

Metta

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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Maybe I missed the memo. Perhaps I wasn't paying close enough attention. Or somehow it wasn't big enough news in London. Whatever the case may be, I was startled when I read recently that someone named Metta World Peace was playing basketball in the NBA for the Los Angeles Lakers. I remember World B. Free of the NBA and He Hate Me of the XFL, but Metta World Peace was a new one.

Even more striking was the fact that someone named World Peace was suspended for seven games for putting his elbow into the face of an opponent with considerable force. The elbow assault followed a dunk by the player with the peaceful name and was totally unprovoked. It is probably a new way to celebrate a dunk.

Those of you who have been following the Lakers and the NBA all season, and I know there are a few of you, no doubt know that World Peace is both unattainable and Ron Artest. The name change came sometime last fall before the opening of the NBA season and before Metta appeared on "Dancing with the Stars."

So what's in a name? Apparently a lot!

"Metta is a Buddhist term meaning "loving kindness and friendliness towards others." So clearly this is a good choice for the Artest, formerly known as Ron. "It took many years of research and soul-searching to find a first name that was both personally meaningful and inspirational," reports World Peace's publicist.

The quest ended and so Ron Artest legally became Metta World Peace as soon as he was able to clear up an outstanding traffic ticket. Metta was quoted as saying that he hoped that the name change would "inspire and bring youth together all around the world." If nothing else, it should inspire those who believe that basketball is a contact sport, and that preps the youth of the world for martial arts training.

When World Peace was Ron Artest he was noted for his rough play and short fuse. The most memorable item on his resume was the November, 2004, melee in the Indiana Pacers/Detroit Pistons game. A fight broke out between Ron Artest

and Ben Wallace with a few minutes remaining in the game after Artest mugged Wallace from behind. As things were calming down someone in the stands threw a drink at Artest, who then went into the stands after the fan and got the wrong fan. Other players joined in as did several more fans.

Another fight broke out a bit later involving Artest and two fans who came on the court after him. It was one of the most memorable brouhahas in sports involving players and fans. In the end there were arrests and suspensions with Artest being suspended for the remainder of the NBA season and playoffs. That cost him nearly five million dollars and any chance at the Noble Peace Prize.

So in choosing the name Metta World Peace either Metta has been transformed from his days as Ron Artest, or in fact the name World Peace fits the player very well. Watching World Peace in his unprovoked elbow to the head of James Harden and then seeing him on Friday night playing his mugging defensive style and kneeling James Westbrook in the chest while Westbrook was lying on the floor, one might conclude that the new name does not portend a new man.

I for one do not believe there has been any transformation of the man, but I would still concede that the new name is appropriate. If you look at what passes for World Peace these days, the former Ron Artest, may in fact have chosen the perfect name. The fights and skirmishes continue despite the suspension, the elbow to the head and the knee to a defenseless opponent seem to be completely within the spirit of world peace.

Looking around the world there are any number of dust ups taking place from the Sudan to the Caucasus, from the streets of Mexico to the streets of Damascus. The absence of war does not indicate the presence of peace. As the United States has military personnel fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, and is air mailing rockets and missiles to perceived enemies in villages from Yemen to Pakistan, most Americans will tell you their country is at peace. No need here for a good publicist.

In his combative style of play and his track record as a sportsman Metta perfectly mirrors the state of world peace. The only improvement would be to drop a "t" and become Meta World Peace. The prefix Meta means "beyond" or "about" and

would seem to more accurately reflect the true state of Ron.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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