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New Players Welcome

The (sports) Gospel According to Mark: A Moment of Gratitude

By Mark Chalifoux
Tuesday, November 23, 2004

It's not often that I get to break earth shattering news in my column, but here it is. Several Indiana Pacers attacked fans who threw things at them last Friday, resulting in several lengthy suspensions and the creation of a new sports scandal for ESPN to bludgeon us with every night. Remember, you heard it here **FIRST**.

I was glued to my TV Friday night along with many sports fans. I reveled in the situation, especially when some hardguy felt it was his place to come on the court to cool things off. Watching him get obliterated by Ron Artest and Jermaine O'Neal was great television; I almost expected to see a smiling Vince McMahon come strutting out of the tunnel and start exchanging high-fives with Artest and O'Neal while talking smack to a knocked out Detroit Fan.

I immediately called my friend and he too became glued to the TV. It was hard not to become enamored with the situation, which will soon be labeled with some sort of "gate" name (similarly to Janet Jackson's nipplegate). My money is going with "Pacersgate," "Artestgate," or "Attacking stupid fans who throw things on the court and absolutely pummeling anyone who thinks they belong on the court during the melee-gate."

After about half an hour of the mind numbing nonstop coverage, my friend called me and said that he was fed up with it. We ended up abandoning the TVs and discussed the state of sports during a walk to clear our heads. To be honest, I ignored the majority of

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the conversation, as I was still replaying the entire Pacersgate saga in my mind. While he was debating about how society was going to be affected, my mind kept drifting to the fans getting beaten worse than Tonya Harding's ex-husband.

Eventually, I started listening when he began talking about soldiers in Iraq. I frantically went over scenarios in my head about how we got to this topic from "Artestgate," but I merely improvised by giving the occasional nod while listening to him. My friend began talking about how the real role models in this country were the men and women who were giving up their lives to defend our way of life. Ultimately, our conversation moved him to send several care packages to troops overseas to show his gratitude for their service.

After the conversation, as I turned my attention back to "____," I began to think that my friend was right. Now, this isn't a column about how sports don't matter (they are much more than that to many, many people), but too often it seems like we take our soldiers for granted.

You see a lot of yellow ribbons on cars, which is great, but there is more that people could do. My friend used www.treatanysoldier.com to send his care packages and they were extremely helpful. I think it's important that people show their gratitude for the people who let us live our lives without fear (well, I guess there is always fear of drunk fans and Ron Artest). These people let us live in our world where the most important thing that happens is a fight between players and fans.

I don't often stray from the sports world and go on rants like these, but I think that it's fitting for this time of year. Many people will be thousands of miles away from loved ones during the Holidays, some for the first time. It doesn't matter if you do or don't support the war, supporting our men and women who bravely give up their lives to keep us safe is something entirely different.

Do what you can, write a letter, send a care package (www.anysoldier.com) or just say a prayer for our men and women overseas. If you send a package before Dec. 5 it should be reach Iraq before Christmas. A moment of gratitude can go a long way. Again, next week I will get back to the regular column. You may now turn back to your regularly scheduled coverage of "Attacking stupid fans who throw things on the court and absolutely pummeling anyone who thinks they belong on the court during the melee-gate."

Mark Chalifoux is a weekly columnist for SportsFan Magazine. You can reach him at Rockne48@und.com



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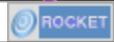
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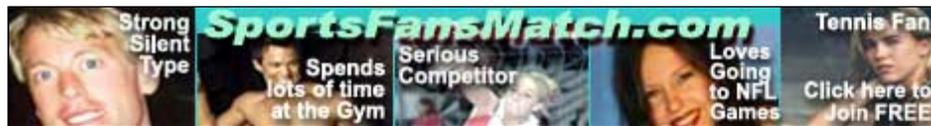
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