

the sports
Silence is 'stupid'

By MILTON RICHMAN
UPI Sports Editor

If silence is golden, then people like Steve Carlton, Dave Kingman and George Hendrick don't have a worry in the world. They're going to find out even richer and happier as they are now — they think. The same goes for most of these other sociological heavyweights, these born-again supercilious bimbos, who consider themselves important, too busy or too indignant to talk with the press. I'm talking about such assorted copyists as Jimmy Connors, Thurman Munson, Ken Stabler, Larry Bird and Danny Ainge.

In case you've never heard of Danny Ainge, he's a race driver and comes from Hawaii. Reporters call him the "Silent Hawaiian," and he is in awe when he does consent to speak with them, he'll tell them, "I have the answers — you don't have the questions."

Sometimes, when I see a Carlton, Connors or a Kingman get up on his soapbox for not being able to hear what each has to say, I can't help wondering if they realize whom they are hurting most. Themselves, of course.

Think back, what was it that originally got you interested in those who take part in a particular sport? And was your interest was captured, was it that helped cultivate it? For me, it was largely the newspapers, and I don't think I'm that different than anyone else.

Let me give you a few examples of how absurd and stupid this veil of silence can turn out to be:

Richie Ashburn was a ball player for the Phillies and he was an unusually good one. Now he does a column for a Philadelphia paper. Carlton will talk to other ball players but not to writers, but when Ashburn went up to him to ask him a question not long ago, the petulant Phillies pitcher wouldn't answer it because he was a writer! Now, I

mean, how ridiculous can you get? Then there's George Hendrick, the Cardinals' outfielder, who also refuses to talk to writers.

Last week, John Milner of the Pirates hit a ball which Hendrick caught with a fine leaping grab along the wall of Busch Stadium. Don Berns of UPI's St. Louis bureau has never had any trouble with Hendrick, and after the game, he said to him:

"George, did you catch the ball in front of the wall or did you run into the wall?"

"You saw it, didn't you?" Hendrick answered.

"I was so far away, I couldn't tell," Berns answered, honestly.

"Look, man, you saw it," Hendrick finished his little speech. "It happened just the way you saw it."

The division between the players and the press seems to be growing, and I have my own theory for that, too. Some players think not talking to the press is the "in" thing to do. You know, monkey see, monkey do. They think it gives them some kind of stature not to talk to newsmen when actually they achieve the completely opposite effect in the long run.

Without publicity, where would Babe Ruth have been? Joe Namath or even Muhammad Ali? One thing you have to say about Ali — he knew the value of publicity perhaps better than any athlete who ever lived.

Some front office officials are upset when their players don't cooperate with the press; some are indifferent.

Harry Dalton, executive vice president and general manager of the Milwaukee Brewers, sees both sides of the coin, the players' side and the media's side.

"I think there are times when it's understandable why players don't want to talk to the media," he says.

"That's because of the treatment they get from some reporters. By and large, though, I think it's the players' responsibility to keep

dialogue open with representatives of the media. To amplify that, players are short-sighted if they think they have the right to stand mute. They're wrong. It is the fans who support the players and the fans who want to know their comments. The only way they can get the players' comments is through the media."

Peter Bavasi, president and chief executive officer of the Toronto Blue Jays, has by far the clearest approach to all this player-media problem of anyone I've seen.

"We have a special public relations seminar with our players each spring and we tell them what business we're in," he says. "We tell them we're in the entertainment business and they are entertainers. We try to explain to our players, in great detail, that the job of the 'beat writer,' especially the one on an afternoon paper, is demanding. The afternoon writer has to be creative. He must create 162 times a year. The morning paper writer has to be creative also, we explain to our players, but we tell them the afternoon writer probably will ask more probing questions."

"Our players are given to understand that the vast majority of print journalists are highly competent. We tell the players they will rarely, if ever, be misquoted, misunderstood perhaps, but rarely misquoted, so it's incumbent upon them to make themselves better understood."

"We also tell our players," Bavasi goes on, "that we have 40 people in the front office busy at work trying to sell our product and that the cooperation of the players not only is requested but absolutely necessary."

Peter Bavasi, whose father, Buzzie, runs the Angels, is unique among baseball officials.

"There is no bad news in sports journalism," he insists, "only different degrees of good news. I tell everybody that's my father's line, but it's really my line."

Astros replace Dixon

United Press International
HOUSTON — The Houston Astros Tuesday acquired the contract of right-handed pitcher Frank LaCorte from a minor league team to replace injured pitcher Tom Dixon on their roster.

LaCorte will join the Astros in Pittsburgh Thursday. He pitched 10

games at Charleston in the International League and was 3-6 with a 2.49 ERA and four complete games.

LaCorte, 27, started the season with the Atlanta Braves. He allowed nine hits and seven runs in eight innings with them before being traded to the Astros for pitcher Bo McLaughlin.

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