

O.J. Simpson human not hero should be treated as such

Well, it's been almost a week since the arrest of O.J. Simpson for the murders of his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman. Like all great American tragedies, this one has left us with many unanswered questions and consequences.

What would compel one of the most well known athletes and celebrities of all time to ruin his life, the life of his children, and ultimately end the lives of two innocent victims?

Of course we all know that he is innocent until proven guilty. But is he really?

In effect wasn't his trial played out Friday night on national television for millions to see? After all, by not turning himself in, O.J. didn't do much to prove his innocence.

People sat and watched on their couches. In bars. At work. Millions of judges and juries watched as O.J. continued his trek of freedom. Did anyone even consider the fact that maybe O.J. may not be guilty?

The evidence was laid out all nice and neat for people to convict O.J. There was the bloody glove that matched the one at the murder scene. There was the witness that supposedly saw O.J.'s car at Nicole's house on the night of the murders. Then there was O.J.'s suspicious, quick exit to Chicago where hotel staff members discovered blood in his room.

Don't get me wrong. I don't necessarily think that O.J. is innocent. What I think does not matter. His guilt or innocence will ultimately be determined by a judge and jury in the city of Los Angeles. Yes, that's right, Los Angeles—the city that couldn't convict the Menendez boys and couldn't handle the Rodney King trial. So never fear, O.J.'s in good hands.

Or was this a sporting event, complete with banner waving fans, cheering as "The Juice"

made one last dash toward the goal line? Did these people realize that they were cheering on an armed fugitive of the law? They're lucky they were not injured in the incident.

This wasn't number 32 running down the sidelines on a chilly Buffalo Sunday. This was a desperate man, contemplating taking his own life. Do we really believe that O.J. cared that people held up signs like "Save The Juice"?

Somehow I think that O.J. had better things to worry about at the time.

ESPN seemed to think that this was some sort of twisted sporting event. While their coverage of O.J.'s chase rolled on, ESPN periodically ran updates of "important" scores in the world of sports, just as they would if "Motor World" or "Speed Week" were on.

NBC has a similar philosophy. Unfortunately for NBC, O.J. decided to take America along with him on his little joy ride during game 5 of the NBA Finals. NBC had to make a decision how to handle covering the pivotal game 5 and perhaps the biggest breaking story in the last decade. What did NBC do? They did what they thought every sports fan would want. They covered both. In some areas of the country, they showed both at the same time. While O.J. cruised along I-5 with longtime friend Al Cowlings and his white Bronco, Patrick Ewing and Hakeem Olajuwon battled it out on a box in the lower corner of the screen. Now that's technology.

As one might expect, reaction to the whole situation has been varied. Reactions range from the longtime friends and fans who simply refuse to believe that O.J. Simpson is capable of committing such a hideous crime to cynics who just sit back and marvel at the pure entertainment value of the ordeal, restlessly waiting for the



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made-for-TV movie to come out.

For me, the day O.J. Simpson was arrested for double murder will forever be etched in my mind. Along with the space shuttle disaster, the Berlin Wall coming down, and Magic Johnson's revelation that he had contracted the HIV virus, this will be something that I will always remember. This is one of those things that in 20 years when someone asks you where you were when O.J. went down, you could immediately answer.

Me? I was warming up at a softball game when O.J. was finally arrested. I was drinking grape Kool-Aid on a sofa in South Dakota when Magic Johnson held his news conference with his shocking news.

As a sports fan I can remember many special events. I remember "The Catch" as Dwight Clark leaped for Joe Montana's miraculous pass in the end zone to defeat the Dallas Cowboys in the 1982 NFC Championship game.

I remember Bill Buckner letting Mookie Wilson's creeping ground ball leak through his legs as Ray Knight raced home, giving the New York Mets new life and eventually the 1986 World Series Championship.

These are just some of the many sports memories that I cherish. They are just that—sports memories.

What happened last week is not to be mistaken for sports. O.J. Simpson is no longer an athlete. This is no longer a sporting matter. It seems very odd then to

see people sympathizing with an accused killer like this. Would we all be so quick to support him if he was a mechanic from Flint Michigan?

America's obsession with its heroes tends to severely cloud its judgment. Why should O.J. Simpson be treated differently because he was perhaps the greatest running back of all-time? Why should he be treated differently because he hurdled rows of seats in car rental commercials?

If society learns one thing from this tragedy, let us hope that it is a better sense of what is real and what isn't.

People see celebrities on television and immediately assume that they know something about that person. Heck, I'll be the first to admit that O.J. seemed like a nice enough guy from what I had seen on television. The fact is that we know close to nothing about the real people behind the personality that we see at home on the screen.

Having O.J.'s final stand played out live on national television further complicates the matter. While there tends to be a feeling that everything on TV is real, the chase came across as a special edition of *Cops in Los Angeles*. The one thing that O.J. didn't want was public humiliation. He urged us to remember "the real O.J. and not this lost person."

Whoops. O.J. probably shouldn't have tried to make a run for it if he was so concerned about maintaining his public opinion ratings.

It is fine to remember the old O.J. He provided us with some great memories while running for USC and later for the Buffalo Bills. It could be argued that he was the biggest celebrity of the 1970's. This being said, it is now time to turn the page in the way we view O.J. Simpson, the person.

He is obviously a troubled

man. Great athletes are allowed to have actual human emotions and problems. It is part of the human condition. People forget that athletes and celebrities have actual lives.

One thing that disturbs me is the callousness with which some people treat an incident such as this. As soon as the story broke, one of the hottest topics on sports call-in shows was whether or not Simpson should be allowed to remain in the Football Hall of Fame if he should be convicted.

Is this really what we need to be discussing in the face of such a tragedy? Do we really think O.J. cares if he is in the hall of fame at this point? Is the hall of fame so important that we need to allow a murderer to be a member, based on what he did on a football field.

I personally don't care if O.J. is in the hall of fame or not. The hall of fame is a place where great players are honored for their tremendous achievements on the field. It is by no means a marker for great human beings. There is no hall of fame for great people. If there was, O.J. wouldn't be inducted. He probably gave-up that right in 1989 when he physically battered Nicole Brown Simpson.

Arguing about whether or not O.J. should be allowed to remain in the hall of fame if he is guilty of this crime is like a heart attack victim worrying about an ingrown toenail. It simply does not matter. It is a trivial element in an extremely complex and tragic issue.

Whether you think O.J. Simpson is guilty of this crime or not, it is important to remember that he is a human being first, and a famous ex-athlete and pitcher second. No banners are necessary. No trading cards need to be issued. Let's just treat this one as if he were a human being.

Chris Metz will be the Emerald sports editor fall term.

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