



Director's Corner

Baba Jahi Awakoaiye

Like many of my peers the Olympics is track and field – actually more specifically, it's the sprints, relays, and any field event with some Africans (notably the long jump). I mean, the marathon, the steeplechase, the 3000 meters, and 5000 meters; after awhile, it's just a bunch of guys running around the track.

Of course, as a thoughtful person – and in an effort to at least appear impartial and open, I make an effort to watch other events. It's the Olympics, so I figure that regardless of which event an athlete is competing in, they've put in years of training to appear on NBC, so watching is the least that I can do. It begins with swimming, and in my lifelong quest to master the "dog paddle", I am honestly amazed at swimmers who guide like dolphins, and appear to be "breathing water". However, to their detriment they're just so good, that their bodies are rarely above water, so without the aid of the underwater camera, all I see are arms flailing in the water. And after awhile it looks like my kids playing in the bathtub. I was excited for a moment, when the silver in the 50 meter sprint went to a sister from "France" (which is another column - there were so many Africans crossing over to other countries, I was expecting Al Davis to announce the signing of some brother from the Congo).

Gymnastics is another sport that I generally only watch during the Olympics, but it is nevertheless impressive – if, but for a moment. The "women" are exceptionally graceful, but it's hard to appreciate a sport dominated by 12 year old girls.

I'm still waiting for track and field to please begin, but in the background I'm watching the men's basketball. And this is where it gets really funny. You mean that 12 brothers can't beat a squad from Argentina? We're only in a handful of sports in the Olympics. Beyond half the events in track and field, a little boxing, basketball is pretty much it. It's not like some brother flew overseas to Greece with his horse "Estaire" to compete in the equestrian events.

Even the games they win are close. They're sweating bullets to beat teams from Spain. These are countries that began playing basketball during the Jordan era. There must be a gazillion brothers playing basketball in America everyday, and we can't field a team to beat Argentina? Sure the international game is different – different defenses, the ball is bigger, blah, blah, blah. It's not like the international equivalent of "football" (which is actually rugby outside of the United States) – it's still basketball.

**"It's almost become a law:
"Four Asians and a brother
will own the court."**

Then I am painfully reminded of games I've seen at playgrounds throughout Oakland. It's almost become a law: "Four Asians and a brother will own the court". I'm reminded of a basketball game I played with a brother years ago. We're on the court just shooting around, when two Latinos approach. They ask to play 2-on-2. I size them up quickly, and realize the taller player is barely my height (I'm 5'9", and my partner is easily over 6 feet). I figure this will at least be entertaining. After the second game – and second loss, I'm not entertained anymore. What's happening? The player profiles were correct. We're taller, faster, and quicker. My partner is missing most of his shots; I'm missing a lot as well, but I'm compensating by shooting more. I devise a strategy for the third game. My partner will pass me the ball at every opportunity, and I'll take even more shots. I don't share the game plan with

him, certain that he won't agree to a plan guaranteed to produce victory. Shortly into game three it is clear he has his own game plan, "have Jahi pass me the ball, and shoot the ball at every opportunity". Of course while we're arguing about who's the biggest ball hog, the two Mexicans are making like John Stockton and Karl Malone. Much smaller, and considerably slower, but man, those layouts just keep dropping.

I'm sure the brothers representing the USA at the Olympics were thinking the same thing, and I'm thinking there's got to be a lesson in this somewhere. So I return to the new law. It's important to note that the law requires one brother, because five brothers picked randomly are going to "out-quick" and "out-muscle" five Asians picked randomly. So you need one brother to provide team speed, and a little intensity. The Asians, like our Mexicans in the previous example, are going to pass the ball, play defense, and hustle. In other words, like our dear sisters in the WNBA, they're going to play fundamentally sound basketball. The brothers on the other hand, who are "unfundamentally" sound, but move like Jordan with their \$100 sneakers, will shoot from half court, and take drives to the hoop with a difficulty level of 20 (on a 10 point scale), but which have absolutely no prayer of landing near the rim (or backboard), but again, look good.

Unfortunately brothers have just gotten lazy. Michael Jordan, in the role of basketball sage was asked to comment on the declining talent in the NBA. He remarked that if you pay an untested 19-year old \$10 million a year, what incentive does he have to stay in the gym working on free throws? This translates beyond sports, and into the economics of our communities. I was recently at a beauty supply store (all African products), and watched a sister help the all black customers, while her four Asian employers stood behind the cash register. "Four Asians and a sister"? Now that basketball game doesn't seem so funny.

...in pursuit of the whole African