

Wise, M. (1998, April 14). Ox Eludes Wizards: Off-court Problems of High Paid Stars Disappoints Washington DC Teenagers. *The New York Times*, pp. A1, D31.

## OVERVIEW

The owner of the Washington Wizards National Basketball Association's team, Abe Pollin, spent \$200 million on a lavish new arena, \$105 million on a budding superstar, located the team downtown (in the mostly black community of the nation's capital rather than in the mostly white suburbs), took pride in its black general manager and black coach (only NBA team to have both), and developed relations with inner city schools where students would receive free tickets.

As a team with an impressive roster of young players (Michael Jordan called them a "future force"), the Wizards have been a disappointment on and off the court.

Gheorghe Muresan, the team's center and the NBA's tallest player at 7 feet 7 inches, decided to do a movie, "My Giant," strained a tendon in his right ankle, and did not play all season and may have ruined his career. Tim Legler, 3-point specialist, was out most of the season with a knee injury.

Juwan Howard was charged with driving while intoxicated after speeding in his Mercedes-Benz. Chris Webber was charged with second-degree assault, resisting arrest, marijuana possession, and driving under the influence, along with other traffic violations on his way to team practice. Howard and Webber have been charged with sexual assault. Webber's response: "You're innocent until proven guilty. That's what I heard." Howard said, "The people that support us...they know we're not capable of doing anything like this. It's embarrassing not only for us but our families and teammates." But General Manager Wes Unseld has criticized his players' conduct: "Let's just say their judgment has left something to be desired."

Young fans went further. From Adams Elementary School, one of the schools relating to the team, 13-year olds Kenneth Williams and Adrian Venzor spoke out frankly to the reporter. Eighth grader Williams said, "I just wish they would've stopped showboating and stuck to the basics (speaking of the players' tendency of celebrating dunk shots even when well behind in a game). Maybe then they would've made the playoffs."

Young Venzor's comments were insightful: "Some of them stay out late at parties when they have to go to work the next day. They're always getting into trouble. Maybe they think because they're stars they can get away with anything." And "folding his arms in disgust" he continued, "And Chris Webber should stop shooting threes, too."

Jesse Jefferson, 60, is a Washingtonian who runs the after school program at Adams Elementary in which Kenneth and Adrian are volunteers. He sees interest in the Wizards drying up among young students with whom he works: "We tried to tell kids to look closer to home for their role models...but players...do have an obligation to maintain a certain behavior. These guys get treated like prima donnas from elementary school on up. I don't think they're good role models."

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What most impressed you in this article and what most needs discussing?

2. What do you think athletes should get paid? Should college athletes get something for all the work they put in and all the money their schools make from sporting events? Is it possible to limit incomes of entertainers and athletes, owners and coaches, in a free market economy? What can be done about 21-year old—or even teenage—superstars suddenly getting so many millions?

3. Do you think fans, and the public generally, have a right to expect decent behavior and a hard work ethic from highly-paid superstars?

4. Do young people need heroes and role models? Do athletic and entertainment superstars become role models for young people by nature of their celebrity or prowess?

5. How do the media play into the making of role models and the extent of their incomes?

## IMPLICATIONS

1. Athletics are an important part of the youth culture and even the world of children.

2. The comments of the boys in this article shows how disappointed children and young people can become in their heroes.

3. There needs to be more discussion of athletics and role models among children, as Jesse Jefferson in this article explains.

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