.

LATEST HOT CANDIDATE Through no fault of his own, Gary Kubiak, the Denver Broncos' offensive coordinator, has become something of a flashpoint for the anger of black assistants in recent weeks. The knock on Lewis is that Holmgren calls all the plays for the Packers. Denver Coach Mike Shanahan also calls all the plays, but, some black assistants pointed out, that does not keep Kubiak from being mentioned in team and news media circles as a hot candidate. The only difference between Kubiak and Lewis, the black assistants said, is the color of their skin.

"If anyone wants to know the truth about whether or not I call plays, all someone has to do is ask Mike," Lewis said. "I do call plays. I don't call

The New York Times, January 20, 1998

them every week but I do call plays."

Then he added, with a touch of sarcasm: "Who calls all the plays on the Broncos? Isn't it Mike Shanahan?"

Lewis is uncomfortable with his role as a symbol in the league's hiring practices. He said he wanted the focus to be on Sunday's game between the Packers and the Broncos. When he was questioned by the news media on Sunday night -- a grilling that will probably be repeated every day this week -- he tried to keep the focus on football.

But in a moment away from the crush, his emotions showed.

"Any person in my position would be frustrated," he said. "Of course I want to be a head coach. I think I am more than qualified. Like anyone else, I just want a chance to prove myself. I hope I get it."

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October 29, 1997, Wednesday, Late Edition - Final

NAME: Lowell Perry

SECTION: Section C; Page 4; Column 1; Sports Desk

LENGTH: 1109 words

HEADLINE: PRO FOOTBALL;
O, Forgotten Pioneer: Black Coach Recalled

BYLINE: By MIKE FREEMAN

BODY:

On a frigid day in Pittsburgh in 1956, a talented rookie wide receiver for the Steelers named Lowell Perry took a handoff on a reverse against the New York Giants. The Giants' defensive tackle, Rosey Grier, hit Perry so hard that Perry fractured his pelvis and dislocated his hip. He was rushed to Mercy Hospital.

There was a time in his life when Perry thought football would be his career. He had brilliant skills, and four games into his first National Football League season he had impressive numbers to back them up: Perry had caught 14 passes for 344 yards and 2 touchdowns. He had returned 11 punts for 127 yards and 9 kickoffs for 219 yards. Perry was possibly on his way to being named rookie of the year.

Lying in a hospital bed for 13 weeks, though, his hip feeling as if someone had taken a sledgehammer to it, changed everything. Then, in what was to be a seminal moment for Perry, the Steelers' owner, Art Rooney, paid a hospital visit to his injured player. Not only would the visit change Perry's life, to a degree it would also change the course of professional sports and make Perry one of sport's most significant, if largely unknown, pioneers.

"I remember that day like it was yesterday," said Perry, now 65. "Mr. Rooney was, and will always be, one of the most fair and honest people I have ever known. He told me, 'Lowell, as long as I own the Pittsburgh Steelers you have a job in my organization.' "

The next season, in 1957, Perry declined an offer to play and, instead, roamed the sidelines as a receivers coach for the Steelers. According to the N.F.L., Perry was the first black coach in modern professional sports, basically beginning in the 1940's. That makes this season the 40th anniversary of the first black coach in pro sports.

(Certainly, Fritz Pollard deserves mention. He was the first black coach in the N.F.L., serving as the head coach of the Akron Pros in 1921 and the Hammond (Ind.) Pros in 1925. Pollard was also the league's first black quarterback, with Akron in 1920. But the stature of professional football in that televisionless, low-budget era did not compare to the N.F.L.'s rising popularity in the 40's, 50's and 60's.)

The New York Times, October 29, 1997

Earl Lloyd, in the 1961-62 season, became the National Basketball Association's first black coach, when he joined Detroit. In 1962, Buck O'Neil became baseball's first black coach, with the Chicago Cubs.

Perry's milestone is especially noteworthy, given the N.F.L.'s questionable track record recently of hiring blacks for head-coaching positions. Despite the efforts of Commissioner Paul Tagliabue to improve the situation, there are currently just 3 black head coaches out of 30 in the N.F.L.: Philadelphia's Ray Rhodes, Tampa Bay's Tony Dungy and Minnesota's Dennis Green; about two-thirds of the N.F.L.'s players are black. This past off season the offensive coordinator for the Super Bowl champion Green Bay Packers, Sherman Lewis, who is black, did not receive an interview for any of the 11 vacant head-coaching positions.

Meanwhile, owners brought out of retirement Mike Ditka to coach New Orleans and Dick Vermeil to coach St. Louis.

The situation is not lost on Perry. "I am glad the league recognizes it's a problem, and at least is trying to fix it," Perry said. "The Tony Dungys, the Rhodeses, Dennis Green are helping to pave the way like I did.

"I don't know if they know about me or not. I don't think a lot of people know about me. What really matters is that those men and other black men get fair chances and opportunities to coach in the N.F.L."

For Perry, the coaching job served as a springboard to other opportunities and landmark achievements. While coaching, Perry enrolled at Duquesne University Law School. Two years later, he got his law degree from the University of Detroit Law School. Perry joined the Chrysler Corporation in 1963 after serving as an attorney with the National Labor Relations Board. During his 17 years at Chrysler, he became the first black person to become a manager at an American automotive plant, in 1973. Seven years earlier, he became the first black person to broadcast pro football when CBS hired him to do analysis.

In March 1996, Perry was appointed by Michigan Governor John Engler to the cabinet-level position of director of Office of Urban Programs. Perry mainly listens to and exchanges ideas with entrepreneurs and owners of small businesses. "I've had a good life," Perry said. "I've been blessed. I would not trade what I've accomplished in the business world for anything."

He often thinks about his football past, however. While Perry calls playing and coaching with the Steelers "one of the most rewarding things I have ever done," it did not come without a painful price.

Perry said that as a player and as a coach in the N.F.L., he faced his share of bigotry. In 1956, for example, the Steelers played an exhibition game against the Chicago Bears in Jacksonville, Fla. When the team arrived for the game, a caravan met them at the airport for a parade the city was having for the team. A police officer on a motorcycle, Lowell remembered, used a racist term to refer to the seven or eight black players on the team and cut them out of the parade line. Not only were Perry and the black players kept from participating in the parade, they also could not stay at the hotel with the rest of the team. They stayed at a black hotel.

"Later that day we were practicing at the Gator Bowl and Art Rooney, who had come on a later plane, told all of the black players, 'I promise you, this

The New York Times, October 29, 1997

will never happen to one of my teams again.' " Perry said. The next year, there was an exhibition game scheduled to be played in Atlanta and, Perry said, when there were whispers that Atlanta officials would not allow blacks to participate in the Steelers' parade or stay in the same hotel with white teammates, Rooney canceled the game. The racism wasn't just outside the team; Perry recalls an incident of a fellow Steeler assistant hiding Perry's coach's ID to "make me out to be irresponsible."

These days are much brighter for Perry. He brags about his family, especially his children. His oldest son, Lowell Jr., is a Yale graduate who used to work in the front office of the Seattle Seahawks but who recently formed a company called Detroit Technologies with the Detroit Pistons guard Joe Dumars. His other son, 33-year-old Scott, is believed to be the youngest Division I basketball coach, at Eastern Kentucky. His daughter, Merrideth, works as an admissions officer at Oakland University in Rochester, Mich.

"Of course I will never forget my experiences in the N.F.L.," Perry said.

GRAPHIC: Photo: The former Steeler assistant Lowell Perry was the first black coach in modern pro sports, the N.F.L. says. (Duane Burleson for The New York Times)

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FEBRUARY 2, 1998

SECTION: Pg. 34

LENGTH: 6080 words

HEADLINE: Providence at Bat

BYLINE: Jackson Lears

BODY:

Jackie Robinson: A Biography

by Arnold Rampersad

(Knopf, 512 pp., \$27.50)

No wonder Jackie Robinson is so appealing. The first black man to play major league baseball reminds Americans of the epic period in the quest for racial justice. It was a time of heroes and martyrs: Robinson and King, Rosa Parks and Medgar Evers. It was also a time of villains: Orval Faubus, Bull Connor, Lester Maddox, Byron de la Beckwith--buffoonish at best, homicidal at worst. The clarity of it all is irresistible. On the one side, universalist humanism, the vision of life embodied in *The Family of Man*, a crusade for simple justice led by noble black folks and their white, Northern, liberal allies; on the other side, a mob of rednecks, a repellent symbolic Other for a virtuous nation to define itself against as it took up the unfinished business of reconstructing a backward South. Racism was a pustulating boil in our lower regions, to be lanced through moral inspiration and pragmatic legislation. It was all so unambiguous, wasn't it?

This was an illusion, of course, as Jackie Robinson knew--a lurid journalistic fiction obscuring the myriad forms of race discrimination that flourished outside the South. By the late 1960s, it was no longer possible to deny that racism was a national phenomenon, as vicious in Chicago as in Birmingham. Racial issues would no longer seem so sharply defined. Civil rights lawyers began to devise complicated legislation designed to overturn the diffuse de facto segregation that pervaded American society. They did not always think through the impact of policies such as busing and affirmative action, especially the implications for working-class whites. Simple justice would never look so simple again.

Self-righteousness toward the South subsided; and the redneck Other was no longer such an easy target. White guilt about racism could no longer be so casually projected onto a particular section of the country or a particular social type. If it survived it was directed inward, toward the soul of white America, creating a murky notion of collective self-blame. This psychic strategy may have led to a fairer regional apportionment of moral responsibility, but it lacked any clear implications for political or even cultural debate. And so we are left with a "national conversation" about race that is a muddle of therapeutic cliches: a sign of our current confusion. Contrast this with an era when a single man could carry the message of an entire people: This is my

country, too.

Yet Robinson was more than the point man in the struggle for black equality. He was also a Brooklyn Dodger, a member of the most sentimentalized team in the most sentimentalized era in American sports. And this, too, is part of his preternatural appeal. By the late 1940s, baseball owners and publicists had succeeded in identifying their business as The National Game, the emblem of a democratic and pluralistic American Way of Life. Present-day baseball writers have continued to embrace this mythology, and also to assume that the midcentury decades marked its crowning moment. Despite all the evidence to the contrary--serfdom and low salaries for the players; small crowds; a narrow geographic range confined to the Northeast and the Midwest; the boring predictability of New York dominance--the conventional wisdom maintains that the postwar epoch was a Golden Age of Baseball. It is almost impossible to envision the period except as a grainy montage of Movietone newsreels and Frank Capra film clips. Combine this nostalgia with the common American tendency to load ethical burdens onto athletes' backs, and it is easy to see why our jeremiahs make effective use of Jackie Robinson as a benchmark for measuring our moral decline. I don't doubt that they are onto something: Dennis Rodman and Latrell Sprewell are not inspiring figures. But neither were most of Robinson's contemporaries.

The hardest and most important task for a biographer of Robinson is to set aside his ideological utility as an icon of civil rights and a paragon of baseball, and to bring forward the man himself. This Arnold Rampersad has accomplished. A bland, "authorized" quality sometimes creeps into Rampersad's descriptions of Robinson ("As always, however, he looked with hope toward the future..."), but in the end Rampersad shows that the man is more interesting than the monument. It cannot have been easy. Literary tradition holds (with some justification) that goodness rarely makes for interesting reading. And Robinson was nothing if not a good man. He pronounced civics-book maxims with utter sincerity; and he embodied them with dignity and grace under extraordinarily trying circumstances. On the baseball field, he hit for power as well as average, he covered vast stretches of the infield with astonishing agility, he ran the bases like a demon, and he offered a convincing model of unselfish team play. In the political arena, he struggled to keep the dream of racial integration alive despite an increasingly hostile political climate and the internecine rancors of the civil rights movement.

In a ballplayers' world of philandering drunks, Robinson epitomized the clean-cut morality of boys' sports books. He could have stepped out of a John R. Tunis novel. A devout Christian, he was passionately committed to his wife Rachel, a beautiful and accomplished woman who was equally devoted to him. He never drank alcohol until he was 52 years old, and then on a doctor's advice. He only rarely succumbed (judging by Rampersad's evidence) to the moral failings that the flesh is heir to. His most troublesome vice was a weakness for ice cream, pies, and cake. Despite lapses of tact or judgment, despite run-ins with umpires, sportswriters, and professional bigots, he never provoked lasting enmity. Indeed, Robinson inspired profound admiration on both sides of the color line. What's a biographer to do with such a man?

One possibility is the epic mode. Connect Robinson's story with the broad movements of African American history in the twentieth century, and the tale acquires the resonance of myth. The hero, still a baby, is carried by train westward, part of the great black migration from rural Georgia to southern

California; he encounters a wider world on the (mostly white) playgrounds of Pasadena, and in the army during World War II; he meets Branch Rickey, president and general manager of the Dodgers, himself an American original, a Missouri Methodist with a social conscience. Rickey is Virgil to Robinson's Dante. With his sage counsel, the hero embarks on his lonely quest. He endures innumerable trials. Eventually he triumphs, earns the praise and the respect of those who had once distrusted or despised him, then descends into the maelstrom of civil rights politics, from Selma and Greensboro to Watts, Newark, and Detroit. All the while his body is deteriorating from diabetes and heart disease. And when he finally departs the stage, his cortege is thronged by mourners. Exeunt omnes.

But Rampersad is scrupulous, and he prefers to complicate this picture. One of the strengths of his book is that he remains dry-eyed, avoiding any tendency to sentimentalize postwar baseball, the early civil rights movement, or even (with some exceptions) Robinson himself. Still, amid the batting averages and the fielding percentages, the testimonial dinners, the awards and the honors, the political maneuverings, there emerges a moving account of a gifted athlete's rise and fall: a man incandescent in youth, gray, lame, and nearly blind in middle age, done in at 53 by the premature decline of the body that made his career--a man whose physical disintegration might well have been related to the rage that he courageously suppressed for so long. Rampersad's calm accretion of details dissipates some of the hagiographic haze surrounding Robinson. It restores some of the complexity to an oversimplified era, and leaves Robinson a hero after all. But not an epic hero. A tragic one.

Robinson was born in 1919, the youngest of five children in a sharecropping family in rural south Georgia. His mother, Mallie McGriff Robinson, was a woman of energy and determination who for a while was able to make even peonage pay; his father, Jerry Robinson, was a ladies' man who left home for good soon after Jack was born. Without a father on the premises, the Robinsons were increasingly vulnerable to the whims of their white landlord, who thought Mallie was "about the sassiest nigger woman ever on this place." Her prospects were dimming; the Ku Klux Klan was on the rise in the neighborhood. So Mallie was ready to pay attention when her half-brother, welltailored and apparently prosperous, returned from the West Coast promoting the promised land. "If you want to get closer to heaven," he said, "visit California." Mallie was persuaded. She packed her children and her possessions in a buggy, headed for Cairo, Georgia, and took the train west. There were seven other family members with her, including her sister, her brother-in-law, and their children. Jackie Robinson, little more than a year old, was already swept up in the tide of a mass movement.

After Mallie found steady work as a maid, she and her brother-in-law bought a modest white frame house on Pepper Street, in a working-class neighborhood of Pasadena. They called the place "The Castle," partly because it seemed like a refuge from a town where old people scurried in fear from black faces and where once, Rampersad reports, "someone burned a cross on the front lawn." Pasadena's affluent white majority was determined to keep property values high and colored people in their place. Still, the Robinsons gradually won the respect of their neighbors and made a decent life for themselves.

Despite a growing maze of Jim Crow restrictions, there were plenty of places for black kids to play in northwest Pasadena, and young Jack Robinson made the most of them. He held his own in the nearly all-white public schools, where a guidance counselor listed his probable future employment as "gardener." But

his real home was on the playground. As his sister recalled, " ever since I can remember, he always had a ball in his hand." Marbles, soccer, dodge-ball, tennis, golf, football, baseball: he was determined to excel at whatever he tried. "At that time," according to a childhood friend, "Jackie wasn't a very likable person, because his whole thing was just win, win, win, and beat everybody."

Without setting out to do so, Robinson was already testing the meritocratic mythology of sports. Could "amazing drive," combined with "speed and guile and a fierce will to win," carry an athlete past the color line? Apparently so, in Southern California in the 1930s. At Pasadena Junior College and later at ucla, Robinson soared. In football, he was a brilliant broken-field runner; in basketball, he was a pioneer point guard who introduced the fastbreak to a deliberate white boys' game; in baseball, he was a bandit on the bases who sometimes stole second, third, and home in succession; in track, he was the second-best broad jumper on the PJC team, behind his brother Mack. (Rampersad claims unconvincingly that Jack felt no rivalry with Mack.) By the late 1930s, Robinson had a regional reputation as a superstar.

He also had a reputation as a mad brawler, always ready to smash in the teeth of any white man who insulted him. Rampersad struggles with some success to modulate "the myth of an anti-social, violent Jackie Robinson," but he does not try to hide Robinson's rage, or the white animosity that ignited it. Robinson's anger was a wholly understandable response to a relentless round of provocations: waitresses refusing him service; sports opponents targeting him for special fouls and abuse; bullying cops demanding deference on the street. He came to hate Pasadena. "I've always felt like an intruder, even in school," he later said. "People in Pasadena were less understanding, in some ways, than Southerners. And they were more openly hostile."

Robinson's greatest resentment may have stemmed from the realization that, despite his extraordinary talents, his career opportunities were stunted from the outset. In 1938, the Chicago White Sox, in Pasadena for spring training, played a local youth team that included Robinson, who competed with his customary ferocity. "Geez, if that kid was white I'd sign him right now," remarked the White Sox manager. Robinson was 19, a contemporary of Ted Williams and Joe DiMaggio and as talented an athlete, but with no professional possibilities in view. Meanwhile there were more pressing problems, some of them posed by the Pasadena police. When Robinson stood up to them, refusing to disappear during racially charged confrontations, he risked a night in jail. (This happened on at least two occasions.) He was acquiring a reputation as "a sort of thug" among the ucla faithful, despite their enthusiasm for his all-American accomplishments on the football field.

But Robinson was also beginning to glimpse the forces that would steady some of his rage. One was the socially-charged Methodism preached by the Reverend Karl Everette Downs, a black minister who demonstrated to Robinson that Christianity did not have to be a synonym for submission. The other was Rachel Isum, a nursing student at ucla who epitomized propriety but remained beguiling. She and Jack began a long courtship, made longer by their mutual shyness. They flirted in the school parking lot, while she sat behind the wheel of her weathered Ford V-8; they danced in the dark at the Biltmore. When they finally married, she would provide the single most enduring source of emotional support for a lonely man who "felt like an intruder" for much of his life.

But first they had to get through the war. A second lieutenant attached to a segregated tank battalion at Camp Hood, Texas, Robinson found himself court-martialed when he refused to move to the back of an Army bus after the driver ordered him to do so. He protested when the MPs were called, especially (he claimed) when one of them, a private, called him a nigger. The commandant of MPs brought ridiculously trumped-up charges of insubordination; Robinson was acquitted, but he was embittered.

After the war, Robinson's athletic career reopened quickly. He endured a brief stint with the Kansas City Monarchs in the Negro Leagues. That meant long bus rides, squalid hotels, poor umpiring and unreliable scorekeeping, gifted ballplayers pickling their talents in alcohol. Through all the frustrations, his Christianity sustained him. By this time he had developed a firm belief in providence, a conviction (as Rampersad writes) that "God was behind his life, guiding it, and intending him for some important purpose."

Toward the end of the 1945 season, Branch Rickey clarified that purpose when he summoned the mystified Robinson to Brooklyn. Rickey was a Bible-reading moralist whom some people found insufferable. His sonorous sermons were legendary; his office was known to reporters as "the Cave of Winds." Yet he was also a product of an important ethical tradition that once lay at the heart of American political culture, a tradition that now has been rendered virtually invisible: an egalitarian, tolerant strain of evangelical Christianity. This outlook pervaded the rural Northeast and Midwest. It was compatible with the Republican party when the party was still "the party of Lincoln." (Rickey kept a portrait of Lincoln in his office.) Liberal evangelicalism was individualist and anti-Communist; it embodied the Main Street values of the petit bourgeoisie. But it also fostered a universalist vision of equal opportunity.

Present-day intellectuals are willing to grant some dignity to black evangelicalism, but they are less magnanimous when it comes to white evangelicalism. Branch Rickey should remind us that certain home-grown versions of Protestant Christianity, however alien they may be to skeptical modern sensibilities, possess a profound moral power as well. The belief that one is part of a providential order paradoxically gives strength to individual will and choice. It was liberal evangelicalism, certainly, that formed the deepest part of the complex bond between Robinson and Rickey.

The scene in Rickey's office has entered baseball mythology. "I'm looking for a ballplayer with guts enough not to fight back," Rickey told Robinson. Rickey was not nicknamed "the Mahatma" for nothing; he evoked the blend of Gandhian non-violence and Christian nonresistance that, within a decade, would energize King's leadership. He quoted Jesus: "Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Rickey may have been an old windbag, but he was hitting Robinson in the heart, invoking the Methodist Christianity that they shared. Both men believed that Robinson was part of a divine plan. And a mission foreordained in heaven can inspire exceptional efforts. There is no room in such a worldview for chance: only for faith and will. "Luck is the residue of design," Rickey liked to say. People who think that they are instruments of God's purpose can be dangerous monomaniacs, but not always. Sometimes their conviction sustains their capacity to resist injustice. And so it was with Robinson. His faith in a providential order combined with a sense of personal responsibility soon became a characteristic feature of the early civil rights movement.

Rickey's plan called for Robinson to play for a year with the Montreal Royals of the International League, and then to move up to the Dodgers if the experiment seemed to be succeeding. It did, from day one. Robinson performed brilliantly, leading the Royals to the League championship and silently tolerating torrents of abuse. Montreal fans and black fans everywhere loved him; white fans in rival cities reviled him as a "nigger son of a bitch." Hostility concentrated his energies. When a player in the Syracuse dugout threw a black cat onto the field as Robinson waited to bat, taunting "Hey Jackie, there's your cousin," Robinson doubled and scored.

One can only imagine the tension that Robinson felt in towns where race-baiting was a way of life, such as Baltimore, when 10,000 black fans and 15,000 white fans jammed into a rickety old ballpark to watch Robinson play. Despite his focus on the field, Robinson could not eat or sleep. Rachel was pregnant, experiencing inexplicable fevers but keeping her worries to herself "because," she said, "I had begun to think that I was married to a man with a destiny, someone who had been chosen for a great task, and I couldn't let him down." Even the comparatively skeptical Rachel had begun to accept the notion of Jack's providential mission.

Robinson rode the momentum of his Montreal season into his first year with the Dodgers, surviving an abortive rebellion by some of his teammates, enduring more sneers and insults (and beanballs from opposing pitchers), gradually winning respect from players and adulation from fans, including white ones. Still, even friendly gestures could cause excruciating strain. During one of the regular bridge games on the train, Rampersad reports, his teammate Hugh Casey casually told Robinson "his secret for changing his luck at cards down home in Georgia: I used to go out and find me the biggest, blackest nigger woman I could find and rub her teats to change my luck." Then he rubbed Robinson's hair. Casey was a veteran who had taken an avuncular interest in Robinson; he meant to show that Robinson belonged. But Robinson's silence bespoke his pain and fury. It was about this time that the sportswriter Jimmy Cannon described Robinson as "the loneliest man I have ever seen in sports."

Success on the field brought improvements in everyday life. Robinson's rookie season was a triumph. He and Rachel made some white friends, Jewish neighbors in Flatbush. (This was the ancient era when common experiences of exclusion and common commitments to tolerance brought blacks and Jews together.) More black players began to join the Dodgers, led by the catcher Roy Campanella and the pitcher Don Newcombe. Robinson's life settled into a predictable rhythm: summer on the baseball field; barnstorming tours in the fall for extra cash; winter on the rubber-chicken circuit--an endless round of speaking engagements, awards, and dinners.

In many ways, Robinson remained a prickly loner. After his rookie season, he was freer to let his anger fly. The longer he played, the more likely he was to rage openly at umpires or at opposing players, particularly if he had reason to suspect them of racial slurs. He tossed bats, kicked gloves, and on one occasion he threw a ball at Milwaukee pitcher Lew Burdette, missing his head by inches. "I wanted to hit him right between the eyes," Robinson said. His anger contrasted with the calm of Campanella, who played Sancho Panza to Robinson's Quixote. Campanella was the trickster, Robinson the questing idealist, annoyed by Campanella's apparently easy acceptance of Jim Crow conditions.

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Most of the time, though, Robinson's religious commitments kept his anger in check. Every night, on his knees, he prayed--for strength, for self-control, who knows? His sincerity and his decency sanitized his language. "I was sorry to see Eddie go.... He was a great guy and a swell ballplayer," Robinson said when the Dodgers traded second baseman Eddie Stanky, even though the move allowed Robinson to play a position he coveted. After the Dodgers had a mediocre year in 1948, Robinson said, "I made myself a solemn vow to redeem myself and the Dodgers in 1949." The Dodgers made it to the Series that year, but, as Robinson acknowledged to reporters, the Yankees "kicked heck out of us."

During these years, he began addressing banquet audiences about "my pet peeve, juvenile delinquency." This was before many Americans had adopted irony as a way of life. In-your-face attitudes were not yet *de rigeur* for aspiring free spirits. And lots of thoughtful people spoke as earnestly as Robinson. More than most, he meant what he said. Jackie Robinson really was a character from a boys' book--or at least he behaved like one much of the time.

"I couldn't believe that the man could be so naive. He trusted everybody!" said Martin Stone, an attorney who became Robinson's financial adviser. In 1950, when Robinson starred in a movie called *The Jackie Robinson Story*, he was the opposite of a prima donna on the set; his only demand was that the cast include his ucla friend Kenny Washington. When the filming was over he thanked everyone involved, including an assistant electrician atop a catwalk. Among all the Dodgers, only Robinson consoled the heartbroken pitcher Ralph Branca after he gave up the home run that lost the 1951 pennant playoff to the New York Giants. Robinson befriended eight-year-old boys, visited sick children in hospitals, worked with the ymca and promoted dozens of charitable causes. He was generous, kind, and courteous--a working-class hero.

When working-class heroes succeed in America, they move to the suburbs. By February 1955, the Robinsons and their three children were installed in a house in Stamford, Connecticut. The Robinsons had a big mortgage on a big house, still under construction and already well over budget; they attended the white Congregational Church because Rachel "didn't like being preached at" in the local black church; and their neighbors were almost all white. And Jack took up golf, which became his "grand passion." If the Robinsons in Connecticut could be viewed as harbingers of black embourgeoisement, there were changes in the borough of Brooklyn that also revealed the shape of things to come, including the departure of the Dodgers. By 1956, Rampersad writes, "the repopulation of the borough by new immigrant communities was changing the peculiar culture that had long nourished the team." Walter O'Malley had already formulated his diabolical plan to bring the beloved bums to Los Angeles.

Robinson, meanwhile, was ready to pack up his gear. He was keen to go beyond sports and enter the wider world of business and politics. Achievements in those other realms would not be as clear-cut as batting .300 or winning the Most Valuable Player award; but he hoped that they might be even more significant. He wanted to succeed in business, to discredit racial stereotypes about shiftless blacks and to pay down his mounting debt. William H. Black, a self-made man who owned the Chock Full o' Nuts coffee company, offered Robinson a job as vice-president in charge of personnel relations. Black was a humane welfare capitalist, but he didn't much care for unions. Among other things, he wanted Robinson to be a buffer between union organizers and his (largely black) workforce. What Robinson thought about these plans is unclear; what is clear is that unions did not fit neatly into his liberal-evangelical worldview. He

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believed in the possibilities of entrepreneurial individualism. He took the job.

Robinson also wanted to play a more than ceremonial role in the civil rights movement. It was the hour of integration's apogee. Robinson's rebuke to a New Orleans sportswriter could stand as a summary of the principles of the struggle: "We ask for nothing special. We ask only to be permitted to live as you live, and as our nation's Constitution provides." One could hardly pose simpler or more justifiable demands.

Within a short time after Robinson's retirement from baseball in 1956, however, the clarity of the ballfield and the early civil rights movement yielded to frustrating confusion in business and politics. By the time he died in 1972, his fate resembled that of most professional athletes; he seemed superseded by cultural fashion and ravaged by the passage of time. True to his individualist outlook, he wanted entrepreneurial success as well as salaried security; but nearly all his business ventures, from clothing stores to construction and real estate companies, ended in a muddle. His efforts were undone by the poor management practices of men whom he had naively trusted, by the racist lending policies of banks, and by the absence of investors and spending power in the neighborhoods that he aimed to revitalize.

It was hard to create black capitalism without black capital. A work ethic alone was not enough. And politics proved equally problematic. The Republican Party attracted him; like other liberal evangelicals, he kindled to its reputation for moral probity, its freedom from Southern bigots and urban machines, as well as its enthusiasm for business and its toughness on communism. He was "completely dazzled" when he met Richard Nixon, and he remained sufficiently impressed by him to work for his presidential campaign in 1960. This was partly out of distaste for John Kennedy, who had tried to block the civil rights bill in 1957 and invited Orval Faubus to sit with him on the platform at the Democratic convention. Kennedy, in Robinson's view, was "first and foremost a cold, calculating political machine." Robert Kennedy retaliated by denouncing Robinson as an anti-labor stooge at Chock Full o' Nuts.

But in October 1960, when Martin Luther King was sentenced to four months at hard labor after a Georgia sit-in, the contrast between Republican piety and Democratic corruption became less clear. Robinson pleaded with Nixon to show some support for King; Nixon mumbled about "grandstanding," temporized, and finally refused. Meanwhile Kennedy made a much-publicized telephone call to Coretta Scott King--a canny move, but a risk for any candidate dependent on white Southern votes. (And an indication, perhaps, that Robert Kennedy's commitment to the civil rights movement was beginning to influence his brother.) Robinson was troubled. He prepared to abandon the campaign, but relented under pressure from Rickey, who remained loyal to his memories of the party of Lincoln. After Nixon's defeat, the candidate sent Robinson an engraved plaque in appreciation. Robinson sent Nixon 24 pounds of Chock Full o' Nuts coffee.

As the 1960s progressed, old political boundaries blurred and the civil rights synthesis disintegrated. As early as 1962, conflict between black and Jewish businessmen was surfacing in Harlem. When Sol Singer opened a steakhouse on 125th Street, local people protested what they saw as a threat to undersell an established black-owned restaurant; and Lewis Michaux, a bookseller and black nationalist, organized a protest at which picketers chanted "Jew go away--black man stay!" Robinson criticized the anti-Semitism in the Amsterdam News. "Anti-semitism is as rotten as anti-Negroism," he wrote. "It is a shame that,

so far, none of the Negroes of Harlem have yet had the guts to say so in tones which could be heard throughout the city." This provoked the ire of insurgent separatists, who dismissed Robinson as a "so-called Negro."

The controversy was a straw in the wind. Robinson's universalist, evangelical morality led him to criticize Adam Clayton Powell as well as Bull Connor. As the civil rights movement split between moderates and militants, Robinson was left, characteristically, somewhere in the middle. In a polarizing political culture, his attempt to follow a moderate course of personal probity and political independence left him increasingly vulnerable to caricature as a Hamlet--or an Uncle Tom. The absurdity of this must have rankled beyond words.

Robinson believed that separatist sentiments were far less prevalent in the black community than white journalists suggested. The fascination with the Nation of Islam baffled him. "Where do the Muslims get their money? Who finances them?" he asked in 1963, suspecting that black separatism was the best thing that had ever happened to white segregationists. And white segregationists were also achieving a new respectability in national politics. Robinson thought that George Wallace was "a madman" and Barry Goldwater "a bigot," but he didn't much like Malcolm X either. "Malcolm has big audiences, but no constructive program," he told The New York Herald Tribune in 1964. "He is terribly militant on soapboxes, on streetcorners of Negro ghettos. Yet, he has not faced Southern police dogs in Birmingham ... nor gone to jail for freedom."

By early 1964, sensing "a new bitterness among blacks," Robinson mourned that "every dire development which I had envisioned ... is coming to pass." When Malcolm was killed, Rampersad argues, Robinson's notion of black manhood was superseded by another. The ideal of a patient stoicism, and the universalist dream of integration and racial justice, were being abandoned. "Instead," Rampersad writes, "power was the great goal; and justice seemed to demand an element of retribution, or revenge." Through the late 1960s, Robinson persisted in trying to sustain his universalist vision; his attachment to the doomed candidacy of Nelson Rockefeller, the last liberal Republican on the national stage, epitomized the character of his quest.

If public affairs brought frustration, private life brought sadness and pain--and the sharpest challenge yet to Robinson's faith in a providentially ordered universe. Much of his suffering stemmed from his tormented relationship with his son Jackie Jr. The boy had to struggle all his life with the burden of being Jackie Robinson's firstborn, and never measuring up to his father's expectation or example. As he drifted into high school, his parents became convinced that he needed counseling and a special boarding school. "Sharon and David get as much mileage out of their ability as they can," Jack wrote a friend about his other children, "but Jackie is a little on the lazy side." For years, Jackie Jr. was in and out of special schools; once he ran away from home. He disappointed his parents (especially his father) with his apparent aimlessness. By 1965 father and son were barely speaking. Jackie Jr. joined the army and was sent to Vietnam, where he won a Purple Heart. Returning home, he still could not escape the shadow of his father: a letter from Rockefeller congratulated him for "adding a lustre of your own to the famous name you bear."

Like many another veteran, Jackie Jr. carried unseen scars. He fled to Colorado, came back, couldn't seem to hold down a job, remained a shadowy presence in the Robinsons' bright suburban home. When he walked down the street, he stayed "close to cover," never straying too far from the feeling of

security that the buildings provided. And he took to drugs. In March 1968, he was arrested by the police in Stamford for possession of marijuana and heroin. For two years he fought drug addiction, undergoing a rigorous rehabilitation at the Daytop Center in Seymour, Connecticut. By the spring of 1971 he had beaten the habit, had even become an assistant regional director at Daytop and an eloquent lecturer on drug abuse. Then, at 2:00 A.M. on June 17, he was killed in an automobile accident on the Merritt Parkway. His mother withdrew into grief. His father cleaved to his faith--at what inner cost is anyone's guess.

The most grueling test came from within Robinson's own body. Almost as soon as he quit baseball, he discovered that he had diabetes. He could no longer eat a pint of ice cream at one sitting, or "the pies and cake." This was the beginning of a series of ailments that left him in nearly constant pain by middle age. By the time he was in his 40s, he was frequently using a cane. When he was 51, he had no pulse in his legs, and he was dying of advanced heart disease. June 4, 1972 was old-timers' day at Chavez Ravine, Los Angeles. Robinson "walked like a man of 80," according to a sportswriter on the scene. Someone tossed him a ball; it hit him in the head and knocked his Dodger cap off. He was nearly blind from diabetes. Five months later he was dead.

Yet it is impossible to end the story there. A re-examination Robinson's life provokes reexamination of his worldview. It reminds us of an ethical idiom that has slipped away--or worse, become platitudinous. I am referring to the old belief in patient labor and stoical determination, in decency and fair play. These words have lost their luster; they have been abused in apologetics for power. The capacious word "Christian," which Robinson claimed unreservedly, has meanwhile been captured by fundamentalist ideologues, or reduced to a mere pejorative by dogmatic liberals. Since the Reaganite takeover of the Republican party, the liberal evangelical tradition has virtually disappeared from public discourse. But Robinson epitomized its enduring worth.

During the past year, the fiftieth anniversary of Robinson's crossing the color line, various public rituals commemorated his achievement. Most transformed him into an Olympian presence, floating above the contentious realm of social debate. This canonization distorts his larger significance. Robinson's values had specific political and cultural meanings, and they cut to the heart of our own controversies. He was a meritocrat and an integrationist. He exemplified the tradition of Martin Luther King, not the tradition of Malcolm X. It is idle to speculate what positions Robinson might have taken on particular issues of public policy, but one thing is certain: he rejected racial separatism in any form. If Spike Lee is thinking of a remake of *The Jackie Robinson Story*, he might think again.

What remains most striking about Robinson is the bracing atmosphere of moral clarity surrounding the man, the amazing consistency between his deeds and his words. His worldview issued in a plain-spoken morality that contrasts all too sharply with the public idioms of recent American history--the psychobabble, the lies, and the terminal cynicism of the post-Watergate era, now joined by the cyberspeak, the globaloney, and the free-market mumbo-jumbo of our fin-de-siecle. At such a moment, when poses and provocations are mistaken for moral courage, it is worth remembering a man who not only hit an outside curveball to the opposite field, but also did his damndest to be brave, clean, and reverent.

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FIFTY YEARS AGO, OVER FOURTEEN GAMES IN MAY, JACKIE ROBINSON ERASED ANY DOUBT
THAT HE BELONGED IN THE MAJORS, CLEARING THE PATH FOR OTHER BLACK PLAYERS

BYLINE: WILLIAM NACK

BODY:

In the middle of the cool, drizzly afternoon of Sunday, May 25, 1947, as the Brooklyn Dodgers led the Philadelphia Phillies 4-3 in the eighth inning, Jackie Robinson ground his spikes into the rain-softened dirt of the batter's box at Ebbets Field, turned to face Phillies reliever Tommy Hughes and waited for Hughes's 3-and-1 crippler.

Forty days had passed since Robinson donned a Dodgers uniform and became the first black man in this century to play in the majors, going 0 for 3 in his debut at Ebbets on April 15. In recent games the 28-year-old rookie had begun to evince signs of settling down and playing the crisp, commanding brand of ball that Branch Rickey, the Dodgers' president, had predicted of him. "You haven't seen the real Robinson yet," Rickey had been telling writers all spring. "Just wait."

Through his first 30 big league games, played in six National League cities, the rookie had alternately struggled and soared, at times performing brilliantly at first base (a position new to him that year) but often pressing at the plate. Of course, Robinson had also been the target of racial epithets and flying cleats, of hate letters and death threats, of pitchers throwing at his head and legs, and catchers spitting on his shoes. In the midst of all this bristling animus, there was a circuslike quality to Dodgers games, with Robinson on display like a freak; with large crowds, including many blacks, lustily cheering even his dinkiest pop-ups; and with the daily papers singling him out as the "black meteor," the "sepia speedster," the "stellar Negro," the "muscular Negro," the "lithe Negro" and "dusky Robbie."

"More eyes were on Jackie than on any rookie who ever played," recalls Rex Barney, a Brooklyn reliever that year. It was a wonder, as he endured the mounting pressure of his first weeks in the bigs, that Robinson could perform at all. Yet perform he did, putting together a 14-game hitting streak in the first 2 1/2 weeks of May. By May 25, with the first extended road trip behind him and the novelty of his presence on the wane, Robinson was sensing what he later called a "new confidence" in his game. As he took the field that day against the Phillies--who, led by their Southern-born manager, Ben Chapman, had lacerated him with taunts of "nigger" and "black boy" from the dugout during their first series in April--Robinson had begun to feel, as he would put it, "some of the old power returning."

Sports Illustrated, May 5, 1997

In the fourth inning, with the Dodgers down 2-0 and their shortstop, Pee Wee Reese, on first, Robinson lashed a single to right center off Phillies starter Dick Mauney. Moments later Reese and Robinson raced home when Dodgers centerfielder Pistol Pete Reiser crashed a double off the left-centerfield wall. Two innings after that, with Reese again on first and Hughes now pitching, Robinson reached for a fastball and lined a single to left. Reese later scored when Hughes balked him home from third.

Having been at the center of the rallies that gave Brooklyn that tenuous one-run lead in the eighth, Robinson now dug in against Hughes and worked the count to 3 and 1. Hughes delivered a fastball high in the strike zone, fat as a melon, and Robinson turned all his 195 pounds into it, striking the ball harder than he had struck one all spring. Dick Young, the Dodgers' beat reporter for the New York Daily News, mixed jazz with golf in search of a simile to describe the blast, rhapsodizing that the ball left home plate "like something out of Louis Armstrong's trumpet. It started on a low line, took off suddenly like a golf drive and zoomed far back into the lower leftfield deck."

The Dodgers won 5-3, and contemporary accounts viewed the game as Robinson's breakthrough in that young season, fulfilling Rickey's prophesy that when the real Robinson at last arrived, he would be worth all the waiting. No one on that afternoon in May appeared more relieved than Burt Shotton, the Dodgers' manager. "He has finally become relaxed and is playing the kind of ball that earned him his major league chance," Shotton said. "Until today we just couldn't get him to take a normal cut at the cripples they were getting him out on. Time after time we gave him signals to hit the 3-and-1 pitch, but very often he didn't even swing. Guess he had too much on his mind."

Despite all he had on his mind, despite all he had endured during the early days of that long season, it had grown clear by mid-May that Robinson, even a struggling Robinson, was in the Brooklyn lineup to stay. "The guy just had too much talent," says Reese, "and too much guts." Indeed, Robinson had won over teammates and opponents alike during his 14-game hitting streak, which was all the more impressive because it was a direct response to a horrible slump that would have finished lesser men in his situation.

As Robinson nursed an old college football injury to his right shoulder, he went 0 for 20 between April 23 and April 30, which dropped his average from .444 to .225 and prompted talk that he ought to be benched. "He should be given a rest in view of his ailing right arm and slump-pressing at the plate," Young wrote in the May 1 Daily News, "but the Dodger powers appear reluctant to bench him for attendance and possible public relations reasons." Young was not sympathetic to Robinson in those days, and he wasn't the only doubter among baseball writers.

"Right now Jackie Robinson doesn't shape up as a first baseman," wrote Pat Lynch of the New York Journal American. "His weak hitting is something the shrewd assayers of baseball talent have been on to all along."

The more sympathetic writers offered an alternative solution to Robinson's problems at the plate: bunt. In The New York Sun of May 1, under the headline ROBINSON'S JOB IN JEOPARDY, Herbert Goren urged the rookie to start laying the ball down: "In Robinson's case, a deep sense of pride is getting the call over common sense. Jack wants to prove in the big leagues that he is not a leg hitter. Yet he is one of the best bunters in baseball. His former manager,

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Clay Hopper of Montreal [where Robinson played minor league ball the year before], said he believed Robinson could bunt .260 even if he tried nothing else."

In fact, as Robinson would soon admit, Rickey had been pushing him to bunt the ball as a way of restoring his confidence at the plate, but Robinson did not want to give his many detractors further cause for disparaging his play and spreading doubt about him as a major leaguer. "Mr. Rickey wants me to lay it down more," Robinson told Harold Burr of the Brooklyn Eagle, "but I don't want to bunt my way through the National League. That's what they said about me at Montreal last year, and I want to live that reputation down."

The chief cause for hope that Robinson would break out of his slump was that he was hitting the ball hard--though mostly at someone. On April 30, after the 3-1 loss to the Cubs at Ebbets Field, Shotton said he had thought about benching Robinson but then decided to let him work out of his difficulties at the plate. "There's no reason to get all excited," Shotton said, "no reason to panic."

On May 1 the New York Post's Arch Murray, perhaps Robinson's most ardent supporter in the local press corps, reported seeing signs in the loss to the Cubs that the rookie was emerging from his slump: "He hit two balls as if they'd been shot out of a gun--one that smacked into [pitcher] Doyle Lade's upflung glove and another smash that Peanuts Lowrey dug out of the dirt at third. [Robinson] refuses to get down because he's not hitting. 'But,' he admitted ruefully last night, 'I'd sure like to get some base hits.'"

Those late April days in '47 would remain the most trying in Robinson's professional life, and the deepening pain was evident on the man's face. "You'd look at him and you knew he was pressing and pushing," Barney, the former reliever, recalls. "He had all that other stuff on his mind. He worked hard to break out of that slump. If we had a night game at eight o'clock, Jackie would be at the ballpark at 10 the next morning to take batting practice. If a pitcher got him out on a slow curve, he would have [Dodgers coach Clyde] Sukeforth throw him slow curves until Jackie's hands blistered. I saw this. He just worked so hard! He could not let himself down. He could not let his race down. He couldn't let anybody down."

No sooner had the alarms been set off by suggestions that the rookie be benched than Robinson was standing in the batter's box at Ebbets Field in the first inning on May 1, facing Bob Chipman of the Cubs. With one slash of the bat, on a pitch hard and in, Robinson made his way into the next day's headline in the New York Herald Tribune: ROBINSON SNAPS HIS BATTING SLUMP WITH TWO-BAGGER. The collar was off, at last.

Because of rain the Dodgers did not play their next game until May 6 at Ebbets Field. Brooklyn beat the St. Louis Cardinals 7-6 as Robinson stroked two singles, one of which contributed to a three-run rally in the sixth. On May 7, in a 2-1 loss to the Cards, Robinson singled in the third inning and in the ninth was robbed of at least a double. According to Gus Steiger of the New York Daily Mirror, St. Louis centerfielder Terry Moore raced toward left "to make a brilliant catch of Jackie Robinson's searing liner."

But Shotton was despairing over Robinson's failure to attack hitter's pitches, and never more so than in the seventh inning of that game. With the bases loaded, one out and the Cards leading 2-0, Robinson worked the count

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from Howie Pollet to 3 and 1. Then he froze and watched the next pitch whistle by.

"Jackie looked at the only fat pitch Pollet threw all afternoon," lamented Shotton after the game. "A fastball. He let that go and he went after the change..." and bounced into a double play. The Dodgers hit into four double plays that afternoon, but, Shotton muttered, "Robinson's was the killer."

On May 8, in a 5-1 loss to the Cards, Robinson extended his hitting streak to four games, but other screws were tightening on him. The next morning the sports editor of the Herald Tribune, Stanley Woodward, broke a story that the president of the National League, Ford Frick, had headed off a players' strike aimed at forcing Robinson out of the game. The story said the revolt had been instigated by "certain St. Louis players," though none were identified by name, and had been quashed when Frick warned that he would suspend every player involved.

"I do not care if half the league strikes," Woodward paraphrased Frick as saying. "Those who do it will encounter quick retribution. All will be suspended and I don't care if it wrecks the National League for five years. This is the United States of America, and one citizen has as much right to play as another. The [league] will go down the line with Robinson whatever the consequences. You will find if you go through with this...that you have been guilty of complete madness."

Cardinals manager Eddie Dyer denied that there was a strike brewing, although reports of one appeared in newspapers nationwide, and if the controversy had any ill effect on Robinson, it was not apparent in his play. On May 9 in Philadelphia, in his first game outside New York City, the rookie, "playing under mounting pressure, experienced the best day of his young major league career," Bill Roeder of the New York World-Telegram wrote. The Dodgers lost 6-5, but Robinson kept his team in the game until the end. He not only singled and doubled and scored two runs, running his hitting streak to five games, but also, as Michael Gaven of the Journal American reported, he "made two amazing saves on low throws and executed the best play of his short career [at first]." In the ninth inning, with the Phillies' Lee Handley on first, Robinson raced in to catch Emil Verban's popped bunt, whirled toward first and threw a strike to double Handley.

The "mounting pressure" cited by Roeder included the news, revealed to the press on May 9, that police were investigating letters that had threatened Robinson's life. "He turned them over to me," announced Rickey. "Two of the notes were so vicious that I felt they should be investigated."

The pressure also involved Robinson's lodging when the Dodgers arrived in Philly. The players usually stayed at the Benjamin Franklin Hotel, but when they arrived there the hotel manager turned them away, telling the team's traveling secretary, Harold Parrott, "Don't bring your team back here while you have any Nigras with you!" The Dodgers ended up staying at the Warwick. Parrott later wrote that Robinson looked pained over the incident, "knowing we were pariahs because of him."

In the midst of such turmoil, Robinson soldiered on. "I'm just going along playing the best ball I know and doing my best to make good," he told Murray. "Boy, it's rugged."

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Earlier that spring Robinson had struggled to make the switch from second base to first, the only position the Dodgers had open at the time. "They just handed him a first baseman's glove," says Barney. "And he had never played first base! He took it, and he never said a word, never complained."

Not surprisingly, at the beginning of the season Robinson had looked tentative at first base. On ground balls between first and second, he was unsure of what to do--cover first and let the second baseman field the ball, or field the ball and let the pitcher cover the bag. "A lot of times," recalls Clyde King, then a Brooklyn pitcher, "Jackie would break for the ball when the second baseman was there to grab it. And then he'd have to make the difficult throw to the pitcher. But Jackie learned quickly."

The night of May 9 Rickey gave Robinson what some saw as a vote of confidence by selling the Dodgers' backup first baseman, Howie Schultz, to the Phillies for \$ 50,000. The next day Rickey announced that he would also give up the aggressive campaign he had been waging to acquire the New York Giants' power-hitting first baseman, Johnny Mize. "We'll be all right," Rickey said. "I don't have the slightest doubt of Robinson's ability. He is finding his way around first base and hitting with more confidence."

On May 10, in a 4-2 win over the Phillies at Shibe Park, Robinson hit in his sixth consecutive game, cracking a waist-high pitch for a single to left in the eighth inning. By then the purported strike had turned Robinson into an even more sympathetic figure and had moved the New York Post's Jimmy Cannon to ask that Robinson "be judged by the scorer's ledger and not by the prejudices of indecent men." Cannon also wrote, for the ages, "It is my belief that Robinson is a big leaguer of ordinary ability."

And yet, however wildly he misjudged the rookie's talent, Cannon was the only writer in New York to glimpse the poignance of Robinson's life as a Dodger: "In the clubhouse Robinson is a stranger. The Dodgers are polite and courteous with him, but it is obvious he is isolated by those with whom he plays. I have never heard remarks made against him or detected any rudeness where he was concerned. But the silence is loud and Robinson never is part of the jovial and aimless banter of the locker room. He is the loneliest man I have ever seen in sports."

On May 11 the Dodgers dropped both ends of a Sunday doubleheader at Shibe, but Robinson's single in the opener ran his hitting streak to seven games, and another single in the second game gave him eight in a row. By then the Phillies' dugout was no longer riding Robinson with racially abusive language--Frick and baseball commissioner Happy Chandler had warned sternly against it, telling the players to keep their jibes "above the belt"--and Dodgers second baseman Eddie Stanky, unable to resist, was needling the Phillies for the tameness of their taunts.

"That's right," Stanky yelled from the dugout. "Talk to him nice, you guys!"

Robinson tried to ignore the black cat that a spectator turned loose on the field before the first game, and at Rickey's urging he had reluctantly posed for the cameras with his chief tormentor, Chapman. The Philly manager had come under widespread criticism for the vulgar, biting slurs with which he and his men had attacked Robinson in April, and his job was in jeopardy.

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For Chapman's pitchers, however, Robinson remained a target. Ken Raffensberger, a Philly starter at the time, remembers a pitchers' meeting that Chapman called early in the '47 season. "He told us that if we got two strikes on [Robinson] early [in the count] and didn't throw at him or knock him down, it's a \$ 50 fine. That was just for Robinson. I told Chapman, 'I've never thrown at anybody in my life, and I'm not starting now.' I avoided the fine by not throwing strikes to him on my first pitches."

Robinson was a source of controversy everywhere. Chapman got the thumb in the second game of the May 11 doubleheader over an incident involving the rookie. Robinson, attempting to bunt, got hit in the stomach with the ball, and umpire George Barr waved him to first. Chapman came hurtling out of the dugout in protest, arguing that Robinson had left the box and had been hit as he crossed the plate. "Barr refused to concur," wrote Young in the Daily News, "and many fans shouted accusations from the stands to the effect that the ump might be a little short on the courage necessary to make such a decision."

Robinson was at the center of a maelstrom in the national pastime, performing under burdens never carried by another ballplayer, but he had promised Rickey that he would not fight back for at least two years. He endured the most humiliating treatment with a poised and gentlemanly grace. Throughout the season he wrote a column for The Pittsburgh Courier, a black weekly, and while he was seething within, those columns read like the letters that soldiers at the front send home to their anxious mothers, avoiding any hint of the conflict in their midst.

"I've been a pretty busy fellow the past week," began one column in mid-May. "Between trying to play big league baseball and answering all kinds of questions about alleged strikes and threatening letters, I haven't had much time to do anything else. However, as things are going now, I guess I haven't anything to worry about." Oh, yes, there was that heckling he took from Chapman and his boys at Ebbets Field, but he and Chapman had smiled together for the cameras. "Chapman impressed me as a nice fellow," Robinson wrote, "and I don't think he really meant the things he was shouting at me the first time we played Philadelphia." And, gee, those threatening letters? "I admit that I've received some, but by the way they were written I would say they're from scatterbrained people who just want something to yelp about."

Back home on May 12, in an 8-3 win over the Boston Braves, Robinson was all over the box score, and writers began to note the number of games in which he had hit safely. Wrote Goren, "He singled in the second to run his hitting streak to nine games. He was hit by a pitched ball, walked and sacrificed. He stole two bases. It was the first real exhibition of his speed. Robinson now has scored 20 runs. He leads the league."

Robinson would steal 29 bases in 1947, tops in the National League, but he was hesitant on the base paths at first, taking short leads off the bag, and he did not really start galloping until mid-May. But even before that, his skill and quickness made him a disruptive force when he got on base. Against the Braves on May 12, according to Roscoe McGowen of The New York Times, "Robinson's skill on the bases helped set up the first two runs of the game. Jackie came so far off third on [Dixie] Walker's grounder to [first baseman Earl] Torgeson that he drew the throw, with the result that everybody was safe."

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"In all my 53 years in baseball, Jackie was the best base runner I've ever seen," says King, the Dodgers pitcher who went on to manage in the big leagues and is now a New York Yankees scout. "I'm not talking about base stealing or speed on the bases but instinct. It was there that first spring training. I'll never forget how he would be on first base, and there would be a base hit to leftfield, and he'd take a big turn around second, and the leftfielder would throw behind him into second. He'd keep going and trot into third. It took time around the league before the leftfielders realized that Jackie was suckering them. We'd sit on the bench and just laugh."

On May 13, in Brooklyn's 7-5 loss to the Reds in Cincinnati, Robinson smashed a single in the ninth, scoring fellow rookie Duke Snider, and ran his hitting streak to 10 games. Before the game Shotton had told the Post's Murray that Robinson "has more heart under heavy pressure than any ballplayer I ever saw." Robinson had been drawing large and enthusiastic crowds to Dodgers road games. He helped bring a record 41,660 fans to the Sunday doubleheader in Philly, many of them literally hanging from the rafters at Shibe, and 27,164 to Cincinnati's Crosley Field on the night of May 13. Of the Crosley fans, according to press reports, as many as 9,000 were black. Scores of spectators that day had come from cities as far south as Birmingham and Atlanta, many arriving by train at Cincinnati's Union Terminal, others pulling into town in buses and cars bearing Tennessee and Kentucky plates. "Many in the crowd...were Brooklyn fans," wrote Roeder, "or, to be specific, Jackie Robinson fans."

The Dodgers had become a traveling road show, and in May, as attendance soared wherever Robinson played, the Pittsburgh Courier's sports editor, Wendell Smith, penned this ditty:

Jackie's nimble, Jackie's quick, Jackie's making The turnstiles click

There were black faces all around Crosley Field that first night of the Dodgers-Reds series. Robinson had often expressed the fear that blacks in the crowds at his games, as energetic as they were, might one day do something that would embarrass him. Brooklyn pitcher Ralph Branca recalls that on that first trip to Cincinnati, he sat in the dugout and saw black hands and arms reach out to Robinson as he returned to the Dodgers' bench. "He had popped up, and all the blacks were screaming and shrieking, and he got upset with them," Branca says. "He said, 'Be quiet! Behave yourselves. I only popped up!'"

But Robinson also suffered racial insults in Cincinnati, and they took all forms, even musical. At the end of that May 13 game, as the crowds clambered for the exits and the players walked down the leftfield line toward the tunnel leading to their clubhouses, the Crosley organist started playing Bye Bye, Blackbird. Gabe Paul, then the Reds' traveling secretary, says he nearly keeled over when he heard the music. "I was shocked," he says. "Somebody must have put [the organist] up to it."

According to John Murdough, then the Reds' ticket manager, Paul flew into a rage, yelling, "Get rid of that guy! Get him out of here. This is a disgrace. We'll never live it down!"

At least in Cincinnati, unlike in Philly, there was no trouble over Robinson at the Dodgers' hotel. Young praised the establishment in the New York Daily News: "Magnolias to the Netherland-Plaza, which accepted Robinson's registration here with the rest of the Brooks, right on the South's borderline, too."

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On May 14, in a 2-0 loss to the Reds at Crosley, the Dodgers mostly waved at Ewell Blackwell's pitching, but Robinson extended his hitting streak to 11 games by beating out a roller to second, then ripping a solid single to center. While his team had lost seven of its eight games on the road, Robinson was hitting at a .406 clip away from Ebbets Field, and Murray gloated, "He is stilling the reactionary tongues in the rival press boxes. Anti-Robinson feeling was particularly noticeable in the press coop at Cincinnati."

Among the converted local skeptics was Lou Smith, who covered the Reds for the Cincinnati Enquirer and who wrote on the eve of the May 13 game that Robinson was no lock to stay at first base. "Robinson...is no Dolph Camilli in the field," Smith wrote, referring to an earlier Dodgers first baseman. Had Robinson not been the first Negro in the major leagues and the focus of so much attention, Smith wrote, "he would have been benched a week or two ago." The next day, in quick reverse, Smith was telling readers that he had learned that Robinson "is a cinch to stick with the Dodgers" and "has already mastered all the fine points of playing the bag. Jackie is not an overpowering hitter, but he hits the ball hard. His line drive to Eddie Lukon in the fifth was one of the hardest hit balls in the game." After Blackwell tossed his shutout, Smith noted that "Robinson was the only Dodger to get more than one safety off Blackie's blazing fastball and exploding curve."

The winds were shifting for Robinson on the road. On May 15 in Pittsburgh, during a 7-3 loss to the Pirates, he went 2 for 5 to stretch his streak to 12. In the third inning, after Robinson laid down a bunt, the Pirates' Hank Greenberg, stabbing at the pitcher's rushed and wild throw to first, accidentally crashed into Robinson as he raced across the bag. The rookie was sent sprawling. Robinson singled in the seventh, and as he stood on first base, according to the Pittsburgh Courier, Greenberg asked if he was all right. "Hope I didn't hurt you," Greenberg said. "I was trying to get that wild throw I tried to keep out of your way but it was impossible."

"I was just knocked off balance," Robinson replied.

Greenberg, a New York-born Jew who had come up with Detroit in 1933, had known the sting of ethnic slurs, and Robbie sensed at once the empathy of a man who had fought the same battle years before. Greenberg asked him how things were going, and Robinson said, "Pretty good, but it's plenty rough up here."

Greenberg said he understood. "You're a good ballplayer, and you'll do all right," the future Hall of Famer told the future Hall of Famer. "Just stay in there...and always keep your head up."

The next day, in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Vince Johnson wrote that the Pirates' Ralph Kiner had hit two home runs and Billy Cox had hit one, "but they had to share the applause of the 13,000 fans with Jackie Robinson, a ballplayer who has what it takes."

Pittsburgh was the warmest port Robinson had been in yet. On May 16 he went 2 for 4 in a 3-1 Dodgers victory over the Pirates, and the next day he stroked two more singles in a 4-0 loss, extending his hitting streak to 14 games and raising his batting average to .299. More important, Robinson could feel his teammates circling closer around him. On May 17, when Pittsburgh pitcher Fritz Ostermueller nearly beamed him with a rising fastball--it struck Robinson's arm as he jerked it up to shield his head--the Dodgers in the dugout rose to their

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feet, gathered on the steps and peppered Ostermueller with threats and profanity. In the May 24 Pittsburgh Courier, Robinson's closest friend among the writers, Wendell Smith, wrote, "It was then that they displayed, probably for the first time, that they regard him as one of them."

It was in Pittsburgh, recalls Barney, that one of the Dodgers' most respected leaders, Branca, tried to rally the team around Robinson. For weeks Reese had been quietly urging his teammates to get behind the rookie, but it was Branca who called the first meeting for that purpose. Robinson was not present. "We have to get behind Jackie to help him," Branca said. "They're all on him. He's gonna be here. He's here to stay. And he's gonna help us win the pennant."

That was prophetic. On May 18, before 46,572 people, the largest paying crowd ever to see a baseball game in Chicago's Wrigley Field, Robinson went hitless in four at bats, ending his streak, but the Dodgers rallied in the seventh inning to defeat the Cubs 4-2. Brooklyn was on its way to beating St. Louis in the race for the National League pennant, and Robinson, who would end his first season hitting .297, was on track to win the majors' first Rookie of the Year award. The crowds and Robinson's fellow big leaguers were beginning to learn what kind of player he could be. Certainly the Phillies were learning faster than any other team.

"Robinson was one ballplayer you didn't want to get riled up," recalls Andy Seminick, then the Phillies' catcher. "Something about certain players: Get 'em mad and they'd hurt you. Jackie Robinson was definitely one of 'em. He rose to the occasion and clobbered the tar out of us. He beat us everywhere--at bat, on the bases, in the field. Finally Ben Chapman said, 'Let's lay off him. It's not doing any good.'" By the end of May, during that series at Ebbets Field, the Phillies were poking fun at Chapman, who hailed from Alabama, on the subject of Robinson. Philadelphia outfielder Del Ennis had singled and was standing on first base when he heard Robinson singing and humming to himself.

"What was he singing?" Chapman asked Ennis when he returned to the bench.

Ennis did not miss a beat or crack a smile. "Alabama Lullaby," he said.

It was during that series, of course, that Robinson climbed on Hughes's cripple and drove it into the seats for his second big league home run. As Robinson started toward first, Hughes angrily threw his glove in the air. And third baseman Handley, taking a new ball from Seminick, wound up and threw the ball and his mitt to the ground. The 18,016 customers at Ebbets Field roared as Robinson crossed home plate and headed for the bench.

There, on the dugout steps, the white hands reached for the black.

GRAPHIC: B/W ILLUSTRATION: ILLUSTRATION BY JULIAN ALLEN, COVER, 17 DAYS IN MAY, WHEN JACKIE ROBINSON PROVED HE WAS NOT JUST A PIONEER BUT A STAR, [Drawing of Jackie Robinson in game]; B/W ILLUSTRATION: ILLUSTRATIONS BY JULIAN ALLEN, AGAINST THE PHILLIES IN THE RAIN, ROBINSON OVERCAME HIS, INDECISIVENESS AT THE PLATE AND SILENCED CHAPMAN, AN EARLY NEMESIS, [Drawing of Jackie Robinson batting in game]; B/W ILLUSTRATION: ILLUSTRATIONS BY JULIAN ALLEN, PHOTOGRAPH USED AS REFERENCE FOR ILLUSTRATION: UPI/CORBIS-BETTMANN, ROBINSON'S MERE PRESENCE GAVE EVERY DODGERS GAME, WHETHER AT, EBBETS FIELD (LEFT) OR AWAY, A

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CIRCUSLIKE ATMOSPHERE, [Drawing of Jackie Robinson signing autographs from fans above dugout]; B/W ILLUSTRATION: ILLUSTRATIONS BY JULIAN ALLEN, PHOTOGRAPH USED AS REFERENCE FOR ILLUSTRATION: ROBERT WHEELER/LIFE PHOTO, ON THE BASE PATHS THE QUICK, DARING ROBINSON RATTLED INFELDERS,, SUCKERED OUTFIELDERS AND PRODUCED RUNS FOR BROOKLYN, [Drawing of Jackie Robinson running bases in game]; B/W ILLUSTRATION: ILLUSTRATIONS BY JULIAN ALLEN, RICKEY NEVER STOPPED TOUTING ROBINSON TO REPORTERS, AND IN MAY, THE ROOKIE JUSTIFIED THE OWNER'S FAITH IN HIM, [Drawing of Branch Rickey talking to reporters]; B/W ILLUSTRATION: ILLUSTRATIONS BY JULIAN ALLEN, PHOTOGRAPH USED AS REFERENCE FOR ILLUSTRATION: ART DALEY, "IN THE CLUBHOUSE," CANNON WROTE, "ROBINSON IS A STRANGER...HE, IS THE LONELIEST MAN I HAVE EVER SEEN IN SPORTS", [Drawing of Jackie Robinson sitting alone in clubhouse]; B/W ILLUSTRATION: ILLUSTRATIONS BY JULIAN ALLEN, GREENBERG, WHO HAD BEEN SUBJECTED TO ETHNIC SLURS, TOO,, ENCOURAGED ROBINSON TO HANG IN THERE AND KEEP HIS HEAD UP, [Drawing of Jackie Robinson and Hank Greenberg]

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HEADLINE: Harry Flournoy, Texas Western Forward;
March 28, 1966

BYLINE: B.J. Schecter

BODY:

As Texas Western's all-black starting five prepared to take on Adolph Rupp's all-white Kentucky team in the 1966 NCAA basketball championship game in College Park, Md., Harry Flournoy and his Miners teammates knew they had a chance to change the face of the sport. They knew that no team with five black starters had ever won an NCAA title; they also knew that the legendary Rupp, who was going for his fifth national championship, refused to recruit black players. A few hours before tip-off, a visibly upset Miners coach Don Haskins told his players he'd just heard Rupp vow that "no five blacks are going to beat Kentucky." "From that point on," Flournoy says, "Kentucky had as much chance of winning that game as a snowball had of surviving in hell."

Texas Western (now UTEP), led by the disruptive defense of Willie Worsley and the scoring of Bobby Joe Hill, who finished with 20 points, grabbed the lead midway through the first half and won 72-65. Though he scored just two points in six minutes before twisting his left knee, Flournoy, a 6'5" forward, was shown on the cover of the next week's SI grabbing one of his two rebounds, from Wildcats All-America Pat Riley. "Kentucky was playing for a commemorative wristwatch and the right to say they were national champions," says Flournoy, who averaged 8.3 points and 10.7 rebounds that season. "We were out to prove that it didn't matter what color a person's skin was."

Flournoy had already experienced racism on the court at Emerson High, the predominantly white high school he attended in Gary, Ind. "All the best players on the team were black, but there was this unspoken rule that no more than three blacks could play at once," says Flournoy. "It was a bad situation, but that's the way things were in those days."

These days Flournoy, now 54, is a sales representative for a bakery based in Los Angeles and lives in Lakewood, Calif., with his wife, Yvette. He no longer plays basketball, but he follows UTEP and the local college teams on TV and, every now and then, especially during March Madness, reflects on what he and his teammates accomplished. "I wonder what college ball might be like if we hadn't won that game," says Flournoy. "A lot of people don't realize what it was like for black players. But now I see so many players disrespecting the game--trash talking, mouthing off to officials and coaches, and showboating. Sometimes I can't even watch because they are undoing things we worked so hard for."

--B.J. Schecter

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HEADLINE: This Nation Is Not Yet Color-Blind

BYLINE: Gordon, Ralph

BODY:

This Nation Is Not Yet Color-Blind

THE FLAP OVER THE RACIAL identity of Tiger Woods just won't go away. Sure, it won't the tremendous accomplishment of his winning this year's Masters golf tournament. Nor will it erase insensitive comments of perennial jokester Fuzzy Zoeller, called Woods a "little boy" and joked about him eating fried chicken and collard greens. But Woods' comments on The Oprah Winfrey Show certainly will raise the temperatures of those who feel that this young man should not be ambivalent about his racial heritage or identity. He told Winfrey that as a child he made up the term "Cablinasian" -- a combination of Caucasian, Black, Indian and Asian -- to describe himself. He insists now that he is not Black but multiracial.

America is a strange place when it comes to race. Historically, those who even slightly appear to be Black have been so categorized. The striving of so many people of mixed heritage to have a "multiracial" category in the next census has met with minimal recognition.

Woods, whose mother is Thai and whose father is Black, certainly falls into this category. But even he has to recognize how most people in this nation see him. And whether he likes it or not he must contend with the fact that many of the remaining racists in this country see him as Black. Imagine Woods trying to explain to a racist policeman or to a skinhead that he's not really Black.

Perhaps our categorizations are a bit too simplistic. Many Blacks in America, who long ago stopped using the labels Colored and Negro, now call themselves African-American. But are these terms really interchangeable? "Black" denotes a racial category, as does "White." African-American denotes a nationality or heritage, as with Italian-American or Jewish-American.

Consider this: If an Ethiopian couple migrated to Italy and became citizens there, one would call their children Italian nationals. If one of those children then immigrated to the United States and became a citizen here, they literally would be an Italian-American. (People in some of the nation's Little Italy neighborhoods probably would not take kindly to this categorization.) If a White South African woman came here and became a U.S. citizen, would not this woman be a "true" African-American even though she is not Black?

The point is that we Americans blithely use terms for race, nationality and heritage in interchangeable ways that are prone to misinterpretation. The

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"melting pot" of America does not easily lend itself to such oversimplifications. The emergence of a racially mixed celebrity who appears Black, such as Woods, brings this issue to the forefront in ways that are disturbing and that become fodder for water cooler, dinner table and television discussions.

The young Mr. Woods must know that his prominence as a professional golf star is not due just to his feats on the greens nor his youth. Nor is his fame a result of the public's perception of him as a person of mixed heritage. Woods is famous in large part because he is breaking the color line of golf. He has crossed that line of demarcation between Black and White.

Woods also should know that few Black Americans are "purely" Black. His own father is a prime example. Because of the cruelty of slavery -- which author Kenneth Stampp so aptly referred to in the title of his book as The Peculiar Institution -- many, if not most, Black Americans have other than "Black" blood flowing in their veins. Nonetheless, this does not warrant our bearing a multiracial stamp. Woods may contest this point, since his mother is Asian and his claim to a mixed designation is more clear.

One would hope that we will one day see a United States in which these types of discussions and arguments have become meaningless. Sadly, that day is not even close -- despite the color-blind society fantasies of Ward Connerly, who championed California's Proposition 209 against affirmative action, and others who would ignore the fact that racial barriers still are prevalent in this society. Perhaps the push by multiracial Americans to be recognized as such eventually will move us to broaden our categories and start to deemphasize the differences between Blacks and Whites -- while retaining our proud and individual sense of heritage.

Perhaps then we will not only have a color-blind society but an enlightened one, as well. But for now, Tiger Woods would do better to recognize the key element beyond his considerable talent -- his Blackness -- that has vaulted him to prominence. There's nothing "mixed" or "multi" about that.

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HEADLINE: WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO THE WHITE ATHLETE?;
UNSURE OF HIS PLACE IN A SPORTS WORLD DOMINATED BY BLACKS WHO ARE HUNGRIER,
HARDER-WORKING AND PERHAPS PHYSIOLOGICALLY SUPERIOR, THE YOUNG WHITE MALE IS
DROPPING OUT OF THE ATHLETIC MAINSTREAM TO PURSUE SUCCESS ELSEWHERE

BYLINE: S.L. PRICE, SPECIAL REPORTING BY GRACE CORNELIUS

BODY:

What do you do for a living?" Each time Kevin Little hears the question, he suffers a small crisis. He would love to say straight out, "I run fast. I am a sprinter." But Little is tired of facing disbelief, tired of the skeptical sputter that always follows such a statement. So he often just mentions his part-time job for U.S. West and moves on. Why bother?

"People do not understand," Little says. "They look at me like, But you're white."

Little is one of the fastest men in the world. His winning time of 20.40 seconds at the world championships in Paris last March tied the American indoor record in the 200 meters. That victory--over a field that lacked world-record holder Michael Johnson but included 1997 outdoor world champ Ato Boldon--made him the first white American since 1956 to win a major international sprint title. At 29, Little is in his prime, but the confidence he displays took too long to earn. That's because, aside from suffering the usual self-doubts, he matured in an age when the white sprinter is about as common as the horse and buggy.

He tries not to let this bother him, but it is fact: None of the 25 fastest times in the 100 and only one of the 25 fastest in the 200 was run by a white man. Of the 14 track and field gold medals won by U.S. men at the Atlanta Olympics, just one--Randy Barnes's in the shot put--was won by a white. It's strange, being a human blip, but Little suspects he is only the most glaring anomaly on the American sports landscape. Every year he notices fewer white faces in big-time sports. He scans the sports pages, watches games, talks to white kids and parents. "In basketball and football, and other sports too, the interest isn't there anymore," he says.

Little trains in a tired antique of a gym at the University of Colorado. He glides over a 60-meter straightaway time and again,

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and he hops up the wooden steps on one leg, then the other. The place is empty. He works alone. His steps echo through the dim light, and you can see why he wonders if he is some kind of anachronism, walking point for a dwindling tribe. "Where is the white athlete going?" he says.

The white athlete is getting out. The white athlete--and here we speak of the young men in team sports who ruled the American athletic scene for much of the century--doesn't want to play anymore. Distracted by other leisure-time pursuits and discouraged by the success of black athletes, who have come to dominate sports in spectacular fashion, the white athlete is now less interested in playing certain mainstream games, most notably basketball and football, than are his black counterparts. He is increasingly drawn to sports that in the U.S. are played primarily by whites, such as soccer, or to alternative athletic pursuits that are overwhelmingly white, such as mountain biking or rock climbing. After a six-month SPORTS ILLUSTRATED inquiry into the subject of race and sports, including dozens of interviews with coaches, athletes, executives and academics and a nationwide poll of 1,835 middle school and high school kids, all indications are that the white athlete will continue his steady fade.

Should anyone care? A century ago a New York City newspaper editor all but shrieked in print, "We are in the midst of a growing menace. The black man is rapidly forging to the front in the ranks of athletics...we are in the midst of a black rise against white supremacy." But 50 years after Jackie Robinson broke major league baseball's color barrier, white Americans have come to embrace black sports heroes in ways unimaginable in 1947. That a white majority calmly accepts minority status in one of its most cherished social institutions is itself a measure of progress, and the appeal of a Michael Jordan across racial lines is unquestioned.

"In 1960, if white girls in the suburbs had had posters of a Negro that dark on the wall, there would've been hell to pay," says black social critic Stanley Crouch. "That kind of racial paranoia is not true of the country now. Today you have white girls who are Michael Jordan fanatics, and their parents don't care."

Robinson ushered American sports into an era of significance beyond the playing field. During the next two generations, the once monochromatic world of team sports became a paradigm of, and sometimes a spur to, racial equality. One milestone followed another: Larry Doby broke into the American League several months after Robinson's debut; the NBA and the NFL were completely integrated; a Texas Western basketball team with an all-black starting lineup beat Adolph Rupp's all-white Kentucky squad in the 1966 NCAA final; that same year the Boston Celtics' Bill Russell was named the first black head coach of a major professional team; the Washington Redskins' Doug Williams in 1988 became the first black quarterback to win a Super Bowl.

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Management was still firmly white--and, regrettably, remains so today--but one could argue that the playing field had become the nation's common ground, the one highly visible stage on which blacks and whites acted out the process of learning to live, play and fight together as peers. 1

Today fewer whites stand on that common ground. Black players became a majority in the NBA in the mid-1970s and now fill 80% of the league's roster spots. In the NFL 67% of the players are African-Americans, and blacks hold such a strong lock on the skill positions of defensive back, wide receiver and running back that their near monopoly resembles the onetime white stranglehold at quarterback. In major league baseball the black presence isn't nearly as pronounced--17%, with Latinos (many of whom are also black) now making up 20% of the players--yet during the past 25 years, blacks have been a disproportionate offensive force, winning 41% of the Most Valuable Player awards.

This domination shows up at the high school and college levels as well. Sixty-one percent of Division I college basketball players are black, and of the 15 members of USA Today's 1997 All-USA high school basketball team, only two were white. Division I college football, meanwhile, is almost 52% black, and last year's 25-member All-USA high school football team included just two whites, the punter and the placekicker.

In December of last year at the Orange Bowl, recruiters filled the press box for Dade County's annual high school football all-star game, the showcase for what many believe is the richest vein of talent in the country. Of the 81 players who took part, only three were white.

"An athlete is an athlete, but, dang it, there just seem to be more black athletes than white," says Florida State football coach Bobby Bowden. "We've got a [white] phenomenon on our team, a quarterback named Danny Kendra, whose vertical jump is 39 1/2 inches--more than anybody else we've got. He bench-presses 425 pounds, and his leg press broke the school record. He runs a 4.5 40. But there ain't many like him. And my thinking is that there's a whole lot more blacks who can do that than white guys."

Kendra isn't alone in defying athletic stereotypes. Wayne Chrebet is the New York Jets' most reliable wide receiver. The New York Giants' Jason Sehorn, the only white starting at cornerback in the NFL, runs a 4.4 40 and led his team with five interceptions last season. In 1996 Los Angeles Clippers forward Brent Barry became the first white to win the Slam Dunk Contest at the NBA All-Star Weekend. At a time when sports have reached an unprecedented level of importance in American life, however, these are rare exceptions.

Whites have in some respects become sports' second-class citizens. In a surreal inversion of Robinson's era, white athletes are frequently the ones now tagged by the stereotypes of skin color. The twist: Whites themselves are doing much of

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the tagging. They are more and more often choosing sports in which they feel they can still compete--baseball, ice hockey, in-line hockey--thereby perpetuating a cycle. White athletes, outplayed or simply intimidated, stop playing basketball or football; examples of college and pro success by whites become more scarce; the sport loses some of its appeal for the next generation of white kids.

A comparison between SI's youth poll, which was conducted by the New York City-based Peter Harris Research Group and Louis Harris, and a similar survey conducted in 1990 reveals that in the last seven years the gap has widened between black and white participation in high school basketball and football. Some 40% of the black high school students in the SI poll said they participate in basketball, compared with 15% of the whites. In football 21% of the blacks participate, compared with 15% of whites.

NCAA figures on white participation in Division I college football and basketball are revealing as well: From 1984 to '90--the most recent period for which figures are available--the number of white freshmen on scholarship for football dropped 22%; the number dropped 11% in basketball.

"I'm told by lots of coaches that you can't get white kids to go out for basketball teams in urban areas," says Richard Lapchick, head of the Center for the Study of Sport in Society at Boston's Northeastern University. "If you're fielding a team in Boston, the white kids just aren't going to go out, whether they can make the team or not. I hear that around the country, too."

"White parents are starting to guide their kids away from certain sports," says Thomas Elkins, who coached track at racially mixed John Marshall High in Cleveland for 18 years before retiring in 1995. "In the first three years of busing at my school [1978 to '80], I had 30 kids, and I was determined to maintain a mixed team. The first year it was 15-15, and we had a great time. But after the third or fourth year, it started going more and more black. And I'd ask white kids, 'Why don't you come out?' They'd say, 'Aw, I can't run with those guys.' Then around baseball season we'd joke: 'Did you know there were this many white kids at this school?' Because that's all you'd see out for baseball. Same thing with basketball: Three or four white kids out for the team, and that's it; but for baseball and wrestling there'd be tons of 'em."

While the SI poll did not find a shattering of self-confidence among young white males, it did reveal cracks: Some 34% of them agreed that "African-American players have become so dominant in sports like football and basketball that many white athletes feel they cannot compete at the same level." Fully one third of white males in the poll believe that blacks are more aggressive in sports, and nearly a third believe blacks are simply bigger and stronger.

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The poll indicated dramatically divergent views on athletics and race, which reflect an increasingly polarized sports culture. The responses revealed that while many young whites are unsure of their place in athletics, young blacks, brimming with self-confidence and certain that sports are one of the few professions in which they can make it big in America, are pouring heart and soul into team sports. This is no surprise to longtime observers who have noted two vastly different attitudes on the playing field. "Suburban kids tend to play for the fun of it," says William Ellerbee, basketball coach of national power Simon Gratz High in Philadelphia. "Inner-city kids look at basketball as a matter of life or death."

White kids in search of a new athletic niche are casting a wide net. Whites in the SI poll cited 33 sports--compared with 20 among blacks--that they themselves are best at, and a substantial plurality of white males (46%) agreed that "white athletes are turning their attention to new sports...partly because they can make breakthroughs in these sports that they are less likely to make in major sports."

"The white kid has found other things to do," says Carlos Cespedes, president of the Dade County Coaches Association and an assistant football coach at Miami's Palmetto High. "My school is very affluent, and our enrollment is only 17% black. But our football team is usually 50-50. Why? A lot of the white kids wouldn't bother doing the work we require of our football players. They're skiing in Colorado. They're flying over to Europe. I go to every national convention. I hear the same thing from the coaches: The white athlete is not as hungry as the black athlete. Period."

Of course, the differences Cespedes cites are socioeconomic and cultural, not inherently racial; given the opportunity, a black teen might also choose to ski in Colorado rather than play football. But that option is not as widely available to blacks as it is to whites. More than 40% of black children in the U.S. live below the poverty level, compared with 16% of white children.

All of which leads to a question that's often at the heart of the discussion of race and achievement: Does one group outperform another because of innate ability or outside influences? Is it nature or nurture (page 52)? Cespedes chimes in with those who argue that, in this case, economic forces are responsible--that black males, like some Italians and Irish in the first half of the century, are using sports as a way to a better life. SI's poll found that young African-American males see sports as a rare opportunity for advancement: Some 51% of them agreed that blacks "care more about sports because sports are one of the few ways in America that blacks can make a lot of money," and by almost a 3-to-1 margin over whites they said that one of the most important reasons to play is "If I am successful at sports, I can make a lot of money."

But many people find it hard to believe that economic incentives

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alone account for black athletic dominance. These observers offer a simple theory: Blacks dominate sports because they are faster, quicker, better. "If you want a gauge, go to the track meets," says Bowden. "Who's winning all those track meets?" Certainly there is a chuckling acceptance, among both blacks and whites, of the inability of whites to leap high and run fast. It's not that whites won't play anymore, the thinking goes: It's that they can't.

Though open discussion of inherent black athletic superiority remains taboo, few deem it offensive to joke about "white man's disease" or to make a movie called *White Men Can't Jump*. When tennis player Jim Courier, in a press conference at this year's U.S. Open, described fellow American Chris Woodruff as "one of the fastest white guys I've ever seen," no one blinked. An exceptionally fleet white athlete such as Chrebet, Sehorn or Green Bay Packers wide receiver Don Beebe is, as Little says, "looked at as a freak of nature."

Black is best. That is the understanding in sports now: not just that blacks are the dominant racial group playing, but also that they possess superior athletic skills and have thus transformed the way sports are played. "You see better catches, runs, tackles--anything involving mobility, toughness, anything physical," Bowden says. "An [all-white] football team in the South in 1960 couldn't touch a football team today that's integrated. Couldn't even touch 'em. You ask what [blacks have] brought to the table? They've brought better athletes."

When coaches and players talk about the issue, they usually use the logic of the obvious: Open your eyes. Look around. "If 80 percent of the league is black, that means that black players are that much better than white players," says Orlando Magic center Rony Seikaly. "The black players are superior. No doubt. I go to Lebanon in the summer, and we have pickup games, and there's this one 18-year-old Nigerian playing in the Lebanese league who can touch his head on the rim. It's amazing, [blacks'] athletic ability. They're built, they're buffed. We work out to get a body like that, and they just come out naturally buffed."

Even coach Bruce Rollinson of Mater Dei High in Santa Ana, Calif., whose predominantly white football team has won the mythical national high school championship in two of the last three years, concedes a physical disadvantage against a mostly black opponent. "Get ready for the speed," Rollinson tells his players. For years the coaches of Nebraska's largely white football team knew exactly what Rollinson was talking about: The Cornhuskers would fly to the Orange Bowl only to get thrashed by Miami or Florida State. In 1993, when the Big Red coaches began talking about recruiting quicker, Miami-type players for their defense, everyone understood the code: Nebraska needed more blacks. The Huskers have gotten them and have won two national titles in the last three years.

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The perception of black superiority isn't found only among white coaches and players. A plurality (34%) of black males in SI's poll agreed with the statement, "Whites are not as good athletes as African-Americans." Some 42% of the black males who attend racially mixed schools said that they sensed their white peers backing off from sports because they felt they couldn't compete with blacks. Jason Webb, a nationally ranked backstroker at Virginia who is half black, half white, says, "In general, it just seems that blacks are more athletic." Football coach Walt Frazier of Miami's Carol City High, whose team won the class 6A state championship last year and is 12-0 so far this year, says he hears black parents all the time telling their children, "You can't let that white kid outrun you! You can't let that white kid outjump you! White kids can't run or jump." Says Doug Williams, now the football coach at Morehouse College, "More times than not, it's hard to find one who can jump."

When Barry beat five black players to win the Slam Dunk Contest, some took it as the trashing of a stereotype. "That's huge," TNT commentator Reggie Theus told a national TV audience. "It dispels a heck of a myth." Not in Barry's mind, it didn't. "I like to think [the idea that white men can't jump] is not true, but I find myself at men's clubs and gyms around the country and I see men playing, and I have to say it is true," Barry says. "More often than not, you see white players who just don't play that [high-leaping] style. They play below the rim, they play the court game, they play the savvy game. They're just not very athletic, so that's what they've got to do to succeed."

Such talk may not be politically correct, but the underlying fact--that at the elite level blacks are the fastest runners, the most prodigious leapers, the dominant force on NBA courts and NFL fields--is unassailable. While the scientific jury, faced with intriguing preliminary evidence, still debates whether black athletes possess innate physical advantages, the white athlete works in a world that seems already convinced of the answer. As a kid in snowy-white Iowa, Kevin Little heard the stories: Blacks have an extra muscle in their legs. Blacks have the genetics. "I don't believe the black athlete is superior," he says. "But you don't know that when you're young and impressionable. I'd go to a track meet and people would say, 'Aw, he's going to get his ass kicked.' Even the black sprinters would look at me like, What are you doing here? You're wasting your time. It's not coming just from the whites. It comes from everywhere."

In high school and his first years at Drake, and even at the 1988 U.S. Olympic trials, Little couldn't escape the thought that he shouldn't even try running sprints. He'd sign up for a meet, and people automatically assumed he was entered in a distance event. "It breaks you down," he says. "It makes you question your abilities. It took years before I had enough confidence to say, 'I'm here, and they have to beat me.'"

As some of today's young white males harbor doubts about whether

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they are good enough to compete with blacks, they find fewer white superstars than ever to emulate. The NBA no longer has a white star on the order of Larry Bird, and in pro football only Troy Aikman and Brett Favre can approach Barry Sanders, Emmitt Smith or Jerry Rice. After Cal Ripken Jr., you'd be hard put to name a current white baseball player with the name recognition of Ken Griffey Jr. or Barry Bonds. In track and field, no white U.S. male has made an impact since Bruce Jenner at the 1976 Olympics. Even distance running is ruled by blacks: In an 11-day stretch in August, black Africans broke seven world records at distances from 800 to 10,000 meters. The SI poll asked kids to list their sports role models; seven of the top 10 athletes cited were black. Aikman and Ripken were the only white males in the top 20.

This is, by and large, refreshing news: Kids seem to be color-blind in choosing athletic role models. Yet the paucity of white stars seems to have subtly affected the perceptions of some whites. Says Texas professor John Hoberman, author of the recently published *Darwin's Athletes*, an examination of race and sports, "There is definitely a spreading white inferiority complex." One symptom is a near desperate effort to elevate any white talent to stardom. From the time he was in high school in Southern California, Keith Van Horn, the All-America forward at Utah who was chosen second in this year's NBA draft, continually heard himself called "the next Larry Bird." Never mind that Van Horn, now with the New Jersey Nets, lacked the sublime passing touch that made Bird unique; he was white, tall and more than just a shooter, and that was enough. "I talked to [scouts and coaches from] the Utah Jazz two years ago," says Van Horn, "and they named players they thought I played like: Tom Gugliotta, Detlef Schrempf and Toni Kukoc. When they asked me, I said Schrempf--and Derrick McKey."

Blacks, understandably, react to any crisis of confidence among whites with a wry smile. Hoberman points out in his book that until the early 20th century, African-Americans were considered inferior to whites in athletics--weaker physically, less able to handle pressure, not smart enough to understand complex strategy. What black would go out of his way to reassure the white athlete now? "I'd think blacks would always want to keep the stereotype that we're better than whites; it's an advantage," says Isiah Thomas, the former Detroit Pistons All-Star guard. "When two guys walk on the court to play basketball, and the white athlete's dealing with the guy's blackness and the black guy's dealing with the business of basketball, the black guy beats him."

Too often, the full definition of athleticism gets lost in the racial shuffle. Much was made of Bird's work ethic and smarts, but few players of either color have had his uncanny hand-eye coordination. In the mid-'80s no athlete had a broader range of athletic skills than Danny Ainge, who, as an NBA All-Star guard, a near-scratch golfer and an infielder good enough to make the major leagues, was actually a better all-around athlete than

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Michael Jordan. Yet when Ainge was introduced as the coach of the Phoenix Suns last year, his predecessor Cotton Fitzsimmons used a familiar white stereotype to describe him. "He said it as a compliment, but this is typical: Danny wasn't a very talented athlete, but he got the most out of his ability," Ainge says. "You know, I could touch the top of the square [above the rim] in my young days and dunk. Unfortunately, athleticism in our society is all ranked on how fast you run and how high you jump. There's so much more to it than that."

Mix the notion of white athletic inferiority with the comfortable suburban culture in which so many young white males live, and the result is an atmosphere in which commitment to a sport such as basketball or football becomes ever more rare. Growing up in his upper-middle-class East Bay neighborhood, Barry would make weekend trips to inner-city Oakland. "If we drove to our high school [gym], it would be locked up," Barry says. "But if we drove downtown, we knew garbage cans would be holding the doors open, and guys would be playing."

Barry appreciates players who clamber out of the ghetto. "But it almost takes more effort to get out of a situation where you could sit back and be comfortable," he says. "If you're struggling, you could say, 'I don't need to do this anymore. My parents have great jobs, I could go to any college I want.' It's a much different set of social barriers; the pressure on you to perform isn't so great. If you're the white kid and you've got glee club after school, the ski trip on the holidays and Stratomatic baseball in the spring, well, that's what you're going to do. I pride myself on the fact that I had to have a lot of desire and will and competitiveness to get out of white suburban America and make it in a game dominated by great black athletes."

One of the SI poll's more striking findings was that even though whites at racially mixed schools have been dropping out of basketball and football, these students are less likely to buy the idea of black superiority in athletics than students at all-white schools. The less whites are exposed to blacks, the more inclined they are to believe in the athletic stereotypes. (The reverse, however, is not true; according to SI's poll, blacks at racially mixed schools are more likely than those at all-black schools to believe African-Americans are athletically superior to whites.)

While SI's poll did not find a direct admission of inferiority by a majority of white kids--66% of white males disagreed with the statement that whites are not as good athletes as African-Americans--the playing patterns of white athletes are more telling. In football, for example, both blacks and whites report volunteering, or being led by parents or coaches, to play certain "white" or "black" positions, a practice Lapchick calls "positional segregation." SI's poll found that 54% of white kids tried out for positions on the unglamorous offensive line or defense, compared with only 31% of black kids.

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"You see a dominance, and that's what you believe," says Sehorn, who grew up in a poor, racially mixed suburb of Sacramento and whose coaches never discouraged him from playing defensive back and wide receiver. "You begin to believe that black people are better in basketball or can just run faster. We place people in boxes: one kid in this position, one kid in that position. I was fortunate to be directed in a different way."

Most kids, black and white, report that coaches generally are the ones who encourage positional segregation. But Mater Dei's Rollinson often encounters white parents who won't consider that their child might be good enough to play a "black" position at the college level. He says these parents see their son lining up at cornerback or wide receiver and say, "He'll never make it because he's not black." Rollinson tries to tell them their boy runs a 4.5 40-yard dash and has great hands, but they don't want to hear it. "They come right back and say, 'Don't give me that BYU story,'" Rollinson says.

Brigham Young is perhaps the most prominent exception to the black domination of sports. Relying almost exclusively on white talent, the Mormon school has fielded teams that have continually competed at the highest level. The football team sits perennially in the Top 20, making an occasional run at a national title. The basketball team has won 15 Western Athletic Conference titles, made 17 NCAA tournament appearances and produced a dozen All-Americans, and for a week in 1987 it held the No. 2 ranking in the country--yet the Cougars have never started more than one black. "I don't think I had ever played on or against an all-white team," says Van Horn, the former Ute. "When we played BYU, it was strange."

The paucity of African-American players on BYU teams has worked against them. "We haven't had the quickness that a black student-athlete has," says Roger Reid, a Cougars basketball coach for 19 years, seven of them as head coach. Nevertheless, BYU has beaten predominantly black teams from such schools as UCLA, Notre Dame and Virginia. The Cougars have defeated black teams that started games thinking that when push came to shove, their own athletic superiority would tell. San Diego Padres outfielder Tony Gwynn learned this. As a junior point guard in 1980 he went to Provo, Utah, with his San Diego State team and got beaten badly. "Those BYU guys were flying through the air, jumping over guys, getting rebounds, and that's the first time I thought, These guys are really athletic," Gwynn says. "Our whole club was shocked."

The next day someone tried to soothe Gwynn's pain by saying that the Cougars had special springs under their floor. "We're like, 'Aw, no wonder! I knew they couldn't jump!'" Gwynn says with a laugh. Only later did he realize: "How come I wasn't jumping any higher?"

Strange, the way things turn around. Now that the superb white

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jumper or sprinter is such a surprise, blacks can easily ensnare themselves in an old web and underestimate the next Don Beebe because of his skin color. Rollinson, whose team is all but a high school version of BYU, says, "I really believe that the school that is majority black is more apt to buy into the stereotype: 'You white guys aren't going to run by us. We're going to beat you with our speed and our athleticism.' The problem is, football is won in the tackle box...and now all of sudden here come the honkies, and we're just pounding on you and pounding on you. We start the game ass-kicking, and we just don't stop. And now we've created doubt."

That's what Kevin Little looks for. He uses black dominance as his weapon: No one wants to lose to him. "Then the edge goes to me," he says. "I can look into their eyes and their faces, and if they have a little fear of losing to a white sprinter, I've won right there. I'm holding the cards."

Wherever he races, Little can feel it, the slightest hint--and it is no more than a hint--of what Jackie Robinson felt 50 years ago: He is the White Guy, the one athlete in the field whose skin color is noted every time he runs. "That's my identity," Little says, and, no, he doesn't like it much. When he wins before a white audience, the roar from the crowd has a different quality, a current of surprise, "like they just saw a miracle happen," he says. When he won the 400 meters at the Mt. SAC Relays in Walnut, Calif., last year before a racially mixed crowd, there was a low buzz from the stands, then silence.

At home in Iowa, his parents share in the glory. Often someone will offer a smile of congratulations and tell his mom that Kevin must have black blood.

SIDEBAR:

TOO SINGLE-MINDED?

Many young blacks are so intent on becoming the next Jordan that they forgo more realistic paths to success

In Harlem they stomp out into the winter chill four times a week and glide over the ice. It is like a photographic negative of a typical high school hockey game: Three dozen black kids circling two rinks at the north end of Central Park, whacking each other's ankles with hockey sticks, flopping on their bellies and rising back up on their blades. Hockey in Harlem, a schoolwork-and-slap-shots program, has been running games for a decade. With 275 kids ranging in age from four to 18, it is operating at full capacity.

"People tell me hockey is a white person's sport and I shouldn't play," says one of the players, Feliz Cameron, 15. "They say, 'Why do it? You're not going to make it.' But I'm proving them wrong."

Sports Illustrated, December 8, 1997

Even as many young white males, faced with the black dominance of basketball and football, try to find their footing outside the athletic mainstream, blacks are casting an ambitious eye on traditionally white sports such as hockey, gymnastics and swimming. "Nobody is giving us anything," says Philadelphia Department of Recreation coach Jim Ellis, whose inner-city swimming program produced Virginia senior Jason Webb, one of the fastest backstrokers in the nation. "We're working for it."

That blacks have overcome--or are overcoming--barriers to success in all sports is welcome news, but some African-Americans view it as a mixed blessing. "Blacks have always played the games," says Thomas Elkins, former track and field coach at John Marshall High in Cleveland. "The slave master used to watch the slaves play games to amuse himself. Fifty years after Jackie Robinson, we've progressed to the point that we're still athletes and entertainers, we're just better paid."

Elkins and others worry that too many of today's black youths unrealistically focus on becoming professional athletes. Although any given high school starter has only the slimmest chance of making the pros, 55% of the middle-school-age and high-school-age black males polled by SI (compared with 20% of the white males) think they may be good enough to play pro basketball. Some 49% (compared with 27% of whites) believe they could reach the NFL.

"It's hard to break that train," says Walt Frazier, football coach at Miami's Carol City High. "The kids are still looking at the popularity, the financial security of pro sports, even though statistics say you have a greater chance of being a rocket scientist." When SI's poll asked students to pick from a list of careers the ones they thought they could successfully pursue, 57% of black males chose "professional athlete." Pro sports was the only career selected more often by blacks than by whites or Latinos. By contrast, in assessing their ability to enter fields other than sports, black males were the least likely to believe they could succeed in careers requiring higher education. "I've tried to stress education to my kids, to other kids," says San Diego Padres outfielder Tony Gwynn, "but it seems like excelling in school is so much harder than throwing a ball through a hoop or running with a football."

Impoverished black teens aren't the only ones who aspire to a sports career. "My son is 16, with a near genius IQ," says Molefi Asanti, former chairman of African-American Studies at Temple, "and all he wants to be is the next Michael Jordan."

Former major league pitcher Dave Stewart, now the Padres' pitching coach, agrees that black youngsters put too much emphasis on sports. But he also knows that when he was growing up in a poor neighborhood in Oakland, sports made him feel better about school and gave him a life. "If athletics is what we're going to be good at, and the one thing we can be the

Sports Illustrated, December 8, 1997

majority at, the one thing in which we can set up our businesses and families and pass [the wealth] on--so be it," Stewart says. "Right now it's sports, but we're seeing a lot more black people in government, more black doctors, more black lawyers. You've got to begin somewhere."

Perhaps as more blacks become successful in other fields, their children will need and want sports less. Not long ago Isiah Thomas, the NBA great and former Toronto Raptors vice president, was talking with Buffalo Bills defensive end Bruce Smith--two African-American millionaires discussing their kids. Smith told Thomas he would never let his three-year-old son, Alston, play football: It's too painful, too rough.

"My son plays violin, and he plays golf," Thomas said. "Basketball? He likes to watch it, loves going to games. But I've got a gym in my house, and he doesn't necessarily want to use it. But he'll play his violin all day." --S.L.P.

BOX STORY:

A COLOR SNAPSHOT Percentage Who Are Black

U.S. Population	13%
Major League Baseball Players	17%
NFL Players	67%
NBA Players	80%
1996 U.S. Male track and Field Gold Medalists	93%

BOX STORY:

FEELING INFERIOR "African-American players have become so dominant in sports such as football and basketball that many whites feel they can't compete at the same level as blacks"

White Males

34% Agree
45% Disagree
21% Not Sure

Black Males

53% Agree
27% Disagree
20% Not Sure

Source: SI poll of 1,835 middle school and high school students from across the U.S.

BOX STORY:

NAMING THEIR GAME Sports kids think they're best at

	Black Males	White Males
Basketball	72%	29%

Sports Illustrated, December 8, 1997

Football	51%	27%
Baseball	28%	29%
Soccer	5%	13%

Source: SI poll of middle school and high school students
(respondents could name as many as three sports)

BOX STORY:

WHO WANTS TO JOIN? Kids' interest in playing team sports

	Black Males	White Males
Very Interested	77%	61%
Somewhat Interested	16%	23%
Not Too Interested	2%	10%
Not at All Interested	1%	5%

Source: SI poll of middle school and high school students

BOX STORY:

WHITE FLIGHT "White athletes are turning their attention to new sports like mountain biking and roller hockey partly to make breakthroughs they're less likely to make in other sports"

White Males
46% Agree
30% Disagree
24% Not Sure

Black Males
50% Agree
14% Disagree
36% Not Sure

Source: SI poll of middle school and high school students

BOX STORY:

BIG-TIME DREAMS Percentage of kids who think they may be good enough to play a professional sport someday

	Black Males	White Males
Basketball	55%	20%
Football	49%	27%

Source: SI poll of middle school and high school students

BOX STORY:

RECRUITING FALLOFF Number of white freshmen who received athletic scholarships at Division I colleges

Basketball
1984 333

Sports Illustrated, December 8, 1997

1990 298

Football

1984 2,074

1990 1,617

Source: NCAA Graduation Rates Report

BOX STORY:

CAREER PATHS "Realistically, what could you become when you grow up?"

	Black Males	White Males
Pro Athlete	57%	41%
Lawyer	17%	27%
Teacher	14%	28%

Source: SI poll of middle school and high school students

GRAPHIC: B/W PHOTO: SPORTS ILLUSTRATED PICTURE COLLECTION, COVER, What Ever Happened to the White Athlete? [Four members of basketball team]; B/W PHOTO: PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN BIEVER, [Eight runners leaving starting line]; B/W PHOTO: MARTIN JEONG/UPI/CORBIS-BETTMANN, The NBA hasn't had a white superstar since Bird (left) retired in 1991; Little (racing Michael Johnson) is the only white American since 1956 to win a major sprint title. [Larry Bird and opposing player in game]; B/W PHOTO: JIM GUND, [See caption above--Michael Johnson and Kevin Little racing]; B/W CHART, [A COLOR SNAPSHOT], [Chart not available--bar graph illustrating percentage of U.S. population and sports participants who are black]; B/W PHOTO: L.A. ROTHSTEIN, Florida State quarterback Kendra (10) has a vertical leap of 39 1/2" and runs the 40-yard dash in 4.5 seconds, but as Bowden says, "There ain't many like him." [Danny Kendra and teammates]; B/W CHART, [FEELING INFERIOR], [Chart not available--two pie graphs illustrating percentages of white males and black males agreeing, disagreeing, or uncertain with statement]; COLOR PHOTO: DAMIAN STROHMEYER, Sehorn (31), the NFL's only white starter at cornerback, says that unlike many whites, he wasn't discouraged by his coaches from playing a "black" position. [Jason Sehorn and opposing player in game]; B/W CHART, [NAMING THEIR GAME], [Chart not available--bar graph illustrating percentages of white and black males who feel they are best at certain sports]; B/W PHOTO: V.J. LOVERO, Mater Dei High has won two of the last three national titles, but its coach says black opponents often assume they'll beat his team because it's mostly white. [Members and staff of Mater Dei High School football team]; B/W CHART, [WHO WANTS TO JOIN?], [Chart not available--bar graph illustrating black and white males' interest in playing team sports]; B/W PHOTO: JOHN IACONO, Griffey and other African-Americans constitute just 17% of big leaguers but are a disproportionate offensive force. [Ken Griffey Jr. batting]; B/W CHART, [WHITE FLIGHT], [Chart not available--two pie graphs illustrating percentages of white males and black males agreeing, disagreeing, or uncertain with statement]; B/W PHOTO: JOHN W. MCDONOUGH, [Michael Jordan]; B/W PHOTO: JOHN W. MCDONOUGH, White kids have few role models of their own color, such as Aikman (above) and Jenner, to emulate. [Troy Aikman in game]; B/W PHOTO: HEINZ KLUETMEIER, [See caption above--Bruce Jenner pole-vaulting]; B/W CHART, [BIG-TIME DREAMS], [Chart not available--bar graph illustrating percentage of black and white males who think they may be good

Sports Illustrated, December 8, 1997

enough to play professional basketball or football someday]; B/W PHOTO: NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBA PHOTOS, Slam Dunk winner Barry says most suburban white kids aren't motivated to put in the work required for athletic success. [Brent Barry in Slam Dunk contest]; B/W CHART, [RECRUITING FALLOFF], [Chart not available--bar graph charting decline in athletic scholarships awarded to white freshmen from 1984 to 1990]; B/W PHOTO: DAVID LIAM KYLE, Though NBA scouts automatically compared Van Horn with white players such as Bird and Schrempf, he likes to compare himself to a black forward, McKey. [Keith Van Horn]; B/W CHART, [CAREER PATHS], [Chart not available--bar graph comparing rise in percentage of white and black males wanting to be pro athletes with decline in choices for lawyers and teachers]

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: December 17, 1997

12TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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January 5, 1998, Monday, Late Edition - Final

SECTION: Section C; Page 4; Column 1; Sports Desk

LENGTH: 871 words

HEADLINE: Sports of The Times;
Searching To Bridge Racial Divide In Athletics

BYLINE: By WILLIAM C. RHODEN

BODY:

BRETT FAVRE was cruising yesterday at Lambeau Field. The Green Bay Packers' nimble quarterback was peppering Tampa Bay with classic bullet passes, moving, maneuvering. Finally, Favre executed a surprise run on a 2-point conversion attempt and scored. In the exuberance of the moment, Favre jumped up and tried to dunk the football over the crossbar. He didn't make it.

The announcer describing the scene on radio gushed, "Well, I guess Woody Harrelson was right -- white men can't jump."

When are we going to stop this foolishness? Last month, Sports Illustrated asked, "Whatever Happened to the White Athlete?" For the last month, there has been an unabashed racial feeding frenzy surrounding Keith Van Horn, the Nets' talented rookie, who happens to be white. We seem to be in the midst of a resurgent preoccupation with the color of muscle. This obsession has been with us for nearly three centuries, since African slaves were portrayed as beasts as a way to rationalize the slave trade.

In the last century sportswriters -- mostly white, mostly male and mostly well meaning -- have observed an increasing African-American physical presence in sport with awe, suspicion, resentment, ambivalence.

What's fascinating about the question asked by a magazine, and the talk about Van Horn, is the persistence of the preoccupation. Over our history, the reaction to perceived African-American progress -- or threat -- has been bitter and often negative: Dred Scott, Plessy v. Ferguson.

In sports, the reaction to the dominance of black jockeys in the 1890's was not white jockeys' vowing to work and get better. Instead, it was a nationwide move to stop licensing blacks to ride. Black players were banned in 1867 and, informally, in 1887 from different professional baseball leagues. At the end of the 19th century, cyclists attempted to stop Major Taylor, an African-American who was the country's cycling champion, from competing by denying him membership in the important cycling organizations. By 1934 black players had been eliminated from the National Football League by a gentlemen's agreement among owners.

After Jack Johnson won the heavyweight title from Tommy Burns in 1908, the victory created such a maelstrom in the United States that a national cry arose for Jim Jeffries to come out of retirement. He came back in deference to "that portion of the white race that has been looking for me to defend its athletic

The New York Times, January 5, 1998

superiority." This was the genesis of the desire for a Great White Hope that we thought -- we hoped -- was dead and buried. Obviously, it's alive and well.

Keith Van Horn has said that he doesn't give a damn about being a White Hope. He's a rookie in the National Basketball Association who wants to keep his head above water, if not the rim. Reporters insist on placing an added burden on his shoulders, the suffocating flip side of racism that has ruined countless careers before they began. It's the same burden that the Olympic skater Debi Thomas carried in figure skating in those days in the 1980's when she had to expend psychic energy talking about being a black figure skater. Here we are on the eve of a new century and this same insecurity, or maybe it's greed, resurfaces.

Obviously, it's not enough that whites control virtually every phase of sports, from the grounds crew to ownership and most of what can be found in between. Despite dominating some sports on the playing field, in the universe of sports, African-Americans represent a small percentage, if that. During the Tennessee-Florida football game this season, there was a point when all but two of the players on the field were African-American. A quick glance around the press box revealed a sobering contrast: two African-Americans. The Southeastern Conference, so heavily loaded with black players, hasn't been able to find an African-American head football coach yet.

"Whatever happened," indeed. At the moment of truth, we always seem to ask the wrong question.

Before the Steelers-Patriots playoff game in Pittsburgh on Saturday, Paul Tagliabue, the N.F.L. commissioner, and Mel Blount, the Steelers' Hall of Fame defensive back, sat at a table and talked over lunch. Blount spoke excitedly about the highly acclaimed youth camp he runs on his 268-acre farm in Claysville, Pa., 30 miles outside Pittsburgh.

There had been a few problems. In 1989 the Ku Klux Klan held a rally by Blount's farm, and just last month someone scrawled racist graffiti in the road that goes past his home. The local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People held a march.

Blount said he wasn't deterred or disillusioned. "This really isn't about black or white when you get down to it," he said. "It's about good people. The trick is to find people who have the same values, the same morals, and bring them together."

What matters is not who can jump, but who can play; not that there is a white hope, but that there is hope. I hope Keith Van Horn is not seduced the way Jim Jeffries was seduced -- to commit to a battle that he can't win.

Some people will keep trying to hoist Van Horn up the racial flagpole. If the rookie is smart, he'll keep telling everybody, "I ain't climbing."

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: January 5, 1998

 **Belmont Stakes**

06/07/97 - 09:56 PM ET - Click reload often for latest version

Triple Crown thumbnail sketches

A look at the horses who have won thoroughbred racing's Triple Crown, the Kentucky Derby, Preakness and Belmont Stakes.

SIR BARTON (1919)

A chestnut colt by Star Shoot-Lady Sterling, by Hanover. Owned by J.K.L. Ross, trained by H.G. Bedwell and ridden by Johnny Loftus.

Was a maiden when he entered the Kentucky Derby. Went to the post coupled with Billy Kelly and was the favorite because because of the entry. Set the pace in the Kentucky Derby and drew away to win by five lengths over Billy Kelly.

Won in the same fashion in both the Preakness and the Belmont Stakes. Won the Preakness by four lengths over Eternal. Set an American record as well as a Belmont Stakes record by running the 1 3-8 miles in 2:17 2-5 after a slow start for a 5-length victory over Sweep On.

GALLANT FOX (1930)

A bay colt by Sir Gallahad III-Marguerite, by Celt. Owned by Belair Stud, trained by James Fitzsimmons and ridden by Earl Sande.

Including the Triple Crown, posted nine victories and a second in 10 starts to set a record for earnings with \$308,275 as a 3-year-old.

Wore down Crack Brigade, who set the pace, in the stretch to take the Preakness by three-quarters of a length. Took the lead in the back stretch and won by two lengths over Gallant Knight in the Kentucky Derby. Completed the sweep with an easy 3-length victory over Wichone.

OMAHA (1935)

A chestnut colt by Gallant Fox-Flambino, by Wrack. Owned by Belair Stud, trained by James Fitzsimmons and ridden by Willie Saunders.

Omaha was born from the first crop by Gallant Fox, making them the only father-son combination ever to win the Triple Crown.

Was the second favorite to Nellie Flag, a filly, and closed fast to win by 1 1/2 lengths over Roman Soldier in the Kentucky Derby. Came back a week later as the favorite in the Preakness and won by six lengths over Firethorn with the second fastest time in that race up to that time. Overtook Firethorn in the stretch at Belmont to take the race by 1 1/2 lengths.

WAR ADMIRAL (1937)

A brown colt by Man o' War-Brushup, by Sweep. Owned by Glen Riddle Farm, trained by George Conway and ridden by Charles Kurtsinger.

Won all eight of his starts, six of them stakes, as 3-year-old and became the first Triple Crown Winner to go unbeaten in his sophomore year.

Was the post-time favorite in the Kentucky Derby and took an early lead and beat Pompoon by 13/4 lengths. A week later at the Preakness, War Admiral and Pompoon battled again with a terrific duel in the stretch. War Admiral held a slight the lead throughout the stretch to win by a head. The Belmont was War Admiral's easiest race of the three, as he posted a 3-length victory over Sceneshifter.

WHIRLAWAY (1941)

A chestnut colt by Blenheim II-Dustwhirl, by Sweep. Owned by Calumet Farm, trained by B.A. Jones and ridden by Eddie Arcaro.

As a 2-year-old had a tendency to run the outside rail when going around turns, but was cured when trainer Ben Jones devised a blinker which prevented him from seeing the outside rail.

Whirlaway set a Kentucky Derby record with a burst of speed in the stretch to double his 4-length lead and shave Twenty Grand's mark of 2:01 4-5 to 2:01 2-5, a record he held for 21 years. A week later in the Preakness he came on from seventh place to the lead at the quarter-mile mark and won easily by 5 1/2 lengths over King Cole. Only three horses challenged him in the Belmont and he by 2 1/2 lengths over Robert Morris.

COUNT FLEET (1943)

A brown colt by Reigh Count-Quickly, by Haste. Owned by Mrs. John D. Hertz, trained by D.G. Cameron and ridden by Johnny Longden.

Won all six races as a 3-year-old.

Was the favorite in all three races and led all three wire-to-wire. Posted a 3-length victory in the Kentucky Derby and an 8-length victory in Preakness besting Blue Swords both times. He outran both horses from the start in the Belmont and galloped through the stretch for a 25-length triumph over Fairy Manhurst.

Unfortunately the Belmont was his final race when it was discovered that he rapped his right foreleg, bowing the tendon.

ASSAULT (1946)

A chestnut colt by Bold Venture-Igual, by Equipose. Owned by King Ranch, trained by M. Hirsch and ridden by Warren Mehrtens.

Assault won the Horse of the Year title and took home \$424,195, breaking the record for 3-year-olds held by the 1930 Triple Crown winner Gallant Fox. He overcame a crippled hoof and only posted two victories in nine starts as a 2-year-old.

Was given little consideration as he went off at better than 8-to-1 in the Kentucky Derby and won by eight lengths over Spy Song. Was the favorite for the first time in his career in the Preakness. After having a four-length lead in the stretch he had to hang on to finish a neck ahead of Lord Boswell. Assault came from behind, trailing Natchez by five lengths at the eighth pole, and came on in the final furlong to win by three lengths.

CITATION (1948)

A bay colt by Bull Lea-Hydroplane II, by Hyperion. Owned by Calumet Farm, trained by H.A. Jones and ridden by Eddie Acaro.

Posted 19 victories and a second in 20 starts as a 3-year-old. His only loss was to Saggy in the Chesapeake Trial Stakes.

Stablemate Coaltown set the pace in the Kentucky Derby and Citation took the lead at the top of the

stretch and coasted to a 3 1/2-length victory. In the Preakness, he led wire-to-wire and finished 5 1/2 lengths ahead of Vulcan's Forge. The final leg was the easiest as he again led wire-to-wire and won by eight lengths over Better Self in the Belmont.

SECRETARIAT (1973)

A chestnut colt by Bold Ruler-Somethingroyal, by Princequillo. Owned by Meadow Stable, trained by Lucien Laurin and ridden by Ron Turcotte.

The first Triple Crown winner in 24 years captured the attention of millions as he set two world records, two track records and tied another as a three-year-old.

Became the only Kentucky Derby winner ever to finish under two minutes with a 1:59.25 clocking as he passed rivals on the outside for a 2 1/2-length victory over Sham. Secretariat beat Sham by the same margin in the Preakness. He posted one of the greatest feats in thoroughbred racing with a 3 1-length victory in the Belmont Stakes and a world record time of 2:24 for the 1 1/2 miles, shattering Gallant Fox's record by 2 3-5 seconds.

SEATTLE SLEW (1977)

A dark brown colt by Bold Reasoning-My Charmer, by Poker. Owned by Mrs. Karen Taylor, trained by Ben S. Castleman and ridden by Jean Cruguet.

Purchased for \$17,500 at the Fasig-Tipton Kentucky Sales and was later given a world-record book value of \$12 million in 1978 when a half interest was sold for \$6 million. He is the Triple Crown winner to race through the series with an unbeaten record.

In the Kentucky Derby, Seattle Slew took the lead from For The Moment at the top of the stretch and held off Run Dusty Run for a 13/4-length victory. He ran the fastest first mile in the Preakness at 1:34 4-5 and held off a challenge by Iron Constitution for a 1 1/2-length victory. Ran wire-to-wire in the Belmont to post a four-length victory over Derby challenger, Run Dusty Run.

AFFIRMED (1978)

A chestnut colt by Exclusive Native-Won't Tell You, by Crafty Admiral. Owned by Harbor View Farm, trained by Lazaro S. Barrera and ridden by Steve Cauthen.

Followed Seattle Slew's triumph in 1977 to mark the only back-to-back Triple Crown winners. Affirmed also had the toughest road to the Crown as he beat Alydar, the father of 1987 Triple Crown hopeful Alysheba, in all three races by a combined margin of less than two lengths.

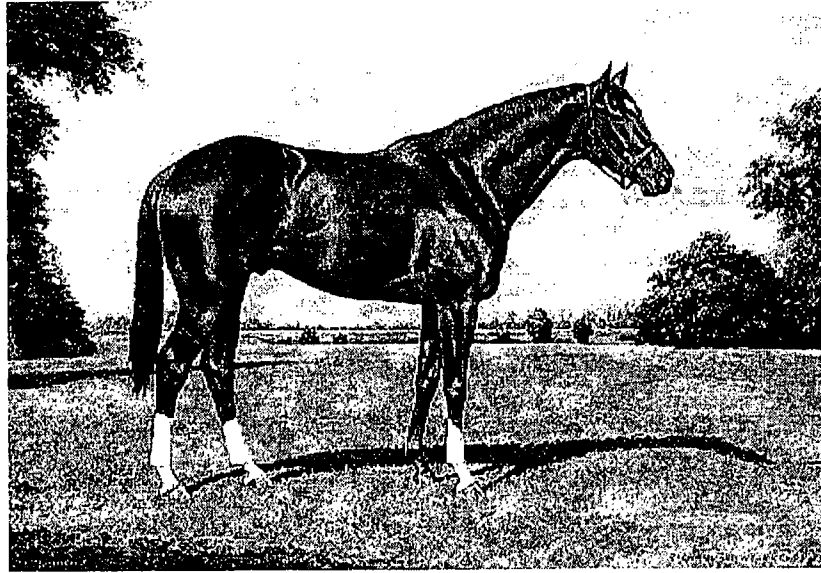
Affirmed came off the pace to win the Kentucky Derby by 1 1/2 lengths, the largest margin of the the series. He withstood a late challenge by Alydar to win by a neck in the Preakness. In the Belmont Stakes, Affirmed and Alydar staged a classic head-to-head duel with Affirmed winning by a head. It is considered perhaps the greatest Triple Crown Series ever.

By The Associated Press

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Secretariat

A True Record Breaker



Secretariat's performances were more than heroic, they were totally astounding. He won the Triple Crown after others had tried for twenty-five years. Six times since 1948, winners of the Kentucky Derby and The Preakness came to Belmont only to be defeated by that legendary race.

But, on June 9th, 1973, Secretariat arrived at Belmont after a record-breaking win at Churchill Downs and a fabulous run at Pimlico where he was denied a sure record by a faulty timer.

Would Secretariat be humbled by Belmont as so many others had been? Not on your life. He attacked that track like no one ever had before. Here's how Whitney Tower described it in Sports Illustrated:

"It was the greatest performance by a racehorse in this century. As Secretariat thundered down the homestretch at Belmont Park to the roar of nearly 70,000 fans, he took on legendary stature. His long stride carried him to the finish by an ever-increasing margin in poetic rhythm. And when the wire was reached, the mile-and-a-half Belmont Stakes won and the ninth Triple Crown in racing history earned, the closest competitor - if he can be so called - was 31 lengths to the rear."

Curriculum Vita of Secretariat	
Born:	March 30, 1970
Died:	October 4, 1989.
Sire:	Bold Ruler
Dam:	Somethingroyal, by Princequillo
Starts:	21
Wins:	16
Earnings:	\$1,316,808.
Retired at stud after 1973.	
Horse of the year:	1972
Horse of the Year:	1973
Triple Crown Winner:	1973

Secretariat was buried at Claiborne next to Riva Ridge, his stablemate and 1972 Kentucky Derby winner.

BACK

10TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

Copyright 1998 The Denver Post Corporation
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January 8, 1998 Thursday 2D EDITION

SECTION: SPORTS; Pg. D-01

LENGTH: 625 words

HEADLINE: For Stewart, the rainbow leads to gold

BYLINE: Mark Kiszla

BODY:
The old, black-and-white laws of football do not apply to Kordell Stewart. The quarterback formerly known as Slash breaks all the rules of the game. Indiscriminately.

The NFL has never seen anything like Stewart. The star of the Pittsburgh Steelers bombs convention. He outruns stereotypes. He changes everything.

Stewart knows he's an African-American quarterback. The man owns a mirror. But Stewart plays the game in living color, not black and white.

"I don't see football in terms of who's white and who's black. That's ignorant," Stewart told me one wintry night in 1994, the passion in his voice leaving little clouds of white steam in the cold, dark air. It's not about whether we should give the job to a black guy or a white guy. That's not an issue with me. It's about who can get the job done."

After needing two years to persuade the Steelers he was the man for their quarterback job, Stewart has taken Pittsburgh to the AFC Championship game against Denver in his first season as a starter. How did he get here?

Stewart has stolen from the best, without shame or prejudice. When he was growing up, his quarterback heroes were John Elway and Randall Cunningham.

One white.

One black.

Stewart became a little of both. He's the only NFL quarterback who can throw or run for a 70-yard touchdown.

"He could be a wide receiver in the NFL, and he could be a running back in the NFL," Denver coach Mike Shanahan said. But Stewart would rather be the QB who pushes the game into the 21st century.

In 1997, when the NFL's quarterback club grew more diverse than at any time in the game's history, Stewart proved himself more than the best of the six African-Americans who ran the offense and called signals for a league franchise.

The Steelers have reached the Final Four of the Super Bowl tournament because Stewart has joined San Francisco's Steve Young, Green Bay's Brett Favre and Elway as one of the four most dangerous quarterbacks in the league.

The Denver Post, January 8, 1998 Thursday

Maybe you recall Stewart as a kid with the deer-in-the-headlights eyes looking for somewhere to hide against Nebraska, and doubt he could've grown into one of the NFL's elite quarterbacks just three years after leaving the University of Colorado. Well, the Broncos made the same mistake. And they paid for it.

After discounting and disrespecting Stewart in the defensive game plan, he threw for 303 yards and the Steelers blew away Denver 35-24 during the regular season.

Denver will bring blitzes, switch pass coverages and try to turn the AFC Championship game into an impossible riddle for Stewart. But it still might not make any difference.

"What Kordell Stewart and John Elway have in common is they're both big-, big-play athletes. And that's the No. 1 thing you want in an NFL quarterback," Shanahan said. "They both can make a play when nothing's there. They can find a way to beat you when there's nothing you can do to stop them."

Stewart doesn't flinch at the comparisons to the best AFC quarterback of a generation.

Not at all.

He wants to inherit everything the Broncos' legend owns when Elway retires.

"I will be a Pro Bowl quarterback," Stewart boldly predicted months ago, before leading the Steelers to an 11-5 record and a division title. "And I will go to the Hall of Fame one day."

Stewart can do more than beat you. He could change the way we all look at the game.

In 1988, Doug Williams of the Washington Redskins became the first black quarterback to win the Super Bowl. That was historic. Ten years later, Stewart is starting a new revolution.

He could be the first quarterback America forgets is African-American.

There are so many colors in Stewart's game, nobody can possibly see everything he brings to the NFL in black and white.

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16TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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December 7, 1997 Sunday 2D EDITION

SECTION: SPORTS; Pg. CC-01

LENGTH: 774 words

HEADLINE: Kordell Stewart has traded in his slash, but the question remains...
Star quarterback or great athlete?

BYLINE: By John Henderson, Denver Post Sports Writer

BODY:

PITTSBURGH - The Slash is gone. However, a question mark remains.

Kordell Stewart has established himself as the starting quarterback of the Pittsburgh Steelers. Only eight NFL quarterbacks have thrown more touchdown passes this season. Only four have better records.

While the stigma of black quarterbacks appears to have vanished, Stewart said last week it hasn't gone too far away. He knows. He has fought it his entire professional life and he says he's still fighting it.

"I don't say it's over," said Stewart, who leads the Steelers against Denver (11-2) at 11 a.m. MST today at Three Rivers Stadium. "It's what it is. What it is it's always going to be: 'He's a great athlete,' as opposed to being a great quarterback."

Stewart was asked if he still hears that. He laughed.

"Oh, my goodness: 'He has great ability,'" Stewart said. "You still hear it. It's a compliment, but at the same time it's an insult because it's not like he threw a great pass or he went out and did a great job. It's more he has great ability to go out and do those types of things."

Stewart, 25, doesn't hear that from the Steelers. Coach Bill Cowher named Stewart the starting quarterback before this year's training camp even began. But for his first two years in the league, Stewart came across as a great athlete wanting to play quarterback.

The slash label given after he helped the Steelers to the Super Bowl as a running back/receiver/punter/quarterback two years ago led to some national endorsement deals. But it hasn't wiped that image from the sporting nation's consciousness.

According to Stewart, the double standard in the NFL is alive and well.

"If you take a Drew Bledsoe-type quarterback or a Troy Aikman-type quarterback and he does the same movements that I'm doing in the pocket, then he's a great quarterback," Stewart said. "Or a Brett Favre. But you come back to a Steve McNair or a Kordell Stewart, or a Jeff Blake and do the same exact thing that Troy Aikman, Brett Favre or Drew Bledsoe do, then he's a great athlete. I don't know if they're really hearing what they're saying, but I hear it."

The Denver Post, December 7, 1997 Sunday

For the record, Stewart's best statistic is his won-lost record. His quarterback rating of 75.9 is 11th in the AFC with 2,364 yards, 17 touchdowns and 13 interceptions and a .536 passing percentage. Then again, this is his first year as a starter.

Yet many TV commentators when talking about Stewart say, "He's a lot closer to a Randall Cunningham than a Warren Moon." Stewart wonders why they never compare him to a white quarterback.

"What are they really saying?" Stewart said. "You've got a Mark Brunell, who signed a huge signing bonus and it wasn't based on his abilities but what he did for his team. We're 9-4 right now. We're doing very well and as far as the black and white issue goes, when you really get right down to it, there are white quarterbacks who aren't doing well and I'm one of the black quarterbacks, along with Steve McNair and Warren Moon, who is doing well."

Stewart, however, isn't complaining. He knows he's blessed with 4.4 speed - that would be "athletic ability" - that has allowed him to score 10 touchdowns the last two years as a rusher and a receiver.

And while he criticizes those who patronize his skills, he sees some advantages in the way he and other black quarterbacks play the game.

"I feel we, as far as the black (vs.) white quarterback, have the edge because when it's time to really get some things done, we can get out of trouble," he said. "We can make things happen by the snap of a finger because of the capabilities we have at being able to run in the backfield."

Stewart never faced this stigma before. Growing up in suburban New Orleans, he started playing quarterback in middle school with no objections from young coaches and became an All-America option quarterback at John Ehret High. After his first year at Colorado, coach Bill McCartney switched from an I-bone option attack to the three-wide receiver pro set, and Stewart playing quarterback was never an issue. He threw for a school-record 6,481 yards.

As a pro, the differences are more global.

"There are tons of things," he said. "It was a big change. It was more of a responsibility. You're not just a quarterback of a team, but you're the leader of an organization, a multimillion-dollar and billion-dollar corporation."

And as that leader, he hopes some day to take a stand on important issues. Only one goal must be met in order to earn his soapbox.

"My goal is to win a Super Bowl so I can have an opportunity to sit down and talk about that," he said. "I would love to have that opportunity."

GRAPHIC: PHOTOS: Associated Press Kordell Stewart's running ability often draws comparisons to black stars such as Randall Cunningham ... But he wonders why his passing style never draws comparisons to white quarterbacks.

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SERIES: RACE IN SPORTS. This is another in a series of occasional reports

HEADLINE: SUNDAY SPECIAL / RACE IN SPORTS / HARMONY IN THE HUDDLE / WHILE NOT WITHOUT PROBLEMS, THE NFL EXPERIENCES LESS RACIAL STRIFE THAN THE REST OF SOCIETY. STEREOTYPES MUST STILL BE FOUGHT

BYLINE: By Bob Glauber. STAFF WRITER

BODY:

This is another in a series of occasional reports on the role race plays in shaping the way games are played and the way sports is managed at all levels.

From within the sheltered walls of his NFL locker room, where the lines of race are often blurred, Giants linebacker Corey Miller recalls a humiliating episode of discrimination in vivid detail.

Last May, Miller was about to board a USAirways flight for Newark to report to a Giants minicamp. Miller had purchased a one-way, first-class ticket, but was inexplicably detained at the airport.

"They thought I was a drug dealer," Miller said. "That was pretty obvious that I was being stereotyped as a young black guy with a big gold chain, a sweatsuit, a Rolex watch buying a one-way ticket. People perceive you as being something they think you are."

After being searched, Miller was allowed to board a later flight, but reported late to practice and was fined by team management. A spokesman for USAirways' customer relations department did not return telephone calls seeking comment. Miller plans to file a lawsuit during the offseason. Miller also told of being stopped and searched at gunpoint two years ago by police officers near his New Jersey home and of being taunted in college by other blacks because his girlfriend, whom he subsequently married, was white.

"As a black man in America, I've seen a lot of prejudice in my lifetime," Miller said.

But the one place where he says he has never felt racism is where he now sits. Discussing race relations while sitting in a room where the Giants players ordinarily listen to their coaches give instructions about strategy, Miller says this is the only place, aside from his own home, where he truly feels respected for who he is and what he does.

Miller's experience is not unusual. For NFL players, like athletes in other sports, the impact of race in the locker room is often vastly different from outside the games. In order to get a snapshot of how race impacts athletes' relationships, Newsday examined life in the NFL. In interviews with dozens of

Newsday (New York, NY), December 21, 1997

NFL players, coaches and administrators, there is virtual unanimity that, while not without problems, most NFL locker rooms are true melting pots where racial harmony is fostered through positive relationships among players of varied racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds.

The NFL is not immune to racial concerns. In a league in which 70 percent of players are black and 30 percent are white, only three of 30 head coaches are black. And while NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue has been at the forefront of helping to raise awareness among team owners to increase the hiring of blacks, both in coaching and administrative positions, there are only two black general managers in the game.

Most players interviewed said they considered the football workplace to be far better than the world off the field, where they say they often confront the racial stereotypes and prejudices that have afflicted American society for years.

Miller says he wishes the environment he has experienced during a seven-year career in the NFL could be duplicated outside the locker room. He knows, however, that it is pure fantasy to expect it.

"I think race relations in here are better," he said. "I don't know if it's because you spend so much time with each other, because we work together and guys learn to love and accept each other for who they are. That's not always the case in society. I think if we could all have the relationships outside the locker room that we have inside the locker room, this world would be a better place."

Giants kicker Brad Daluiso nods his head in agreement as he listens to Miller, his best friend on the team, detail his experiences with bigotry. Daluiso, who is white, grew up on the opposite side of the country and in a dramatically different racial culture from Miller, believes the relationships fostered in NFL locker rooms force black and white players to raise their consciousness.

In fact, had it not been for football, Daluiso believes he might never have experienced friendships with blacks.

"I grew up in a predominantly white area of San Diego," Daluiso said. "So for someone like myself, if I didn't play football, I'd probably be living in San Diego sitting behind a desk and I wouldn't have had the experiences that I've had and wouldn't be aware of the problems associated with race."

Daluiso and Miller, for instance, are close friends on and off the field. Their families socialize regularly during the season, and their children play with one another.

"I think we both have a lot in common, and so do our wives and families," Daluiso said. "It's not that I look at Corey as black or he looks at me as white. It's that I think we look at each other with common interests, with football being the first, and we just get along. I don't know that there's anything more to it than that."

Daluiso isn't sure why there is more racial harmony in NFL locker rooms than in society at large, but he surmises that the sheer closeness of the players

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during an intense, defined period of time forces them to get along. That and the fact that they have common goals -- playing in the NFL and winning.

"I think it's something we really enjoy," Daluiso said. "We're basically playing a game, and we're playing it together. That may lead to a little more peaceful workplace than other situations, where it might not be as much fun. We enjoy what we do and we count on each other and that kind of eliminates some of our problems.

"We eat together, meet together, take showers together, hang out here all day together, stay in hotels together," he said. "It's more of a family atmosphere." Friction and friendship

But race relations are not always ideal in locker rooms.

Earlier this year, for instance, the Carolina Panthers were stunned by an incident during training camp in which quarterback Kerry Collins got into a confrontation with two teammates, one African-American and the other Hispanic. Collins reportedly used the word "nigger" in front of wide receiver Muhsin Muhammad, who is black, and called offensive tackle Norberto Davidds-Garrido, who is Hispanic, a "wetback" when the two were drinking in a bar.

Collins, who subsequently apologized to both players, said he meant the remarks as a joke because he thought he had established a close enough relationship with the two that the words would not be termed offensive.

"I made a mistake. I joke around. I'm sarcastic. I said something that wasn't meant to be taken offensively. Regardless of that, it was. I apologized, but in no way did I mean anything by it. I made a mistake, and I think I learned from it," Collins said. "But I think those people who truly know me know I'm not a racist. I certainly do not think along those lines in any way whatsoever. There's no ill will or bad blood. If anything, we know each other better."

Sometimes a source of friction is friendship. For instance, former Jets defensive tackle Marvin Washington, who is black, befriended defensive tackle Dennis Byrd, who is white, during the late 1980s. The two quickly became roommates and best friends, but Washington, who is now with the 49ers, said some black players didn't approve of the relationship.

"I'd have guys saying to me, 'Why are you hanging around with a white guy?' " Washington said, declining to identify the players. "I said, 'Hey, I'll hang out with whoever I want to hang out with.' I grew up in a mixed neighborhood, so it was never any big deal with black guys hanging out with white guys."

It is not uncommon to see players separated by race, especially when they are not in the football environment. And even when they are together during the season, there is often a self-segregation process. In many training camp cafeterias, white players generally eat with white players, and blacks with blacks. Miller and Daluiso said that is not always the case with the Giants, however, as players mingle more by position than by race.

"I think if you walk into our lunchroom, you'll see white guys hanging out with black guys, whites with whites and blacks with blacks," Daluiso said. "I don't think there's any hard and fast rules about that."

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Racial tension was raised this week, when two black players from the Broncos accused the NFL of being too lenient in meting out a \$7,500 fine to Denver linebacker Bill Romanowski for spitting on 49ers wide receiver J.J. Stokes during last Monday night's game. Romanowski is white, Stokes is black. Broncos tight end Shannon Sharpe and wide receiver Willie Davis suggested the league would have fined a black player more had he been caught spitting on a white player. But NFL director of football operations Gene Washington, who is black, defended his fine and said race had absolutely nothing to do with the amount of the fine. Team chemistry

Former Bengals receiver Cris Collinsworth remembers how furious he felt walking into coach Sam Wyche's office shortly before the start of training camp in 1988.

Wyche, concerned about team chemistry, had decided to change the way players roomed with one another at camp, forcing them to abandon the practice of staying with whom they chose and enforcing an integrated rooming list.

"Man, was I angry," Collinsworth said. "I told Sam, 'Training camp's hard enough, so don't tell me who I have to room with.' "

Collinsworth had wanted to remain roommates with Turk Schonert, a white quarterback, but instead was told to room with Joe Kelly, a black linebacker. It turned out to be one of the most rewarding experiences of Collinsworth's life.

"I got to know another guy from another race, and there were things I had no clue about," said Collinsworth, now an NFL analyst for NBC and HBO. "I can remember Joe telling me that he had a house in Los Angeles, and that he had this gold, flashy Mercedes. He'd be driving to his house, and he was pulled over a bunch of times because he was black. The cops would say, 'What are you doing?' And Joe would say, 'I'm going home. That's my house over there.' They'd always want to look in the trunk."

"I don't think you can ever understand that until you could hear about it from someone who's been through it," Collinsworth said. "But that's the thing with football. You're forced to live interracially. Sure, there are going to be some problems, there are going to be some cliques. But at least you're in there slugging it out and you're getting through some tough situations, and that you are more advanced than the rest of society."

But Wyche's reasoning went beyond simply trying to improve racial interaction. He wanted his experiment to translate into more victories, which was precisely the case that year, because the Bengals went to the Super Bowl.

"The gut feeling was that when it came down to the critical times in games, that these guys would look at each other and know what was important in their lives," said Wyche, an NBC commentator. "It might have made a difference in the way they competed for each other."

Collinsworth is convinced it did.

"I think we all got to know each other on a different level," he said. "I think there was a lot to be said for having that experience."

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Miller wishes the Giants would enforce a similar rooming system during training camp, for the same reason Wyche had the Bengals room interracially. The Giants, like all other NFL teams, have no strict rooming policy and allow players to stay with whomever they choose.

"I think it's better to integrate at times," Miller said. "You get to know more about a different race, because that's the only way you're going to get to really know a person. It's going to take spending time with that person, and when you're on the road or in training camp, you're spending quality time with somebody and you get to learn a lot about the people you're living with."

But general manager George Young believes racial understanding cannot be enforced, and therefore has no plans to change the team's rooming setup.

"I don't like to mandate that, unless there's some reason that we feel it's causing a problem," he said. "Let the players have their own friends. It's better that people can choose of their own volition. Then it's more meaningful. I'm not for having more laws than you need. I'd like it to be a little more of a natural function than a forced function. I think in a free society, people ought to have the right to choose."

Besides, Young said, sports in general has a better track record in race relations than most other areas of society. "Sports has probably done more for race than any other institution in this country," he said. "It gives people the opportunities to produce, and usually your judgments are based on production." Off the field

"The biggest thing about sports, especially football, is that you become like a family," Miller said. "You're relying on one another, and it doesn't matter if that guy next to you on the line of scrimmage is black, white, green, whatever. You need that guy and he needs you."

Nevertheless, Miller and other NFL players are disheartened by what goes on outside the locker room and after the game, when they return to an outside world that is far more insensitive to racial issues than their workplace.

According to experts, it is not an uncommon experience.

"When people are working together, race becomes irrelevant, because they've got to achieve a common task," said Dr. Herbert Gans, a professor of sociology at Columbia University. "But just because there is racial peace on the field and in the locker room doesn't mean it will translate into the outside world."

Dr. Harry Edwards, a professor of sociology at the University of California at Berkeley and a consultant for the San Francisco 49ers, said it is a natural reaction for players to go their separate ways, no matter how well they get along in the locker room.

"Once they're away from football, the strains and pressures on both sides have to be relieved," he said. "Where they find that relief is in a space where they do not have to deal with that constant strain. They find places where they can heal, where they can feel comfortable, where they can recreate themselves, both blacks and whites."

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When Jets cornerback Corwin Brown was a teenager growing up in the western suburbs of Chicago, he got a job working in a White Castle restaurant in a white neighborhood. One day he walked outside to throw away the trash when a group of three or four young white men came by.

As Brown recalled, the men started taunting him, repeatedly calling him a "nigger." Fearing for his safety, Brown quickly walked back into the restaurant.

But for the next several months, any time he served a white customer, Brown wondered about something.

"I thought, 'Is this the type of person who would do something like the other guys did to me?' " Brown said. "It was always in the back of my mind. That had a powerful effect on me, because it was something that had never happened before. I didn't even know what racial prejudice was until then. I didn't realize things like that ever happened."

Now, sitting in a corner of the Jets' locker room, Brown recounted the incident as if it occurred yesterday, saying he will never forget the transformation he experienced as a result.

"It made me aware of the real world," he said. "It made me realize that there are hateful people out there."

But peering around his locker room, where white and black players mingled with one another during a lunch break, Brown pointed to this scene as a model for the rest of society.

"I think what football gives you is a place where all players need one another, regardless of what color you are," he said. "I look at these guys as my teammates, my partners. I need them and they need me, and we're all working toward something together. I wish it was like that everywhere."

Packers defensive end Reggie White, an ordained minister who is a frequent commentator on race relations in America, agreed that race relations are vastly different in the NFL.

"I think that's because football creates an environment that allows racial harmony to exist. It provides a mechanism where blacks and whites can work together with a single purpose," White said. "The problem in society is that you don't have a lot of situations where that exists. In the inner cities, where I do a lot of my work, you have disadvantaged blacks who look at their lives and don't know how to change them. The people in the more affluent communities aren't inclined to reach out and help them, either because they're not aware of the problem or because they don't want to be aware of the problem."

"I think we have a unique situation as professional athletes where we can bring to light some of these issues," he said. "It's important that we speak out and try to help people get along."

Every offseason, Miller returns home to Columbia, S.C., where he owns an upscale home in a predominantly white neighborhood. Miller believes he has a good relationship with area residents, and is cordial with his neighbors.

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But there are times when he feels uncomfortable around some of these people, especially the ones who appear overly friendly. Many of them will ask him about what it is like to play in the NFL, and they want to know about the various personalities of other players.

Miller is not uncomfortable because he dislikes talking about his profession; it's just that he has noticed that many of the people who seem eager to befriend him virtually ignore other black residents in the neighborhood.

"It's funny, because I'm a young black guy living in one of the nicest neighborhoods in Columbia, and white people will talk to me," he said. "But as far as the black guy who lives up the street, they don't talk to him. It's almost reverse racism."

Experiences like this make Miller realize that for all the apparent advances in race relations inside the cocoon of an NFL locker room, life outside football hasn't appreciably improved. A look of sadness comes over his face as he attempts to reach out and offer his own solution to the issue.

"I see people from the inside, sort of how God sees us," he said. "God judges us on the inside, not from the color of our skin. I think if people start to see that, this world will be a better place." Stereotypes Must Still Be Fought

For Wayne Chrebet, the stereotypes were rarely spoken, but always implied.

At every level of football, he was considered too small. Too slow.

And too white.

"I've definitely been stereotyped," said the Jets' second-year wide receiver, who made it to the NFL as a free-agent walk-on from Hofstra. "Just coming out of college, there's a stereotype that there aren't many white receivers in the NFL."

Chrebet is the exception -- he made it to the highest level of football, despite the racial stereotyping he confronted -- but he now wonders how many others at his and other positions never got the chance to play professionally because of prejudice, whether it was overt or unintended.

"I've seen a lot of guys who had the talent in college but weren't drafted because they were stereotyped," Chrebet said. "Why does it have to be like that? I don't understand it. I think there are many white receivers to go through college who didn't get a chance, just as there are many white cornerbacks and black quarterbacks. It's just something you have to deal with, but I don't think it should be that way."

Despite the overwhelming consensus among players, coaches and league executives that race relations are better in the NFL than in most industries in society, there continues to be a perception that some players are wrongfully typecast when they come into the league, often along racial lines.

For instance, Steelers quarterback Kordell Stewart, who is black, was told by most pro scouts who looked at him while he played at the University of Colorado that he was best suited to play wide receiver in the NFL. This, despite the fact he grew up playing quarterback in both high school and college.

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"Quarterback is my thing," said Stewart, who has led the Steelers to the playoffs in his first season as the team's starter. "A lot of teams wanted me to try out for other positions, and I told them, 'No.' I just said, 'I know I'm a quarterback. I'll be one eventually.'"

The Steelers were one of the NFL's only teams to actually ask Stewart about his desire to play quarterback, which played a major role in his being drafted by Pittsburgh in the second round in 1995. Had he been drafted by another club and projected to play wide receiver, he likely would have refused.

"The Steelers were the only team that asked me about my quarterbacking," he said. "They were the only team I heard say, 'You will be a quarterback here.' They handled it more respectfully than anyone else."

Giants cornerback Jason Sehorn, who is white, said he, too, has perceived racial stereotyping, since most NFL defensive backs are black.

"It's something of an oddity, I guess," he said. "You don't see a lot of white cornerbacks in this league or at college, so it's unusual."

But unlike Stewart, who was urged by most NFL scouts and coaches to play receiver, Sehorn said his coaches never dissuaded him from pursuing his dream.

"I was always urged by my coaches in a positive manner," he said. "They made me feel that I had every right to be a football player, that I could do anything as long as I put my mind to it."

The problem of racial stereotyping is often difficult to put a handle on, simply because few people in position of power in the NFL say it is a factor.

Giants coach Jim Fassel, for instance, said he has never viewed players in terms of race.

"I've spent my whole life in football, and the thing is, it doesn't matter where you come from, what your ethnic background is, or what your religious beliefs are," he said. "If you can play, you're going to play."

Jets coach Bill Parcells agreed.

"I don't even know how many black players or white players I have on my team," he said. "All I know is that I look at these guys as athletes who are trying to do their jobs. I'm for helping players, whether they're black or white. That's always been my attitude."

One NFL administrator, who asked not to be named, admitted some NFL talent evaluators have gotten caught up in stereotypes, but mostly unintentional.

"Look at the black quarterback issue," he said. "I think you're seeing a number of teams open up to the possibility with more black quarterbacks proving themselves, but I think it took a while to break down the wall, to make executives realize that black players have every right to play quarterback as white players. I think it's getting better, but I still think there's room for improvement."

Newsday (New York, NY), December 21, 1997

GRAPHIC: Newsday Photos by Paul J. Bereswill- 1) Brad Daluiso. 2) Corey Miller.
3) Newsday File Photo by Paul J. Bereswill- Some Jets didn't approve of Marvin
Washington's friendship with Dennis Byrd, who is white. 4) Newsday Photo by J.
Conrad Williams- Jason Sehorn has observed racial stereotyping, because most NFL
cornerbacks are black.

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HEADLINE: MAN OF STEEL SLASH MAKES HIS MARK AS FULL-TIME QB

BYLINE: MIKE RUTSEY, TORONTO SUN

DATELINE: PITTSBURGH

BODY:

Forget that Slash stuff. Kordell Stewart wants none of it.

Slash is history. He's done. Now, it's Kordell Stewart, exclamation point.

It's not that Stewart is strictly one-dimensional now that he has been the Pittsburgh Steelers No. 1 quarterback for the entire 1997 season. It's not that he has forgotten his first two years in the NFL, when coach Bill Cowher gave him the "Slash" moniker for being a quarterback/wide receiver/running back.

Stewart can still slice and dice with the best of them as he showed the Denver Broncos back on Dec. 7 when he threw three TD passes and ran for two others in Pittsburgh's convincing 35-24 victory.

Attempting to pigeon-hole him at this point of his development is a decided mistake as the Broncos, in their first meeting, so painfully learned. After racing to a 21-7 lead, the Broncos defence went soft, Stewart picked up steam and the rest is history.

When Cowher named Stewart, 25, as his No. 1 quarterback at the start of the season there were plenty of doubters. The University of Colorado graduate was a gifted athlete and an exciting player to be sure, but he was not the prototypical NFL-style quarterback. Instead, he was a curiosity, an experiment.

"Everybody at the beginning of the season had their doubts about Kordell," Steelers guard Brenden Stai said. "But after a few games, it was obvious that he could do the job. He always had confidence in himself, but that confidence has just soared the second half of the season."

Stewart's ability to learn on the job and learn quickly is the chief reason the Steelers went 11-5 on the season, won their playoff game 7-6 over New England and now are a victory away from a trip to the Super Bowl.

"Everybody knew there would be some growing pains with the offence with Kordell at quarterback," veteran backup Mike Tomczak said of his teammate. "I mean, face it, he was the wild card in this offence so he knew he was under the gun."

"But the thing is, he never let that pressure get to him. He has the sort of presence and sort of glow you just can't teach a guy. Kordell orchestrates an

The Toronto Sun, January 11, 1998

atmosphere of total confidence."

Learning quickly and adapting to new situations is nothing new for Stewart. When he first arrived at Colorado in '91, the Buffaloes ran a run-oriented wishbone-style offence. In Stewart's final year, Rick Neuheisel, his fourth coach in as many years, employed a more pro-style attack based on Stewart's ability.

"If I'd had (Neuheisel) since my freshman year, I'd have gone in the first round," said Stewart, a second-round pick. "He taught me about coverages and gave me confidence. He helped me big time."

Stewart's running ability that was refined at Colorado, though, remains as big a weapon as his right arm and is prone to giving defences fits. Last week, it was Kordell's 40-yard burst around the left side that resulted in the Steelers' lone TD in their playoff victory.

"He's the Barry Sanders among NFL quarterbacks," said former Colorado teammate Matt Russell, who plays for the Detroit Lions. "Nobody can run faster than Kordell and nobody can stop him once he puts on one of his darting moves."

While the tributes, especially in the second half, have come his way with regularity, Stewart, a rookie NFL quarterback in most regards, has taken it all in stride. There is no swelled head, no look-at-me attitude.

"I'm basically just doing my job," Stewart said. "I always said I'd love the opportunity to be the starter and help a team with this kind of opportunity."

While he isn't cocky, he oozes confidence.

The Broncos -- for all they want to say about their defence, their new running game, their great quarterback John Elway -- owe their appearance this afternoon as much to the final-seconds meltdown suffered by quarterback Elvis Grbac and the Chiefs coaching staff.

The Broncos know they can't count on that happening today.

John Elway, with his 40-plus come-from-behind victories, may be the king of comebacks, but Stewart, who idolized Elway while growing up just outside New Orleans, is the prince in waiting.

Six times this season, including the victory over Denver, Stewart has led his team back to victory -- unprecedented for first-year, first-string quarterbacks.

"I never get nervous -- ever," Stewart said.

Confidence is something of an innate quality that when allowed to grow becomes a powerful force. Stewart has had it for most of his life.

"He's a driven person," Neuheisel said. "Just about the time you tell Kordell he can't do something, he'll do it. I've never seen anybody as determined as he is."

The Toronto Sun, January 11, 1998

Perhaps it's a by-product of Stewart's upbringing. When he was just 11, his mother Florence died of liver cancer -- a disease that last year also claimed his 29-year-old sister Falisha. While he was away at university, one of his cousins was shot to death in New Orleans.

Having experienced the tragedy of life, the wins and losses don't seem as important.

"People talk about wins and losses as if they were the end of the world," Stewart said. "When you lose a family member, that's 10 times worse.

"If I lose a game, I'm just going to go back, look at in on the film and try to understand why I made the mistakes I made. Life is more serious than that."

In Pittsburgh, though, to Steelers fans, the wins are paramount and Stewart has become the real deal, a quarterback that can manufacture victories with David Copperfield-like flair.

"There's no panic in him, but that's the character of this whole team, really," Pro Bowl centre Dermontti Dawson said. "Kordell has played well and he's only going to get better. He has caused a lot of excitement around here."

"I don't think you have to worry about Kordell," Neuheisel said. "I don't think people have seen the real deal yet."

And if you're a Bronco, that's a scary proposition.

GRAPHIC: photo CONFIDENCE MAN ... There were doubts at the start of the season whether Kordell Stewart could do the job as the Steelers' full-time quarterback. But Slash has answered those questions with an exclamation point.

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BYLINE: DIANE PUCIN, THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

BODY:

SAN ANTONIO -- On Monday night, something ended for the University of Kentucky, something nasty and sad, something that had tainted the school's basketball program for decades.

On Monday night, Tubby Smith, elegant, emotional, sweet, smart and African American, coached Kentucky to its seventh NCAA national title.

As he did, one could not help but remember there was a time when a Tubby Smith could not even "play" for Kentucky, let alone coach the team.

Fifty years ago, Adolph Rupp, a stubborn, clever genius of a coach, a stubborn, crafty, closed-minded man, coached Kentucky to its first national title. He did so without an African American, until late in his career, when he finally bowed to pressure and signed African American center Tom Payne.

Finally, the legacy of hatred and racism that Rupp had left has been laid to rest.

"Tubby, Tubby, Tubby," the Kentucky fans chanted. A year ago, when he first came to Kentucky, some feared that Tubby Smith, son of a Maryland farmer and one of 17 children, who was nicknamed for his love of the family's copper bathtub, would be run out of town.

They worried that Smith would be cut no slack, that his career would come to harm, that his color would mean that these hypercritical, maniacal fans would never accept a loss, any loss, when it came from a team coached by a black man.

"A lot of people doubted him," said Smith's son, G.G., a guard at Georgia, where Tubby coached until this season. "But he hung in there tough. He blocked out all those people who said he couldn't do it."

"Tubby, Tubby, Tubby," the people from Hazard and Lexington sang over and over and over.

"Y'all just saw the greatest coaching in the history of the game," said Tom Foley of Louisville.

Foley, 74, a lifelong fan of the Wildcats, admitted as he wiped tears from his eyes, that, yes, he was guilty. Guilty of believing that Rupp was right, that Kentucky wouldn't need black basketball players, shouldn't have black basketball players. He believed that the game would always belong to "the

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white boys out in the country," he said.

~~"But I was wrong and Coach Rupp was wrong and we were all wrong,"~~ Foley said. "Coach Smith is the classiest man on the face of this earth and I love him. I love him dearly."

Cameron Mills, a white player from Lexington, made two monster three-pointers Monday. Mills' father, Terry, played basketball for Rupp. The weirdness of this didn't mean anything to Cameron Mills, and, you know what? That's a good thing.

"Coach Smith is the best, nothing but the best," he said. "When my dad played, it was another time. He loves Coach Smith, too. Who wouldn't?"

Earlier in the week, Smith talked about watching Texas Western, with five black starters, defeat Rupp's all-white team in the NCAA championship game in 1966, beating into the ground the idea that black players didn't belong on the floor with white players.

"Seeing an all-black team like that be an underdog and win the way they did, it gave all underdogs some hope," Smith said. "That's what it did for me."

Back then, when Smith saw Kentucky, he saw a team and a university that wouldn't give his kind a chance. Now Smith is the coach there, and if the world doesn't change fast enough, it does change. Good people of all races can make things change.

C.M. Newton, who hired Smith, presented the championship trophy to him Monday. Newton, by the way, had recruited the first African American basketball players at Alabama.

Newton knew that Smith had joined programs at Tulsa and Georgia and won, immediately, with players recruited and coached by another man. Newton also knew that the Kentucky fans would not be patient.

Smith understands this. He said the program is "more than basketball in Kentucky. It's a way of life."

It's a way of life because of Rupp, but for a long time it was a way of life that didn't include so many players and people in the state. It didn't include Clem Haskins and Tom Thacker, who left the state and led Cincinnati to two NCAA titles; or brothers Dwight and Greg Smith or Butch Beard or Wes Unseld, who went to Louisville .

Smith didn't want to talk about what this win meant to him, personally, about why his eyes were bursting with tears and why he looked bewildered, almost, as the blue-and-white-dressed Kentucky fans kept shouting his name. "Tubby, Tubby, Tubby."

As the clock ran out on Kentucky's win, you looked to the bench. It was white-hand-locked-with-black-hand-locked-with-white-hand-locked with-black-hand. It was a team brought together by Smith, who put himself into his players' hearts because he got close to them.

"This is not about me," Smith said.

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But it was about him. And it was about more. It was about closing a door to the awful past, permanently, and opening the door to something better.

GRAPHIC: photo Tubby Smith closed the door on an awful past at Kentucky and then he, in his first season, coached the Wildcats to an NCAA title. The Associated Press

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HEADLINE: WHEN BLUEGRASS GOT THE BLUES

BYLINE: BILL LIVINGSTON

DATELINE: ST. PETERSBURG, FLA.

BODY:

For Scott Padgett, home was Louisville, but it could have been anywhere in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. It could have been a place where they claw coal out of the ground or a place where white lightnin' is brewed. The basket could have been hung on a barn door or heaven could have been a playground in the inner city. For a lot of kids in Kentucky, the biggest night of their lives is any night the University of Kentucky plays basketball.

Padgett is the only member of the current Kentucky team who admits he watched what happened on March 28, 1992.

"I watched it on TV. I lived in Louisville, but I was always talking trash to the kids who were Louisville fans. I was Big Blue all the way.

"We always turned the sound down and listened to Cawood Ledford do the game on the radio. I was pretty upset that night. I probably threw things and screamed a lot after Christian Laettner hit that shot."

People at Kentucky can tell you how Sean Woods banked in a crazy driving hook from the lane with 2.9 seconds left; and how Grant Hill threw the inbounds pass that former Kentucky coach Rick Pitino didn't contest; and how Hill hit Laettner, sweeping up from the left corner, at the distant foul circle; and how Laettner, at triple zeroes on the clock, ended as perfect a game as anyone ever played by making his 10th field goal in 10 tries, the same as he shot from the foul line.

Duke 104, Kentucky 103, in overtime, in the game to go to the Final Four from the East. In the greatest game ever played.

"I remember thinking we would have CBtwo guys on Laettner, which meant he couldn't get the ball," Padgett said. "But [Deron] Feldhaus and [John] Pelphrey were behind him, so he did catch it. Then, he dribbled, and I thought there was no way he would get it off in time.

"Of course, my dad was saying there was no way Laettner should have even been around to take the shot, since he stomped on [Aminu] Timberlake earlier in the game. The stomp bothered him more than the shot."

Tonight, Kentucky and Duke play for the first time since then, in the South Regional final. No one asks people from Duke where they were when Laettner hit

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the shot, but it remains the wound that won't heal to Kentucky fans. Agonizing defeat is unforgettable. Thrilling victory is compromised by the quest to repeat or three-peat.

It was only the second time Duke had run the last-second play all year. The first time, Hill threw a curveball that bounced out of bounds, past an open Laettner, against Wake Forest. It was one of only two games the Blue Devils lost that year. Against Kentucky, as Hill said: "I threw my fastball."

Pitino, now the coach of the Boston Celtics, has said he can't forget not guarding Hill on the inbounds pass, or telling Pelphrey during the last timeout, "Whatever you do, don't foul."

Kentucky has won more college basketball games than anyone. Kentucky, with its Fabulous Five and its Fiddlin' Five and its point-shaving scandal; with Adolph Rupp, the Baron of the Blue Grass, his overt racism, and the sea change loss to Texas Western with Joe B. Hall and the Slaughterhouse Five; with Kyle Macy and the Ron Mercer-Antoine Walker-Derek Anderson machine of 1996; with Orlando "Tubby" Smith now, its first black coach; Kentucky, with all its glorious and inglorious history, out to settle an old score.

"I don't know how much relevance 1992 has to this game," said Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski, the only principal from six years ago still working at the same job. "What I remember most was the look on Richie Farmer's face when Laettner hit that shot. It's not just the quality of a game that makes it great, but the stakes. That game was for the Final Four. It gave us a chance to repeat as national champions. I felt the greatest moment of elation at the same time as I saw the moment of deepest defeat on Farmer's face."

Kentucky retired the jerseys of the four seniors (Woods, Pelphrey, Feldhaus and Farmer), the four who stayed through the Eddie Sutton/Chris Mills probation scandal, the four who almost did the impossible, and so were called forevermore "The Unforgettables."

"Look at the rosters," said Padgett. "Duke had Hill, Laettner, Bobby Hurley, guys who went on to NBA careers. Kentucky didn't have players like that. They just had great heart."

Pitino had no equal at whipping his players into a froth, but Smith has retained the same system of pressure defense, breakneck offense and waves of substitutions, while lessening the stomach-churning fear of the Pitino era that a player would be yanked to the bench upon the commission of a single mistake. He also has spared his players Pitino's obnoxious trait of ripping them after big losses.

Neither team might have the mortal lock lottery draft pick of recent years, although don't bet against Duke freshman Elton Brand becoming one some day. With Brand, along with fellow freshmen Shane Battier and William Avery, Duke has the makings of another of those extended runs that made the Blue Devils the nation's best program for most of this decade.

Actually, with all the talk about 1992, 1995 might be the more accurate historical model. In 1995, Kentucky won three straight NCAA Tournament games by an average of 34 points, much as this year's team has won by an average of of 22.7. Then North Carolina's Dean Smith controlled the tempo, Kentucky went

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3-point crazy (with Rodrick Rhodes playing so badly Pitino practically forced him to transfer to Southern Cal), and Carolina won a shocker, 74-61. "I can't believe how dumb we were," a petulant Pitino said.

The lesson is that nothing is certain in college basketball. Witness Utah's amazing rout of Arizona yesterday. But 40,000 fans will be in Tropicana Field tonight, hoping to be part of history.

"Every time you turn on the TV to watch a game, there's Laettner hitting that shot," said Krzyzewski. "That was one of those events where people know where they were at when he made the shot. It was one of the defining moments of history in basketball. It brought a lot of people together."

In Kentucky, thousands of would-be Scott Padgetts will mute the TV set and listen to Ralph Hacker, who followed Ledford after the latter's retirement on March 28, 1992, rapt in the glow of a state's dreams, waiting for the biggest night of their lives to be the best one, too.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO BY: ASSOCIATED PRESS; Christian Laettner, top, is in the middle of the celebration after hitting a last-minute shot to beat Kentucky in a historic regional final six years ago.

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