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View from Russia - America's Cup - UCF Baseball - Basketball Hall of Fame

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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It has been a long two weeks away from the sports scene in the United States. It is really amazing how easily you can be cut off from it, and how unimportant it can seem from a distance of several thousands of miles. Out in the Ural region of Russia there is little news of the NBA or NHL playoffs, and little awareness of the intensity of the American sports scene. However one university student did ask me if I was from the same Orlando where the Magic and Shaquille O'Neil played.

I left before the end of the Boston series and the only news I heard via a telephone call was that the Magic had defeated the Celtics. I also heard that Michael Jordan had been fined for wearing the wrong color shoes and the wrong number on his jersey. That bit of information came from the BBC without any news of the outcome of the games.

Then in one of those surrealistic time warp events I saw highlights of the Boston victory over Orlando which I had seen in person. These highlights came two weeks after the event, while I was sitting on plane out over the Atlantic this past Monday. By then I had a copy of USA Today purchased in Frankfurt that morning, and I knew that the Orlando-Chicago series was on with the Magic holding a 2-1 lead. I was also catching up on the NHL playoffs and the young baseball season, which I had nearly forgotten was underway.

Among the dramatic developments that occurred in my absence was the sweep of the America's Cup series by New Zealand. I had heard a few BBC reports on the races and knew that Dennis Conner was being handled with ease, but I was surprised to see that the Kiwi's were able to shut him out. Dennis Conner now holds a distinction that few in sport will ever equal. In the America's Cup competition the U.S. has lost the cup only twice in 144 years, and Conner was the loser both times. He has also won more America's Cup races than anyone else in history.

This was an odd turn of events given the fact that without manipulation of the rules in the Defender's Cup series Connor's crew would never have made the finals. The other American crews must have had some bitter feelings as they watched America go down to defeat to Black Magic I, knowing that Conner's America should probably not have been there at all.

Other news out of the University of Central Florida was the victory by the baseball team in the TAAC tournament which

guarantees Jay Bergman's team a slot in the NCAA baseball playoffs. UCF baseball has been on the brink of national prominence several times before, but this may be the year when Bergman's team gets all the way to Omaha. It has been a great season highlighted by the 29 game winning streak, a 48-11 record, and a top ten ranking. Congratulations and best wishes in the upcoming playoffs.

The other event that caught my eye on my return was the induction ceremonies for the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts. Most notable was the induction of Kareem Abdul Jabbar the NBA's all-time leading scorer, and arguably the greatest basketball player in the history of the game. He led his teams to championships in college at UCLA, and in the pros at both Milwaukee and Los Angeles and his sky hook can still be seen in the mind's eye. Jabbar could create havoc for all NBA defenses and offenses, and many overlook the fact that not only was he a great scorer, rebounder, and passer, but he was one of the dominant shot blockers in the history of the game.

Two other inductees of note were Cheryl Miller who may be the best woman player in the history of the game, and Alexandr Gomelsky of the Soviet Union. Cheryl Miller scored over 3,000 points in a tremendous career at USC where she is now the coach of the Lady Trojans. Gomelsky was the architect of the great Soviet International and Olympic championship teams and was clearly a coaching genius.

But for me the inductees who were the most important were those from the Minneapolis Lakers. From the time I can first remember having an interest in basketball, it was the Lakers who were my home team. Johnny Kundla, the Laker coach of the great teams of the 1950's, and Vern Mikkelsen, who would now be described as the small forward on those teams, were inducted together. They joined teammates Jim Pollard, the power forward, Slater Martin one of the all-time great point guards, and George Mikan, one of the first dominant big men in the NBA, all of whom had been previously elected to the Hall.

These were excellent teams to watch, and I can remember Mikkelsen especially for his peculiar two-handed-over-the-head set shot which looked awkward but which he hit with devastating accuracy. I remember that shot especially well as I would practice it endlessly out behind the garage where I repeatedly sank it at the buzzer to beat the hated Boston Celtics.

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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