

Remember the Titan

by MARK GREY 7.9.09

On July 4th, football fans all across the country were shocked to hear the news that a former MVP had been killed at the young age of 36. As if news of Steve McNair's death wasn't surprising enough, the way he died was the biggest surprise of all. As information continued to leak about his death, questions started to rise about his life. The entire sports world is now wondering how McNair should be remembered. The answer is simple. He should be remembered for what he was: a Titan.

Webster's defines a titan as "one that is gigantic in size or power: one that stands out for greatness of achievement, one with influence." What better word to describe one of the toughest quarterbacks in NFL history? On the field, they didn't make them any tougher than Air McNair, but he always had a soft spot in his heart for his community. When he wasn't busy giving opposing defenses nightmares, McNair was giving young athletes hope. Thanks to the great success McNair had, every kid at every small and historically black college believed he had a shot at making it to the NFL.

As the details of the way McNair was killed began to unravel, many fans and writers were shocked. They thought they knew him; Air McNair would never do those things. My question to all that share those thoughts is: what made you think you knew him? Was it because you watched him every Sunday for 13 years? Was it because you saw him in a United Way commercial helping in the community? Was it because he spoke so well and carried himself with such class off the field? Was it all the money he raised for the Katrina victims? Was it the high level of respect every player in the NFL had for him? Whatever your reason was, the lesson that needs to be learned is that we don't know any of these athletes.

In today's media-crazy world, everyone likes to judge others. Consequently, we hastily and unnecessarily label everyone. The media and the fans have divided these athletes into groups with some players labeled "good guys" and others labeled "bad guys." All week, everyone has been asking how this could happen. After all, McNair was one of the good guys. Remember when everyone claimed that there was no way Rafael Pameiro would use steroids because we knew him? Did we? What about, "Manny is just being Manny. He wouldn't cheat. He's such an easy going guy." Really? It's time people start realizing how little we really know about these athletes and understand that they have private lives just like everyone else.

Just last year, fans all over were shocked to hear that Marvin Harrison was involved with a shooting. Everyone was confused because Marvin was one of the "good guys." The truth is, what does anyone really know about Marvin Harrison? We know he is a great football player and that's it. That's all we really need to know. In today's society, we look to these athletes to be perfect and then try to bash them when we find out they are human just like everybody else. We want them to be great athletes, great business men, great role models, and well-educated pillars of the community. Yet most of us don't meet even one of those standards. We need to judge them only for what they are: great athletes. We need to stop making character judgments about people we have never met. We need to do away with these "bad guy/good guy" labels because at the end of the day, we have no idea who they are or what kind of private lives they live.

Now that McNair has passed, people are wondering if the way he died will tarnish his legacy. The way he died should have nothing to do with his legacy. Steve McNair's legend is that he was a great NFL quarterback who did a lot of work for his community and helped open doors for other black quarterbacks. Period. If he was a marriage counselor, then maybe his legacy would be tarnished. However, he was a football player. McNair's private life should be just that: private. It should not be something for everyone else to judge him by. If McNair had lived to be 100 years old would football fans all over remember him as Steve McNair, the great husband? Of course not. He would be remembered as a great football player who was quite charitable and that's what he should be remembered as now.

There is so much information about McNair's death that we will never know, so it is only fair that we remember him and his life by what we do know. We know that he was a great player who played the game with passion and heart. We know that he was a leader on the field who played through injury after injury to help lead his team to victory. We know he was a league MVP who gave young black quarterbacks all over the country hope. With such a long list of accomplishments in life, it would be a shame to remember him by what he didn't do. So here's to remembering Steve McNair for what he was and always will be: a Titan.