

TALE OF TWO ATHLETES; COLLINS PRAISED, TEBOW PANNED

Contributed by Jeff Crouere
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In the politically correct world of sports today, it is no surprise that the media went crazy in praising Jason Collins, the first gay professional athlete to go public. Collins is a 7 foot free agent center who is a 34 year old journeyman in the NBA. He only averages a few points a game and is used sparingly, but, today, he is a household name.

After his announcement, Collins was greeted with overwhelming support. He received a phone call from both President Obama and former President Clinton. Among the thousands of supportive tweets he received were positive messages from the First Lady and his college classmate Chelsea Clinton. Collins was besieged by requests for media interviews and had to admit that he was humbled by the strong show of encouragement.

Collins does not have to worry about any type of discrimination. As an openly gay professional athlete, Collins will be given more opportunities in the NBA and will likely receive lucrative endorsement deals. His career as a personality will go into overdrive, even while his playing career winds down. His agent knows full well that Collins is a hot commodity. He has been shopping a book deal for Collins with major publishing houses. We should expect to see the autobiography of Jason Collins hitting bookshelves in the near future along with a major publicity tour.

Collins is also veering into the world of politics. This week, it was announced that he will join Mrs. Obama in headlining the Democratic National Committee's annual Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Leadership Council Gala event. Collins has now become so popular that he will be a big fundraising draw for a political party who will try to use him as much as possible. Tickets for the event will cost as much as \$32,400, a pretty steep price to pose for pictures with a seldom used back-up.

In the meantime, evangelical Christian athlete Tim Tebow was released by the New York Jets. Although he was signed with much fanfare, Tebow was never given a chance by the Jets, even though he could have contributed to a team that struggled last year. After being released by the Jets, Tebow declined an opportunity to criticize the team, instead he tweeted a quote from the Bible. This was another indication of Tebow's character and class, qualities rarely seen in the world of professional sports. In the aftermath of Tebow's release, plenty of so-called sports experts were quick to criticize the quarterback. They said he had limited talent, could not throw the ball accurately and had a style that did not mesh with the NFL. Such comments are ridiculous for Tebow clearly has plenty of ability. At the Florida Gators, he won the Heisman Trophy and led the team to two national championships. He set numerous SEC records by accounting for 145 overall touchdowns, 57 rushing touchdowns, 12,232 yards of total offense and a passing efficiency of 170.8. After his stellar college career, Tebow was a 1st round draft pick by the Denver Broncos. In his second year, Tebow took over the starting job when the team was 1-4. Tebow led the team to the playoffs and engineered a victory against the Pittsburgh Steelers. When the Broncos signed future Hall of Fame quarterback Peyton Manning, Tebow was traded to the New York Jets and the rest is history. Throughout his brief NFL career, Tebow has been the subject of unfair criticism. It seems his Christian beliefs were a lightning rod for the sports media. Tebow has been maligned and ridiculed from the moment he was drafted in the NFL. He has been criticized for being a strong Christian and wearing his faith on his sleeve. It seems Tebow is controversial for no other reason than he is a strong Christian. He does not cause problems with other teammates or get into trouble with the law. He sets a great example for youngsters and has the type of values that should be welcomed in every locker room. Hopefully, at least one NFL team will have the courage to sign an athlete with tremendous heart, unquestionable talent and a track record of success. Hopefully, at least one NFL team will not be intimidated by the politically correct environment that discriminates against people of faith.

If only NFL executives were in tune with the American people. According to a recent Nielsen survey, Tebow, who boasts 2.2 million followers on Facebook, has been named by Americans as the pro athlete who holds the most influence with the public. He was rated as “influential” by 29 percent of those surveyed, topping the list. Ironically, this “influential” athlete has no NFL team to call his own.

If Tebow is still without a team by the start of the next football season, there will be no doubt that discrimination exists today in the world of professional sports; however, it is not directed against gay athletes, instead it is directed against devout Christians like Tim Tebow.