

# **The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r**

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## **The Unusual Spiral The Other Side of the Tracks By Perry Redd BC Columnist**

We just witnessed two tragedies in the span of a week. The late Kansas City Chiefs linebacker, Jovan Belcher, fatally shot his girlfriend, 22-year-old Kasandra Perkins on Saturday at the Kansas City home they shared with their 3-month-old daughter, Zoey. He then drove to the Chiefs' practice facility at Arrowhead Stadium, where coach Romeo Crennel, general manager Scott Pioli and defensive assistant Gary Gibbs witnessed Belcher commit suicide. How utterly tragic...

Shortly afterward, the NFL was rocked by the car crash that killed Dallas Cowboys player, Jerry Brown, and left his teammate, Josh Brent, facing a manslaughter charge as the driver of the vehicle. Two weeks ago, San Francisco 49ers defensive end, Demarcus Dobbs, walked away from a one-vehicle accident on his 25th birthday, and was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence. Would this rash of incidents lead us to believe there's an epidemic or are these merely coincidences?

Sudden and untimely death is nothing unusual for the Black community. Heck, Chicago is anticipating at least 436 homicides this year. Just a couple of hours prior to this writing, an 18-year-old was hurt in a burst of gunfire near a school bus. Three or four people started shooting in the direction of the bus, which was near a busy intersection. The 18-year-old was struck in the leg. He was taken by the bus driver to a local hospital, where he was listed in good condition. At least one bullet hole could be seen in the side of the school bus. Unfortunately, this rash of unhealthy behavior is not unusual.

What *is* unusual is millionaires' and well-paid athletes' lives spilling into the unusual. Making super-money for playing a child's game is unusual. Being a highly, well-paid athlete and committing suicide is unusual. So what are the common denominators in these tragedies?

I can't say that I am 100% sure, but I'll settle for 95%: the preparation given to these young men in their formative years is in question. Dealing with the stressors of fame, money and family are foreign concepts to newly-minted millionaires. Being able to afford the premium sports car and then testing its limits are unusual. Driving 100 miles an hour is unusual; and who's there to deny them the opportunity to ruin their lives? I'll say that mentoring is secondary, at best, when it comes to preparing these young men for real life off the field.

I'll even venture to say that low literacy rates are common factors in the undisciplined nature portrayed by these young men. When our children buckled down in studies, *they* exhibit discipline. They may or may not be willing, but it *is* discipline. From all appearances, these young men lack discipline. These are young *Black* men, for whom a lack of discipline is a sure element in the extinguishing of a hopeful life. Pro football cannot save an undisciplined soul.

My hopes are that the National Football League, the NFL players union, former players and the college alumni will step outside their cheerleader roles and step into the role of mentoring and playing "the heavy" with these precious lives. Brown's death and the arrest of defensive tackle, Josh Brent, after police say he caused the fatal wreck by speeding and driving drunk, put the NFL Players Association's safe ride program back in the spotlight. It was revamped three years ago after concerns that enough players weren't using it. Are programs enough to save lives? I see programs like that (and remember DARE, the youth drug prevention program?) as band-aids treating the symptom, but failing to cure.

Union spokesman, Carl Francis, said the program is a strong point of emphasis, and every player's membership card includes the contact information. And John Glavin, CEO of Florida-based Corporate Security Solutions Inc. that runs the program, says he is happy with how the union gets the word out about the program. What's he happy about? People are going to jail - and dying. Though these are grown men, there need to be mandatory rules in order to be a part of this elite

club, the NFL. These are extreme instances; they call for extreme measures.

Look, I am a Black man who happened to make it into my 50s. A reckless lifestyle was only saved by grace. It appears grace is missing these young men. I imagine there are hundreds more we don't know about, but it's just a matter of time before the next incident falls into the column of the unusual.

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