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## O. J. Simpson - Hero vs. Celebrity

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It has been a wild and crazy several weeks of sport while WUCF has been off the air to increase power, and over the next few weeks I will try to catch up on some of the notable action. The Stanley Cup and NBA Finals have concluded, the World Cup has moved to center stage, the Baseball All-Star game is approaching and so apparently is a strike, Wimbledon is approaching its climax, stories of corruption continue to flow off the college campuses in Tallahassee and Miami, Evander Hollifield has been cured of heart problems by an Orlando faith-healer, and O.J. Simpson has gone from running through airports to running from the police.

But this week how can I speak about anything but the O.J. Simpson story?

First, there were the events of the now infamous weekend. Although I was in Atlanta where my focus was Braves baseball, it was impossible not to get caught up in this story. Before leaving for Friday night's game I heard the L.A. District Attorney report that O.J. had failed to turn himself in, and was now a fugitive from justice. At Fulton County Stadium people joked about seeing O.J. running through the stands, the parking lot, or selling peanuts. After the game the car radio came on in the middle of the freeway chase, parade, triumphal march, suicide ride, or whatever it was.

The scenes of people on the overpass cheering on The Juice, the people running out to the car to cheer him and wish him well, the traffic jam, the helicopter jam, the mini-cam jam, were all more than any sensible human being might be able to handle. Luckily there are few sensible folk left, so what does it matter. The chants of "Go, Juice" in these circumstances were mind numbing.

Has all of life become a football game or a sporting event? I kept waiting to hear someone talk about the failure of the police's prevent defense, O.J.'s elusive style, or how with someone like O.J. you can't really stop him you can only hope to contain him.

It was interesting too how the evidence against Simpson seemed to accumulate so quickly; how in the end many of the stories and

reports which flashed across the TV screens proved to be totally false or highly inaccurate.

Even more interesting was how quickly the victims of the crime became irrelevancies. Everything was "the Juice this and the Juice that." All the concern seemed to be over Simpson. What of his former wife who was now dead? What of Ronald Goldman who was now dead? Were these two people not a part of this story. Why was there so little interest in the fact that two people were dead, butchered, and left families behind to mourn the loss?

Through it all there was the air of disbelief. Former teammates and players, broadcasting partners, journalists, and friends of O.J. were interviewed and talked of their shock, of how this was not the O.J. they knew. Nor was it the O.J. any of us knew. That O.J. was the star running back at USC and for the Buffalo Bills, he was the wonderful guy who made appearances at charity events, who was on ABC and NBC sports as a football analyst, who appeared as an actor on TV and in the movies, who did all those commercials. He was the Juice, the all-American, Heisman Trophy winner, great player, great guy. He was the hero, the role model, who seemed to conform to all of those qualities that constitute the concept of character in the middle class world of television, advertising, and public values.

But of course as many are now saying and as I have been writing for the last two decades, there is a vast difference between a celebrity and a hero. A hero is known for heroic deeds and qualities which are displayed in substantive human action. A hero has qualities of character and displays human values we would like to emulate. A celebrity, on the other hand is a creation of the modern advertising and public relations industry. An image without reference to substance of character. A celebrity is, as Daniel Boorstin says, someone known for their well-knownness.

Running with a ball, regardless of how well it is done, does not require qualities of character or high ideals. But in this society celebrity and heroism have become confused, and so we are always surprised when celebrities turn out not to be people of high moral character or valued human ideals.

When the mask is torn away we do not always like what we see. When O.J. turns out to be someone who is haunted by demons, who has a long track record of wife abuse across two marriages, we are shocked and want to deny the realities.

But the fact is we never knew O.J. We knew only a public relations version of O.J. And I suspect this goes back some time into Simpson's athletic past. One wonders, in fact, if O.J. ever knew O.J.

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