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SPORTS

Athletes and entertainers that uplift

By Marc Rasbury

It is a shame that most media outlets dwell on the Michael Vick's and O.J. Simpson's of the world or the situation going on at the Garden when it comes to the off the field issues of the athletes and entertainers. You can goggle OJ Simpson and come up with thousands of articles regarding that idiot. But, google Allan Houston and Nick Buoniconti or see how many athletes and entertainers are participating in the "Jena 6" protest and the list will be short. Well thank God that not all athletes are like OJ Simpson and more are like Houston and Buoniconti.

Over the past week, I had the opportunity to spend some time with these gentlemen and witnessed first hand the extraordinary work that they have committed themselves to after their playing days were over. And these endeavors dwarf their outstanding accomplishments on the field.

Through The Allan Houston Foundation and The Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis, these two gentlemen are not only helping individuals who need assistance the most, they are also truly enhancing society.

Unfortunately, Allan Houston is known more for the maximum contract that he signed with the Knicks several years ago than fact that he dropped 53 points on Kobe or hit the winning bas-

ket in the first round of '98 play-off series against Miami. It is no telling what Houston would have accomplished in the NBA, if he played along side a quality point guard like Jason Kidd at any point during his career. Knee surgery forced him out of the game two years ago. And while we may eventually see him teaming up with Kidd in the near future, what he has done since he left the Knicks may be more important than anything he accomplished on the court.

Two weeks ago I told you about the "Father and Sons Basketball Clinic" that the Allan Houston Foundation sponsored. The whole purpose of that day was not to improve the participants' jump shots, but to enhance the relationship between the father and sons.

Last week Houston's Foundation held an awards dinner to honor young entrepreneurs from this area. The Harlem Chamber of Commerce, Citigroup, Lenovo and Harlem YMCA co-sponsored the event along with the Allan Houston Foundation. Lorena Lopez and Karif Jon Arthur Gray took home the Allan Houston Leadership Award. Keia Cuffe and Keith Kinch won the Citigroup Excellence Award. Cherie Byrd and Candace Herring won the Harlem Chamber of Commerce Harlem-based Entrepreneur Award. Other honorees in-

cluded Audley Wilson, Maurice Clayton, Melissa Hayes, Chris Melendez, Collete Smith, Ricardo Rivers, Hollis Heath and Donald Cogdell.

The business skills that these young kids learned over the past year will not help them with their future goals but will help improve the quality of life of all New Yorkers. I guarantee that all of these kids will make our world a better place in the not-so-distant future.

On Monday, Nick Bouniconti was in New York for the 22nd Annual Sports Legend Dinner sponsored by the Bouniconti Fund for a Cure to Paralysis. Bouniconti was anchor of the famous "No Name Defense" which led the Miami Dolphins to two Super Bowls including an undefeated season in 1972. His son, Marc, was paralyzed as a result of a football injury while playing in college and the Dolphin's captain assumed the mission of finding cure for this disability. He partnered with Barth A. Green M.D. in 1985 to help found the Miami Project to Cure Paralysis.

The dinner was held at the Waldorf Astoria and with over 1300 philanthropic icons and business leaders in attendance. They helped raised close to 6 million dollars that evening. Three time basketball MVP Magic Johnson, Super Bowl MVP John Elway, former NY Ranger Mark Messier and baseball great Joe Morgan were



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Members of the Allan Houston Foundation pose with representatives from the Lenovo Corporation and the Audley Wilson and Maurice Clayton who won the Company's Innovation Award. (Photo by Marc Rasbury)

among the honorees. But as Bouniconti told me, “the real stars are the ones who are in the labs and hospitals trying to find a cure for this problem. We are close. Doctors are now performing some experimental procedures on animals and hopefully, performing these procedures on humans is right around the corner.”

Many of you know about the major protest that is about to embark on Jena, Louisiana on Thursday. Many sports and entertainment personalities will join approximately 10,000 protesters who are going down to this small southern town to protest the in-

justice imposed on six young black teenagers. These boys were arrested for taking a gun from another boy who they got into a scuffle with a day earlier. The boy in question returned with a loaded shotgun after the earlier altercation. The six teenagers took the gun and unloaded it. But they were arrested for taking the boys rifle and not *returning* it to the *owner*.

Now let me get this straight. Someone comes after you with a loaded shotgun with the intent of killing you. You are able to disarm this individual. But you are arrested for taking his property because you did not

give him back the rifle? That's justice? Well like Richard Prior said back in the day, “Just Us”.

I'm happy to see that several entertainers and sports stars will be among the protesters down in Jena. Radio stars Michael Baisden and Steve Harvey brought this situation to the public's attention and many of the bigger names in the industry have jumped on the bandwagon as well.

These are a few of the examples of our beloved athletes and entertainers doing the right thing. They are using their names to uplift and inspire. They are not using their fame just to improve bank accounts, but society as a whole.