

**The
BLACK
C o M M e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

Issue 173 – March 2, 2006

Letter to Shani Davis: Show 'Em Your South Side
by Roger Brown
Guest Commentator

[click here to become a](#)

bc PAID SUBSCRIBER

(Use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page)

Printer Friendly – PDF Format



Copyright © 2002 - 2006
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved

On February 18, Chicago native Shani Davis won the 1,000-meter speed skating competition at the Winter Olympics, becoming the first African-American ever to win the gold medal for an individual event in the games. What followed was the kind of slap in the face that has become an all-too-common smudge in the area of race relations, fueled by white teammate Chad Hedrick. But Shani Davis is a Chicagoan, and it quickly became apparent that he knows a good alley fight when he sees one.

Dear Shani,

Consider the odds. How many ice skating rinks do they have in the Hyde Park neighborhood where you grew up? Your teammate, Chad Hedrick, either didn't know, or didn't care that you were from the South Side of Chicago, a bastion of strong backs and even stronger constitutions. He didn't know, or didn't care, that you traveled for miles to practice your chosen sport. He didn't know, or didn't care, that kids in your neighborhood teased you and even chased you home from school, because ice skating is not exactly an indication of being down wit the brothas. He didn't know, or didn't care, that when you could have been embittered by this, you instead embraced your culture and reached out to young people, and you still do.

Worst of all, Chad Hedrick didn't know, or didn't care, that all of this made you stronger, physically and mentally. So when he diss'd you on the occasion of your Olympic gold, he had no idea what he was in for.

You had congratulated him when he won a gold medal in the 5,000-meter speed skating competition. But he chose not to congratulate you when you won the 1,000 meter gold. He felt you were being a poor teammate because you had chosen not to take part in yet another race, a team competition that would have given him the chance to satisfy his greed for yet another medal. Come on, now. Perhaps you should have carried his bags, too.

The Black Commentator – Letter to Shani Davis: Show 'Em Your South Side

Then he had the nerve to say it would all be settled in the 1,500-meter race, when you and he would oppose one another. He was so right.

The Italian won the gold in that race. You came in second to win the silver, and guess who came in behind you. Chad Hedrick had to settle for the bronze. It was, indeed, settled. Almost.

There was still the media frenzy to contend with. In the news conference that followed, each of you tried to remain cordial as questions continued for a half hour. Finally, you put him on Front Street. With Hedrick sitting right there, you called him out, for all the world to see, for failing to congratulate you on your accomplishment in the 1,000 meters.

He was stunned. His reaction was of the "how dare you" variety, as if Rosa Parks had just denied him a seat on the bus. After a very long and pregnant pause, he rambled a repeat of his contempt that you didn't help him win that other medal. But there was really little he could say. He'd lost the race, and now, he'd lost the alley fight.

At that moment, you became Muhammad Ali, refusing to step forward to be inducted into the Army. You were Doug Williams, spanking the Denver Broncos and their great white hope, John Elway, in the Super Bowl. You were Tiger Woods and the Williams sisters, being true to yourself and your undeniable success. You were Tommy Smith and John Carlos, making a statement about what you believe, and not caring that so many would miss the point entirely.

Some white folks have sounded-off about what you, a Black man, should have said amid the racial tensions, as if they had a clue. You likely would have been a story about racial progress in America, exemplified in a white-dominated sport. It's the kind of story that makes white folks feel good about themselves and their own "tolerance."

So when you see them describe you as "arrogant," think of it as code for "true to yourself," as seen through the eyes of people who still don't get it. And take it as a compliment. Back in Chicago, your fans, Black and white, would expect no less.

You showed 'em your South Side.

Roger Brown can be contacted at rogerbrown2006@aol.com.