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## Rodman Rules

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After watching Michael and the Bulls win a sixth NBA championship you can only come away with a sense of awe at what this team has done. In the process however one Bull doesn't get his due as a basketball player, although one hears and sees more than enough about him for his off-court activity.

The next basketball book out of Chicago ought to be titled Rodman Rules. Clearly the most colorful of the Bulls has become a key member of the championship team, and clearly for Dennis Rodman the rules are different. Phil Jackson said as much admitting a few days ago that the only hope for reforming Rodman would be "shock therapy."

I hate to admit this but I may be falling in love with "The Worm," both as an anti-hero and a basketball player although certainly not a role model.

As a basketball player Dennis Rodman has proven to be a key to the latest Chicago championship run. It is clear that Michael is not quite the potent offensive force he once was, and it is clear that it is defense that won this latest championship. Michael plays defense very well, Scotty Pippen plays it even better, but Dennis Rodman is the key on defense.

Much of the discussion during this series centered on the disappearance of Karl Malone as a factor during key times of several games. This is explained as some sort of failure by the mailman and could redefine the term "going postal," at least as a sports idiom. Karl did not fail to deliver; Dennis mugged the mailman and outplayed Malone in several situations. If Karl Malone is the mailman, Dennis is the FedEx man.

Rodman is quite simply the best defensive player in the NBA, and good defense stops good offense in most sports.

In addition Rodman gets the key rebounds for the Bulls, brings an energy level to the floor that can ignite the rest of his teammates, and sets screens and passes the ball as well as anyone. In game four Dennis also proved that he could produce in the clutch as he hit four straight free-throws in crunch time. On the television broadcast Isiah Thomas said that in the old Detroit Piston glory days two players were regarded as the best under pressure, John Salley and Dennis Rodman. He said that before Rodman made the first two of the four free throws.

All of this has enhanced my admiration for "the Worm" because Rodman did it while defying all the rules. After game one in Salt Lake City Rodman went off to the gambling tables in Vegas. After game three in Chicago he went to Detroit to join Hulk Hogan and those marvelous sportsmen from the World Wrestling Federation. There he smoked cigars, partied with the Hulkster and had several babes draped on his arms. He missed a twenty-minute practice with the Bulls and Jackson fined him, as did the league.

This sent segments of the press into cardiac arrest, especially Bob Costas who seems to have taken "Rodman bashing" as his chief mission during the N-B-A on N-B-C. How could Dennis do this to his teammates? How could Dennis have risked the chemistry of the team at this crucial moment? Dennis has committed a sacrilege on this sacred ritual. Enough already!

Everyone knows who Dennis is. Everyone knows what you get when you sign Dennis to a contract. Nothing is disrupted when Dennis is being Dennis. While the press was calling for Dennis to apologize to his teammates, and perhaps the nation, Jordan and Pippin blew it off. Then Rodman simply came to work on game day and dominated Karl Malone, the Jazz and the boards, and for good measure he threw in those four straight free throws.

This seemed to be driving Bob Costas crazy and led him to depart from his generally impeccable job as a play-by-play man to rail against Rodman. In the process Costas has failed to report accurately what was going on in front of him. Isiah Thomas tried to correct this nonsense, but Costas seemed unwilling or unable to listen. And if someone doesn't just "deck" Jim Gray for his pontifically inane comments and questions I will be both surprised and disappointed. Gray makes you long for Bill Walton.

So Rodman has defied all the rules, lived his life in ways that should make him fail at sport, and exposed the emptiness of the "sport builds character" school of the rationale for sport. On the contrary, said Haywood Hale Broune "sport builds characters," and Dennis Rodman underlines that truth.

Rodman also proves that you don't have to be a great offensive player to make big money as a celebrity in the NBA. He has proven to be a marketing genius in a league where marketing genius has been much used, valued, and admired. This is not what David Stern had in mind, but still it sells, and as long as it sells, and as long as Rodman contributes on the court, he

will be in Chicago with the Bulls.

Rodman was a key player in this the sixth championship for the Chicago Bulls and it is not likely the Bulls would be there without him. How he runs his life off the court has absolutely no bearing on his athletic performance on the court. You also have to love this too because it makes all the sanctimonious coaches, sports writers, and members of the evangelical athletic movement squirm.

Dennis Rodman is the anti-hero for our time. He defies the rules and thumbs his nose at authority and reaps the benefits in our celebrity-crazed culture.

>From Babe Ruth to Muhammad Ali this has been an attractive package. And Dennis Rodman shows that in some ways it still is.

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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