

Heroes always give their best



Philip
Dine

Looking through some old newspaper clips the other day, I chanced upon a piece I'd written for the *Washington Post* on April 27, 2003. The Sunday commentary made light of the unending media buzz about former NBA superstar Michael Jordan's future, which was crowding out real news. Jordan, then an executive running the Washington Wizards, was the subject of incessant local speculation about whether he'd return to the hardwood.

I also took issue with journalists' tendency to deify Jordan as a hero for having done his job on the court at a high level—and suggested that the hero label in sports be reserved “for

the selfless generosity of a Roberto Clemente (or) the inner strength of a Jackie Robinson.”

What struck me on this recent rereading was a sentence toward the end, which I'd forgotten about: “How many people give their best every day on the mail route or in the classroom for small change and always respect the job?”

Long before arriving at the NALC in August of 2010, in making a point about folks who bring a quiet pride and consistent professionalism to their craft, I instinctively thought first about letter carriers.

That admiration has only increased the past couple of years, as I've learned how much you're willing to do to preserve the future of one of this nation's great institutions—the United States Postal Service—by informing the public and influencing legislators.

Ideally, a federal agency would be well led—with the leadership developing a vision for the future, communicating it in compelling fashion and possessing the political knowhow to get it enacted.

As we know, no such luck. It's up to us to provide a plan, educate the media and inform the public, and prod lawmakers to do the right thing. To that task, you bring a willingness to engage and a savvy that allows you to do so effectively.

Three examples from diverse sections of the country, drawing on the rallies to preserve Saturday delivery:

In Connecticut, a large crowd on the New Haven Green included members of both chambers of Congress. Branch 19 President Vincent Mase and Connecticut State President Chuck Page, on the Green starting at 6 a.m., were interviewed live by several TV stations up to 8 a.m., which

helped build attendance and promote rally coverage. The next day's *New Haven Register*, (the state's second-largest newspaper) played it atop Page One under the headline ‘6 days yes, 5 days no.’

Almost 3,000 miles away, in Pocatello, Idaho, the rally also dominated Page One; the *Idaho State Journal* led with Idaho State President John Paige's explanation about Saturday's value, before quoting other letter carriers at the rally on related matters such as pre-funding, jobs and package-delivery growth. Paige planned to follow that up with another rally for six-day delivery in Twin Falls on April 26, the state convention's first day.

To the South, where Kentucky State President Bob McNulty managed to get a freshman Republican congressman to attend the Lexington rally in a learning mode—he told the media that decisions about delivery schedules should be made not by one person but by 535—and to write a helpful letter to the postmaster general about Kentucky's postal facilities.

Such efforts were reinforced by the work of President Rolando who, when the USPS withdrew its bid to unilaterally end six-day delivery, used the valuable real estate of a widely circulated Associated Press story to outline the need for Saturday mail delivery.

This is why we'll prevail.

The USPS is weak and unimaginative at the top; we're led by someone with a sense of purpose and unwavering confidence in the future. L'Enfant Plaza supplements its flaccid pronouncements with regional employees' letters to newspapers that, parroting the party line, lack credibility or conviction. Letter carriers and union activists tell our story in persuasive fashion, supported by a leadership that trusts and empowers them—with good reason.

Michael Jordan, let me introduce you to some real heroes on the job.

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