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Athletes using sports platforms to push for social change

By Kareem Copeland

Athletes today are using their platforms as sports celebrities to bring attention to the violence that has erupted across the country and recently Carmelo Anthony has been one of the most outspoken.

The New York Knicks All-Star is taking a break from his preparation with the Olympic basketball team Monday to host a meeting in Los Angeles with athletes, politicians and people in the community to advance the conversation about what he's called a broken system.

University of California-Berkeley professor emeritus Dr. Harry Edwards said today's athletes have a level of power that Muhammed Ali and others didn't have in the 1960s, and they have begun using it to speak out against violence both by and against police.

How much change they can effect remains to be seen, as Ali changed the world.

The newfound power of today's athlete comes from monetary wealth, celebrity status and having the vehicle of social media to communicate directly with the masses. They can reach hordes of people, encouraging them to get involved in social change.

"Joe Louis and Jack Johnson and Jesse Owens struggled for legitimacy," Edwards said. Then "you began this struggle for access. Which is what Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby and Kenny Washington and all those guys were involved in. In the 1960s, the struggle was for respect and dignity.

"Now the struggle is for power. And these men have power. So they have a different forum than we had in the late 1960s to be able to go on network television and make a statement concerning violence and the killing of black men, women and children in this country. ... That's an exercise of power. They have the capability today that we only dreamed about in the 1960s when only one or two athletes even had endorsements."

Anthony, LeBron James, Chris Paul and Dwyane Wade gave an anti-violence speech at the ESPYS and expressed their support of the values behind the Black Lives Matter movement. University of Missouri football players threatened to boycott games last year in support of student groups protesting the school's racial environment. School President Timothy Wolfe eventually retired. Serena Williams spoke out against the violence at Wimbledon. Members of the WNBA's Indiana Fever, New York Liberty and Phoenix Mercury recently wore black warm up shirts in the wake of recent shootings by and against police officers, and were fined by the league.

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President Barack Obama greets Armanii Chisholm, age 3, as his grandmother, Chief Religious Program Specialist Tameca Brown, looks on during a tour with wounded warriors and their families in the Cross Hall of the White House, July 25. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

Weary of protest, Baltimore activists seek change elsewhere

By Juliet Linderman

BALTIMORE (AP) — Under the beating summer sun, retired steelworker Arthur B. Johnson Jr. stood outside the Clarence Mitchell Courthouse in Baltimore, clutching the fraying wooden handle of a homemade sign.

"Justice for Freddie Gray," it read. Inside, a fourth officer

was about to be cleared of criminal charges in Gray's death last April, a week after Gray's neck was broken while he was handcuffed and shackled but left unrestrained in the back of a police van. Johnson has shown up for every trial, in pouring rain and sweltering heat.

Thousands took to the streets last spring. The refrain of "No

justice, no peace" rang through corridors on the city's east and west sides for more than a week; after a riot broke out, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake instituted a 10 p.m. curfew. The National Guard rolled into town to restore order.

But these days, Johnson and his sign typically stand alone.

The most recent acquittal, for Lt. Brian Rice, the highest-ranking officer charged in Gray's death, was rapidly preceded by two others, including Officer Caesar Goodson, who drove the wagon in which Gray's spine was snapped.

Still, where once the streets exploded in fire and fury, the sidewalks are calm; the flames extinguished and the palpable rage dissipated.

Some activists say the anger many citizens feel is simply manifesting itself in different ways, and that the focus has shifted from the streets of Baltimore to the state's capital: due to increasing pressure, this year lawmakers enacted reforms to the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights for the first time since its inception nearly 40 years ago. Others say the feverish momentum of last spring was simply unsustainable.

But all agree on one thing: although initially emboldened by the criminal charges brought against the officers by a fresh-faced state's attorney eager to make her mark, the procession of acquittals has left nearly hopeless the residents most familiar with the problematic police practices that landed the city under federal review in the first place.

"There were hopes and expectations that these officers wouldn't just be indicted, but convicted," said Tawanda Jones, a well-known Baltimore activist whose brother died three years ago after an encounter with Baltimore police.

"People felt hopeful, because this is the first time we've ever seen officers get prosecuted. But watching them one by one walk away, there's mournful disappointment," Jones said. "They've lost hope."

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Trail to promote African-American legacy at Kansas sites

WICHITA, Kan. (AP) — A trail promoting African-American history at Kansas sites has recently received a grant for more than \$134,000 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

The Wichita Eagle reports that the Kansas African-American History Trail will be linked to 10 sites in the state that are important to the African-American legacy.

Some of the proposed sites for the trail include the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, the Buffalo Soldier Monument and museum at Fort Leavenworth and the community of Nicodemus.

Nicodemus was Kansas's only all African-American community and is listed as a National Historic Park site.

Fort Scott may also become a site on the trail. It is the hometown of photographer, poet and filmmaker Gordon Parks, and the site of the 1st Regiment Kansas Colored Infantry became the first regiment of black men from a northern state to fight for the U.S. Army.

Kansas African American Museum director Mark McCormick says other site histories may be added as the trail progresses.

McCormick said he came across a trail that Angela Bates helped create while he was looking at old documents. Bates is the director of the Nicodemus Historical Society.

"Here was a map where people could see points of interest with regard to African American history," McCormick said. "I took her map and contacted people."

The grant will help provide funding for a project manager to coordinate activities, marketing materials, a website and a year's worth of events at each site.

"We wanted to point out to people that it is very difficult in this country to talk about the African American experience without talking about Kansas," McCormick said.

Analysis: Congressmen unite after Baton Rouge shootings - An AP News Analysis

By Melinda Deslatte

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — While the congressional candidate signup period often can be a scene of partisan politics and trash-talking, Louisiana's two congressmen who represent Baton Rouge showed a largely united front for a city torn apart by recent shootings.

Republican Garret Graves and Democrat Cedric Richmond aren't natural allies in the red versus blue environment of Washington's political scene.

But as the two men each separately registered for their re-election bids last week, they described conversations about how they could work together to respond to the shooting death of a black man by white police officers, the protests that death sparked and the ambush-style killings of three law enforcement officers only days later.

The men had different viewpoints, formed by different backgrounds and political philosophies, but they also both talked about the need for the capital city to grieve, to heal and to use the tragedies to improve the community.

Graves, R-Baton Rouge, talked of having "some very candid conversations" about tensions in the city and taking "lessons learned from this." Richmond, D-New Orleans, said leaders "have to initiate the conversation" about how to improve the relationship between law enforcement and the black community.

The show of bipartisanship between Baton Rouge's two U.S. House members comes after an unsettling two weeks that put Louisiana at the forefront of a national debate about race and law enforcement.

On July 5, Alton Sterling, a 37-year-old black man, was shot and killed by white officers who struggled with him on the pavement outside a Baton Rouge convenience store where he sold CDs. The killing was captured on cellphone video and widely circulated online.

The Justice Department has opened a civil rights investigation into the death. Thousands of people turned out at several locations around Baton Rouge in the aftermath to protest what they believed was excessive force by police.

The next blow hit July 17, when a masked former Marine ambushed law enforcement along a busy highway, killing three officers and wounding three more before he was shot and killed. Officials say they don't know if Gavin Long's attack came in response to Sterling's death, but they say the officers were clearly targeted by the 29-year-old black gunman.

Killed by Long were East Baton Rouge Parish sheriff's Deputy Brad Garafola, 45; and two officers from the Baton Rouge Police Department: Montrell Jackson, 32; and Matthew Gerald, 41.

After Sterling's death, Graves and Richmond introduced legislation together, to beef up grant spending on the development of non-lethal technologies for law enforcement agencies and training on de-escalation tactics for police.

Richmond said the goal is to "find some measures in between Tasers and deadly force." "We do not need to wait for the findings of a federal Department of Justice investigation to realize that this tragedy could have turned out very differently," Graves said in a statement when the legislation was announced.

In the aftermath of the officer deaths, the congressmen said they also are working together on other items. They're trying to get money to city, parish and state law enforcement to repay some of their expenses for responding to the protests after Sterling's death and the shootings of their officers.

On July 21, Graves announced that \$650,000 in federal cash was on its way, but he said that's not enough, estimating the response costs could reach anywhere from \$3 million to \$5 million.

"Nobody planned for this crisis," Graves said after registering for the Nov. 8 ballot. "If you are going to drain their accounts, they're not going to have the resources they need" for public safety.

Richmond said: "The costs are going to be great, and they definitely need some help."

The men also said they're looking at the funding available for survivor payments for the families of the slain police officers and sheriff's deputy. State and federal dollars are available, and Graves and Richmond said they wanted to make sure the families got the aid.

Getting federal money may be the easy part. The harder problem to solve is how to lessen the tensions that have frayed the city.