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Pat Williams Magician- St. Petersburg Giants - NBC's Final Olympic Overkill

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There is Magic. There is the Orlando Magic. And now there is the Magician. Pat Williams has clearly earned that title for his latest prestidigitation. I don't know anyone who thought that Williams could pull off the signing of Shaquille O'Neal prior to the deadline to match the offer sheet that Dallas had tendered to Stanley Roberts. Certainly the fact that Rich DeVoss was willing to shell out \$40M to get the deal done, and then turn around and cough up another \$15M of pocket change for Stanley, made Pat's job a little easier. But nonetheless, Pat Williams has achieved what everyone else thought was impossible.

When you think about it, this achievement should not have been a great surprise. Pat Williams came to Orlando and did the impossible just a few years ago. Who else could have sold the City Beautiful the idea that they could have an NBA franchise if they just rushed construction on the Arena and then gave the keys to Williams? This was a particularly amazing feat when you consider the fact that most people in Orlando didn't know what the NBA was, because the local sports reporters and TV stations persisted in ignoring it or treating it like a freak show. Williams then went back to the NBA and convinced them that a city with no interest in the NBA, in a relatively small market, with a TV station that showed the playoffs on tape delay after re-runs of MASH, could become a very lucrative NBA market.

Get this man a wand and a cape.

And what of the signing of the Shaq, the long-awaited event in the City Beautiful? On the basketball front it is difficult to know what it will mean. How big the boost will be in the win column remains to be seen, but the impact on season ticket sales was registered immediately. However the Magic sellout most of their games anyway, so in the short run this is not of great significance. However one might wonder what this will do to ticket prices, and how long it will be before DeVoss has Williams convincing the local yokels that Orlando needs a new arena that will seat 25,000 people with double the number of skyboxes.

Then there was the bigger news last Friday in St. Petersburg where it was announced that an agreement had been achieved in principle for the sale of the San Francisco Giants to a group in Tampa Bay. These two big stories are a measure of the difference between the Tampa Bay area and Orlando.

When Bob Lurie announced that he would take bids from anywhere for the Giant franchise, where were the Orlando people? I would suggest that Orlando is still a small city without the resources to pursue major league sport on a grand scale, while Tampa Bay is now home to franchises in the NFL, the NHL, and now the National League.

The good news is that major league baseball is now 100 miles closer, and it will be the Giants not an expansion team. But it still is a long drive for a game, especially if you have to work the next day. The bad news is that this will be Dome ball rather than baseball.

Note also the talk that the American League does not want to see the National League with a monopoly on the Florida market. Such talk is good for Orlando. Unfortunately unless some franchise goes under soon, it will probably be a minimum of a decade before there will be any possibility of expansion. But by then Orlando may also be ready to go after a team with a realistic and effective effort.

The Orlando Magic dropped \$55M in one afternoon for two essentially unproven basketball players, while over in the Bay area a group of investors was putting out just about twice that figure for a major league baseball franchise? Whose money was better spend?

Also this past weekend the Olympics came to a close. As with all the Olympic games there were some wonderful stories of great courage and great performances by athletes. But this Olympics also illustrated two terrible realities about television.

First, it showed that no matter the poignancy of the story, a television report can cheapen and ruin it. For example the story of the American boxer Oscar de La Hoya's quest for a gold medal in the memory of his mother who died two years ago of cancer at age 39 was a touching one. And when Oscar won that gold medal, and went to his knees and then looked up, it could have been a moving moment. But in the end it was not, because NBC had played de La Hoya's story over and over again, added music to the scene, and overdramatised a moment that had enough drama of its own. Unfortunately that was buried by NBC overkill.

Second this Olympics proved again that the invention of pictures, and especially video replay, has flattend human

experience. In a society without pictures and replays each moment is experienced and then falls into memory. Each moment, especially those peak moments, must be savored with our undivided attention. But in the world of video replay these moments can be replicated. Our attention can be diverted because the experience can be gone back to again and again. The result is that experience itself loses its sharply defined quality, its power, and its impact on the senses. This affects the quality of the experience, the nature of the memory, and therefore in some sense the event itself. Life's intensity is diminished.

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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