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Section

SPORTS

Kudos to the good guys among us

This time every year, some well-intentioned sports columnist writes about how today's



C. JEMAL HORTON

African-American athletes would disappoint Martin Luther King, if he were alive.

"It's Black History Month," they write, "and today's black athletes aren't respecting Dr. King's dream."

Then the writer goes on to mention a few select names: Ron Artest, Terrell Owens and Rae Carruth. You know, guys who are supposed to represent the typical, rich, spoiled athlete who thinks the world owes him something.

I say that's a bunch of you-know-what.

Fine. There are a handful of black athletes who act as if they don't have a bit of sense and never use the home-training their mothers and grandmothers certainly gave them when they were kids.

But if we're really honest with ourselves, even the most cynical of us would go ahead and admit that there is not an overabundance of true knuckleheads in professional sports.

Check the headlines. It's the same guys messing up over and over: Owens, Artest and retired people like Mike Tyson and Dennis Rodman.

Other than that, most other professional athletes handle themselves in respectable ways, highlighted by volunteerism and mentoring - which is a lot more than I can say for the majority of us so-called "regular" people. Unfortunately, though, the guys who stay out of the headlines for negative reasons hardly ever get a word written about their off-the-field behavior.

Funny, isn't it?

So, I'm taking this column, at the outset of Black History Month, to talk about the good guys in sport, the men who would make King and Malcolm X and any other civil rights leader proud, if they were alive today.

Those guys, folks, are the rule, not the exception.

This month, I want to remind you of people like Carolina Panthers safety Mike Minter, who is the epitome of dignity and decorum. Sure, Minter is pretty well-known in the Queen City for his charity and class. But outside the Carolinas, he probably is regarded as no different from, say, Chad Johnson, the flashy Cincinnati Bengals wide receiver who dances more than a Rockette whenever he scores a touchdown.

I want to remind you of Indiana Pacers power forward Jermaine O'Neal, who, yes, was seen on camera defending Artest and himself during that infamous brawl in Detroit last season. But you should know that O'Neal was the most contrite of the athletes involved in that whole mess - when I don't think he necessarily had to be. In addition, a few months before the brawl, an Indianapolis high school girl asked O'Neal to take her to her senior prom. After clearing it with his fiancé, he obliged.

And there are many other similar examples.

The thing is, we have to search much too hard to find these types of stories.

It is much too easy for the general public to sit back and write every professional athlete off as a jerk who doesn't care about anything but his endorsements and his touchdowns/home

See GOOD/3C



PHOTO/HARRY DAVIS

Marc Davis, 15, signs autographs for fans last year at Hickory Motor Speedway. Davis aspires to race in NASCAR's top divisions.

Teen racer driven to climb series ladder

By Herbert L. White
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Marc Davis isn't old enough to have a driver's license, but he's on the fast track as a professional racer.

Davis, 15, is one of the youngest drivers in Drive For Diversity, a national program designed to expand ethnic and gender diversity in the motorsports industry. He was chosen from a pool of more than 300 applicants and will drive

late-model cars for Joe Gibbs Racing.

"As in every sport, the talent gets younger and younger," said Davis, a native of Mitchellville, Md., a Washington suburb. "All the teams want a certain mold they want to market."

Davis fits right in. Last year he landed a Drive for Diversity ride with Roush Racing in limited late-model cars at Summit Point

Please see DAVIS/2C



PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

Charlotte Bobcats head coach Bernie Bickerstaff can't get anything to bounce his team's way during a 12-game losing streak.

Sprains, strains, losing: Bobcats have them all

By C. Jemal Horton
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

When the Charlotte Bobcats joined the NBA a year ago, it was understood they would endure some hard times in their infancy.

But few people could have anticipated this kind of ugliness.

Heading into Wednesday's home game against the equally horrible Atlanta Hawks, the Bobcats had a league-worst record of 11-35 and had lost 12 consecutive

games, marking the worst losing streak in franchise history.

And there does not appear to be many more victories in sight.

In fairness to the Bobcats, much of the recent futility can be attributed to an inordinate number of injuries. Four key players in the Charlotte rotation are sidelined indefinitely: reigning rookie of the year Emeka Okafor (ankle), starting small forward Gerald Wallace

(knee), first-round pick Sean May (knee) and vital reserve Keith Bogans (knee).

Also, until this week, starting shooting guard Kareem Rush (finger) was out of the lineup. And in Monday's blowout loss to Cleveland, standout rookie point guard Raymond Felton suffered a back injury, forcing him to leave the game. Team officials were unsure of Felton's status heading into Wednesday.

See BOBCATS/2C

Looking way up

The NBA's worst records as of Wednesday:

Toronto	15-30	
New York	14-30	
Atlanta	12-31	
Charlotte	11-35	

Winning's contagious for J.C. Smith women

By Cheris F. Hodges
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Cassie King, one of the CIAA's most explosive women basketball players, led a confident N.C. Central team into Johnson C. Smith Tuesday.

The Eagles weren't scared of the Bulls, especially since JCSU hadn't beaten Central in two years. But junior guard Tiana Pope made sure that would change with a career-high 25 points in Smith's 65-61 win, the Bulls' eighth straight.

On the other side of the court, King was held to nine points.

"I know she's a good player, but I'm a good player too, and I came with it," Pope said.

On a night that could have been all about Pope, she was quick to

spread the credit.

"We're doing so well, we're on this winning streak and we want it to continue so we can be number one in our division and our conference," she said.

Smith's roll brings back memories of last season's February collapse when the Bulls went winless and exited the CIAA tournament in the second round.

Taylor said that scenario isn't going to play out this season.

"Last year we had one person to join the team last year, Brittany Sumpter, and before she joined us we were 7-2. Then we went on a 10 game winning streak," Taylor said. "When she went down with an injury it was a little too much for that particular team. ... This team has the ability to score from more places."

This year anyone can be the star. Like Pope on Tuesday night.



Taylor



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Tiana Pope scored a game-high 25 points Tuesday against N.C. Central.

SUPER BOWL XL

Bus stops where it all began

By Larry Lage
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DETROIT - Before Jerome Bettis was The Bus, he was Roney.

To those in his hometown, the Pittsburgh Steelers running back still is.

"That's what we call him now to this day," his mother, Gladys Bettis, said in an interview with The Associated Press. "I never call him Jerome."

The NFL's fifth-leading career rusher will be among the brightest stars in the days leading up to Sunday's Super Bowl because the charismatic, 13-year veteran likely will end his career at Ford Field, eight miles from his childhood home.

Sitting in a beautiful house Bettis bought for his parents on Detroit's west side - with a golf course in the backyard and limos in a neighbor's driveway - Gladys Bettis shared stories and showed pictures of the youngest of her three children.

The new house looks far better than the place where those childhood scenes took place - that old house now sits abandoned and charred.

While Jerome Bettis is the face of this year's Super Bowl, his mother still can envision him scurrying off to school with glasses, a white dress shirt and a broken briefcase his dad discarded. When he was picked up for school, papers would fly out of the briefcase with broken clasps.

Was he a nerd? Yes, she says.

"He wanted to be like his dad, who did electrical work for the city of Detroit," she said.

Ethel Session-Burton was Bettis' fourth-grade teacher at Detroit Urban Lutheran School, and her first impression is the one many have 24 years later.

"He always had a big grin on his face," said Session-Burton, who was invited to attend Bettis' NFL draft and 30th birthday parties. "He would even smile when he started to help the janitor clean up before school - every day - when he was in the seventh or eighth grade."

After school during the winter, Bettis would put on double-blade skates - this is Hockeytown, after all - and head to the backyard.

"My husband would get the hose out to make that rink every year - it even had nice banks made of snow," Gladys Bettis recalled.



Bettis