Stereotypes carried ball in New Year's broadcasts

By DERRICK Z. JACKSON
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In 1832, in a speech against slavery, Frederick Douglass said, "Attend the auction; see men examined like horses."

On New Year's Day 1990, you could watch the Rose Bowl, Orange Bowl and Sugar Bowl college football games, and see African American men examined like horses.

"He's a real horse," said ABC's Frank Gifford. "Huge man, but gazelle quick," said ABC's Al Michaels.


Watch the games again. Not once during any of the three games was a white athlete referred to with an animal term. See white men described with brains and valor.

It did not matter what position white men played. A center was "overachieving" and "knows when to snap the ball if he is "smart." A kicker made a tackle and was a "gamer" for his courage. A lineman plays on a hum leg and is "gritty." A linebacker made a tackle because he "kept his head up" and found good "position."

Not once were African Americans "overachieving," a "gamer," "smart" or "kept their head up."

White America loves to use sports and the large numbers of African Americans to show racial progress. Few sports days are bigger than New Year's Day. In a nation of 93.7 million households, the Rose Bowl, Orange Bowl and Sugar Bowl reached 38.8 million homes.

This past New Year's, the airing of those games was downright antebellum. The commentators spewed so much poison onto the airwaves, the football field became a plantation. They fell all over themselves competing for the Jimmy (The Greek) Snyder Broadcasters Breeders' Cup Award.

You remember The Greek. He got fired from CBS Sports for saying that African Americans are great athletes because they were "bred" in slavery to have "high thighs and big thighs that go up into his back. And they can jump higher and run faster because of their bigger thighs, you see."

This year, the winners of the Breeders' Cup are Dick Enberg of NBC and Dierdorf. On a run by Eric Bieniemy of Colorado in the Orange Bowl, Enberg exclaimed, "Those powerful legs of his. You know he has a 30-inch waist. He has to buy special pants because his thighs are 36." During the Sugar Bowl, on a play by Alabama linebacker Keith McCants, Dierdorf said, "This is the match-up the Alabama defensive coaches wanted. They had their studman."

In Webster's dictionary, a "stud" is "a group of animals, especially horses, kept for breeding."

The verbage did not change even when African Americans played quarterback. Once upon a time, when the position was nearly all white, except at African-American colleges, quarterback, more than any other position in team sports, came to symbolize the powers of intelligence.

In the above games, the three white quarterbacks remained blessed with great powers of analysis and communication. Gifford said of white Alabama quarterback Gary Hollingsworth, "The reason they can run that no-huddle offense is because he is a very bright quarterback. He reads defenses. He knows his offense so well that they don't have to get the calls in him. He does it all on his own."

In the Rose Bowl, the main concern for freshman Todd Marino维奇 was coming up with a game plan to relieve him of the "mental load" and "mental pressure" because he had too much to "think" about late in the season. And when he ran, he was a "gamer."

Miami's Craig Erickson was "well-schooled." On a run, Al Michaels of ABC said, "Erickson saw the hole in the middle and just exploited it. That's just like the center Bobby Garcia saying 'We've got something here.'"

When the three African-American quarterbacks performed, it was not with their brains. It was with the body parts farthest from the brain. Their feet.

When Notre Dame's Tony Rice ran for a first down, NBC's Bill Walsh said, "And again, the great instincts that he possesses. ... Look at that great quickness. Look at that great running ability!"

When Darian Hagan of Colorado called signals, ABC said Hagan "has happy feet and is lightening-quick on his feet." When Hagan ran for a touchdown, Walsh said, "You see how instinctive he is. Just a great athletic talent."

Never once were white quarterbacks cited for having "instincts," "athletic talent" or having "happy feet" and "slippery legs." On the times that African-American quarterbacks were said to be generically "gentle," or possess "judgment," the notices came so late that such platitudes were oblitered by the previous focus on them as physical specimens.

Taylor was referred to as "very intelligent" in the third quarter. Rice showed "judgment," "maturity" and "leadership quality" in the fourth quarter. Nobody ever said if Hagan was intelligent, smart or used judgment.

The analytical abilities of all three white quarterbacks were referred to in the first quarter.

This stereotyping is so unabashed that white players are imbued with a rich past and a future of leadership.

The lineage and future for African-American players was much more dubious. There was one comment about a player's father being in construction and another about a father being an usher at Notre Dame stadium. The deepest comments otherwise were for players having an "engaging smile," being the team barber, and how they got their names.

In 1833, Frederick Douglass was handed over to a slave breaker. Mr. Covey. Douglass wrote of Covey: "Mr. Covey's forte consisted in his power to deceive. His life was devoted to planning and perpetrating the grossest deceptions. ... Everything he possessed in the shape of learning ... he made conform to his disposition to deceive."

It does not matter whether the field is one of cotton or one of artificial turf. The networks have so much time and money to plan for and broadcasting of these games that for them not to attempt the least bit of equality in perceiving the efforts of white and African-American athletes renders them guilty of perpetrating the grossest deception in the public mind.