

the sports

'Clams of sports' hurting themselves

By MILTON RICHMAN
UPI Sports Editor

This is a free country, far less restrictive than it ever has been in all its 203 years, and the easiest way you can prove that is by listening to the colossal liberties some people take with the statements they make.

Nowhere is there any better example of free speech than in sports. Even when it wasn't considered as fashionable as it is today, athletes generally said whatever they felt like. They just weren't quoted as much.

Individuals like Muhammad Ali, Thomas "Hollywood" Henderson and Dock Ellis, to name only a few, love to talk and tell everyone what they think. One of the best ways they have of doing that is by talking to reporters.

THEN YOU HAVE THOSE at the other extreme. Fellows like Larry Bird, Indiana State's spectacular All-America, Thurman Munson of the Yankees and George Hendrick of the Cardinals. They are the clams of the sports world, the ones who don't wish to speak to reporters at all.

If people like Bird, Munson or Hendrick do not wish to talk to reporters, that's certainly their prerogative. I've spoken with Munson and Hendrick and found them communicative when they wish to be. On other occasions, they made it plain they had no intention of speaking with anyone.

That's their privilege, their right, but I can assure them they are wrong in their basic attitude. They're certainly not helping themselves. They're really not helping anyone.

George Hendrick, the Cardinals' outfielder, is perceptive enough to realize what he's doing isn't right and to his credit, at least he admits it.

EARLIER IN THE YEAR in St. Louis, Hendrick was asked whether he had been any influence on Garry Templeton, the Cardinals' 22-year-old shortstop who decided that he, too, didn't care to

The future of the NBA

O'Brien likes what he sees

United Press International

DALLAS — Larry O'Brien, the grandfatherly man who oversees the highest paid group of athletes in the United States, spent a distinguished political career learning the signs and what they mean.

And he likes the signs he sees. "A few things stick out in my mind over the past few years," said the commissioner of the National Basketball Association.

"I remember the day after Portland won the championship in 1976. All the traffic was stopped and there was a huge parade and the community was so excited about what its team had done.

"And I remember after last year's championship series I got a call from the White House and was told that the President wanted to see the Washington Bullets and could they come to the East Room for a visit.

"And before the seventh game of the Seattle-Washington series last year I was with the owners of the Seattle club and the tension was so thick.

"I've been in some national elections (as head of the Democratic party). I have sat there waiting for the returns to come in to find out if four years of efforts would pay off. Well the tension you could feel in the arena in Seattle was comproable to that."

In other words, says O'Brien, if the sport of professional basketball can create such tension and can create such enthusiasm among the fans, then things can't be all bad.

"I'll be long gone and we will all be long gone," he said, "and the NBA will still be going strong."

O'Brien was in Dallas last week to look over the 18,000-seat arena that will be completed in about a year. It was the first of his planned visits to possible expansion sites and Dallas is almost certain to be one of the two cities that will receive a franchise for the 1980-81 season.

Expansion of the NBA from 22 to 24 teams was agreed upon earlier this year and the decision came at a time that struck some as odd.

Three of the NBA's showcase markets — New York, Chicago and Boston — are experiencing a down year. Attendance in Madison Square Garden, Chicago Stadium and Boston Garden is down and television ratings have slumped this year as well.

But if all of that is a problem, says O'Brien, why are people clamoring to acquire an NBA franchise?

"The people wanting franchises don't talk to me of any reservations

they have," he said. "And they are certainly free to do so."

"I read these stories about our attendance being down and I don't understand them. We do have a unique situation where teams in three of our major markets have a won-loss record that is saddening to them this year. The attendance for those three teams is down considerably.

"But attendance in almost half our cities is up. And with two weeks to go in the regular season our attendance was down less than 1 per cent from last year — which was a record year."

A common suggestion when a major league expands is that the expansion will dilute the talent in the league. O'Brien scoffs at such a suggestion.

"We have 242 basketball players in our league," O'Brien said, "and sometimes I stop and think, 'gosh, that's it. That's all. Just 242.'"

"This year alone there were 3,000 kids playing basketball in the Division 1 level of the NCAA and we have only 242 in the NBA. I think you and I could sit down and look at a list of all the basketball players who are not in our league and we could come up with a pretty good team."

"And when we expand we will be adding only 22 players. That's not many when you think of all the talent out there. And the coaches feel that the next few years will produce some of the best talent that has ever come into the league."

Along with Dallas, the cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Miami, Pittsburgh and Toronto are being considered as possible expansion sites. A decision on the two choices will probably be made at the league meeting in June.

"It is ridiculous for any sports league to expand for the sake of expansion," said O'Brien. "It creates adverse public reaction for the expansion teams and it creates adverse reaction for the league as a whole."

"But we feel the time is right for the broadening of the base of the NBA. This will probably be our last expansion for the foreseeable future. Our next goal is international play within the next six to ten years."

"The time is past when someone can just show up and be awarded a franchise. We want to award these franchises carefully. We want to get a feel for the community interest. After all, when a team goes into a city it is part of the community and it owes that community something. It's odd when you think about it,

but all the cities we are considering have had basketball — either NBA or ABA. Even Toronto had a brief moment of the NBA years ago. The point I'm making is that there is not one city we are thinking about

where professional basketball has not failed in the past.

"But that doesn't set me back because in no instance where a franchise folded was the basketball comparable to the NBA as it is today."



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talk to reporters last year. Hendrick said he hadn't influenced Templeton at all.

"I told him he had everything to lose and nothing to gain," said the Cardinals' outfielder. Explaining why he chose not to talk to writers, Hendrick added:

"I don't know who I can trust and who I can't trust and I don't want to spend the time and energy to distinguish between the two."

Why, I can't help wondering, doesn't George Hendrick simply try trusting everyone? That's part of the Golden Rule. Burned once by one writer it seems, Hendrick now tars everyone with the same brush. He'd be the first to point out the injustice of it all if reporters employed the same reasoning he does to treat him the way he does them. I wonder if he has ever given any thought to the fact that writers are directly responsible for what have to be the most satisfying experiences in any ballplayer's life. That generally comes when a player is voted MVP and into the Hall of Fame. And who are the ones who do the voting? George Hendrick should think about that some time.

JOHN CLAIBORNE, THE CARDINALS' new general manager, disappointed me, too, when he said "I'm not going to tell a player to talk to the press or not to talk to the press. His relationship with you (the press) is his business."

John Claiborne is dead wrong there. His job is to sell the Cardinals to the community as well as baseball in general to the fans. One of the ways he's obliged to do that is by selling George Hendrick the idea publicity generates interest in the team, interest in turn generates attendance and attendance is what helps pay Hendrick's and Claiborne's salaries.

Several things come to my mind anytime I see athletes refusing to talk to the media.

I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK how vital they're always saying it is to communicate and here they are doing exactly the opposite of what they say. I also think about how some of these strong silent types go off by themselves in a corner, then return years later, maybe for some Old Timers' function, and look around longingly for someone to talk to. Lefty Grove was only one of many I saw do that.

Most of all, I remember the late Frank Graham's classic line in connection with Bob Meusel, who seldom ever gave newspapermen the time of day during most of his career with the Yankees. Near the end, he mellowed somewhat, and Graham, noticing the change in him, wrote: "Now that it's nearly time to say goodbye, Bob Meusel finally is learning how to say hello."

SWC Baseball Standings

Texas	8-1	.889
Arkansas	12-3	.800
Texas A&M	5-3	.625
Baylor	8-5	.616
Texas Tech	6-6	.500
Houston	6-7	.462
TCU	3-7	.300
Rice	3-12	.200
SMU	2-9	.182

Last Week's Results
FRIDAY: Arkansas 3, SMU 1; Texas 12, Rice 3.
SATURDAY: Arkansas 3, SMU 1; Arkansas 9, SMU 2; Houston 5, TCU 1; TCU 13, Houston 11; Texas 7, Rice 0; Texas 16, Rice 0.
SUNDAY: Houston 3, TCU 0; Baylor 7, A&M 3; Baylor 5, A&M 3.

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