

SPORTS

Magic's plight shows we are not invincible



FROM THE SIDELINES

BY DAVE CHARBONNEAU

When I called Oregon men's basketball coach Don Monson, it was obvious he was apprehensive about discussing Magic Johnson.

To be frank, so was I. But I as a sportswriter and he a former coach of Johnson's, we both had to deal with the situation. But then again, I guess everyone has had to deal with the situation. Not just coaches, not just writers, not just athletes, not just sports fans, not just those with the AIDS virus, not just homosexuals, not just drug-users ... everyone has to deal with it.

So I dealt with it. When I first walked into Monson's office, I couldn't help but notice the picture behind him of he and Magic standing together. I had noticed it when I first met Monson on the Tuesday before Magic's announcement, but it did not have nearly the impact on me as it did this time.

Monson was assistant coach at Michigan State during Johnson's freshman season and had helped recruit Magic out of high school.

"We had a good relationship as far as assistant coaches go," Monson said.

The next year, Monson was given the head coaching position at Idaho, and Magic led Michigan State to the NCAA championship.

The rest of the story needs no detailing.

Since Magic turned pro in 1979, Monson has kept in

touch with the superstar. "I probably see him about once a year, sometimes not even that," Monson said. "One thing about Earvin is that he is always very cordial."

Monson was as shocked as anybody when he heard the news last Thursday.

"I felt kind of devastated. He has given a lot to the pro game. I think Earvin is the best point guard ever to play the game," Monson said.

But Monson is concerned with much more than what Magic left behind as a player. He is concerned with what the future will hold for a friend.

"When a good friend gets a serious illness, you're obviously very concerned," Monson said. "It leaves me empty not knowing what will happen in the future."

There is a key word: future. Magic Johnson has a future. It may not be on the court, but he is not dead.

As I read and watch countless reports and stories on Magic, I have realized that most people are talking as if Magic is dead.

Even when I was talking to Monson, I found myself going about the interview as if Johnson were dead.

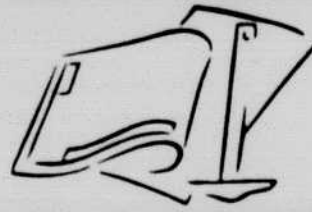
Everyone (including myself) needs to stop worrying so much about his career being over and realize that Johnson is still a human being and still has a life to live.

A very sad statement of our society is how much coverage this whole thing has received. Not that the story doesn't warrant the coverage, but why should it take something like a sports star to open the public's

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BUT SENATOR KENNEDY DENIES EVEN BEING IN THE JACUZZI WITH MADONNA ...

IN OTHER NEWS, FAMED RAPPER VANILLA ICE IS IN SERIOUS CONDITION AFTER A MISHAP WHILE SHAVING HIS EYEBROWS. WE GO NOW TO LIMP SANDERSON ...

BOB, I'M HERE AT OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HOPE HOSPITAL, WHERE DOCTORS SAY ICE MAY BE FACED WITH SERIOUS BRAIN DAMAGE ...

MUSIC INDUSTRY OFFICIALS ARE REASSURING FANS THAT THIS SHOULDN'T SERIOUSLY AFFECT HIS MUSIC ...

Kraig Norris

Oscar the Freshman

THIS IS GETTING RIDICULOUS. MY THIRD SLEEPLESS NIGHT IN A ROW.

OR IS IT THE FOURTH? IS THIS WEDNESDAY OR THURSDAY? OR MONDAY? SATURDAY? I CAN'T TELL ANYMORE!

OH NO!! WHAT CLASSES DO I HAVE TODAY? WHAT TIME IS IT? WHY IS EVERYTHING SUDDENLY SO INCOHERENT??

OSCAR, WHY DO YOU HAVE A SHOE ON YOUR HEAD? WHAT? HELLO. WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? MY CLASS IS THAT WAY!

Neal Skorpen