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The Two Michaels: Jordan and Tyson

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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It may or may not be the best of times or the worst of times, but it is a Tale of Two Michaels. This week marks the return of the two Michaels, Jordan and Tyson, to the spotlight in sportsworld. The return of either one would be a major story, but the return of both in one week is a bonanza. The two Michaels also offer two very different stories of departure and return, and no doubt both evoke a wide range of emotions.

When Michael Jordan announced his departure from baseball some 21 months after leaving the NBA speculation began immediately as to when he would return to basketball. In fact speculation as to when Michael would return to the Bulls had begun when he left the Bulls 21 months ago.

On Friday retail stores were informed by Nike to put up the "I'm back" posters, and on Saturday came word that Sunday was to be the big day. Michael would return to the lineup in Indianapolis, against the Pacers in a nationally televised game. NBC gave the event full coverage with a twenty-five minute pre-game show. TV ratings for a regular season game neared record levels. There was a rush to the ticket windows at Market Square Arena on Saturday but the game had been sold out for two weeks, and so the scalpers had a field day with \$42 tickets going for as much as \$680.

Never had a Double A outfielder who hit .202 caused such a sensation.

Those who knew all along that Jordan was just fooling around with baseball, simply took this all in stride and said "I told you so," acknowledging the inevitable. Those who thought that Michael would never play again and who missed him were thrilled by his return. Here after all is the man acknowledged to be the best player of his time, and one of the very best of all time, returning to the sport he had left behind. No one who loves basketball could fail to appreciate the significance of the day.

What the outcome will be is not so clear. Many are saying that the return of Jordan makes the Bulls instant title contenders. What that view fails to acknowledge is that this is not the same Bulls team Michael left nearly two seasons ago, and it is a team that has glaring weaknesses in the middle and on the boards.

The other more difficult question to answer is what will be the impact of MJ's return on team chemistry? This involves issues

both on and off the court. What will happen to the flow of the Bulls offense and defense with a new man in the line-up, and what about all those egos on the Bulls team whose playing time and media exposure will drop drastically in the face of the spotlight on Michael? Only time will provide answers to these and other questions.

Tomorrow the other Michael returns. Mike Tyson will be released from an Indiana prison on Saturday thus ending his three year involuntary retirement from boxing. It is not likely that he will receive the same sort of welcome that Jordan got. But make no mistake about it, he will be welcomed by many who see Iron Mike as a hero framed by a white community that found him too dangerous. Mike Tyson will also be welcomed back by those who saw him as a major hero of the ring. Conviction in a courtroom has not tarnished Tyson's image in many quarters, and it has enhanced it in others. And as with Jordan, those who will make money off him, will also welcome Tyson.

For all of the speculation of how much Michael Jordan's skills may have diminished, they have not likely declined as much as those of Mike Tyson whose incarceration prevented him from competing in his chosen sport. No doubt he will have retained many of his basic skills, but his opportunities to stay at a level of competitive excellence were certainly much less than those of Jordan.

We know that an enforced layoff of this length will have a severe impact on Tyson, and we also know that this is not the same Mike Tyson as the one who went into prison. Tyson has converted to Islam, and if indeed his character has been transformed as a result, the new Mike Tyson may not have the same mental makeup as the old Tyson. It will be some time before we will know exactly how much this affect Tyson's performance in the ring.

Whatever the case may be this return will be just as interesting as that of Michael Jordan. Tyson is every bit as important to boxing, as Jordan is to the NBA, and probably moreso. The heavyweight division has been floundering without Tyson, and has been turned into a spectacle with the success of George Foreman. Tyson's return can only be a plus.

So the week ends as it began with the return of a Michael. Both mean much to their sport, both left as heroes and return as heroes although under very different circumstances, and both head mini economic fiefdoms. And that's the bottom line.

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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