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Toward a Radical Sport Journalism

An Interview With Dave Zirin

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This interview opens two dialogues with sport journalist Dave Zirin. On one hand, it poses questions to Zirin about his work, its evolution, and its significance. On the other hand, it places his responses in conversation with his writing and initiatives to foster a deeper understanding. Together, these dialogues not only introduce readers to an emerging public intellectual whose work promises to change sport and sport journalism but also highlight the key themes animating his imagination—especially activism, social justice, cultural justice, racism, and sexism.

Keywords: *activism; athletes; social justice; sport journalism; sport and politics*

A decade ago, David Theo Goldberg (1998) rightly highlighted the reactionary force of sports talk radio, arguing that the banter broadcast reflects and reinforces dominant discourses about race, gender, and sexuality. In many respects, Goldberg's findings correspond to numerous studies in sport sociology that have highlighted the conservative tendencies of sport media (see Raney & Bryant, 2006; Wenner, 1998, for an entry point to this massive literature). To be sure, this has to do with the structure of the profession (Claringbould, Knoppers, & Elling, 2004), no less than its audience and ideological utility. And yet as David Rowe (2007) has recently argued, scholars, professionals, and a broader public all too often depoliticize and trivialize sport journalism, regarding it as "the toy department" of the news media." At once then, sport journalism plays a key role in securing consent for neo-conservative projects and advancing neoliberal policies and masquerades as an apolitical space of physical excellence, escapist pursuits, serious competitions, and communal identity.

To date, few journalists have actively challenged the mores of the profession nor openly pressed for a kind of reporting that at once engages with the politics of sport and promotes social justice. Dave Zirin is perhaps the most visible and noteworthy exception to this pattern. During the past 5 years, he has exploded across media as a passionate commentator on the world of sport. Zirin, Press Action's 2005 and 2006 Sportswriter of the Year, is columnist for *SLAM Magazine*, the *Progressive*, and the *Philadelphia Weekly* and regularly contributes to the *Nation Magazine* and the *Los Angeles Times*. Perhaps best known for his Web page edgeofsports.com, which features his column, he hosts a weekly program of the same name on XM Satellite Radio. He

makes frequent appearances on sports talk radio and cable sports programs. Zirin is also a prolific author, writing four books in the past 4 years: *What's My Name Fool?* (Zirin, 2005d), *Welcome to the Terrordome* (Zirin, 2007c), *The Muhammad Ali Handbook* (Zirin, 2007b), and the forthcoming *A People's History of Sports in the United States* (2008c).

The politics of sport center Zirin's work. He concerns himself with labor relations and the corporatization of sport; the prejudices and biases of fans and sportswriters, especially racism, homophobia, and sexism; and the spectacles of nationalism. Whereas the mainstream media castigate athletes, often inciting moral panics and social outrage, Zirin champions the humanness and potential of players. In fact, Zirin often focuses on the athletes who resist, transgress, or reject prevailing norms and dominant ideologies. He takes hope in the resistance of past and present players, often calling out superstars who remain silent or compliant, while complicating the comfortable declarations of others. At the same time, he defends players, like Barry Bonds, Sheryl Swoopes, and Michael Vick, who become easy targets of scorn. Importantly, Zirin has not just written about sport but has advocated for social justice as well. His columns routinely call for action. Even more significant, however, has been his effort to organize athletes and encourage activism. Through jocks4justice.com, Zirin has pressed for the freedom of Gary Tyler and Kevin Foster, both of whom supporters claim have been wrongly convicted.

Some may question his scholarly rigor or worry about the forcefulness of his perspective. Such readings, however, miss the uniqueness and promise of his work. Indeed, Zirin has much to offer sport scholars. First, he focuses on timely topics that push back against commonsense accounts of them. As such, he allows an alternative to corporate media, an alternative that foregrounds politics, presses for engagement and accountability, and avoids comfortable conclusions. Second, Zirin regularly blends a desire to uncover connections and recover forgotten history with a refreshing and approachable style that makes his writing a portal for further inquiry and a useful pedagogic resource. Third, his new media productions suggest vital templates for sociologists of sport interested in finding ways to reach a broader audience and realize the future of social movements. Fourth, and perhaps most important, Zirin routinely inspires through his choice of subjects his passionate perspective and pursuit of social justice through sport.

The following interview began in conversations at the 2007 Meetings of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport in Pittsburgh and continued via e-mail correspondence. In consultation with Zirin, I opted to follow the model of an earlier interview with Norman Denzin that refused the closure of a standard question-and-answer format and put our conversation into dialogue with Zirin's oeuvre to highlight the scope and significance of his unfolding contribution to critical interpretations of sport and movement toward a radical sport journalism (see King, 2006).

CRK: How would you describe what you do?

DZ: I'm a sports writer by trade and I try to write in the language and style of sports writing, which has its own vernacular, to be sure. My beat is that messy, jagged place where sports and politics smash together. Sometimes this happens covertly, as in the way patriotism intertwines with big sporting events, and sometimes it happens with a megaton explosion, like the ongoing drama of the Beijing Olympics. But however you slice and dice it, politics are an enduring, constant, and historic presence in sports. The goal is to try and get the mainstream sports media, athletes and fans, to acknowledge this, and – if they happen to be unhappy with the politics of sports, challenge it to change.

CRK: So much of sport journalism is apolitical and acritical, what drives you to examine sport and politics?

DZ: For far too many people, politics is what the people with the bad haircuts do on CSPAN. But politics are of course the food we eat, the air we breathe, and yes, the sports we watch and play. People aren't alienated from sports the way they are from formal politics. Therefore we often get a more honest discussion about issues like labor right, racism, sexism and homophobia, through the prism of sports. It's this fascinating kabuki theater where a discussion about for example black quarterbacks, is really a discussion about the persistence of racism. That's what I find just endlessly fascinating.

CRK: What experiences with sport, social movements, or the media contributed to your unique treatment of the subject?

DZ: In High School, I was a 5' 10" inch center for the fearsome Friends Seminary Quakers in New York City.

I consider myself a radical journalist . . . I think the best journalism is about taking sides consciously (Murphy 2006).

The weakness in [Noam] Chomsky's argument [that sport fosters social control and deters engagement], however, is that it disregards how the very passion we invest in sport can transform it from a kind of mindless escape into a site of resistance. It can become an arena where the ideas of our society are not presented but challenged. Just as sport can reflect the dominant ideas of our society, they can also reflect struggle (Zirin, 2005d: 21).

. . . if we wish to reclaim sports, we must look at history, learn the role sports play in our world, and listen to the athletic rebels of today who are so often ignored by the media (Zirin, 2007c:22).

Also, remember that [Roberto] Clemente won two World Series, Kareem (Abdul Jabar) won six championships, and Bill Russell won eleven. The idea that politics are a "distraction" to the goals of winning is pure fiction (Zirin, 2007: 61).

What infuriates old-school sportswriters is that people on the web are calling them on their privilege, isolation and celebrity. In sharp contrast, bloggers, with their messy passion and sharp interaction with readers, sometimes sound far more authentic. . . the future of sportswriting won't be defined by bloggers but by all writers who care for the craft, whether they write in the newsroom or the basement. It's a bold new world, and traditional sportswriters, with all their puffery and pretension, should step back from the team-sponsored buffet and open bar and get their hands dirty

It wasn't pretty, but I lived for it and didn't care if the opposing center could spit on my head. I just loved sports. My walls were shrines to Magic Johnson, Lawrence Taylor, and Keith Hernandez. Every stat, every record, and every rule existed only to be memorized. Weekends were for playing ball until sunset.

But somewhere along the way, I got a life. 'Operation Desert Storm' and the L.A. Riots burned across my TV screen. As the world seemed to turn upside down, sports began to seem meaningless at best, and at worst, against any concept of social justice. This became jarringly clear during the 1991 Gulf War when I saw "my team's" mascot thrash a person in an Arab suit at half court while the jumbo-tron encouraged chants of U-S-A. Limping away from the arena, I concluded that sports were part of the problem, and I swore it off like a vegetarian would swear off McDonalds, no room for discussion.

Then in 1996, a basketball player named Mahmoud Abdul Rauf refused to stand for the National Anthem. Rauf believed the flag to be "a symbol of oppression and tyranny," and was willing to suffer the consequences. His courage was stunning, but even more shocking was the howling cries for his head. When Rauf was suspended, some news reports resembled lynch mobs. But others likened him to Muhammad Ali, whose title was stripped for being a draft resistor during the Viet Nam war. This was a history I barely knew. As Rauf began to buckle under the tremendous pressure of right wing bombast, it became clear that our side needed a history of the resistance in US pro sports. To aid this effort, I started writing a column

in the virtual sporting scrum taking place online. They may just find they like it (Zirin, 2008a).

In post 9/11 America, we've seen the growth of partnerships between Major League Baseball and the NFL and The Pentagon for these things called "Military Appreciation Nights." They're trying to goose recruitment numbers and to goose the ideology of the war in Iraq—that the military is in Iraq fighting for our freedom and for our right to sit and watch baseball games. It's pure propaganda, and it's something that more and more people are wising up to (Davis, 2007).

By speaking out for the political soul of the sports we love, we do more than just build a fighting left that stands for social justice. We also begin to impose our own ideas on the world of sports—a counter morality to compete with the rank hypocrisy of the pro leagues. These are ideas that can embrace and cheer competition. That can appreciate the artistic talents of athletes and the strategy of coaches and players alike. That can thrill to seeing Barry Bonds swinging a bat, or Michael Vick shredding a defense, or Mia Hamm kicking a soccer ball. But unlike the mainstream sports jabber, it's a morality that recognizes male and female athletes—and all women—as human beings with minds as well as bodies.

Of course there's room for an Ali, because the problems are still there to be addressed. And even if boxing isn't what it once was, the megaphone of sports has never been louder. So if you combine a mass media with a social crisis then, yes, there's room for an Ali. But there are also countertrends that would prevent the rise of a new Ali. For one, the absence of

called *Edge of Sports*, and just completed my first book *What's My Name, Fool? Sports and Resistance in the United States*.

CRK: You devoted much energy to defending, celebrating, and encouraging political athletes. What makes an athlete a political athlete and why do you think it so important to focus on them?

DZ: James Baldwin once said, "America is a nation devoted to the death of the paradox." In other words, to use the updated version by pro-wrestler the Rock, "Know your role and shut your mouth." Stay in your box. If you're a cashier, a Wal-Mart employee, a sanitation worker, a teacher, that is how you are defined and all you can be. Don't think about being a cashier/artist, a real estate agent. We endure model/actresses and oil company executives/politicians but that is it. Athletes that are political defy the box. Many of them, in my experience, would say more if they felt that there was a media that would take them seriously. We need more writers and academics that do.

CRK: Can you talk about the place of race and justice in your writing?

DZ: There is no question that issues of oppression: racism, sexism, homophobia, often come to the surface very sharply in the world of sports. There is a reason that figures like Jackie Robinson, Billie Jean King, Muhammad Ali, and Martina Navratilova are considered to be figures that have far transcended the sports page. Sports are theoretically a meritocracy so it has always been fertile ground to challenge the idea that some are inherently unable because of their gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. This isn't just about being able to achieve athletically, but about whether people can

social movements like there were in the 1960s, but more so than that, the fact that athletes are set apart from the population. Today there is a much more hostile relationship between athlete and fan. In the wake of Sean Taylor being killed, there was a report in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* about players who arm themselves and answer the door holding a gun. Even though they live in gated communities with bodyguards, they're armed because they're so at odds with the fan. They feel under siege by a nation of enemies, be it the fans, the police, or the media. That's so different from Ali's time. He used to ride around Harlem with reporters in his car, walk around without bodyguards, and say things like, "There's a bullet out there with my name on it; that's between me and God." He had a total fearlessness and felt that if he had to be afraid of his own people, then none of this was worth anything. These are profoundly different times (Gelf, 2007).

At this point, I think we need to revise our expectations of Jordan and other athletes like him. . . It is simply not in his interest to embarrass the Nike brass or puncture his own profits. Unfortunately, the kids in Southeast Asia don't have the luxury to wait for him to change his mind. If we want to change sweatshops and child labor, we have to look to someone else, perhaps even ourselves. Simply put, it's all right to want to Be Like Mike with our basketball shorts on. But we have to strive for better when we leave the locker room (Zirin, 2005d, 248).

Racism in sports is alive and well. . . . Sometimes, racism hides in the shadows, but if you want to see it emerge, just speak out against it—like when baseball slugger Barry Bonds called

strive behind the scenes – from general managers to coaches to sports writers and announcers – as well.

CRK: How have the politics of sport changed? Why?

DZ: There have been some profound changes over the last 30 years. The biggest is Cable TV, the Internet, and the publicly funded stadium have created new revenue streams and wealth. Meanwhile the poorest Americans have gotten poorer and globalization has meant that owners draw their players from a deep pool of global poverty. This has meant that the rewards are greater and the risks of speaking out are more profound. The sports media has of course been affected by this as well. It has become the kind of big business where the rewards have the power to breed conformity and dull the kind of critiques needed in this day and age.

CRK: What distinguishes your perspective or take on sport? How do readers, athletes, and other journalists respond to it? Have you received a lot of push back from fans or journalists?

DZ: I try to listen, respect, and amplify athletes that don't live in the land of cliché. Many political athletes don't speak out because of fear they will either be slammed by the press or – perhaps worse – ignored. I also try to be critical of things – like jingoism – that many of us passively accept when we watch the games. And lastly, I've taken some initial efforts to organize athletes to be part of signature ad campaigns for social justice. How other journalists, readers, and athletes respond usually depends on the politics they bring to the table. Even people who don't want to be active, or see sports made political, respect the work if they believe in some broader sense of social justice. I get a lot of under-the-radar private support from

Boston a “racist city.” He was told to “shut up”. . . And right next to the same old racism, we have the “new” racism, which accuses young Black athletes of being more concerned with “posses,” “boyz,” and “bling bling” than with being serious athletes or even people (Zirin, 2005d: 147).

The choice you face is frankly quite stark: how free to do you want to be? Do you want to be “King James of Nike Manor” or the King of the World? Only by refusing to be owned, only by displaying independence from the very corporate interests that enrich you, will you ever make the journey from brand to three dimensional man (Zirin, 2007a).

We may know that baseball was segregated until 1947. But we don't know the story of Lester “Red” Rodney, the sports editor of the Communist Party's newspaper the Daily Worker. Rodney ran his 1930s sports page as an organizing center to fight for baseball's integration. This campaign garnered over a million signatures, collected at ballparks around the country.

We may know about Billie Jean King's “Battle of the Sexes” tennis match against Bobby Riggs at the Astrodome. But we don't know how intertwined that tennis match was with the fight for Title IX, one of the enduring victories of the women's liberation movement of which King was proudly a part. We also don't know that King was far more than a symbol. She also started a union for women's tennis players to fight for equal pay (Zirin, 2005b).

It also needs to be understood that the incentive of athletes to speak out for social justice lies not in their individual brilliance but in our ability to build

people. But those who actually are comfortable or actively are comforted by the messages—overt and covert—in sports, take their shots. But like the saying goes, the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. I'm glad they're not indifferent.

CRK: How has your work changed and evolved over time? I am thinking here of both your columns and your books, *What's my Name Fool?* And *Welcome to the Terror Dome*.

DZ: I started as an outsider writing about the hidden history of struggle in sports. I also tried to trumpet the case that sports, like any art, is contradictory so it shouldn't be summarily dismissed by left wing critics, or cheered without thought. Now as more of an "insider," I've found the guts of the sports world to be uglier than I thought. I still believe that sports are contradictory, but the nasty side of the business: the way deals are done; the contempt that people can have for one another; the hyper materialism: is pardon the expression, big business on steroids, with enough testosterone to fill an Olympic swimming pool. It aint pretty.

CRK: Can you speak a bit about the soon to be published *People's History of Sport*. What is about? What's your argument? What treasures and surprises does it hold in store for readers?

DZ: The book is part of Howard Zinn's *People's History Series*. It's an effort to show that sports and politics have always done an uneasy dance so any effort to be shocked today – the way IOC officials are shocked by the protests and say "politics and sports don't mix" – is ignorant at best and fatuous at worst. The standard history of sports is usually like a classical Hollywood movie. You have a protagonist with obstacles in his or her past

a struggle outside the arena and in the streets. If we want more Muhammad Ali, more John Carlos', and more Billie Jean Kings—if we want to see a gay male athlete have the courage to risk his neck by coming out—then we need to build a broader movement for social justice outside the arena, so our "heroes" will also have people to look up to (Zirin, 2005b).

No one is going to confuse Tiger Woods with Dr. Martin Luther King. . . Woods is proudly apolitical, content to let his bank account and green jackets do the talking. But often athletes acquire a symbolic importance that extends far beyond any political ideas they may express. Tiger's very success in the world of golf speaks to the dreams of millions of people: the dream that individual greatness can break down even the country club door; the dream that there is a place on the golf course to do more than carry clubs. . . I'm not much of a Tiger Woods fan. He claims to be apolitical but won't hesitate to sign off on commercials that trumpet his multi-cultural heritage. Call it civil rights for sale by the pound (Zirin, 2008b).

Should the NFL be offering an international platform to a company accused of using child labor and refusing to bargain with a union whose leadership was democratically elected? (Zirin, 2008b)

In addition to becoming a profitable form of mass entertainment, pro sports have become an effective means for the political and financial elite to package their values and ideas. This is why sports in this country reflect a distinctly US project, rooted in aspirations for greatness as well as conquest and oppression. The US is unique in playing the national

and those obstacles are either overcome or they're not. This book, places the great sports political battles in the context of their times, with an emphasis on the struggles happening off the field. The perspectives are also given from people on the ground: athletes, fans, obscure sports writers. It's an effort to look at history, some of it familiar, some unfamiliar, from the perspective of the people making that history, not just the typical heroes and sheroes. As for treasures and surprises. . . please check it out and see what you find.

CRK: Can you talk a bit about your website, *edgeofsports.com* ? Why did you start it? How has it evolved

DZ: Actually my brother in law started it by posting the columns I was writing for a small newspaper called the Prince George's Post. He thought that maybe there were other people like me: people who loved sports but hated what they had become and people fascinated by the very thing most big time sports columnists are hostile to: the very politics of sports. If I've found out anything, it's that the angry sports fan is an underserved market.

CRK: How have you used *edgeofsports.com* to advance social justice?

DZ: I once heard the great sports writer Bill Rhoden of the NY Times speak out that athletes need "associations" so if they want to take stands, they don't have to be alone on the island, so to speak. I started something called Jocks 4 Justice, launching signature ad campaigns around the death penalty where athletes could sign on. It's been a good initial step, because it has brought together vets of the struggle like Tommie Smith and John Carlos with present athletes like Joakim Noah and Scott Fujita. It's just the beginning,

anthem before every game (and, since 9/11, playing "God Bless America" during baseball's seventh inning stretch—even for all-American teams like the Toronto Blue Jays). We are unique in employing scantily clad women to tell us when to "cheer." We are unique in calling the winners of our domestic leagues "world champions" (Zirin, 2005c).

By confronting the messages pumped out through our play, we can dissect what we like, what we dislike, and begin to challenge sports—and our society—to change (Zirin, 2005b).

When warplanes fly overhead we can ask how many physical education classes are cut to pay for each Blue Angel.

When college athletes are pilloried for taking under-the-table payoffs, we can ask whose blood, sweat, and tears paid for the brand spanking new enormodome that grace their campuses.

When insanely sexist commercials trade on women's oppression for the high cause of selling beer, we can make clear that this has no place in sports.

When our cities are soaked by sleazy stadium deals, we can stand up as sports fans and say, "Hey, we love baseball, but I'm not going to give a billionaire a \$350 million present for the privilege of watching it."

I read Gary Tyler's story and felt that I had to do something, I just couldn't sit on my ass and watch this man continue to serve time for something that he didn't do. . . Athletes have a voice. . . But it's almost as if they have been conditioned not to use it. I wanted to provide something where collectively they would be able to speak and make significant change at the same time.

but giving these athletes a sense of solidarity is very important.

CRK: What to your mind is the purpose or role of sport journalism?

DZ: The purpose is to critically examine sports, from the play to the politics behind the play. Too much of sports journalism though is an effort to trade access for attendant privileges. This forms the basis of the whole athletic industrial complex. Fans, political athletes that buck the system, and people damaged by publicly funded stadiums get left out in the cold.

CRK: Can sport journalism be used to advance social justice?

DZ: It can and it has. There is a proud tradition: the Black Press in the first half of the 20th century confronting racism and sport, writers like Christine Brennan and Sally Jenkins calling out sexism, Lester Red Rodney of the *Daily Worker*. . . the tradition is very real. For many people, following sports is a substitute for politics.

CRK: You have written much about athletes and activism. What interests you in this subject? How has the activism of athletes changed over time? What makes the political possibilities of sport so urgent now? What obstacles do politically committed athletes face?

DZ: I'm fascinated by the way we have strong associations of Jackie Robinson with the Civil Rights Movement, Muhammad Ali with the anti-war and black power struggle, Billie Jean King with the women's rights movement. Even though sports are supposed to be Bread and Circuses, they can acquire the power of the transformational. Politically committed athletes face a couple very tough obstacles. There is a history of punishing athletes who

We, the undersigned members of the sports community, call upon you, in the name of justice and racial reconciliation, to pardon Gary Tyler and free him from Angola prison. Gary is an innocent man who has spent 32 of his 48 years on earth behind bars for a crime he did not commit. Gary's life has been destroyed because of racial hysteria and that peculiar brand of police work known internationally as "Southern Justice." (<http://www.jocks4justice.com>)

The new parks are "fan-friendly"—unless your kid happens to go to a school whose shrinking budget paid for these monuments to corporate greed (Zirin, 2007c: 155).

Smith and Carlos came to Mexico City to raise awareness about injustices happening in their own country. They wore no shoes on the stand to protest poverty in the United States. They wore beads to protest lynching in the United States. They wore gloves and raised them during the playing of the anthem to signify dissent against the way the African American Olympic athletes were treated. . . Yet none of this 2008 crop of athletes is daring to say that maybe protest begins at home. They are raising concerns about China's policies in Tibet or Darfur, but not the U.S. wars in Iraq or Afghanistan. There are concerns about China's labor standards, but not the way their own sponsors, like Nike, exploit those standards (Zirin, 2008e).

A politics of athletic protest that both looks to its proud history and amplifies the voices of our twenty-first-century athletic rebels will provide us the tools to tear down the Terrordome—tear down the Terrordome and move toward a more just and sane future, both for the SportsWorld and that pesky RealWorld it inhabits (Zirin, 2007c: 258).

speak out, with many coming from poor, immigrant, or working class backgrounds, this can seem like an unnecessary risk.

CRK: How would describe the relationships between fans and players? How have fans politicized sport? Have they always been a reactionary mass?

DZ: Fans see sport as something to enjoy and a source of escape. When that gets challenged, either by greedy owners or players perceived as “uppity” (with racism bubbling near the surface) the results can be very explosive. They feel there is a social contract with sports that the guardians of sport often disrespect. But whether or not they are a “reactionary mass” is historically very dependent on the tenor of the time. It’s very true that what is happening off the playing field determines the politics on the field far more than vice versa.

CRK: What can scholars who study sport do to reach a broader public and make a difference in sport and society?

DZ: I find so much of sports sociology remarkable in it’s breadth and power to, as Dr. Ben Carrington says, “debunk” accepted truths. But it’s too ghettoized and too coded in academic language presented for other academics. I’m not saying there isn’t a place for academic writing, but every sports sociologists department should also might to have a sports and society column in their college paper. Every sports and sociology student should try to intern in their athletic departments. Let’s get the ideas out there in the oxygen. There are way too many brilliant trees falling quietly in the forest.

For African-American women athletes, especially in the WNBA, the closet can be a cavernous, lonely, chamber of depression. Many come from small Southern towns and communities where homophobia is as thick as the humidity. They then go to college programs where learning to stay in the closet can be as much a part of the coaching drills as lay-up lines and the three-person weave. Swoopes’s courageous stance has the potential to begin to move that weight in the other direction. It also has the potential to reach out to young African-American lesbians (Zirin, 2005a).

...sports is not sports anymore. It’s become the athletic industrial complex, a huge octopus with a million legs that affects our lives whether we’re sports fans or not. I don’t think we have the luxury anymore of saying, “Well, I don’t agree with the sports industry, so I’m gonna turn off my TV,” the way a vegetarian might say, “I don’t support the meat industry, so I’m not gonna eat a McRib.” I don’t think we have that luxury because sports affects our lives, whether we want it to or not, so it’s important for everyone to be aware. People need to be aware of the political messages that are pumped through our play, and people need to be aware of the concrete way sports manifests itself in our lives (Davis, 2007).

What gives me hope is that we are starting to see the broader polarization in our society reflected in the world of sports and for the first time in a generation, athletes starting to speak out. Seeing people like Etan Thomas, Adonal Foyle, Sheryl Swoopes, and Anthony Prior defy the cookie cutter image is a beautiful thing. I can’t wait for what the coming year will bring (demleft, 2006).

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