

# THE FEMININE TOUCH

## CHATTERBOXING: IT'S NOT JUST FOR "ET" ANYMORE

By Kimberly Gadette

**"S**hocking!" "Disgraceful!" "Enough is enough!" In hushed tones, the sportscasters discuss Terrell Owens' latest misstep. They take turns at creating reactive utterances of dismay, disappointment and disgust. Yet underneath all their clacking tsks and bottomless sighs of disbelief—is an unmistakable note of glee.

The jaw flapping is not play-by-play, in-depth analysis or color ... plain and simple, O faux-shocked sportsfans, it's called "gossip." Though the stereotype is that girls do it far more than boys, turn on any sports channel, any time, any night, any day, and baby, you've got it: Gossip is an equal-opportunity player.

Not that it isn't fun. With or without a Knick/Nugget brawl in Madison Square Garden, it's a positive scream. But here's a hard news flash: chatterboxing is not a sport. At least not yet.

Though the sporting news version of who's done dirt to who makes just as jolly a read as the latest updates on Britney Spears' panties, or lack thereof, I still want my ESPN-TV. Gossip has its place—but its place shouldn't be front and center on each and every SportsCenter.

In mid-November '06, when Texas Tech coach Bobby Knight touched player Michael Prince's chin during a time-out, the story was as big as countrywide tainted spinach. A Fox News update via ESPN ran an interview with Mike Decourcy of The Sporting News, analyzing whether Mr. Knight gave his player a slap, a tickle or an under-the-chin chuck. From every available angle, Fox replayed the incident five times in just under two minutes. Decourcy gave his final opinion on the subject by stating, "I would not consider this to be an incident at all." With the NBA season having just started, the NFL deeply embroiled in Week #10 and the 2006 AL Rookie of the Year Award going to Detroit Tigers pitcher Justin Verlander, I couldn't agree more.

Importance of any given incident is key. In the case of the '06 Bengals, if it affected overall performance that eight players, or 15% of the team, got to scratch their initials inside the walls of many of our country's finer jails, then it was news. If for all his grandstanding, the fact that Chad "don't call me Chad, it's Ocho Cinco" Johnson wasn't one of those "Ocho Men Out," that was also news. But since the Bengals have now moved on to embracing changes for '07—so should FSN.

And so should we all, especially since most of us complain that there are never enough hours in the day to get 'er done. But when we take a break, and decide to spend one of those few precious hours staring at our sportscasting pals on the television screen, there should be an expectation of some real sports news flashing back at us. And hopefully flashing more than the constant reportage of Oakland Raider Randy

Moss' antics, who redefined the word "scuttlebutt" by pretending to drop trou and rub up against the Green Bay Packers' goalpost in January of '05. Funny? Yes. But newsworthy? Nope, not since two years ago.


Sadly, it's not just the sports highlight shows that are full of innuendo in yo' face. Reminiscent of Andre Gurode's head after Tennessee Titan Albert Haynesworth mistook it for a trampoline, the blather is bleeding buckets onto the playing field itself. Perhaps the sports dudes are running a different kind of competition, e.g., "How many times can you drop a negative fact about Michael Vick during your analysis of the World Cup?" "Hey, guy, your play-by-play on the Pistons was good but even better, loved how you used the word "steroid"—not just as a noun but as a permutation of both a verb and a proper name. Way to go!"

As the NBA has its assigned whistleblower in David Stern, in the sports news division we get Sports Illustrated's Dr. Z, with his "Ninth Annual TV Commentator Awards." Ah, Dr. Z, it's time to once again spread some well-earned shame. As usual, he'll address sportscasters' deficiencies in such areas as identifying players other than the latest jailbird; in describing the action in the arena versus the action in somebody's ex-wife's bedroom; and will remind the tv sportsmen to describe the game that's being played in real time, versus that championship game three years ago when Tommy Terrific's mother was

taken ill and didn't we all just choke up when Tommy dedicated his MVP trophy to her?

With or without Dr. Z's severe wrist-slapping, I'm hoping that the sports channels might rethink the celeb angle. Years ago, the major television networks addressed the public's overweening need for daily, frothy entertainment news—NBC birthed "Access Hollywood" while CBS gave us "Entertainment Tonight" ("ET"). Let's step up to the proverbial plate and match "ET" with our very own "TO." (I'm sure Terrell Owens would love the homage.) If that doesn't satisfy, then there's the model of the all-around-the-clock, all-inclusive-whether-you-want-it-or-not "E! Entertainment TV." As redefined for the celeb sports nut, this new 24/7 exercise could address suspensions, fines, bad behaviors, and rumors of any veracity happening anytime, anywhere in the wide world of sports. It could be called "P! Penalty TV."

Hey ... it could be a hit. And at the same time, the run-of-the-mill sportsfans could watch the regular sports channels and get their fill of games, highlights and—gasp!—real news.

As they never say during the bestowing of any award: "Everybody wins." 

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