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The Voice of the Black Community

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EDITORIALS

A double standard in perception of athletes

Saturday's on-court melee between the New York Knicks and Denver Nuggets was uncalled for and certainly ugly, and NBA Commissioner David Stern was right to mete out punishment to all involved. Each franchise was fined \$500,000 and seven players from both teams were suspended, including Denver's Carmelo Anthony, the league's leading scorer. Mr. Anthony warranted a 15-game suspension, which is appropriate given that he punched a New York player. But the damage didn't end in New York. Professional basketball as a whole took another beating, part of a trend that threatens to overshadow athletic accomplishment.

We've heard and read the complaints: The NBA is full of pimpled-out thugs with rolling poses, negligible social skills and a poor grasp of basketball fundamentals. That the league is overwhelmingly black probably doesn't help matters, with a mostly-white ticket-buying and endorsement-consuming public. Those allegations are patently unfair, especially when compared to other sports. The National Hockey League is built in large measure on a culture and history of violence. Any long-time follower of the NHL knows all about "goons" and "enforcers" who are responsible for roughing up the opposing team's best scorer or protecting his team's best skater. Yet we're hard-pressed to hear anyone complain about on-ice violence; indeed the NHL is having a difficult time attracting new fans, in part because the league is working to reduce fighting. By the way, the overwhelming majority of professional hockey players are white.

Could it be that media, especially television, have sold America's sports public on an over the top product that focuses more on lifestyles of the rich and infamous than the games themselves? Fighting has been a part of American sports since Europeans contended this former collection of colonies, but for some reason, it's become fashionable to elevate athletes to public enemy No. 1 when they duke it out. Are they supposed to throw down at every provocation? No. Should we as a society condone it? No. But our collective disdain is unbalanced.

Fighting in hockey is good but bad in basketball. Pro football has a steroids problem that the league ignores, yet baseball's Barry Bonds is a pariah. A high school junior can join the professional tennis tour yet team sports have age-specific bans. If we're looking for purity in sports, this isn't the place — or time — to find it.

Military and convicts would benefit from beefing up U.S. forces

As the Pentagon and President Bush try to figure out how to address personnel shortages in the military, recruiting new volunteers looks like the only viable option.

Bringing back conscription, or a draft, is politically thorny because middle-class and rich families — like the political elite — aren't going to embrace the thought of their kids going off to fight. That's something, most of them likely surmise, is the role of poor folks. Conscription's champion in the U.S. House of Representatives, Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.), knows this, but still, he holds out hope that patriotism will carry the day.

However, there's another option that is as old as the military itself: Giving convicted criminals the option of joining the fighting ranks.

America's prison population continues to grow as tougher sentencing puts more people behind bars for longer stretches. But instead of keeping people locked up at taxpayer expense, we submit that the nation would benefit more from providing the kind of discipline and job training that can turn wayward convicts into productive citizens. Whether they serve on the front line or support positions, a single tour of duty or a career, doesn't really matter. Time spent in the military can only help both the individual and the country by shoring up an area of need for the armed forces as well as giving Americans a chance to turn their lives around through service. An honorable discharge should be good enough for any veteran to have access to full citizenship in this nation, as well as the thanks of its citizens. As a bonus, America would have a way to built character in a demographic group that previously was discarded to the margins, left to fend for itself or prey on the unsuspecting.

We believe few people grow up aiming for lives of crime, but fall by the wayside, whether it's a lack of access to education, or just plain stupidity. At any rate, providing folks with another opportunity to improve their station in life is something we all could benefit from.



Stern



Anthony



Bonds



Rangel



Obama's media honeymoon is over

After peering from the cover of Time magazine, making the round of TV Sunday talk shows and being urged by newspaper columnists and editorial writers to make a run for president in 2008, Barack Obama's honeymoon with the media is over. Generally, overly favorable news coverage ends the moment a candidate declares for office. However, for Obama, who is still considering whether to run, the tide has already turned.

According to mediamatters.org, a media monitoring site, Republican operatives and conservative talk show hosts launched a not-so-subtle attack on Obama's middle name — Hussein.

"In late November, Republican strategist Ed Rogers began pointedly referring to 'Barack Hussein Obama,' using the senator and potential Democratic presidential candidate's middle name," MediaMatters reported. "Soon, the utterly meaningless — but eminently mockable — fact that Obama's

middle name is 'Hussein' was everywhere. NBC's Mike Viqueira announced 'a man named Barack Obama, whose middle name, incidentally, is Hussein, running for president.' On the December 5 edition of Fox News' "Special Report with Brit Hume," Carl Cameron told viewers, "Though he's written two books about himself already, most people know very little about Barack Hussein Obama Junior's uncommonly privileged life." In case you're wondering: No, John Sidney McCain does not appear in any Fox News stories available on Nexis."

Chris Matthews interviewed Ed Rogers on his show and teased him about mocking Obama's middle name on the program while the regular host was away.

MATTHEWS: Ed, you made some news here the other night. Let's take a look at the tape of what you said.

ROGERS: Oh, come on. MATTHEWS: No, no — of what you said in my absence. When the cat's away, the mouse will play.

ROGERS: Where were you? Where were you?

MATTHEWS: Let's take a look at what you said.

ROGERS [video clip] Hold me down as somebody that underestimates Barack Hussein Obama, please.

MATTHEWS: Well, you know in an American life, the

only time we start using three names for a person is when they're an assassin — you know, John Henry —

ROGERS: There's some truth to that.

MATTHEWS: Lee Harvey Oswald. Why did you invoke the middle name of Barack Obama out of nowhere? What are you up to, sir?

ROGERS: Mostly teasing him as a lightweight and somebody that's just not ready... But I hope he runs. I want him to run. There's more —

Yes, there is more. Matthews, a former Republican staffer, pretended that Rogers "made some news" in his absence when it was Matthews who had been the culprit.

According to the monitoring group, "On the November 7 edition of Hardball — three full weeks before Rogers' comment — Matthews said: 'You know, it's interesting that Barack Obama's middle name is Hussein. That will be interesting down the road, won't it?'"

CNN's Jeff Greenfield was no better than his conservative counterparts.

Referring to Obama, the journalist said: "...He may be walking around with a sartorial time bomb. Ask yourself: Is there any other major public figure who dresses the way he does? Why, yes. It is Iranian President Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad, who, unlike most of his predecessors, seem to have skipped through enough copies of GQ to find the jacket-and-no-tie look agreeable. And maybe that's not the comparison a possible presidential contender really wants to evoke."

Since when did not wearing a tie with a suit equate to being a terrorist sympathizer?

But Greenfield did not stop there. "Now, it is one thing to have a last name that sounds like Osama and a middle name, Hussein, that is probably less than helpful. But an outfit that reminds people of a charter member of the Axis of Evil? Why, this could leave his presidential hopes hanging by a thread. Or is that threads?"

Obama was named after his father, who was born in Kenya, not Kennebunkport. To focus on his name, his big ears or whether he wears a tie shows just how small-minded and vicious some opinionated talking heads can be.

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Run, Obama, run: Barack for president

The specter grows that finds U.S. Senator Barack Obama being turned into a national phenomenon, drawing huge crowds of people wanting to touch the hem of his garment and catch the verbal morsels that fall from his lips wherever he goes. So massive has been this response that it has sparked a political culture of speculation about his chances of running for president in 2008, especially as he travels to places like the testing ground of New Hampshire.

What people find attractive about Barack is first, his background, a white mother and Kenyan father, his early residences in Hawaii, Indonesia, Kansas — all giving off the scent of a multi-racialism in his growing up. Then, there is his degree from Harvard Law School and his role as the first black editor of the Harvard Law Review, traditionally suggesting high intelligence, that he used in establishing a political career in state level politics, making a sound record of accomplishment. Finally, there are the intangibles of charisma, the

earnestness in his voice, the self-deprecating, even folksy style and easily likable smile. These are telegraphic qualities that fit well in a media where personal appeal is the stuff of political allure. It may even trump concerns about his limited political experience.

So, Barack has attracted the curious, selling out halls in a rock-star fashion, eliciting the "run-Barack-run" chant heard when Rev. Jesse Jackson was also making up his mind about getting into the race for president in 1984. But this chant is not coming from blacks. Therein is the difference. Race and politics are in this equation, covered up right now by the hype, but positioned to bolt to the surface at the right moment. That is why the savvy Obama began his speech in New Hampshire recently saying that he was "suspicious of the hype."

Obama is as aware of any one of the lingering fictitiousness of public opinion polls when it comes to assessing white support for black candidates. When Tom Bradley, the black mayor of Los Angeles, barely lost a race for governor in 1982, a pattern was observed: he received high poll numbers, but a low final vote from whites. The same thing happened to

David Dinkins when he ran for mayor of New York City, and Doug Wilder when he ran for governor of Virginia, creating a belief among analysts that the true level of support by White voters for Black candidates is much less than believed.

What political scientists know is that context is important in judging white support for blacks. This was seen in the recent election where Deval Patrick was elected governor of Massachusetts, an overwhelmingly white state. But in the background, as in every state, was an explosive vote against the current administration, amounting to more than 60 percent in some national polls, for its handling of the war in Iraq. Context may also configure the politics of 2008.

In my most recent book, *Freedom Is Not Enough*, I create a "Jackson Model" for Black candidates running for president and compare it to the campaigns of Carol Moseley Braun and Rev. Al Sharpton in the 2004 elections. But there is a distinct difference when black candidates run from a progressive base of black, women, low-income, civil-rights challenged, etc. voters or whether he or she positions the cam-

paign toward a moderate electorate. As a potential candidate already favored by the white mainstream and running second in polls to Hilary Clinton at this writing, the prospect is great that Obama would run toward the main body of the electorate that is to the right of blacks.

This raises the question of where his base will be. He may well attract black voters as a base, who will give him some issue slack because of the view that he may just be the first genuine black candidate to win the presidency. But there is great resentment among some blacks over the rightward drift of the Democratic Party, and if he adds to that, he could be in trouble with black voters.

I think that Barack Obama should run for president, especially since he doesn't lose politically. Even if he loses the nomination fight, it heightens his leadership profile in national politics and virtually ensures his Senate re-election in 2010. Right now, Obama's true political value is unknown because of the curiosity factor.

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