

LeBron James and American Hypocrisy

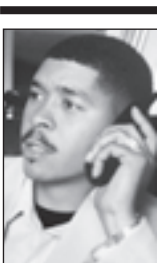
I was prepared this week to write an article on sports and fatherhood. Instead, I was struck by the season opening basketball game of the Cleveland Cavaliers on Thursday, October 30th, featuring the return of Akron, Ohio's native son, LeBron James. With hours of national sports coverage and thousands of fans who traveled downtown to enjoy a free concert from Kendrick Lamar and Imagine Dragons—including live commentary from Charles Barkley and jokes from comedian/actor Kevin Hart—the event was overwhelming.

The city unveiled a new

local celebrities all to see the homecoming of LeBron. Nike even unveiled a new commercial, where “King James” invites the entire city of Cleveland into a team huddle and prep-talk to win a championship in classic black and white film.

It felt like I was watching the NFL Super Bowl, but it was only Cleveland's first game of the season with LeBron back, featuring his new teammates; Kevin Love, Kyrie Irving, Deon Waiters, Tristan Thomas and more. It was also the season premiere of new Cleveland head coach, David Blatt.

By the way, the game



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27th.

But with all of the sports commentators speaking about how amazing the opening night was, I couldn't help thinking about the American hypocrisy of sports and race. I've been to the city of Cleveland on several occasions and know people from the area, as well as from other cities of Ohio. And it's the same old American story; blacks live on one part of town in poverty, while whites live on the other in wealth. And race relations still don't mix like you would think they

would in year 2014.

So I watched the rehashed stories of white Cleveland Cavaliers fans who angrily burned LeBron James jerseys just four years ago when he left the city to take his talents to

South Beach, and I chuckled at their audacity. Thousands of these same angry white fans now profess to love him again, including Cavaliers owner, Dan Gilbert, who was forced to humble himself and apologize for his tantrum and public letter, which lambasted LeBron and his character.

I'm sorry, folks, I know we all look at sports as the perfect meeting ground between race, gender, class, creed and culture, but it continues to astonish me how the white American

populace could care less about LeBron James' twin brother, if he wasn't blessed with the same freakish athletic skills to play basketball. And if James had such a twin brother, would these fans bother to even buy him a drink? Not unless he brought LeBron with him.

As we inch closer to year 2015, we still have millions of white Americans who would never read this sports column just because it has the word “black” in it, identifying a people and culture that they refuse to learn anything about. And if black athletes couldn't dunk, shoot, rebound, or pass a basketball; run, pass, catch, intercept, kick or punt a football; or throw, catch, hit or pitch a baseball, white Americans wouldn't care to know them either.

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10-story high LeBron James banner, featured six hours of fan experience from Nike, invited fans to game watching parties at more than 40 bars and restaurants, and unveiled a humungous, state-of-the-art scoreboard inside Quicken Loans Arena, where those with tickets to the game received free LeBron James T-shirts, a season schedule magnet for their refrigerators and twenty-thousand glow-in-the-dark wands to wave during the game announcements in high-definition 3D.

Of course, the game was sold out, with superstar musician, Cleveland native and part team owner, Usher Raymond and his protégé Justin Bieber sitting court-side, along with filmmaker, Spike Lee, football Hall of Famer turned TV star, Michael Strahan, and dozens of other national and

included NBA All-Star and Olympian Carmelo Anthony and his New York Knicks, with the second game of their new head coach, Derek Fisher. And after all of the crazy build-up, LeBron James went on to have a horrible outing in a 95-90 loss. At one point in the first half, he was 1-9 shooting with four turnovers, on his way to 17 points and eight turnovers.

I felt sorry for the dude. I could only imagine how anxious he was to get it all over with. At the end of the day, he still needed two and half hours worth of energy to play a basketball game before granting a hundred post-game interviews about the loss. Not only that, I read his wife Savannah finally gave birth their first baby girl to add to his excitement and exhaustion on Monday night, October

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November 15

Photo courtesy of Oregon Historical Society

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“The Wake of Vanport” honors the death of a city and the viewing of its history through the collection of Vanport stories told by the voices of those who lived there. It is also a celebration of life after loss. Vanport is a lost city of Oregon with a rich history for all Oregonians.

- ❖ Join us for this screening of multimedia works
- ❖ Post presentation discussion with survivors and producers
- ❖ Refreshments will be served
- ❖ Open to the public and free admission

The Vanport Multimedia Project is an ongoing project of The North Portland Multimedia Training Center (NPMTC) to collect and archive oral history from individuals in the Portland African American community. Thanks to the generous support of Meyer Memorial Trust, the Oregon Community Foundation, the Multnomah County Cultural Coalition and The Skanner Newsgroup for supporting the 2014 Vanport Multimedia Project. NPMTC is a project of The Skanner Foundation.

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