

Floyd Mayweather, Donald Sterling, and TMZ

Written by Thomas Hauser
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Now that Floyd Mayweather vs. Marcos Maidana is over, boxing fans can refocus their attention on the story that the sports media has fixated on for the past ten days.

On Friday, April 25, TMZ posted a tape of a 9-minute-26-second telephone conversation between Los Angeles Clippers owner, 80-year-old billionaire Donald Sterling, and a 31-year-old woman named V. Stiviano. The conversation was recorded by Stiviano, who was once Sterling's mistress. The link to the recording is http://www.tnz.com/videos/0_wkuhmkt8/.

In the conversation, Sterling (who is battling prostate cancer) comes across as an unhappy old man. Stiviano appears to be leading, manipulating, and sometimes goading him into making racist comments. Sterling, after some initial resistance, obliges. The worst of Sterling's comments have been widely reported.

A firestorm of media coverage and protest followed the TMZ post. Barack Obama denounced Sterling's comments as "incredibly offensive." On April 29, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver announced that Sterling had been fined \$2,500,000 (the maximum fine that can be levied by the league under the circumstances) and banned for life from entering the team facilities or attending any team practice or NBA game. Silver further declared that, pursuant to the league constitution and by-laws, he would ask the other NBA owners to force Sterling to sell the team.

Stiviano now says that she "never meant to hurt" Sterling, which is a little like John Wilkes Booth saying that he never meant to hurt Abraham Lincoln. It wouldn't be surprising if her next step is

to sell her story to the *National Enquirer* or pose for *Playboy*.

The media as a whole seems unconcerned with the fact that Sterling has humiliated his wife with public and private dalliances for years. It has also failed to fully explore numerous other issues.

If Sterling's remarks had been about Jews or gays, would the national uproar and punishment have been the same? Does anyone really think that Donald Sterling is the only NBA owner who harbors racist sentiments? What about Major League Baseball owners? The National Football League? Before the sports establishment gets a sore arm from patting itself on the back as a consequence of Sterling's punishment, let's reflect for a moment on the Washington Redskins, who are owned by Daniel Snyder (the other DS).

Unlike "Blackhawks" and "Braves," Redskins is a derogatory term. Want proof? Use the term "Redskins" in a sentence that doesn't carry a negative connotation and is unrelated to the National Football League. Or phrased differently, what would happen if James Dolan suggested changing the name of the New York Knicks to the New York Colored People?

And what about Charles Barkley's comment on national television that the NBA is "a black league"? I love Charles Barkley as a commentator. But didn't he step over the line here? Suppose Barkey had called the NBA a "Christian league" or a "straight league"?

Perhaps the most thoughtful public commentary on the Sterling affair came from Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who addressed it in an essay for *Time Magazine* with characteristic dignity and grace.

"The poor guy's girlfriend is on tape cajoling him into revealing his racism," Abdul-Jabbar wrote. "What a winding road she led him down to get all of that out. She blindfolded him and spun him around until he was just blathering all sorts of incoherent racist sound bites that had the news media peeing with glee."

"Racists," Abdul-Jabbar continued, "deserve to be paraded around the modern town square of

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the television screen so that the rest of us who believe in the American ideal of equality can be reminded that racism is a disease that we haven't yet licked. What bothers me about this whole Donald Sterling affair isn't just his racism. I'm bothered that everyone acts as if it's a huge surprise. [Sterling's racist conduct] has been going on for years and this ridiculous conversation with his girlfriend is what puts you over the edge? That's the smoking gun? And shouldn't we be equally angered by the fact that his private intimate conversation was taped and then leaked to the media? The making and release of this tape is so sleazy that just listening to it makes me feel like an accomplice to the crime."

"Sterling," Abdul-Jabbar concluded, "is the villain of this story. But he's just another jerk with more money than brains."

That makes for a nice segue to Floyd Mayweather.

On April 29, Mayweather said of Donald Sterling, "I don't have nothing negative to say about the guy. He's always treated me with the utmost respect. He has always invited me to games, always. And he always says, 'Floyd, I want you to sit right next to me and my wife.'"

Malcolm X had a term for people of color who thought like that. And it wasn't pretty.

Then Mayweather inserted himself further into the Sterling dialogue by saying that he was interested in being part of a group that would buy the Clippers. But he cautioned, "I can't come in talking about Mayweather only gonna get three percent, four percent. I got to get a solid percentage. Do we want to buy the Clippers? Yes, we do. We are very very interested in buying the Clippers."

That's just the ownership the NBA needs after censuring Donald Sterling for racist comments.

Lest one forget; Mayweather was seen worldwide on UStream.com calling Manny Pacquiao a "little yellow chump," a "whore," and a "f---t." He also said, "Once I stomp the midget, I'll make that m-----r make me a sushi roll and cook me some rice." For good measure, Floyd then added, "M-----r Pacquiao, he can't speak no English."

Closer to home insofar as the NBA is concerned, Mayweather reacted to the outpouring of media attention that Jeremy Lin received two years ago by tweeting, "All the hype is because he's Asian."

Mayweather owning an NBA franchise would also do wonders for the league's outreach to women.

Over the years, Floyd has had significant issues with women and the criminal justice system. In 2002, he pled guilty to two counts of domestic violence. In 2004, he was found guilty on two counts of misdemeanor battery for assaulting two women in a Las Vegas night club. In 2012, he served two months in prison after pleading guilty to charges relating to another indictment for domestic violence.

Nor are women likely to look fondly on Mayweather's recent decision to excoriate his former fiancée, Shantel Jackson, by informing the world via social media that she'd had an abortion and posting ultrasound images of "our twin babies" on his Facebook page and Instagram.

Mayweather, of course, had his own TMZ "Oops!" moment on March 12 of this year, when TMZ reported, "Floyd Mayweather allegedly orchestrated a savage attack on two of his employees he suspected of stealing his jewelry. Sources familiar with the situation tell TMZ Sports the two men had been hired to work on Floyd's Vegas homes. But when jewelry went missing, Floyd pointed the finger at them. We're told the men claim they were instructed to meet Floyd at an off-site location. When the men arrived, they claim Floyd was waiting for them - along with a number of his 'people' who proceeded to beat the living crap out of them with various weapons, including clubs. Our sources say the attack was so brutal the men could have easily died. Both men had broken arms and legs and were hospitalized for several days. We're told the men are adamant they never took anything from Floyd, and it appears Floyd realizes that now."

Two days later, TMZ posted a follow-up report that included X-rays purporting to show "a broken arm . . . a snapped pinkie . . . multiple fractures in the left hand that required pins to reset the bones . . . We're told the left arm was so badly broken, doctors drilled into the bone to attach a titanium plate so it would reset . . . Just a few of the injuries suffered by one of the men allegedly beaten by Floyd Mayweather's crew."

Here, it should be noted that TMZ's Mayweather report was undocumented beyond the unsourced allegations and anonymous X-rays. Unlike the matter of Donald Sterling, there was no tape of the beating. And unlike V. Stiviano, Mayweather's alleged victims chose to remain anonymous.

On March 24, Laura Meltzer (a public information officer for the Las Vegas Police Department) told the *New York Daily News*, "We've had a variety of reports that have come out stating this event occurred. We have not had a victim come forward to the police to make an official complaint. As of right now, the bureau commander is not aware of any complaint that has been officially filed. If this is a victim who is choosing not to come forward and make a report; then that's up to the victim. We don't have any say in that. There is no criminal complaint on file, so there is no reason to go and contact Mr. Mayweather."

That said; TMZ has a pretty good track record on reports of this nature. And there appears to be a culture of this sort of incident around Mayweather. His Rolls Royce was spotted on the scene after an August 23, 2009, shooting outside a Las Vegas skating rink. One of his associates, Ocie Harris, was indicted on attempted murder charges for shooting at two passengers in another car, one of who had reportedly insulted Mayweather. After the shooting, police searched Mayweather's house, looking for evidence, and seized handguns, ammunition, and bulletproof vests, none of which were used in the shooting. Harris' lawyer has said that his client was used as a pawn by police and prosecutors in an effort to link the shooting to Mayweather. Harris subsequently pled guilty to three felony charges and was sentenced to two-to-five years in prison.

Quite possibly, the TMZ report about the beating allegedly administered at Mayweather's command is unfounded. And Floyd is under no obligation to respond to every rumor about him that surfaces in the media. But the silence of Team Mayweather on the issue so far has been deafening.

It's also worth noting how little attention the story has received in the mainstream media. If this had been LeBron James, Payton Manning, or David Ortiz (or Mike Tyson), it would have been the lead story on ESPN SportsCenter and on the front or back page of every tabloid in America.

The fact that boxing's flagship fighter is at the center of these allegations is a problem. The fact

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that the mainstream media doesn't seem to care might be a bigger problem. It shows how little Mayweather (and boxing) now matter to the wider audience.

Mayweather-Maidana was a much better fight than it was expected to be. Floyd is still technically brilliant. He still knows all the tricks. Against Maidana, he sat down more on his punches than in the past and showed a fighting heart.

But at age 37, Mayweather is losing his legs. That was evident early in the fight. And his box office appeal appears to be dwindling.

Floyd is a big draw, but he has always needed a dance partner to generate stratospheric numbers. He was only half of the equation for the dollars that flowed from fights against Oscar De La Hoya and Canelo Alvarez. Best estimates are that Mayweather-Maidana (like Mayweather vs. Robert Guerrero) engendered under 900,000 pay-per-view buys. That means Showtime could lose millions of dollars on the event. And one day before Mayweather-Maidana, thousands of tickets were selling on secondary market sites such as TiqIQ.com for as much as 45 percent off list price.

Want more on where Mayweather ranks in contemporary culture?

Two days before Mayweather-Maidana, a Google search for "Floyd Mayweather" brought up 4,310,000 "results." That's an impressive number. But that same day, a Google search for "Game of Thrones" brought up 548,000,000 results. In other words, interest in Mayweather ran at less than eight-tenths of one percent of the interest in *Game of Thrones*.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com . His most recent book (*Reflections: Conversations, Essays, and Other Writings*) has just been published by the University of Arkansas Press.

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Radam G says:

T-Ha also get down da nitty-gitty of the reality. And cases hate him for it. They don't any truths about Money May's contractions. And dumb jive. Holla!

Carmine Cas says:

Floyd has put is foot in his mouth many times.

El Dude says:

TMZ here I come take a good look at El Dude. This is my 100 mark in a couple of rounds of days. The World just gave a happy-poor, family-man, full x college student, local Boxer/known Brawler who out pure love for the sport commits to Boxing Commentaries the opportunity to make it out of the Barrio. I am the student, I am the rookie, I am the Boxing Prospect Writer of tomorrow. El Dude don't mess around and this forum will one day be my realm.

El Dude is here.

New York Tony says:

I'm no Mayweather fan, but he doesn't deserve to be victimized by the notoriously self-righteous and self-serving Thomas Hauser, he of the poison pen. The Sterling story was a tempest in a teapot to begin with, whipped into a politically correct frenzy to cosset those who yearn to be offended and outraged, and who certainly don't understand or care about the concept or practice of free speech, no matter how crass it may be. "Now that Floyd Mayweather vs. Marcos Maidana is over, boxing fans can refocus their attention on the story that the sports media has fixated on for the past ten days." Why? The story is old news and has nothing to do with boxing. Yes, there's been some aimless talk of Mayweather buying the Clippers, but that ain't gonna happen. Hauser knows this, so why bring it up? Oh, that's right, to use it as a "nice segue" to the TMZ story that Mayweather "allegedly orchestrated a savage attack on two of his employees he suspected of stealing his jewelry." If true, I hope Floyd spends many a year in prison. But that's a big "If." As Hauser himself observes, "Quite possibly, the TMZ report about the beating allegedly administered at Mayweather's command is unfounded. And Floyd is under no obligation to respond to every rumor about him that surfaces in the media," but he then contradicts himself with "the silence of Team Mayweather on the issue so far has been deafening." As for "Mayweather's recent decision to excoriate his former fiancée, Shantel Jackson, by informing the world via social media that she'd had an abortion and posting ultrasound images of 'our twin babies' on his Facebook page and Instagram"...no one ever said Floyd was another Ezzard Charles in the gentleman department, but it's worth noting that Hauser isn't even slightly bothered by the abortion itself, the extinguishing of innocent human life for the sake of narcissistic convenience. No, I'm no fan of Floyd, but I'm even less of a fan of urine-yellow journalism.

amayseng says:

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Ms Jackson had an abortion (allegedly) which is quite disturbing, the fact Floyd put images of his aborted children on social media is right behind that disturbing act.