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Susie Maroney - Kasparov and Big Blue - Coaching Musical Chairs

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
May 14, 1997

It has been one of those weeks when there are so many things to comment upon, I don't know where to begin. The embarrassment of riches has come from a multitude of sources, and invites a veritable plethora of opinions and attitudes from joy and praise to disdain and disgust.

Among the gems available for examination are the test of endurance performed by Susie Maroney of Australia who became the first woman to swim from Cuba to the United States. She overcame a failure a year ago, the stings of jelly fish, hallucinations, nausea, and 15 foot waves in this monumental test of will.

Then there is the basketball coach game of musical chairs. Rick Pitino goes to Boston for a ten year/ \$70 million deal which will give him total control of the Celtic operations and finally send Red Auerbach to the pines. This moved Larry Bird out of Boston to his home state to coach the Pacers, who just lost their coach Larry Brown who moved on to Philadelphia for \$5M a year. Bird will pull down four and a half-million a year, presumably so low because he has never coached as much as a second of basketball at any level.

It would seem that a milepost has been achieved in the NBA. When Al McGuire was at the top of his profession at Marquette University he often said he would never coach in the pros because he did not want to coach players who were making more money than he was. Al may now want to reassess his options given the salaries being paid to Pitino, Brown, Riley and Bird.

It is in fact surprising that more coaches are not better paid, as obviously personality management of professional athletes is an extremely tricky business. Those who can do it best, are the most successful coaches in the NBA, and should be paid as generously as the best players.

Pitino's departure from Kentucky, where he had earned the right to turn the bluegrass purple if he chose to, led to the hiring of former Pitino assistant and Georgia Head Coach Tubby Smith at \$1M a year. The beauty of this hiring is that one of the last southern schools to resist the coming of the black athlete, now has a black head coach, an event that someone once said would come just after the Martians occupied the White House. One would guess that Adolph Rupp is spinning in his grave, and that in cafes and on front porches across the Commonwealth of Kentucky

there have been some very interesting discussions of racial theory over the past few days.

A more disturbing event this past week was the defeat of Garry Kasparov, the world chess champion, by the IBM computer known as Deep Blue. Not only does this bring to mind the specter of the HAL 3000, but it brings into question the future of man and machine. Kasparov had never lost a match to anyone. He was the undefeated champion of the world, and in the final game he was swept away by the RS/6000 SP better known as Deep Blue.

The implications for IBM in their struggle with Bill Gates and Microsoft are encouraging, while the implications for sport and society were more ominous. No longer can we say, "May the best man win." No longer will it be possible to dismiss the notion that a sports team might be run by a computer. Deep Blue could soon be wearing Dodger Blue especially if Fox Sports Inc. purchases the Dodgers, making them the property of Ruppert Murdock. If CBS could destroy the Yankee dynasty in a few short years, how long would it take Murdock to dismantle the Dodgers, and when the Dodgers start losing might Murdock, the Aussie android, turn to Deep Blue as the solution to his problems.

National League purists of course will question whether or not Deep Blue is clever enough to make the double switch but if managing is a chess match, then what else need be said. This makes artificial turf and the DH look like minor irritants.

As to irritants, Garry Kasparov seemed to have a truckload of them at the news conference following his defeat at the inappropriately named Equitable Center in midtown Manhattan. The humiliation of this defeat was anything but equitable, coming in a mere 19 moves. Kasparov lashed out at the machine and its acolytes, accusing them of some sort of unnamed underhanded behavior.

When asked if he was accusing IBM and Deep Blue of cheating, Kasparov would only say, "I have no idea what's happening behind the curtain." He also vowed to come back and tear the machine to pieces in a rematch. By the end it was beginning to sound like the WWF.

One commentator said that Garry Kasparov had something that the computer did not have, a pulse, and this was both his strength and his weakness.

One year after beating Deep Blue handily, Kasparov faced defeat gracelessly and proved once again, as I say each week:

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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