



Sports Talk

By Ron Sykes
Sports Editor

On June 9, 1981 Indiana's Isiah Thomas waited anxiously for the NBA draft. This, however, was not the first draft for the budding superstar. This story from Ira Berkow is certainly worth sharing.

How Isiah Thomas Escaped the bad guys of the Ghetto:

It was Draft Day in the ghetto. That's what everyone there called it. On a few days each year, chieftains of the notorious Vice Lords street gang appeared at certain homes on the West Side of Chicago to take recruits.

On this summer night in 1966, 25 Vice Lord Chiefs stopped in front of the home of Mary Thomas. She had nine children, seven of them boys, ranging from Lord Henry, 15 years old, to Isiah, 5. The Thomases lived on the first floor of a two-story red brick building on Congress Street, facing the Eisenhower Expressway.

One of the Lord's rang the bell. Mary Thomas, wearing glasses, answered the door. She saw behind him the rest of his gang, all wearing gold tams and black capes and some lead guns on their waist bands that glittered under the street lamps.

"We want your boys," the gang leader told her. "They can't walk around here and not be in no gang." She looked him in the eye. "There's only one gang around here, and that's the Thomas gang," she said "and I lead that."

"If you don't bring those boys out, we'll get 'em in the streets," he said. She shut the door. The gang members waited. She walked through the living room where the rest of the family sat. Isiah, frightened, watched her go into the bedroom and return with a sawed-off shotgun. She opened the front door. She pointed the gun at the caped figure before her. "Get off

my porch!" she said, "Or I'll blow you cross the Expressway."

He stepped back, and slowly he and his gang disappeared into the night. Isiah Thomas never joined a gang, and was protected from the ravages of street life...the dope, the drinking, the stealing, the killings...by his mother and his brothers, even those who eventually succumbed to the streets. Two of his brothers became heroin addicts, one was a pimp, a couple would be jailed and one became Vice Lords Chief.

Isiah, though, was the baby of the family, and its hope. He became an honor student in grade school and high school, an All-American basketball player in high school and college, and, as a 6'1 inch point guard, lead Indiana University to the NCAA championship last March.

After only a few weeks out of high school, he was a stand out on the U.S. team that won the Gold Medal in the 1979 Pan American Games, and was a starter on the 1980 U.S. Olympic Team.

Isiah Thomas, a 19-year old sophomore and B student majoring in forensics, with an eye toward law school, passed up his last two years of college basketball to declare his eligibility for the NBA draft.

He had wrestled with his decision all season.

"Don't do it," said Bobby Knight, the Indiana basketball coach. "You can still improve in basketball. You could be worth more." "What's left for you to prove in college?" asked his brother Gregory.

"Son," said Mary Thomas, "Do what makes you happy."

"I know I'm a role model for a lot of people back in the ghetto," said Thomas, "not too many of us

get the chance to get out, to go to college. If I get out what effect would that have on them? And I said I wanted to be a lawyer and one day return there and help the people. They need it. I've seen kids who stole a pair of pants and they get a five-year prison sentence. Literally, because there was no adequate legal help for them.

"I'll get my law degree. I know I can only play basketball for a few years. Then you've got the rest of your life ahead of you. And I have to think of my family. My mother worked hard all her life and for not much money. My father left when I was 3 years old, and my mom had to keep us together by herself. She worked in the community center, she worked in the church, she did whatever she could. She's got a job with the Housing Authority in Chicago now, and she shouldn't be working. Her eyes are bad, and her heart's not good. I'd like her to quit."

By the time Thomas was in the fourth grade, he was a star on the eighth-grade team at Our Lady of Sorrows. His mother and brothers watched him closely. Mary Thomas made sure that he went straight home from school, and did not dandle in the streets. "If I did," he said, "My mother would kick my butt."

From the time he was in grade school, his brothers lectured him. The seven of them sat in a bedroom and closed the door so that their mother and two sisters would not hear the horror stories that they told of the streets. They would take him for a walking tour and point out the dangers. "They told me about the mistakes they had made, so that I wouldn't have to make them," said Thomas.

Lord Henry, for one, had been an All-City basketball player at St.

Phillips. People in the neighborhood contend that he was the best basketball player in the family. He still holds the Catholic League's single season scoring record. But he had problems with discipline and grades and was thrown out of school. He went into the streets, and became a junkie. Isiah could see for himself the tortures his brother went through and the suffering it caused his mother.

At St. Joseph's High in Westchester, a predominately white school in a Chicago suburb, Thomas endeavored to learn text book English. At one point his brother Gregory, was confused. Isiah recalls his brother saying: "You done forgot to talk like a nigger. Better not come around here like no sissy white boy." But the brothers, like Isiah, understood the importance of good English, and the handle it could provide in helping to escape the ghetto, a dream they shared. "What I was doing," said Isiah, "was becoming fluent in two languages."

At Indiana he made All-Big Ten as a freshman, and on March 30th, he scored 23 points to lead his team to a crushing 63-50 win over North Carolina, and was named MVP. As soon as the game ended, Indiana fans rushed to the court. One of them was a Black woman in a red suit jacket with a button on her lapel. The button read, "Isiah Thomas Mom, Mrs. Mary Thomas." Near the center of the court they embraced. She was crying and it looked as if Isiah was holding back tears.

"Thanks mom, thanks for everything you've gone through for me. I hope I can do something for you."

"You've done enough, honey," she said.

Note: Excerpted from the S.F. Chronicle.

Beaver: Publisher, sportsman

Grassroot News, N.W. For those who were in Portland during the late 50s and early 60s, the word Beaver generates a special memory, especially, if the Beaver is Fitzgerald Beaver.

Mr. Beaver first established himself in Portland as a D.J. "I had a D.J. program featuring R&B and branched out into Gospel and Jazz. I came up in the Era of Payola; when Disc Jockeys were a celebrity and I was among the first DJ's in Portland," he recalled. His radio show was called the Eager Beaver Show and he was among the first to bring Black programming into a commercial format.

"I would have remote programs at dances and gas stations and fill up the whole lot. It was real tough getting into radio because there just wasn't any Black radio. First, I went to a radio station and asked if there were any jobs as announcers opened. They told me they didn't have a spot for someone with my brough. Finally, I decided to go out and get some sponsors. When I got some sponsors which represented some money, I didn't go back to the program Director. I went to the owner and said, 'Look, I got some sponsors, some money to put in the station,' and he said 'When do you want to start?' Later, I got into T.V. and put Gospel on the air with a show called 'Gospel Train.' The response was good but there weren't enough people to help. Those few Black people who stood beside me just wasn't enough but it was

enough for me to learn Radio, T.V., and public relations. So when I left Portland and came to Seattle, it was easy for me to click right into the business. Doing the same thing in Seattle paid off but doing the same thing in Portland, didn't," he said.

Other Beaver ventures included: Selling beer, records, in addition to owning a Variety Show on old Union Avenue. "I got a good education in Portland," Beaver added with a smile. "I left Portland and came to Seattle with a job in mind. I was to manage the first Black radio station in Seattle. In this position I would call on Black advertisers and they would complain about the lack of a Black newspaper in the area. I had never been in a newspaper office, but I decided if this is what they want, I'll do my best to give it to them." In 1963, Beaver started *The Seattle Facts*, later expanding to Tacoma, Washington. (*The Tacoma Facts*)

When asked if he perceived any changes in the newspaper business, Beaver indicated that there hasn't been any major changes except in the attitude of the people he represents. "In the early 60s, we started the social revolution and we changed from Negro into being Black. One of the toughest transactions I had to make was to keep from being an Uncle Tom and not being too radical at the same time. You see, a newspaper has to make money to survive and I was in business like I'm in business now. You find a need for that service, you

create a need for that service, you give it to the people and you'll make money."

Beaver's experience exceeded far beyond the newspaper office onto the golf course. Recently, he was elected Area Vice-President of the Western States Golf Association by the Leisure Hour Golf Club of Portland and the First State of Seattle. "Everybody got to have something to believe in. Golf is my outlet. I like to be competitive. I'm not one of the top, top golfers, but I like to win so I try real hard. I've promoted golf in the Northwest and hope the ranks in the WSGA will swell. It's something good and clean and I will make it pay off," he predicted.

Fitzgerald Beaver's work and, the doors he has helped pry open has had a ripple effect on journalism in the Northwest. Every Black newspaper in the Pacific Northwest has received a bit of help from Beaver. George Page (KBOO-FM) found him to be his biggest influence. Beaver is also the father of Lanita Duke, Director of Grassroot News, N.W.



Fitzgerald Beaver

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Albina Ministerial Alliance Family Day and Night Care Program will hold its 11th Anniversary Banquet at Westminster Church on Friday, June 26th at 6:30 p.m. The Church is at 1624 N.E. Hancock.

Speaker for the event is Derrick Bell, Dean of the University of Oregon School of Law. Dr. Bell has been a teacher and an attorney in the field of civil rights.

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School Board member Herb Cawthorne will lead a march from Washington/Monroe High School to Adams High School at noon Sunday to protest the potential closure of Adams High School. Washington/Monroe has already been closed.

A community potluck will follow the march. Purpose of the march is to raise funds to file a discrimination suit against the School Board.

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