

How Sports 'Trap' Black Youngsters

Stanford Official's Radical Proposal

By Ron Thomas

Henry Organ, an associate director in Stanford's fund-raising operations, was walking down an East Palo Alto street with a friend. A black high school student, whom Organ's friend knew, was walking towards them.

"Where's your books?" Organ's friend asked the student.

"He had his woman in one hand," Organ remembered, "and his track shoes in the other. And he said, 'It ain't too cool to be seen with books.'"

"I hope it was an isolated case, but I'm afraid it isn't. And the thing that troubles me is that there was no fear (in the student) about not having a formal education."

For that and other reasons, Organ believes that high-level athletics have been relatively worthless to thousands of black youth. He'd ban all varsity competition if he could.

"If that pursuit was of value, the black community would be utopia," Organ said. "As some of the stars drive around in Rolls Royces, most black people are still walking because of a lack of decent public transportation in their communities... The black community is in need of health scientists and technicians, not infielders; business people and economists, not quarterbacks.

"It's a drastic problem requiring a drastic solution."

About 15 years ago, Organ noticed the soaring numbers of black young men who aspired to pro sports careers and million-dollar contracts. His initial interest developed into a well-researched hobby. Today in Organ's office, he can pull out several bound volumes of news clippings pertaining to black athletes.



By John Storey

Henry Organ says the black community needs scientists, not infielders

Except for boxers, black pro athletes were almost unheard of until professional baseball, basketball and football were integrated in the 1940s and '50s. Now Organ believes many black families' obsession with athletics as economic salvation has become so "cancerous" — even "terminal" — that it's impossible to strike a proper balance between academics and athletics in black communities.

"I don't question the right of any black child to pursue any career, or question the right of any parent to encourage a child to go into athletics," Organ said. "But when it comes to institutional

See Page 51, Col. 4

An Athlete Who Found Another Way

By Gary Arnold
Washington Post

Unlike Sylvester Stallone, who seems a larger specimen on the screen than he is in person, Carl Weathers looks imposing in three dimensions.

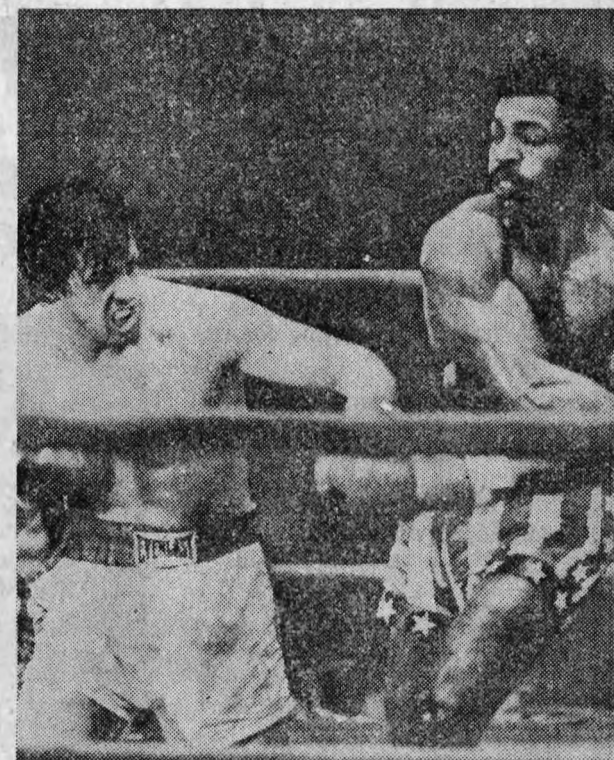
At 6-foot-2 and a muscular 205, there's no incongruity between his crunching, big-pawed handshake and deep, commanding voice and his screen impersonation of black heavyweight champion Apollo Creed in "Rocky II."

Weathers is on the edge of what could become a major starring career. He has gained much along the 31-year trail from New Orleans, where he was born, to the San Fernando Valley, where he now lives with his wife, Mary Ann, and their two sons.

The oldest of three children born to a day laborer and his wife, Weathers recalls New Orleans as "a heavy-duty city when I was a kid. That was still the Deep South when I was growing up, and we were in the bowels of the city. I wasn't a fighter by nature. I held it all inside. It was not a happy time. In fact, when I'm feeling sorry for myself, I remember it as a perfectly miserable time. I think I was consciously trying to escape from a very early age.

"In the streets they'd kill you, literally. It was my curse to be a sensitive kid. Certain things I was drawn to — like doing a little acting or singing in the choir — had no credibility on the street. And I was too ignorant and intimidated to try to explain why they seemed valuable to me. The other guys would say, 'What is this man?' and all I could do was mumble.

"I didn't get an active desire to play along with the peer group pressure, to be macho machismo, until I got into the eighth grade and woke up to the fact that only the guys in sports seemed to attract



Carl Weathers (right) brawled with Sylvester Stallone in 'Rocky', and became famous

the good-looking girls. That's how I got my first girl, by going out for football."

Weathers was impressive enough as an eighth-grade football player to earn a scholarship to St. Augustine, a prestigious Catholic high school for black male students. "If you were a black kid in New Orleans," Weathers said, "it seemed like an overwhelming privilege and opportunity. For me it was as awesome as going into outer space."

Despite his attachment to the school, Weathers moved to California after his junior year following a

See Page 51, Col. 2

Organ

From Page 47

support (meaning educational entities, the government and fundraising organizations) of exploitation, then I have a right to speak out."

For instance, "I have serious doubts when a high school district will allow an athlete to participate in three or four sports for four years. I think students who do this are predominantly black."

Organ deplures the impact of what he calls "The Athletic Industrial Complex:" including pro sports executives, athletic directors, coaches, players, cheerleaders, television commentators and fans who associate athletics with patriotism.

"The typical scenario I see is this adoring father who throws a toy football into the bassinette, and buys his son a T-shirt with #44 on it when he's 1-year-old," Organ said. "If you figure a 4 or 5-year-old kid has seen 200 to 300 games on television, and all the books he reads center around athletics, then these roots are deep and not easily overcome 10-12 years later."

Organ also fears that many black parents and organizations mistakenly believe that athletics are black males' only ticket to financial security.

White children, Organ contends, are less likely to become spellbound by athletics because their neighborhoods provide more varied role models and "the white kid is starting to believe he is not supposed to be as good as the black athlete — so why try?"

Organ seeks to limit organized athletics to intramural or summer programs. "September to June should be strictly business," he said. And, by eliminating varsity sports, Organ believes black colleges can "devote their limited resources to academic pursuits."

There are some obvious arguments against Organ's proposal. How would he respond to the coach who cites black athletes who have received an education that would have been impossible without an athletic scholarship?

"I can't question the coach's facts, but I can question his theory," Organ said. "I believe, if the athlete put as much effort into academics as athletics, he could be here on an educational scholarship."

Organ also believes the time-honored, supposed benefits of athletics (like learning teamwork and poise under pressure) can be gained through more educational activities — such as a debate team.

Organ has no children, but if he did, "I would tell them they can only participate in one sport a year," he said.

"In addition, I would probably enforce the philosophy my brother used with his five sons: 'You study when you're fresh, and play when you're tired.' I think most children do the opposite."