



C. JEMAL HORTON

Go USA, but behave

So let me get this straight: American athletes are supposed to train 12 hours a day, compete for a spot on the United State Olympic team, make the umpteenth-hour flight over to Greece ... and then bridle their patriotism, should they be fortunate enough to win a medal?

This is the message the United States Olympic Committee has given American team members about how they must conduct themselves this summer? No tiny flag-waving? No running around the stadium with the Stars and Stripes wrapped around your shoulders?

You have got to be kidding me.

If security concerns for Americans at the Olympics have gotten this bad - and the USOC says that they have - then the Games are just not worth it.

Team USA needs to stay right here in the States. America should forget about the Games this time, boycott them - again.

Why should Americans go over to Athens if they can't be themselves? Why go over there if you can't show pride the way you wish?

Why?!!!
 "American athletes find themselves in extraordinary circumstances in Athens in relation to the world as we know it right now," Mike Moran, a former spokesman for the USOC, said at a New York news conference two weeks ago. Moran has been retained as a consultant to advise athletes about the correct way to behave in Athens.

"Regardless of whether there is anti-American sentiment in Athens or not, the world watches Americans a lot now, in terms of how they behave and our culture," Moran said. "What I am trying to do with the athletes and coaches is to suggest to them that they consider how the normal things they do at an event, including the Olympics, might be viewed as confrontational or insulting or cause embarrassment."

For the United States to even consider such a stipulation for its athletes is ridiculous. Granted, things are more than a little tense for Americans now, considering the fighting in Iraq and recent evidence that U.S. military forces have been torturing detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison.

But if those things have made Americans such a major target, especially for something as pedestrian as showing country pride at a sporting event, that's all the more reason for the U.S. Olympic team not to go to Athens.

I hate to sound like Oliver Stone. But you can best believe that, if someone like Moran took time to warn about how American athletes should conduct themselves in Athens for fear of retaliation, there's a really good chance that things are ten times worse than we know.

Please see AMERICAN /3C

Blending talents creates learning curve for Sting

By Herbert L. White
 herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

The Charlotte Sting doesn't have the luxury of time to figure out how to play well together.

Charlotte is integrating several new players into a veteran starting lineup with mixed results through two games. The Sting will try to get above .500 when it takes on Indiana Friday at the Charlotte Coliseum.

"It's not about the coaching," Sting coach Trudi Lacey said. "I'm not out there playing, so it's really about them playing together it's going to take them

some time to get some games under their belt but they really have a feel for each other."

Charlotte stumbled out of the gate in losing to Houston in the home opener, then rebounded in a win at Washington. The Sting collapsed in the second half against Houston, especially on defense.

"Offensively we were very tentative, but again, the thing I was most disappointed in was we didn't make the hustle plays," Lacey said.

"Really, there was no excuse for the way we played. Basically, their stars (Cheryl Swoopes with 29 points and Tina Thompson with 19) came

to play and ours didn't."

Help arrived in the Washington win with the return of forward Allison Feaster, who missed the opener because of commitments to her European team. Feaster came off the bench to score 15 points on 4-of-8 shooting against the Mystics, including the go-ahead basket with 1 minute, 8 seconds left.

Still, Lacey said, the Sting is a work in progress as everyone learns their roles.

"I said all along it's going to take us a while to blend this team together," she said. "It's on the job training now, so we've got to get it done."



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Point guard Dawn Staley drives for a layup in the Sting's WNBA season-opener against Houston. Charlotte plays Indiana Friday at the Coliseum.

FIT TO RACE



PHOTO/WADE NASH

AI Shuford has trained his share of championship athletes from Major League baseball to college football powerhouse Miami (Fla.). He's a fitness consultant to Joe Gibbs Racing and Team Rensi in NASCAR, where he's responsible for teams in the Nextel and Busch series. A former client, Chip Ganassi Racing, used his expertise to win the Indy Racing League's IndyCar championship in 2003.

Trainer keeps NASCAR crews, racers raring to go

By Herbert L. White
 herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

Driving a race car for three hours requires physical and mental skill.

It's AI Shuford job to make sure drivers and their crews are at the top of both.

Shuford, a Shelby native, is owner of All-In-One Health & Safety Consultants, which contracts with some of NASCAR's top teams. His clients include Joe Gibbs Racing in the Nextel Cup Series and Rensi Motorsports in the Busch Series. Shuford, a former trainer with the NFL's Carolina Panthers from 1994-2000, is at the forefront of sports medicine in NASCAR as more teams employ trainers to keep drivers and crewmembers in top physical shape.

"All of a sudden, they realize they've got to have more in order to take care of these guys and keep them going so they don't have to worry about continuity," Shuford said.

Shuford's resume is full of championships - five to be exact. He was on the Kansas City Royals in 1985 when they won the World

Series and at the Miami (Fla.) when the Hurricanes won three national football titles from 1988-94. He also put together the training program for Chip Ganassi Racing in 2003, which earned an Indy Racing League championship with Scott Dixon. The sports may be different, but goals aren't.

"I have the same demands from those guys as I do with football players or baseball guys - strength, power, endurance on the physical side," Shuford said. "But on those same three qualities also translate over to the mental aspect"

Shuford, 44, didn't grow up a race fan, although NASCAR stars would race at the Cleveland County Fairgrounds when he was a kid. His father, however, was a big fan despite the unspoken admonition that blacks weren't allowed to feel comfortable at tracks in the 1960s.

"I was born and raised in Shelby near the end of segregation era," Shuford said. "We were not allowed to go to the fairgrounds. My dad tells these stories all the time about guys

Please see TRAINER/2C

Diversity effort seeks Magic touch

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CONCORD - Basketball Hall of Famer Magic Johnson



Johnson

will serve as co-chairman of a new NASCAR committee on diversity. Since his retirement, Johnson has been a successful businessman, using his own company to stimulate economic growth and develop-

ment in urban areas around the country. That includes the 70 Starbucks Coffee locations and five movie theaters he owns.

Part of Johnson's duties will include helping NASCAR in creating a program to identify and develop black, Hispanic and women drivers and crew members. He also will advise NASCAR chief operating officer George Pyne on diversity issues.

"When you think about the NASCAR brand, it resonates everywhere," Johnson said Thursday. "They have the

No. 1 sports brand. I have the No. 1 urban brand. So bringing these two brands together, we hope that we can reach out to minorities across this country and introduce a wonderful sport that is already doing very, very well."

NASCAR also announced the successful beginning of a minority program that has five drivers and six crewmen competing in its Dodge Weekly Series and Craftsman Truck Series. They were selected after a competition combine held in January.

Cobras build up as season winds down



PHOTO/WAYNE JERNIGAN

Carolina quarterback Rickey Foggie is tackled during the Cobras' 36-31 win over Grand Rapids. Carolina is 6-9 this season after going winless in 2003.

By Herbert L. White
 herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

The Carolina Cobras can lay claim to a successful rebuilding season.

Saturday's 36-31 win over Grand Rapids at the Charlotte Coliseum was the Cobras' third home victory of the season after opening with 11 straight losses in the building. It also improved Carolina's record to 6-9, six wins better than last year's 0-16.

"Looking where we were a few weeks back ... I think we took some steps," Carolina coach Ron Selesky said. "It was a game we could've easily lost but we found a way to win."

The 1-14 Rampage never led but missed a chance to win when Anthony Buich's fourth-down pass to Carlos Johnson was broken up by Carolina's Fred Vinson with four seconds left. Last season, that play would've gone against the Cobras, who made a habit of losing games late.

"It was the type of game that you know it's a team you should beat and would beat ... but you know in the back of your mind that there's a very good chance that it could be a game like that," Selesky said. "I've got to give them a lot of credit. They slowed the game down to a grinding halt. They dictated the flow of the game."

The Rampage was in position to win because it controlled the clock and momentum, never allowing Carolina to build on its early momentum. Grand Rapids held the ball for 47 minutes, 7 seconds compared to Carolina's 27:53. The Cobras, who've won two straight for the second time this season, did just enough to stay in front, with quarterback Rickey Foggie hitting 21-of-33 passes for 275 yards and three scores. His most important connection was a 45-yard strike to Bernard Holmes that led to Rob Bironas' 23-yard insurance field goal with 48 seconds left.