

Tuesday, June 15. 2004

Ralph Wiley

My 200th entry in this blog is unfortunately to be a sad one: Ralph Wiley, one of the best, most interesting, most provocative, most original sportswriters around, passed on at home on Sunday.

He was just 52, and his age and sudden death are eerily similar to Doug Pappas's passing. Like Pappas, Wiley often wrote things contrary to the accepted stream of thought of the American public, and like Pappas, he did it well enough that reading his work was an aesthetic pleasure as well as an intellectual one.

I'm not familiar enough with Wiley's career body of work, but I read a number of his columns from his time at ESPN's Page 2, and they were always engaging, always creative, and always aggressive. Aggressiveness can be a distraction or an annoyance if it isn't done well, but this never seemed true of Wiley's work; rather, it was just all the more obvious that he felt true passion about his subject. Wiley's passion was not simply that of an admirer of sports and athletes, either. He wrote, more than any other sportswriter I know, about free speech, politics, and, most of all, about race. Wiley realized that the country still has a lot to work out in the field of race relations, and he never backed off from saying so loudly.

As many said when the news of Doug Pappas's death was heard, we can only hope that writers absorb the lessons Wiley was trying to teach and continue down the path he blazed.

UPDATE: Chris Lehmann has written a little something about Wiley as well. It's weird that of all the sports blogs I read, no one has really mentioned this. On the other hand, Wiley wasn't really known as a baseball writer, so I guess he was not really on the baseball blogosphere's radar.

Posted by jason in Reading at 18:39