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Prime Time: The Game Behind The Game

R. André Perry

Ramapo College of New Jersey

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“...The sports community must adopt a mandate to seek out, discover, nurture, and develop electronic media professionals and journalists for the 21st century. The boundaries must be removed for people of color and women if we are sincerely committed to diversity in sports, on and off the court.”

Our presentation will examine sports and media as institutions of popular culture, power, and influence. Furthermore, we will examine the sociological and psychological impact of media and the propagation of certain myths that affect some of the *Prime Time Players*, The African American Athlete.

We take the position that sports and media are mutually dependent and supportive institutions with overlapping relationships. Electronic media and sports represent a large reserve of advertising and programming inventory.

However, with all the commercial success, sports institutions consistently come up short when it comes to addressing issues of sports as popular culture, entertainment, social issues, sexism, and racism.

While the African American athlete is a key ingredient in the financial success of sports, the media typically portray African American athletes as overpaid and as "super jocks" incapable of performing outside the sports arena. One can simply reflect on statements made by former commentator, Al Campanis (ABC's "Nightline") and statements that led to CBS's firing of Jimmy The Greek, as examples of how media view and portray the African American athlete off the court and the field.

Another myth perpetuated by media is the high school stepping stone to college and professional sports. Instead of reporting on high school sports as a feeding trough, the media should explore a realistic balance of opportunities and challenges facing young athletes.

Without compromising basic financial realities, the media should on a regular basis report information and cover stories that reinforce education, testing, scholarship, and sources for academic support.

Media coverage of high school sports need not mirror professional sports as the *only* alternative. The media needs to take a new look at their role as the ultimate promoter of sports. The media also has an obligation to communicate: "that for every athlete who succeeds to professional ranks, there are thousands of young men and women who must succeed in the game of life *after* the game."

Furthermore, the sports establishment and media organizations have an obligation to expand their efforts to address issues of substance abuse, domestic violence, aids, and cancer research.

Finally, with affirmative action under a vicious attack, the sports community must adopt a mandate to seek out, discover, nurture, and develop electronic media professionals and journalists for the 21st century. The boundaries must be removed for people of color and women if we are sincerely committed to diversity in sports, on and off the court.

Our presentation will focus on several assumptions, including:

- The Lack of African American representation in sports media organizations.
- Does the media-sports partnership limit serious investigative reporting/coverage of such topics as High School Athletes: Fortune, Fame and Failure?
- How Mainstream media is coverage of African American athletes.
- The creation of a social contact and its impact on young people.
- Media, sports, and the African American female athlete.

PRESENTERS:

R. André Perry has authored and presented several papers on The African American Experience in Sports, Media and Entertainment. Perry received his B.A. from Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C. and his Master's from Brooklyn College. To his credit, Mr. Perry has logged twenty years of professional experience as a radio-tv writer, Producer and director. During the last ten years Mr. Perry has served as a tenured Professor of Communications in The School of Contemporary Arts at Ramapo College of New Jersey. He teaches courses in electronic media production, history and criticism, and has designed several interdisciplinary courses on sports and minorities in the mass media for liberal arts credit.

Mr. Perry currently holds an administrative position as the Director of Academic Media Services/International Telecommunications Center at Ramapo College. He serves on Ramapo College sports advisory council, is President of the Teaneck High School Parents Basketball Association, Past V.P. of Bidy Basketball of Teaneck, and has served as a baseball and basketball coach in the town recreation programs.

Tom M. Jones is co-author and editor of *Blueprint For Success: An In-depth Analysis of NCAA Division III Athletics*. Among other things, Jones, a two-time CLIO winner in national advertising, is also a copywriter, marketer, lecturer, consultant and trained voice-over talent. His experiences as a network broadcast producer/director for both the University of Maryland and the Washington Redskins, as well as an active parent of a (NCAA) Division I-AA football player (who attends a predominantly white college), makes him very familiar with the concerns of the success and failure tracks of African American athletes.