

The Magic of Johnson continues despite HIV

Earvin Johnson will never play another game of professional basketball. Never again will a crowd be able to "ooh" and "aah" while watching Magic dish off an assist, drop a three-pointer or fill the lane. This part of his life is over, existing now only in highlight films and memories.

When Johnson announced last Thursday he was retiring from the Los Angeles Lakers because he had tested positive for the HIV virus, the news crossed generational lines and international borders. The world collectively shook its head, wondering how such a terrible thing could happen.

And for the first time, for many, it brought home the tragic consequences of the AIDS epidemic.

Other celebrities have contracted the disease: Rock Hudson, Robert Mapplethorpe and Liberace, to name a few. But never has the announcement come from such an unlikely source and with such an unexpected, sudden impact.

In the past, it has been far too easy to dismiss AIDS as a disease contracted only by a stigmatized few. It is a gay and lesbian disease, a drug-user disease, an unlucky blood transfusion disease — or so conventional thinking went.

AIDS has leaped across all boundaries as surely as Magic Johnson stood on that podium and shocked entire generations.

It is a cliché to say a good thing might come out of tragic circumstances, but in this case it's true. If nothing else, Johnson has pushed himself into the spotlight to promote awareness of the disease, promising to become a spokesman. Later, he will speak to President Bush and address Congress. AIDS will get a nationwide billing like never before.

Johnson did not have to do this. He is comfortably rich, courtesy of salary, endorsements and shrewd investments. Magic could have just as easily faded from public view, cloistered himself in some hideaway and shut out the world.

He didn't. No hair-pulling or moans of "Why me?" Simply a prompt acknowledgment of the virus and a refusal to let it get him down.

There will be ramifications — statements from idiots who revel in the stigma of the disease and refuse to accept its true nature. Public scorn from an unenlightened few will surely follow.

Johnson accepted this, and in one brief news conference exposed AIDS for what it is: a plague, an epidemic, as indiscriminatory as an earthquake.

Magic deserved better than this, as does everyone with the HIV virus. Johnson should have gone out on a crest of unabashed public glorification. A farewell tour, like Julius "Dr. J" Erving enjoyed, receiving accolades in every NBA city, his fans getting the chance to pay him, back for years of entertainment.

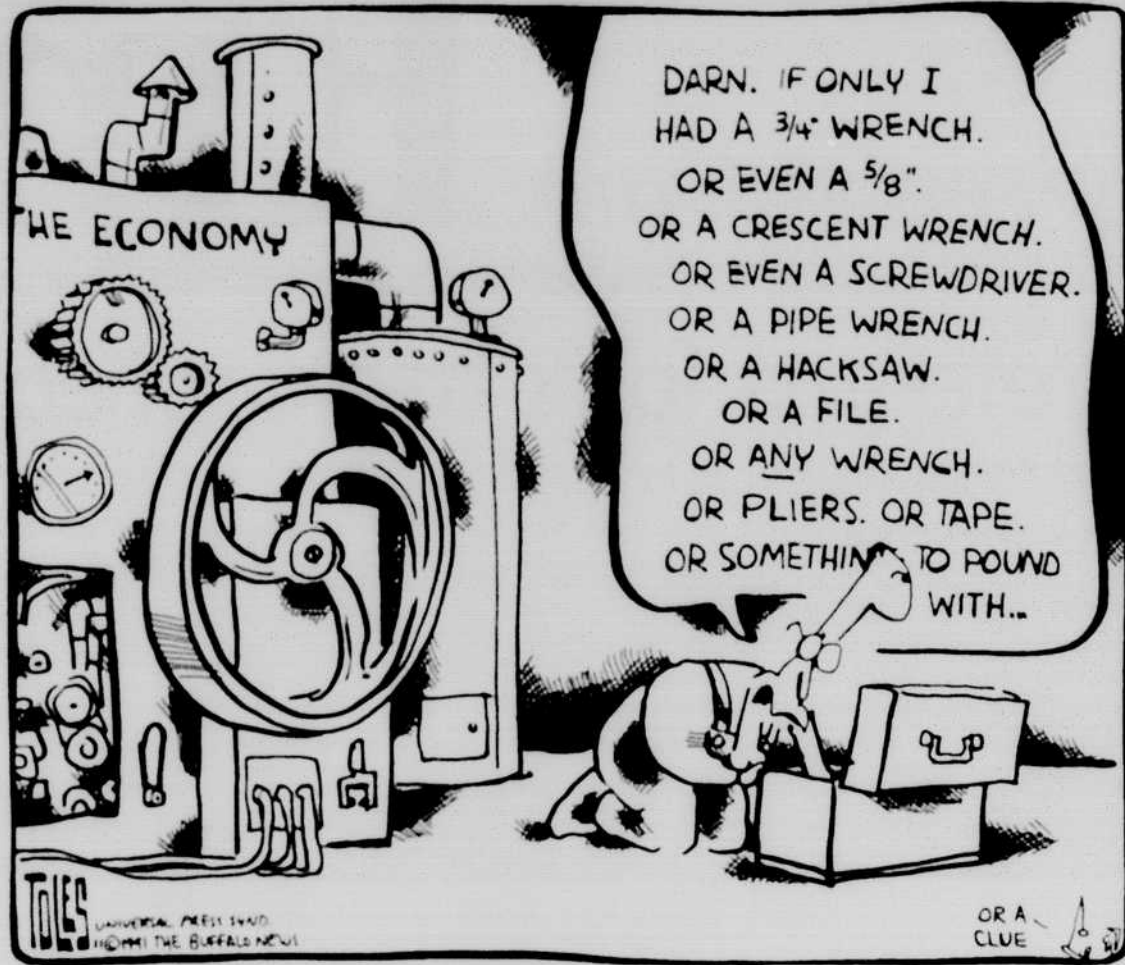
He will never get such a tour. Magic's memorial will be done in newsprint — a hollow legacy.

Jim Murray, the Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for *The Los Angeles Times*, said AIDS picked on the wrong person this time. Johnson, he said, will not cower in front of the disease or fall victim to stigma.

If anybody can beat the disease, Murray went on, it will be Magic.

The omnipotent smile is still there, though tinged with weary awareness. It is an unwinnable game right now, but anybody who saw Magic on the podium Thursday, displaying the kind of class few are blessed with, knows he will not go down easily.

The basketball Magic is gone, but the Magic of the man remains.



LETTERS

Pop quiz

Dear Myles Brand: As an interested and concerned person on how money is spent on education and sports at your school and OSU, I have some questions concerning the sport statues on the athletic building that are to be relocated.

1. What was the original cost of the statues and installation?
2. What is the cost to relocate them?
3. Why are they being relocated?
4. Were the statues made by a sculptor outside the state of Oregon?
5. Didn't the AIA firm that designed the building and the art committee have plans showing the original location, and were they approved?
6. Were funds for the statues donated by other people and not a planned cost in the building budget?
7. I don't know Bill Byrne, athletic director, but I hear he didn't like them and they blocked his view. He should tend to his job and not be an art critic and dictate the relocation.
8. You could have spent that money on student scholarships.

Guy Owen
Milwaukie, Ore.

Fantasize

I commend the *Emerald* for committing front-page coverage on Oct. 25 to the first of a series of articles on AIDS.

I only hope the other installments are better than the first.

Reporter Tammy Batey devoted nearly a third of her article to air one individual's outlandish opinion that AIDS has a "strongly spiritual purpose" to educate others.

This is simply the desperate flip side of the argument that AIDS is a form of divine punishment.

Please don't waste a good opportunity to get the true medical facts in the minds of people who are in denial about the threat of this disease. And please refrain from perpetuat-

ing ridiculous myths about AIDS.

If we are going to combat this horrible epidemic, more of us need to be armed with the facts, not fantasies.

Bill Lynch
Center on Human Development

What?

We live in an age of pluralism. The dominant mode of understanding the great issues of our times (religion, personal relations, personal rights) is done via the lens of cultural relativism.

While it is heartening to see emotional issues dealt with in the public forum, there is also a disturbing, ominous development.

It is implied that all belief systems are equally "true." At the same time it is also proposed that one individual "truth" (i.e., that all beliefs are equally correct) is exclusively true. In other words, it is more "true" than the rest of the "truths." This is a blatant contradiction.

To give an example where two basic beliefs are in contradiction, we can speak of cosmology. The universe has either existed forever or it has not. It wouldn't make sense to say both of these positions are correct, yet obviously one of these must represent the history of our universe. It would seem to matter.

Relatedly, can one take the position that decisions of personal expression are exempt from moral or ethical scrutiny? I'm not saying here that one person has the right to change another person's morals. What I do argue is as members of the same community, we do have the right to evaluate these morals. There is an important difference here, one that lies at the crux of our moral dilemma.

A final question: Is it possible that there is a right and wrong independent of the whims of humanity? In the final analysis, we must choose

(to quote Alasdair MacIntyre) "Whose justice, which rationality?"

Kelly O'Connell
Philosophy

Sinking

In response to Lori Parkman's (*ODE*, Oct. 22) cry for help, let me just give you a clue.

If only 2 percent of Americans are homosexual, that means there are 5 million of us. Including bisexuals, we comprise — by your own figures — 12,500,000 citizens. Is any of this sinking in?

We don't care about numbers and ratios. Our real joy is that for each one of us there is another. Maybe you don't like to find others like yourself. ... If we were like you, we wouldn't want to find each other either.

LeAnne Patterson
Eugene

Simon says

Anyone who steals from the University Bookstore is stealing from every student. When the bookstore has to raise prices to cover the costs of shoplifting, all students suffer in the form of higher prices.

I hope that when Jo Sonja Watson makes decisions in her capacity as ASUO vice president, she does a better job of considering the effects on the student body, because every honest student is the victim when someone shoplifts at the University Bookstore.

Simon F. Blagg
Eugene

Restoration

Jo Sonja Watson, your leadership ability is not in question. However, your judgment and ethics are. Restore my faith in the integrity of the ASUO vice president's office. End this controversy in a mature, decisive manner. Resign.

Ron Harper
Sociology

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