

FORUM

McLendon uses legacy to inspire

Nigel Alston

Motivational Moments



Not to know is bad; not to want to know is worse.

- African Proverb

It was John McLendon's sense of humor and down to earth style that impressed me.

That's how he teaches and I'm sure, that was how he coached.

He finds something a student is interested in and uses it as the vehicle to deliver a message. His vehicle is sports. Last Saturday, his message was a walk down memory lane.

He is a VIP, but you'd would never know it - unless you just happened to catch him during one of the hundreds of times he was surrounded by reporters, asking him questions that ranged from the mundane to the how it feels to be a living legend. Coach McLendon was honored last Saturday at the annual RJR brunch held during the CIAA tournament. It is the sixth year Reynolds has sponsored the brunch to honor and recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to higher education and the CIAA.

Coach McLendon's contributions can't be overlooked.

He pooled a personal loan from Mechanics and Farmers Bank in 1946 with money from three other coaches

and rented a boxing arena in Washington, D. C. to put on the first CIAA tournament.

But his list of accomplishments doesn't start or end there. It goes on.

He was a student of Dr. James Naismith, the inventor of basketball, at the University of Kansas and the first black in the university's physical education program. He is the only surviving member of the first class to graduate. And the list of firsts goes on and on. He won six conference championships at North Carolina College for Negroes (now North Carolina Central University).

He was the first African-American to win a national basketball championship when Tennessee State defeated South-eastern Oklahoma in the final of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics Tournament in 1957. In 1959, he became the first university coach to win three consecutive national basketball titles.

He has been recognized as one of the top six coaches who changed basketball in America from 1950 to 1994 by Basketball Times magazine and the selected "Coach of the Century" in 1992 by Sports View magazine.

McLendon invented the four corners offense used by some of the nation's top collegiate and professional teams.

"You use it only when your opponent needs the ball," said McLendon. "In the last three to four minutes when your team is up five to six points. It will not work otherwise."

He shared this with another

coach who wanted to know how to use it.

That coach perfected what he learned and used it against McLendon in an invitational tournament in Georgia. When McLendon looked down the opposite end of the court, the coach smiled and waived at him.

He not only shared his knowledge with others, he also took risks.

He had a lot to lose in 1944 when he organized what has become the most famous basketball game to be kept a secret.

"The Secret Game," pitted his North Carolina College against Duke University during the time segregation reigned supreme. According to a story by Mike Hudson of The News and Observer "it was a private, unpublicized, no spectators allowed game between NC College and Duke Navy Medical School."

He wanted a chance to prove his team was the best - black or white. After the Eagles trounced Duke 88-44, they swapped players and played another game.

Forty years later, the secret is out of the bag now and efforts are underway to turn the event into a movie.

Now 83, with all the firsts including being a member of the Basketball Hall of Fame, you would think McLendon would coast a little. He doesn't. He is using sports as a vehicle to educate young people about their culture. He realized in his words, how "abysmally ignorant" students are of their his-

tory. This revelation hit him after a student approached him and said, "I understand you might be the Jackie Robinson of basketball."

Then she asked who Jackie Robinson was.

That's when he decided to teach a class about the history of sports and the role of minorities at Cleveland State. He loves it because the students don't know anything and he can fill them with knowledge.

He not only tells them about the contributions of minorities, but their contemporaries as well.

To fully understand the impact of Hank Aaron, you also need to know something about Babe Ruth.

Adversity kept him and others going in those early days.

Now, he says "it is diversity. If you are not ready for it, then you will be in trouble."

And like all true teachers, he knows when to sit down.

"Since I have said something important," he said. "I'll sit down."

I could have listened to him for hours.

I imagine he is a good fisherman. He knows something about using hooks and pulling you into his wealth of knowledge.

Then he fills you up.

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No race card for Lyons

Earl Ofari Hutchinson

Guest Columnist

Now that a Florida jury has convicted Henry Lyons president of the National Baptist Convention USA, one of the country's largest and most influential black organizations of racketeering and grand theft, the big question is why did so many of his followers claim that he was framed?

The evidence had piled high that Lyons did illegally take money, cavort with his mistress, flaunt an opulent lifestyle, and thumb his nose at church leaders, and those in his congregation who questioned his profligacy. Yet many blacks inside and outside his organization circled the wagons and dutifully took up Lyons' self-serving wail that he was being persecuted as part of a white racist conspiracy to nail outspoken black leaders.

While this blindness to reality by some blacks is the ultimate in collective racial denial, it is all too predictable. Whenever an African-American winds up in front of a court bench these days, more than a few African-Americans will reflexively shout that they are victims of a racist conspiracy. It is a good, if not well-worn, ploy, that some black politicians in particular have raised to a state-of-the-art enterprise.

Former Illinois Congress-

man Mel Reynolds shouted racist conspiracy when he was indicted, tried and convicted of criminal sexual assault charges. Former Washington, D.C. mayor Marion Barry shouted racist conspiracy when he was indicted, tried and convicted on a drug charge. California Congressman Walter Tucker shouted racism when he was convicted of bribery charges. Other black elected officials have loudly shouted racist conspiracy when they are accused of, or nailed for, sexual hijinks, bribery, corruption, or illegal campaign spending.

It takes no imagination to suspect that some of the probes of black politicians and community leaders walk the thin and often misty line between the legitimate concern with bagging lawbreakers and racially-motivated political harassment. And it takes even less imagination to know that some in the media will saturate the public with sensationalist features and exposes, of high-profile blacks accused of, or suspected of, committing crimes while downplaying the crimes of prominent whites.

But this does not mean that leaders such as Lyons didn't commit the crimes they were accused of.

Yet some blacks absolve them by saying that they are only doing what white politicians, corporate executives, and ministers have been jailed for. That may be true - but does it make it right when blacks commit the same type of criminal



Lyons

acts? If it is a crime when whites do it, it's no less a crime when blacks do it.

Beyond the issue of right versus wrong, there's a practical reason why the argument that whites do it too should sink fast in the water.

Black ministers, like politicians, have a special duty to the black communities. Many blacks view them not as politicians, but leaders and advocates. They look to them to represent their interests and to challenge and confront institutional power. When they take bribes, steal money, lie, cheat, and deceive, they betray the trust of African Americans.

They should not be treated as objects of pity, folk heroes, or latter day Robin Hoods, persecuted by the white establishment. They are crooks and not vigorously condemning them for their actions further erodes the moral capital that blacks have built up in the battle against poverty and discrimina-

tion. To accuse some in the media, or some witch-hunting government officials of applying racial double-standards, and demand that government law enforcement agencies prosecute all lawbreakers the same, is fair and just. However that is not the same as condoning criminal behavior because those prosecuted are black and the criminal justice system is perceived as racist.

This is a crucial distinction that African-Americans must make when their is overwhelming evidence of criminal wrongdoing. Those that refuse to make that distinction will always be ripe for the pickings of men such as Lyons who as the state prosecutor aptly put it trade the good book for the bank book.

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