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There Should Be More Pro Athletes Like Tracy McGrady Color of Law By David A. Love, JD BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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[Tracy McGrady](#), shooting guard for the Houston Rockets, recently changed his jersey number from number 1 to number 3.

The number 3 stands for a three-point program to stop the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan, which has already claimed 300,000 lives: peace, protection and punishment. McGrady is a pro basketball player-turned-human rights activist. He visited refugee camps in the troubled region with members of the [Enough Project](#). And he has decided to devote time off the court to humanitarian efforts, including [a sister city program](#) that links middle schools, high schools, colleges, and universities in the U.S. with schools in the Darfuri refugee camps. A documentary film called [3 Points](#), which is available for online viewing, discusses McGrady's journey to the refugee camps. Recently, on the Rachel Maddow show, he had this to say:

I don't live on the Earth just to live to walk it, I live on here to make a difference, and I've done a lot of things in the community of Houston and Florida, within the states, but I wanted to something more on a global level, and this is huge. I mean, it was a no brainer for me. Especially when once I got over there and saw how bad it was, you know, you can't come back and not do anything.

At a time when many athletes seem to receive attention only when they find trouble, this is a rare and welcome piece of news. To be sure, there are other stars out there, citizen-athletes who are doing their part and making a difference. Society needs to

hear more about them.

And there is a long history of people who stuck out their neck for political and social causes that were important to them. For example, Bill Russell of the Boston Celtics was a civil rights advocate who participated in the 1963 March on Washington. Muhammad Ali was a conscientious objector to the war in Vietnam, and was arrested, convicted and stripped of his boxing title for refusing to serve in the military. The Supreme Court later overturned his conviction. And during the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, African-American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their black-gloved fists—a symbol of “Black power”— when they received their medals.

Rarely these days do we see such bold statements and actions from our professional athletes. Perhaps it speaks to a past era, when people in the spotlight viewed themselves as representatives of their community. Perhaps it speaks to a present fear of lucrative corporate endorsements being cancelled if one “rocks the boat” and speaks out. “After all,” the argument goes, “if they’re giving you all of that big money to play ball, why mess it all up?” Such a mentality reminds me of the gladiator in ancient Rome, who risked bodily injury for the entertainment of the crowd. That gladiator fought and died at the behest of Caesar, who, in turn, benefitted politically from the games, and used the spectacles to divert public attention from the nation’s problems.

Perhaps it is unrealistic to expect everyone, or every athlete for that matter, to be a leader like Tracy McGrady. At the same time, people who are in the public eye are role models, whether they like it or not. Their stature, their exposure, and in some cases their wealth, provide them a unique opportunity to reach down and pull others up. They can influence young minds to do positive things, if only by example. And they can shape public opinion by giving badly needed exposure to important issues. And in some cases, as with McGrady, they can motivate their own peers to get involved in causes greater than themselves.

I salute Tracy McGrady and others who have dared to exhibit leadership off the court and off the field as well as on it. They challenge all of us to do better.

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