

Look past the obvious to broaden opportunities

Continued from page 1C
in the National Hockey League is a black man, yet you would be hard-pressed to find a black boy who knows him. Actually, you would be hard-pressed to find a grown black man who knows him.

OK, I'll end the suspense: His name is Jerome Iginla. Few people in and around the sport of hockey dispute

Iginla is the best player in the world right now. It's too bad more black people don't know that.

Example 2: The greatest rodeo cowboy in the world - and, arguably, ever - is a black man named Fred Whitfield. You want to see amazing calf-roping, then try to find time to catch a rodeo when Whitfield is competing. The man is a phe-

nomenal athlete, even though he can't take off and dunk from the free-throw line.

My point? More African-Americans have to be open to NASCAR and other things, particularly when opportunities are created.

How can we expect others in this country to be diverse if we, first, are not willing to be diverse?

Don't get me wrong. Racing is white, but it's not entirely white. There are black crew members and a handful of up-and-coming drivers on the lower series. On the top circuit, the Nextel Cup, there is Phillip Horton (no relation), a former NBA athletic trainer who is a crew coach for Robert Yates Racing. And former Carolina Panthers trainer Al Shuford

is a successful fitness consultant in the motorsports industry.

There are a number of jobs available to African-Americans in NASCAR, from mechanic to engineer to crew chief to, well, owner. Not that it's easy to obtain a career in the sport. It isn't. But this much is obvious: The first step in obtaining a career in auto racing is

wanting one.

And that's why I applaud NASCAR for even mentioning diversity when it didn't need to.

I just hope that more African-Americans will take the league up on its offer to be more diverse. Now that would be more than neat.

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Pistons' Hamilton lets 'er Rip to push Detroit to NBA Finals

Continued from page 1C
the court and around screens. Miller had been the primary defender against Hamilton previously in the series.

"I wish I would've. ... I don't know," Artest said. "He just played great."

Hamilton was 7-for-15 from the field and 7-for-8 from the line. His teammates were just 20-for-67 from the field and 4-for-7 from the line.

"In the second half I slowed down, and I started hitting some shots," said Hamilton, who missed just two of seven shots after halftime.

The Pistons didn't have a scorer in double figures until Hamilton's two free throws gave him 10 with 3:26 left in the third quarter, and pulled Detroit within six.

Heading into the game, the Pistons were 0-6 when trailing after three quarters in

the playoffs.

Hamilton made sure the trend didn't hold.

Artest may have been overcome by frustration when he put his forearm in Hamilton's face with 3:57 left and was called for a flagrant foul.

Hamilton, who wears a plastic face mask to protect a nose that was broken twice this season, got up and made two free throws to put the

Pistons ahead - for the first time - 61-59.

"It certainly had an impact," Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said. "It was a tough call."

With Artest chasing him a couple minutes later, Hamilton's basket gave Detroit a 65-61 lead.

Hamilton scored at least 20 points for the 28th time in 35 playoff games with the Pistons, who acquired him

from Washington two years ago for Jerry Stackhouse.

"We'd be lost without Rip and we'd probably be home by now without him," Corliss Williamson said.

The Pistons' latest series-ending win allows them to take another step in the playoffs, just as they have the previous two seasons.

In 2002, Detroit advanced to the second round for the first time since 1991. The

next season, the Pistons made it to the conference finals, then fired Carlisle and hired Larry Brown.

"We had gone as far as we were going to go," Pistons president of basketball operations Joe Dumars said. "That team was not going to come back this year and beat Milwaukee, New Jersey and Indiana. I knew that. That's why it was time to shake that team up."

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Isuzu Ascender has GM's qualities

SUV's ride and interior rival GMC

Envoy

When is a General Motors SUV not a General Motors SUV? When it's an Isuzu Ascender.

What's an Isuzu Ascender? A Chevy Trailblazer, or GMC Envoy or, well, you get the picture. GM owns a stake in Isuzu and Isuzu needed a bigger SUV once it got rid of the Trooper. So what better excuse to build another GM SUV?

None, because the Ascender is pretty good. It debuted a few years ago as a seven-passenger vehicle. New for '04 is the five-passenger. Everyone doesn't need to carry seven folks. Besides, the shorter wheel-base vehicle handles better than its longer sibling.

The Ascender's interior is more GMC than Chevy. Isuzu opted for the more upscale look. The dash has an expensive look. The fake wood trim that graces the dash and doors is almost nice. Almost.

The leather bucket seats are comfortable for front passengers. Each is power-operated and can be articulated to make any size person happy. The second row is comfortable as well, but also splits for different types of loads.

The engine is the vibrant inline six-cylinder that produces 275 horsepower. It's oh so smooth and powers. The four-speed automatic is OK, but a five-speed would be better. It does shift crisply and smoothly.

The ride is pretty good. On a 300-mile round trip, the Ascender handled like a champ. The steering is quick and responsive while passing power is as good as it gets.

At \$33,372 the Ascender isn't so much a bargain as it is worth the money. You can buy the same thing several different ways under different names but it still comes out as a good deal.

He has his fathers eyes, his grandmothers looks, and he has lead in his blood from the house we live in.



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