



By John Harris Jr
VILLAGER Sports
Columnist

(VILLAGER) - The raging debate over the best player in NBA history always comes down to two players: Michael Jordan and LeBron James.

As if Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain and Oscar Robertson - basketball superstars from a different era - never existed.

Just because something is more current, doesn't always make it better. Google and YouTube aren't the answer for everything.

To the current generation, Russell was the old man with the gray beard looming in the background at the deciding game of the NBA Finals presenting the MVP trophy named after him to the series' top player. He will be sorely missed in so many ways.

For starters, Russell deserves to be included in the greatest player of all-time debate.

Imagine, for a moment, Jordan and James returning from an outing with their family and encountering unspeakable defilement upon opening their front door. And then being expected to perform at the highest level on the basketball court as if nothing happened - winning 11 NBA titles and going 10-0 in Game 7s in his career; the most titles any NBA player has won, more than Jordan and James combined - become the first Black coach in NBA

Bill Russell: One for the Ages



BILL RUSSELL

history (winning two titles as a player-coach) and revolutionize the game with his shot-blocking prowess.

Impossible you say? Welcome to Bill Russell's World.

I'm quoting directly from a letter that Karren Russell, daughter of the legendary Russell who passed away on Sunday at age 88, wrote for the New York Times about her family's experiences with racism.

Karen was a young

girl when her family returned to Boston from a three-day weekend only to discover their home had been robbed and vandalized.

"Our house was in a shambles, and N***A was spray painted on the walls. The burglars had poured beer on the pool table and ripped up the felt," Karen wrote. "They had broken into my father's trophy case and smashed most of the trophies. I was petrified and shocked at the mess;

everyone was very upset. The police came, and after a while, they left. It was then that my parents pulled back their bedcovers to discover that the burglars had defecated in their bed."

Bill Russell did the best he could do as a Black husband and father attempting to protect his family against a system designed to keep a foot on his neck. Keep in mind, Russell was a famous athlete who led the hometown team to

multiple championships, but to white folks in Boston he was just another you-know-what.

"We received threatening letters, and my parents notified the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)," Karen wrote. "What I find most telling about this episode is that years later, after Congress had passed the Freedom of Information Act, my father requested his FBI file and found that he was repeatedly referred to therein as "an arrogant Negro who won't sign autographs for white children."

Unlike Jordan and James, who had advertisers and sponsors to pacify, Russell didn't care how the public perceived him. When the Celtics retired Russell's number in 1972, he refused to attend the ceremony, in protest of his treatment by the city.

"His attitude has provoked racist responses, and these have tended to obscure the very basic issue of the right to privacy," Karen

wrote. "Any professional athlete, and certainly any Black professional athlete, is supposed to feel grateful to others for the fame he or she has achieved."

Bill Russell was fearless and relentless on the court and off. He constantly spoke out against racism while playing in the NBA and inspired other Black athletes to fight for justice. He attended a 1967 summit in Cleveland featuring top Black athletes showing support for boxer Muhammad Ali's refusal to fight in Vietnam. Russell also attended the March on Washington but declined an invitation from Martin Luther King Jr. to stand beside him because he didn't consider himself worthy of such a gesture. "He invited me to be up here, and I respectfully declined because the organizers had worked for years to get this together, and I hadn't done anything," Russell said at the March on Washington's 50th anniversary.



President Barack Obama awards the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Bill Russell on Tuesday, February 15, 2011 in Washington, D.C. / Getty Images

Representative Celia Israel Criticizes Kirk Watson for Return to Redlining

AUSTIN, TX - Mayoral candidate Celia Israel condemned fellow candidate Kirk Watson for his housing policy proposal that would perpetuate Austin's systemic failures and inequitable housing practices that have failed the people of this city for generations.

Watson's plan allows city council members and individual neighborhoods to veto housing proposals for working families they deem to not fit their neighborhood aesthetic. Housing and civil rights advocates have blasted this plan as a return to the policies that created our current housing crisis, making it even more difficult to build units that working families can afford.

"At a time when Austin needs to come together for new and



creative solutions to our housing crisis, Kirk Watson has offered a look to the past rather than looking ahead for more creative and forward looking solutions," said State Representative and candidate for mayor Celia Israel.

Watson's plan also harkens back to a dark time in Austin's history, when redlining policies dictated who was allowed to live in certain neighborhoods.

"Make no mistake, this policy will only divide us by income and race even more than we already are," stated Israel. "It's a throwback to decades past in Austin politics when the most affluent neighborhoods didn't have to share power with their more marginalized neighbors."

Israel concluded,

"To solve a crisis, you need bold leadership with an inclusive spirit that brings everyone to the table. You don't send them to their corners in a segregated city. Austin deserves better than the Watson redlining plan."

Rep. Israel continues to make housing the driving issue of her campaign, and has put forth a bold, progressive plan to tackle the housing and affordability crisis in Austin.

In a letter to the editor in this week's Austin Chronicle, Celia fleshed out how Watson's proposal ignores history and threatens to further price out working families. You can read that here.

More information about Rep. Celia Israel can be found at www.celiaforaustin.com.

Jan. 6 rioter from Texas sentenced to more than 7 years in prison

By Eric Neugeboren | The Texas Tribune

WASHINGTON - Guy Reffitt, a Texan who prosecutors said "lit the match" of the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, was sentenced to 7 1/4 years in prison on Monday, the longest sentence of any rioter to date but less than what the Justice Department had pushed for.

Reffitt, a 49-year-old from Wylie, was the first rioter to be convicted at trial in March when a jury found him guilty on five counts: two counts of civil disorder and one count each of obstruction of an official proceeding, entering and remaining on restricted grounds with a firearm and obstruction of justice.

Reffitt, who was a recruiter for the antigovernment movement The Three Percenters, never entered the Capitol but helped ignite the crowd "into an unstoppable



force" against police officers who were attempting to protect the Senate wing doors, a prosecutor at the trial said. He was equipped with a handgun, body armor, a helmet, radio and flex cuffs.

"Reffitt sought not just to stop Congress, but also to physically attack, remove, and replace the legislators who were serving in Congress. This is a quintessential example of an intent to both influence and retaliate against government conduct through intimidation or coercion," prosecutors wrote in a sentencing memo.

Prosecutors sought

to enhance his sentence to 15 years using a provision in federal law that allows for harsher punishment in terrorism cases, though Reffitt was not convicted of a terrorism charge. Reffitt's case is the first time prosecutors have sought a terrorism enhancement sentencing for a Jan. 6 rioter.

The longest sentence of all Jan. 6 rioters was previously 5 1/4 years, which was given to two defendants. Prosecutors claimed that because Reffitt was armed with a firearm, chose to go to trial and was a primary instigator in the riots, he deserved the longest sentence to date.