

NBA greats need history class

One of the great things about sports is records. They give us a chance to compare the great players and accomplishments of the past against those of the present. In other circumstances, they allow us to compare two contemporary great performers or performances.



STEVE MIMS

The greatness of a record comes out of its spontaneity and is one of the things that makes watching a game so special. Other records are built up over a season. These are the records based on the durability and the consistency that legends are made of. In basketball, things like Oscar Robertson averaging a triple-double one season, or Wilt Chamberlain averaging more than 50 points per game one year, are standards by which greatness is judged.

Sadly, it appears records are now something much more trivial, something people aim for rather than achieve. The great records are accomplished under normal circumstances when players put up superhuman efforts throughout the flow of a game.

Last Sunday was the final day of the NBA season and twice attempts were taken at records, one accomplished and one failed. Both tainted history.

The first example was the matchup of present vs. past, as Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf of the Denver Nuggets went after the NBA record for highest free-throw percentage in a season.

The record of 95.8 percent is held by Calvin Murphy, who was in attendance at the game in Houston, the team he works for.

Murphy's record was in jeopardy when with 6:50 left in the game, Abdul-Rauf was fouled for the first time all game, and needed to make both free throws to get the record.

After Abdul-Rauf made the first one, Murphy and his organization, the Rockets, did their best to screw up history's records. The Rockets called time out to try and ice Abdul-Rauf, an action that wouldn't be done in the course of a normal game, while Murphy grabbed the ball from the referee and began rubbing it, putting a so-called curse on it. When Abdul-Rauf went to the free-throw line, he missed the shot while Murphy screamed at him and slapped "high fives" with nearby fans after the miss.

It is doubtful Murphy's curse played any part in the miss, and his screaming couldn't be much louder than what Abdul-Rauf faces in any opposing arena, but the lack of class exhibited by Murphy was not what one would expect from a Hall of Famer.

In the other example, it was present vs. present, as David Robinson and Shaquille O'Neal fought for the NBA scoring title on the last day. The two were practically entering the final game, when San Antonio's coach

John Lucas and his players made a farce out of the record, allowing Robinson to score 71 points and get the scoring title.

Robinson is always the focal point of San Antonio's offense, but Sunday was ridiculous. Robinson attempted 41 shots, twice as many as he averages in a normal game. One of the reasons the Admiral got so many shots was because Lucas instructed his team to foul its opponents, the Los Angeles Clippers, to stop the clock and give the Spurs the ball back so Robinson could shoot more.

Robinson and his teammates went along with the plan and seemed to revel in the way they were able to rewrite the history books. In fact, Robinson's Spurs were able to win the game, not a tough thing to do considering they were playing the Clipper.

The NBA record for free-throw percentage in a season and the 1993-94 NBA scoring title are not the most famous records of all time. In fact, most people don't know or care who holds them, but history does. Greatness and history are things to strive for and relish when found, but neither Murphy nor Robinson should spend much time over their impaired records in history.

Murphy is a member of the Basketball Hall of Fame and Robinson will probably join him in the future, and deservedly so, but the great ones shouldn't have to go to such extremes to grab history. Their play alone should do so.

Steve Mims is the Sports Editor of the Emerald.

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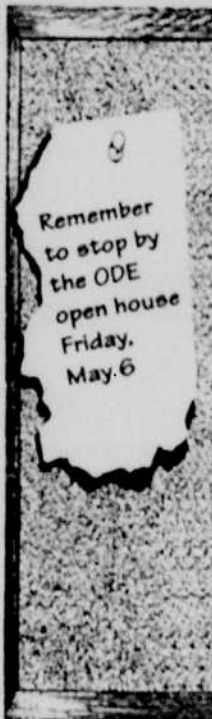


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