

...is that I get to respond to the media.

This is the email I got today from a columnist at the Dallas Morning News:

-Original Message-

From: "Blackistone, Kevin"

To: "mark cuban (E-mail)"

Date: Mon, 15 Mar 2004 13:25:33 -0600

Subject:

Mark,

You've diverted my attention for the moment from the tournament. (If you want in on our pool, though, let me know.) The following is what I'm writing about for Tuesday:

One, I understand you want to protect your guys, your investment, but Bruce Bowen is just a tough one-dimensional player, not a dirty, I don't think. The thing with Fin was bad, though. And just a few years ago, of course, was the whole Juwan Howard-Spurs thing that knocked Derek Anderson out of the playoffs. Now, that was bad.

Second, why not leave it to your coaches to coach Josh on how to handle the pressure. Plus, he's an ACC Player of the Year who logged four seasons in that league. He probably knows about playing tough.

KBB

PS Just curious, but not from a writing stand point: Did you ever have any interest in Vin Baker?

Here is my response to him:

The stuff about a bounty on Bowen is bullshit. Never happened. And I know you like the separation of church and state, and don't like me near the players, but that's your issue, not mine. ■

Here is the reality. What I do know is the tendencies of officials better than anyone on our team and probably better than anyone in the league.

I pay to track it, and I pay attention to the information I get.

It's not unusual for me to tell Del or our players for things to watch out for from specific officials. Are they more likely to call blocks vs. charges, 3 seconds or not, etc. In this case we had a very good head official one of the best in the league whose tendency is to let the guys play. He is the same official that told our guys before a Spurs playoff game last year that this is going to be "just like in the backyard, call your own fouls." The same ref from the Brad Miller vs. Shaq game, and I can give you other examples of well officiated, but physical, games. That is why I was speaking to Josh.

I spoke to him in a break after Bowen had got up underneath Josh and was slapping at him when he had the ball. It could be argued whether it was a legal guarding position or not, but that's why I told Josh to legally use a ball swipe to clear space. This was going to be a physical game and because he was the rookie he could be the one that got the tech and I would pay the fine for it. Josh is certainly not the type to back down from anyone, but all players get confused from time to time trying to figure out how a game is going to be called. I knew exactly how this game was going to be called once it got going, and that is why I said something to Josh.

Thanks,

M

This is what he wrote. Note that he conveniently used only part of my response to make it seem like my comments to Josh were in response to Bruce Bowen and Michael Finley getting into it. Unfortunately, he ignored the part of my response that said it was not. My conversation with Josh was long before Fin and Bowen got into it.

And of course, this intrepid columnist completely ignored and left out the entire reason I was talking to Josh so he could come in with a slam about why I shouldn't be talking to players. How convenient for him.

From the Dallas Morning News' Kevin Blackistone:

It was an ugly incident between the Mavericks and the Spurs and at the worst of times. This is not a recollection of the Bruce Bowen-Michael Finley battle from a few nights ago, however. I'm recalling the second round playoff matchup between Dallas and San Antonio three springs ago, when the Mavericks were happily participating in the club's first postseason in a decade.

In the opening contest, Juwan Howard, with the Mavericks then, struck Derek Anderson while Anderson was airborne readying to dunk. Anderson landed hard and awkwardly and suffered a separated shoulder.

Howard was ejected. The Spurs were left fuming, calling it a dirty play.

In the next game, the Spurs' Danny Ferry fouled Howard hard. The refs issued Ferry a flagrant.

Late in the third game, with the contest all but over and the Mavericks beaten, Howard knocked Malik Rose to the floor. It was called a flagrant foul, too, and rightfully so. It was as unnecessary in its roughness as it was in its timing. Howard should've been booted.

But Spurs owner Peter Holt, as best we know, did not tell his players he would pick up the tab for a league fine if they got a technical for retaliating against Howard. That would be bush league, or National Hockey League, if you will.

That, however, was Mark Cuban's reaction to the forearm shiver Spurs defensive pest Bowen gave Finley a couple of Fridays ago, baiting Finley into a response that led to Finley's ejection.

Cuban reiterated his thought to me Monday: "I was speaking to Josh [Howard]. I spoke to him in a break after Bowen had got caught up underneath Josh and was slapping at him when he had the ball. It could be argued whether it was a legal guarding position or not, but that's why I told Josh to legally use a ball swipe to clear space. That this was going to be a physical game, and because he was a rookie, he could be the one that got the tech, and I would pay the fine for it."

A league official confirmed Monday that it is investigating Cuban's comments. "We're looking into it," the official said.

And you wonder how it is that certain players earn reputations as ruffians. Josh Howard doesn't need it. The league can't afford to condone such things, either.

How can Cuban cry bloody murder over a questionable play by an opponent after standing by one of his players after that player committed a far more dangerous act against an opponent? That's disingenuous.

There is nothing wrong with looking out for your athletes, an investment in the hundreds of millions of dollars, but not the way Cuban just did it. Make a report to the league. Let it handle the situation, as it did the other day by fining Bowen and issuing him the flagrant foul the refs failed to pin on him.

Leave the playing of the game, and the coaching of it, to those employed to do so. They know the game the best, or should.

Josh Howard has been playing basketball for quite some time. He played for four years in one of the toughest college conferences in the country, the ACC, and was its player of the year last season. No doubt he learned long ago how to deal with a physical player, even one like Bowen, whose tactics have been questioned by some of the league's best players, including Ray Allen and Vince Carter. Carter suggested not long ago that Bowen undercut him and caused him an ankle injury. Bowen was fined a couple of seasons ago for kicking Wally Szczerbiak in the face, although it appeared accidental.

Maybe he is a dirty player, but imagine how Cuban would embrace him on this team. A player known for being a tenacious defender, no matter how borderline to being dirty, is a missing ingredient here.

The usually even-tempered Finley dealt with Bowen knocking him to the hardwood by returning the favor.

Enough.

Basketball has become plenty physical. It doesn't need encouragement. It doesn't need to become the dangerous tit-for-tat game inside the game that manifests itself in baseball-turned-beanball and hockey-turned-back alley brawl.

Not only that, but Cuban spends a lot of money employing so many coaches that they need a second row of seating at games. If Howard needs to be reminded or taught how to shed a defender, the coaches can do it, especially those who've played the game and done so in recent memory, like Ro Blackman. A player doesn't need the owner telling him what to do, especially if it's out of bounds, anymore than the owner needs a player telling him how to price tickets.

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The sad part of all of this is that despite his disregard for the facts, Blackistone is one of the better columnists.

That speaks volumes about his profession.