

4-3-2006 Sports Heroes

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2 JOSH CENTOR: Welcome to "Mondays With
3 Myles". I'm NCAA blogger, Josh Centor. And today
4 Dr. Myles Brand and I are going to discuss our sports
5 heros.

6 Dr. Brand, I know you have to have some
7 really good sports heros.

8 DR. MYLES BRAND: Oh, I've got some sports
9 heros that I've really looked up to all my life and I
10 think they're very special people.

11 You know, different individuals have
12 different sports heros and for different reasons, and
13 sometimes a different player or a coach or something.
14 Let me tell you about my two favorite sports heros.

15 Now, I mentioned to you earlier that I grew
16 up in Brooklyn, and I used to go watch the Brooklyn
17 Dodgers. And one person who played for the Brooklyn
18 Dodgers who was my sports hero was Jackie Robinson.
19 First of all, he was a great ballplayer. He was quick
20 afoot; he was a hard hitter; and certainly a good arm and
21 really a great infielder. So I really enjoyed watching
22 Jackie Robinson play.

23 But the reason he was my sports hero,
24 because he was very good, but there are other players
25 equally as good, was his ability to break through the

1 color line, and the courage he showed in doing so really
2 quite remarkable. And you know, it didn't solve all the
3 civil rights issues and it took frankly decades to make
4 much more progress of the civil rights movement, and we
5 still have some issues that we are yet to resolve.

6 But the fact of the matter is that he made
7 an important statement that had lasting consequences, and
8 he did it with self-sacrifice. You know, when I think
9 of -- whenever you face a hard decision or whenever
10 things seem to be getting you down, I always think of
11 Jackie Robinson's courage. So that's one of my sports
12 heros.

13 My other sports hero -- or one of other of
14 my two favorites is Senator Birch Bayh. Senator Birch
15 Bayh, you say? What sport did he play? I suppose he was
16 an athlete. But that's not why he's my sports hero.

17 He was the person who fathered Title IX.
18 Before 1972, women literally barely participated in
19 sports. You know, they played half-court basketball --
20 they weren't allowed to work up a sweat. And there were
21 no scholarships or very few scholarships. And you know,
22 since 1972, the number of women who have participated has
23 increased by fivefold. Quite remarkable.

24 I think it's fascinating about why Birch
25 Bayh did this. He initially looked at Title IX to make

1 sure that women had an opportunity in postbaccalaureate
2 professional programs, like law and medicine and
3 business, because our colleges and universities were
4 discriminating against women in those areas, and oh, yes,
5 it also applied to athletics.

6 Well, it turned out in postbaccalaureate
7 programs now women are very well represented and that's
8 not an issue anymore. But Title IX, the ability of women
9 to participate in sports on an equal level is still an
10 issue, although enormous progress has been made.

11 And you know, Birch has come in for some
12 criticism of it, but I think he did the right thing. You
13 know, I believe Title IX was the most important piece of
14 civil rights legislation affecting higher education in
15 the second half of the 20th century. A remarkable thing.

16 JOSH CENTOR: It sounds like both of them
17 had a pretty profound effect on you.

18 DR. MYLES BRAND: They did. These were
19 people who were willing to take a stand, to get up and be
20 counted, even if it was unpopular; to do the right thing.
21 And in both cases, to help others other than themselves.
22 And these were not done for egoistic reasons or
23 altruistic reasons. They were helping others. Yet they
24 were willing to take the hits and be strong when they
25 needed to be.

1 JOSH CENTOR: Why are sports heros
2 important, especially for today's youth?

3 DR. MYLES BRAND: I think sports hero is
4 one kind of hero. I think sports, because it's a
5 competitive environment lends itself to having heros.
6 But there are other kinds of heros too.

7 You know, everyone must think that Lincoln
8 was a hero, for example, as I do, or the Dalai Lama is a
9 hero. And you know, people who were willing to put
10 themselves on the line to do what's right, even in
11 self-sacrifice. So our world is full of heros.

12 You know, many people think that their
13 parents are heros. And I've heard -- when I ask people,
14 who is your hero? It's not unusual to get back an
15 answer, you know, it was my father who held three jobs so
16 I could go to college; it was my mother who was taking
17 care of me when I was ill.

18 I mean, those sorts of things -- they're
19 heros or heroines in the lives of people too. It's just
20 that sports, because it's so visible and competitive, it
21 can -- it lends itself to identifying heros.

22 JOSH CENTOR: Student athletes can be
23 thought of as sports heros as well; can't they?

24 DR. MYLES BRAND: Oh, they certainly can.
25 And to young people in the grades schools and high

1 schools they often are.

2 I think we need to -- when we look at
3 heroes, not only look at their physical attributes, well,
4 how high can you jump, can you dunk? I mean, I think you
5 also need to look at personal characteristics, the
6 quality of the person, as Martin Luther King would say,
7 the quality of the person. Is this a man or a woman of
8 character? Is this the kind of person I want to be like?
9 Is this the kind of person I can look towards to emulate
10 in my own behavior? I mean, those are the questions.

11 So I think we need to look deeply into
12 people, rather than just superficially when we pick our
13 heroes.

14 JOSH CENTOR: Does the importance of sports
15 heroes and someone to look up to transcend sports?

16 DR. MYLES BRAND: Oh, I think so. You
17 know, and the case of Birch Bayh is a good example. Yes,
18 what he did was important for sports and continues to
19 be -- there's no question about that. But frankly, I
20 think that was an important statement about our culture,
21 namely that women are to be valued in all areas --
22 postbaccalaureate, higher education, which means that
23 they're now eligible for leadership jobs they might not
24 have been before; equity in terms of receiving
25 opportunities to go to college or play sports.

1 American culture? You know, that's an interesting
2 question. You probably have to ask a sociologist that.

3 But there's something about Americans that
4 we like competition. We like victory. We take losing
5 seriously. We work hard at being the best we can be,
6 whether it's physically or mentally or in business. And
7 I think that's just the kind of person we are.

8 And sports, I think, reflects that
9 characteristic of our culture and reinforces it. And
10 because sports is so much of the competitive
11 environment -- striving for excellence, having winners or
12 losers, being able to excel -- I mean, those
13 characteristics typically American are exhibited in
14 sports. And so we've made it part of our culture, which
15 no other country has.

16 JOSH CENTOR: Well, another great
17 conversation. Thank you, so much for joining us here.

18 "Mondays With Myles" can be found on the
19 NCAA blog, the DoubleAZone.com, every Monday morning. If
20 you'd like to subscribe, you can find our podcasts on
21 iTunes.

22 Dr. Brand, thanks so much.

23 DR. MYLES BRAND: Good to be with you,
24 Josh.

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