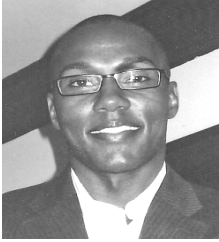


## Sports...



## Sports by Swift

By Harold T. Swift

Harold Swift is a doctoral student at Western Michigan University Kalamazoo, MI

## What Is Beef?

I initially wrote a piece on the changing football coaching positions in the NCAA and NFL, but after seeing the movie "Notorious" I was moved to talk about the movie's message and how it can apply to the world of sports nationally and locally.

The movie "Notorious" is the life story of Christopher (B.I.G.) Wallace and his rise to the top of the rap music industry (Adults only movie). I know you're thinking how in the world this movie's message can have any correlation to what's going on in sports. Just give me a chance to explain. For those of you that can remember the mid 90s and all the hoopla the media made of the East Coast vs. West Coast beef, bare with me while I catch everyone else up to speed.

In the early 90s Tupac Shakur was the hottest rapper in the rap game, until Christopher Wal-

lace aka Biggie Smalls came on the scene. The two were good friends before Biggie became popular, and Tupac would actually mentor Biggie on how to handle the fame from the media, fans, and industry. As Biggie began to gain respect from the media and fans as the best rapper in the game, an unfortunate incident happened. Tupac was shot in the lobby of a recording studio where Biggie was recording. Tupac believed that Biggie and Sean Combs had set him up to be killed. This triggered an all out East vs. West feud, not only in the rap music industry, but with the fans of these two regions.

This feud lasted until it took the lives of the two most influential artists in hip hop, Tupac (Age 25) and Biggie (Age 24). Two friends turned enemies, all due to a misconception of an incident, fueled by unsubstantiated rumors, and media hype.

So how does this tie into sports? Nationally, this same ignorance goes on between adult fans

of rivalry teams. We have this hatred for others based on what sports team they like. For example, you don't want to be wearing an Ohio State Buckeye jersey in Ann Arbor, MI and vice versa, or a New York Yankees or Mets t-shirt in Boston, MA. It may be dangerous for your health to do so.

Locally, it is related to the beefs going on in Kalamazoo amongst school age kids. And when I mean school age I'm talking K-12. Yes, elementary kids as well. For those that are unaware, kids are fighting each other based on what side of town they live on. The North Side vs. the South Side, and so on. This dislike starts at pee wee league age and continues through high school. This has led to fights at schools and sporting events, making it necessary for school administrators to hold games on weekends to prevent altercations from happening.

The million dollar question is, why do we Beef? Is it because we put too much emphasis on minute things? Could it be that we can't

distinguish what's real and what's not? Or, maybe we use sports too much as a stress reliever from our daily lives. I don't know the answer to these questions.

Rivalry games were created to sell tickets and are media driven. The beef amongst fans was once just during the game with a little trash talking, but now has carried over into our everyday lives. We need to get it back to its original place and that's on the playing field.

Unfortunately, it took the deaths of Tupac and Biggie for the hip hop community to understand how simple minded a beef really is and come together in unity. I'm hoping that our sports community will do the same thing before someone gets hurt, because rivalry games were not started to make people hate each other over a game they love.

*This is dedicated to my friend and brother in Christ, Kennedy Crawford. Rest in peace.*

## Money Matters...

## Responding to Customer Requests, Sears brings back Layaway in 2009 -- Layaway Offered Year-Round in Sears Full Line and Sears Hardware Stores

BlackPRWire -- Responding to savvy consumers who want to continue to manage their finances in the New Year while taking care of their families' needs, Sears announced it will offer its layaway program year-round. Just as it did during the holiday season, Sears will enable customers to reserve Sears' best merchandise, pay in installments and pick up the items within 90 days.

A customer from Nyssa, Oregon was just one example of the calls and emails Sears received, stating: "Layaway saved our Christmas this year! It is a wonderful tool for those of us that want to make purchases and do not have the funds to pay for it all up front."

"The response to Sears' offering layaway over the holidays was quite positive, and as a result, we decided to extend into 2009," said Don Hamblen, Sears' chief marketing officer. "The feedback from shoppers was incredible. By offering great values and an affordable way to pay for their purchases with layaway, we are confident that customers will be able to continue to give their families the things they want and deserve in the New

Year."

Another customer from Fairbank, Iowa sent the following message: "Stress Free Holiday Shopping! Layaway was very helpful to me and my family this year. Instead of stressing about holiday shopping within a few weeks before Christmas, I was able to shop once, put a small down payment down that day and then make a payment once every two weeks. Layaway took a lot of stress out of my life and no credit card debt to boot! Thanks for offering such a helpful service!"

Merchandise from a wide selection of Craftsman tools and storage, lawn & garden equipment, and patio furniture for spring and summer, as well as the well-respected Lands' End and Ty Pennington lines, along with jewelry and fitness equipment to fit every need are eligible for layaway.

The Sears 2009 layaway program does not affect the existing Fine Jewelry program. Sears will offer layaway in most full line and hardware stores, and layaway fees do apply.

Visit [sears.com/layaway](http://sears.com/layaway) for more information.

## Chris Gardner: From Street Life to Wall Street

BlackPRWire -- Fathers want to see their children live a life of happiness, and Chris Gardner is no different. What is different about his story is where he came from and how he got to the top of the ladder as the head of his own brokerage firm.

Chris was raised by his mother, a school teacher who kept him grounded in reality. Although his own father was absent, his uncles stepped in as role models and influenced him so much that he enlisted in the military after high school, as some of his uncles did. After serving in the military, Chris took a job as a medical supply salesman. He knew, however, that it wouldn't be his lifelong vocation after a conversation with a stranger in a red Ferrari encouraged him to go into stockbroking. Chris applied for stockbroking training, got accepted into a program and left his previous employment. By this time, he had gotten married and had a young son.

Then circumstances took a turn for the worse. First, the man who offered Chris the training slot was fired, then he faced jail time for \$1,200 in parking violations, and his wife walked out on him and their son. Chris was reduced to homelessness, sleeping

at nights in homeless shelters, public restrooms and in his office when he eventually did enter another training program through the assistance of another stockbroker. His minimal stipend wasn't enough to make ends meet.

Chris successfully completed the brokerage training program, passed his licensing exam and joined the firm of Dean Witter. Later, he would join Bear, Stearns & Company and become a top producer at the firm. Chris' biggest break would be the one he created himself when he launched his own brokerage firm, Gardner Rich & Company, in 1987, where he is currently president and CEO.

Even at the top, Chris hasn't forgotten what he went through at the lowest points. That is why Gardner Rich & Company donates at least 10% of its earnings to schools and educational projects. That is why he does motivational speaking to help others reach the top. That is why he has just released his memoirs, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, which will be made into a film later this year. That is what makes him an example of the meaning of Fathers' Day.

## Black Women Bridging the Economic Gap

by Abigail Wolfe

(BlackPRWire) According to recent information posted in *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (JBHE) a four-year college degree not only increases the earning potential of black Americans but almost completely closes the economic gap between black and white citizens who are equally credentialed. Government figures from the Census Bureau show that blacks gain a vastly different value from a four-year college degree when compared with varying

levels of educational achievement. African Americans with an associate's degree or two year community college degree improve their incomes by only 41% over blacks with only a high school diploma. Yet African Americans with a bachelor's degree, or four-year college degree, improve their incomes by 99.5% over that of blacks with high school diplomas alone!

Another interesting development in the progress of African Americans reveals an astonish-

ing gender gap as a progress report on the status of black Americans in higher education reveals that black women are now earning college degrees at twice the rate of their black male counterparts. In fact, the number of black women earning bachelor's degrees has increased by 55% since the 1970's compared with an increase of only 20% in black males. Even more extraordinary are the statistics on black women in the areas of law and medicine with the num-

ber of degree earners climbing 219% since the 1970's while only increasing 5% in black males. Surprising as these numbers seem, the exciting and continuous positive rise in educated African Americans within our nation sets great things in motion, fueling perpetual progress in a quickly changing world.

## Office space for Lease

Kalamazoo Two office spaces available for lease, very reasonable. Two office spaces available for lease, very reasonable.

Northside Non-Profit Housing Corporation, 118 W. North Street (Alexander Building, West of Ecumenical Senior Center and a

block South of the Kalamazoo Bus & Train Station). Space also available to hold classes.

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