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Fans are stuck with negative sports writers

Why is there so much negative reporting on the sports pages of Detroit's two daily newspapers?

This isn't a sudden reaction on my part. It has been a subconscious feeling with me for many years.

The thought came into sharp focus after reading reports about the pathetic performance of the Tigers on opening day. Detroit was poor, no question about that. And some idiot-type fans acted like apes.

But to read the dailies, you'd almost get the idea the entire season is a washout right now.

THAT REMINDED ME of a headline the morning after Earvin "Magic" Johnson made his debut in collegiate basketball two seasons ago. Johnson's performance was average, no theatrics, nothing special. He was your average nervous freshman.

The screaming sports page banner: "Where was the magic?"

The guy writing that head just wasn't about to be patient. He wanted instant stardom. When it didn't appear, out came the needle.

Some of the darndest things keep turning up, like the lethal slashes made by one writer about the departing University of Detroit basketball coach when he accepted a post in California.

"No big loss," the writer began. Then he proceeded to chop up the mentor and finally the whole U-D hardwood program, tabbing it a nickel-and-dime operation.

This same scribe will be the first to yell bloody murder when Titan basketball fortunes sag and promising inner-city players seem to shun what the writer calls a rinky-dink U-D.

Another writer accused the Pistons of dumping games in order to finish lower in the standings and get a prime draft pick. Great thought.

THIS PERCEPTION OF NEGATIVISM in metro Detroit sports reporting has spread across the nation. A former Detroit sports writer, who now travels coast to coast while writing books and doing newspaper consulting work, recently spoke to this point.

He said that Detroit writers have the reputation

in professional athletic circles for displaying about the worst attitudes anywhere. Everything they touch seems to turn to sour grapes.

Now that's a real shame because Detroit papers have some of the most talented writers anywhere. All of us have seen brilliant reporting and analysis in the sports pages of our two dailies.

Yet there seems to be a fascination for putting the knock on everything.

Even the people doing sports for television often try to parrot their brother wordmen. Their little digs last only a few seconds, and they never can be quite as offensive as some of the things that are printed.

SO WHAT TO DO? Well, I'm afraid, little or nothing.

Oh, sure, there can be letters to editors, and under just the right conditions they may help.

But readers probably have to do the same things athletes, coaches, general managers and club owners have been doing for years — accept what is served up.

What I'm afraid is that we have too many egos, all eager to flash their opinions, and not enough newspaper reporters writing about sports.

At least one person who worked in the athletic department of a large Michigan university has told me that officials there absolutely refused to talk with Detroit sports writers.

Every ruse imaginable was used to avoid them. About the only time coaches and athletic directors ever were nailed was during weekly press luncheons or at mob scenes in sweaty under-the-stadium rooms following games.

Sports scribes hate this sort of thing, especially when the TV boys come with their cameras. But the system seems to have bred the conditions. College athletic brass seem bent on making it as uncomfortable for sports writers as they appear to make it for coaches and athletic directors.

ALL OF WHICH REMINDS me of a sage observation made years ago by an Ohio newsman.

"Printed words are like bullets," he said. "And they can be just as deadly."

Cooperation needed in solar energy research, expert says

To stimulate solar energy development, America needs specific national goals, says a University of Michigan expert.

"The goals probably should be in the form of the quantities of solar energy that would be produced at various dates," Prof. John A. Clark of the U-M mechanical engineering department says.

"For example, a reasonable goal for applications in residential heating and cooling, industrial process heating, and electrical power generation might represent approximately five to seven percent of the national energy needs by the year 2000."

"The effect of such goals is to establish much needed markets for solar conversion systems, a necessary stimulus to the present solar industry."

The basic question, Clark says, is how to stimulate the development of new, improved and more cost-effective solar energy conversion systems.

One way to accomplish this, he suggests, is a closer government-industry partnership, perhaps in the form of a

consortium of private industry, government agencies and user groups.

Energy is a national problem, basically a political problem at the national level, Clark notes. And "by the year 2000, the utilization of both conventional and alternate energy sources should be firmly established in the national energy picture."

Solar energy — contrary to the popular belief that it is "free" — is probably the most expensive form of energy today with the exception of passive solar applications, Clark says.

"The practical utilization of solar energy requires the investment of considerable capital," he points out. The solar industry is suffering largely because "of economic penalties that the solar installation would impose today in competition with traditional sources of energy."

To stimulate the development of cost-effective solar energy, Clark says "there must be a national effort to accelerate not only the development of the solar conversion systems, but also the establishment of the markets

through the setting of national goals.

"The present federally funded demonstration programs are too small to be considered truly market stimulators."

In addition, Clark says, "there is a great need for new research in the fields of innovative design, manufacturing, installation and maintenance techniques, and similar efforts in packaging and shipping of solar energy conversion systems of all kinds."

"Through such efforts, significant cost reductions can be expected and would place solar conversion systems clearly in economic competition with conventional sources."

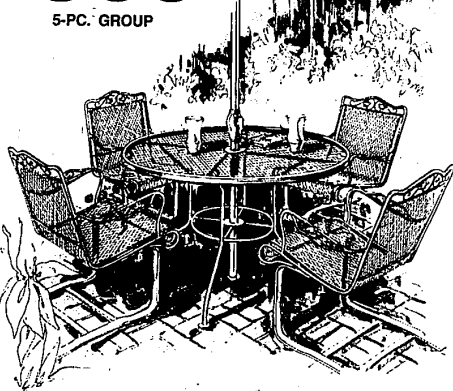
To accomplish these research efforts, Clark suggests "there be increased cooperation between the federal efforts in solar energy and the private industry" — through a consortium.

Clark, a former chairman of the U-M mechanical engineering department, has been active for the past 33 years in the general field of energy conversion.



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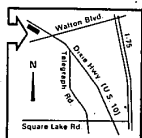
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