

Bison Dele

Sport is an increasingly sophisticated machine for the creation and maintenance of a complex array of effects: spectacular, nationalist, positivist, capitalist. Even in the excessive or extreme sports in which rules are regularly broken- cage fighting, hockey, television wrestling, etc., bounds are clearly delineated. There is rarely confusion among the participants, observers, and commentators as to the meaning of a play, a transgression, a failure of nerve, the level of execution. To exceed previous norms is an expected component: records are made to be broken, point totals, to be regularly exceeded.

In the realm of technique where skill levels are expected to be ratcheted up through methodical study, repetition, and play, as well as in the incidences of transgression and punishment, the games reveal their deeper meaning: they provide a sort of social solace, a form of solidity and narrativity within culture. The goal is always to win the game, but also to transcend the previous records and through this process of intensification, to progress. Sport in this way suggests a manageable incremental antidote to an increasingly unstable and decidedly accelerating reality. It is essentially- even in its prescribed moments of radicality or transcendence- staunchly conservative. The slow process of improvement in a strictly delimited form offers viewers the solace of slow-motion positivism against the larger social backdrop of incredibly fast and chaotic movement. There is energy and drama, but Sport represents not merely a simplified model of interaction, but a model of slow positivist adjustment over time.

Interpretability, positivism, the presence of universal rules are at once miniaturizations and intensifications of the rule of law in civil society. Individual sports are condensations of rules that relate to values governing the social. Their delimited relation to free play is a scale-model of that of the larger society to freedom generally. The striated structures, the carefully constrained aleatory elements, the algebras of interaction, the complexities of farm systems, scouting, coaching, and the obvious close relation between sports and capital (a reciprocal relation in which sports is shaped by capital's concerns and in turn lends its metaphoric structure) are all microcosms of the larger structure.

The individual athlete is a node on the body of sport; her relation to the whole is holographic. Her behavior is expected to reflect and embody the whole- to simultaneously exemplify the conservative aspects and fuel the innovation. She is to be an engine and a model, energetic and reserved. Exemplary, law-abiding, and law giving, radical in ways that excite but never touch the deep moral structure.

Players are required to submit to an incredible array of normative procedures, both on- and off-court. Radical discontinuity is disapproved of, as is too-extreme individualism. The figure of Michael Jordan is exemplary: the individual should excel through performance, never through decoration or excessive self-aggrandizement. Jordan's persona is one of steadfastness, even when inexplicable or bizarre situations rise up on the periphery of his life (his father's kidnapping and death, his on-again off-again divorce, he attempts at other sports); it is his role as still center on the court that endures.

Even at the center of normalizing, naturalizing tendencies in a culture, slippages are always apparent: Bison Dele, originally Brian Williams, NBA champion, former team-mate of Michael Jordon, seemed always on the edge of sport, eventually walking away from it, described as depressed, at times suicidal, bohemian, sexually ambiguous, constantly reinventing his persona. His likely death on his boat in the middle of the ocean at the hands of his brother, also a name changer: from Kevin Williams to the incredible Miles Dabord, who then killed himself in a drug overdose on a Mexican beach, was the end of an unusual life.

Neither the most mysterious figure in sport, nor the most obviously contradictory, Dele fascinates precisely because of his lack of apparent extremism: he was in many ways an ordinary, troubled young man. A physically huge man, a drug-user, and a multimillionaire with an NBA championship ring, he adopted the name Bison to honor his mother's Native American heritage and Dele to honor the first slave in his family. He walked away from a contract worth an estimated 35 million dollars to wander the world, first the Middle East, then Australia and New Zealand.

Around Bison, the slippages seemed to cluster: Transcending his father's (a member of the Platters) fame. Experimenting with subcultures, bohemianism, drugs. Embraced on-court as a shockingly natural talent, rejected off-court by his fellow players as a freak, a misfit.

And the newspaper articles kept cropping up: Bulls Star Suicide Attempt, Pistons Star Walks away from 35m., then Boat Missing, Boat found, Dele, Girlfriend Missing; Dabord tries to purchase half a million in gold posing as Dele, Dabord in a coma after overdose on Mexican Beach. Dabord dead after family pulls life support...

-Scott Benzel

Anonymous on [July 22nd, 2010 at 11:36 pm](#)

I have an old Bison Dele Pistons jersey that I found while walking on the beaches of Tahiti

DetectiveNordberg

Anonymous on [July 23rd, 2010 at 12:03 am](#)

Hey Hipster, how much did you sink on that vintage Bison Dele jersey?

[Hit Bull Win Steak](#)

Anonymous on [July 23rd, 2010 at 12:25 am](#)

There is a store w/ Bobby Phills jerseys on sale. I hear they are going fast.

HugsFromHarold

Anonymous on [July 23rd, 2010 at 12:54 am](#)

[@roland_t_flakfizer](#): A Bison Dele jersey is not to be used as a personal flotation device.

HugsFromHarold

Anonymous on [July 23rd, 2010 at 1:25 am](#)

[@Hatey McLife](#): I want to be like you when I grow up.

from an Internet Chat Board, 2010