

Hope... The Ultimate Team Sport

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November 24 2020 11:02 AM



When I was a 21-year-old Harlem Globetrotter traveling through then communist-Poland (inside the so-called Iron curtain) – I would frequently be asked by students my age, “what I found so great about the racist and corrupt USA? I would innocently answer “hope” as the core of the American dream. I believed this because hope is the cornerstone upon which democracy and capitalism are built. Today I believe this more than ever.

I felt honored discussing the potential of voting rights and sharing my belief in the fundamental values of domestic tranquility and opportunities for all - which to me

“trumped” all USA’s problems in route to a more perfect union. Maybe I felt this way because I was raised in a small town of 8800 people or because freedom, democracy and perfection are works in process, or maybe, because my great-grandfather was a slave – and here I was college educated, travelling the world, with the hope someday of being a multi -millionaire.

The owner/co-founder of the Globetrotters, Abe Saperstein, praised me for the media feedback with pay increases and headlines on team posters as an example of America’s Basketball Ambassador of Goodwill.

Whatever the outcome had been, by age 21, I had personally confronted lots of ignorance, insensitivity and mean-spirited racism and nationalism in over 50 different languages. More importantly, I found reasons to love and respect more people than I would ever have imagined.

The news and images of the Emmett Till murder of an innocent 14-year-old Black Chicago teenager in Smart, Mississippi to this day, remains in my sub-conscious and nightmares; as does the memory of the small Edwardsville, Illinois restaurant owner who refused to serve food to a 15-year-old high school student-athlete because of color – what ignorance and short sightedness. When I was asked in those frequent German, Polish and Russian street debates what I thought about the future of Blacks and White relationships in America? I recall a statement by friend and famous bandleader Cab Calloway, “bigotry, greed and ignorance have no boundaries or timetable,” he said, “each of us must learn to pity and be tolerant of the fact that every room and community will have a few fools with big mouths and disrespectful attitudes.”

I remembered hearing stories when the school system desegregated and some leaders said with conviction “next thing you know those kids will want to play on Edwardsville’s sports teams! Our school system will be destroyed and our young white girls will be traumatized.” I also personally remember an NBA official named Marty Blake who said with sincerity and caring, “white families and fans would never come see a sports event with too many Black players.” My friends and teammates Gov Vaughn and Don Ohl were two of the greatest shooters in NCAA history. Gov was rejected by the NBA because of his skin color. A year later the Harlem Globetrotters whipped the College All-Stars (future NBA selectees) in a nationwide 21-game series. Vaughn averaged over 20 points per game and was selected the tours’ MVP – and was still never called to the NBA - what a waste. I personally witnessed the corporate world’s denial of equal opportunity and the waste of talented women and people of color in Marketing, Engineering, Science, Medicine, etc. Years ago, BBD&O interviewed me for a research position and asked that I read a book entitled The 30 Billion Dollar Negro by Parke Gibson. I could not believe the marketing and economic data it revealed.

What was missing then and today was understanding, dignity, respect, and forgiveness. What we seem to have today is a growing supply of misinformation- and non-scientific opinions. In some situations, news sources are from not so well-intentioned politicians, teachers, clergy, and the rapidly growing underground social media brokers. (I'm predicting a complete restructuring of Americas alternative information industry, which is proving to be a blessing and a curse). I stated in an earlier essay, President Mandela said he wanted no part of American style democracy and capitalism without first getting improved schools and law enforcement. In my opinion, one of the key pillars of the future of democracy is its tolerance of conflict and the publics ability to peacefully disagree. I doubt our founders clearly foresaw the population diversity growth, the emergence of global economic supply and demand trends, etc.

Our country has become dangerously divided as some of us routinely demonize differences.

Imagine for a moment you are on a large commercial airplane and the pilot announces "there is bad weather ahead and this aircraft has a disabled flight control system and no radar contact with the nearest airport, but don't worry. I have confidence we will land safely. However, we'll need everyone's help to survive." This fictional scenario is similar to today's reality. Awkward changing of leadership, the Covid-19 Pandemic, sustained global economic uncertainty, growing cultural, racial and ethnic divides, disruptions in Healthcare/capacity, environmental issues, and several very messy international threats.

Our beautiful country, is not an electronic or mechanical machine, a return to safety, requires everyone to offer prayer and active support – as in reaching out and being extra kind to your neighbors, supporting your mayor and hardworking law enforcement leaders. The one thing we all need immediately is a prayer for peaceful conversations and conflict resolutions. For example, my beautiful cousin Rhonda reminded me today in a prayer ... "let there be light, miracles, signs, and wonders and let there be healing." HOPE- has always been my major element in what makes America great.