



## Ron Artest, Meet Charlie Sifford

*By Debbie Waitkus, Golf for Cause*

There's been lots of talk over the past several days on the airwaves and around the water coolers about the m  le   at the Indiana Pacers-Detroit Pistons basketball game. We've seen replay after replay on television of the foul on the court and the ensuing altercation on the court and the fight in the stands with the fans.



As many of you know, David Stern, the NBA Commissioner, administered some hefty fines and suspensions to the players. I'm reminded of those times my parents wanted to make an example out of me, dishing out a punishment that put the fear of death into my younger siblings' minds.

Now, I'm not suggesting that the penalties the NBA handed down to the players are unreasonable. What I do find troubling is that the players chose to cross the line – the boundary separating them from the fans. But the fans struck first, you say. A fan tossed beer onto Ron Artest.

The issue is professionalism. As an athlete, you can get caught up in the moment. The adrenaline is flowing; you become invincible. Yet, professional athletes, along with a paycheck, accept a level of responsibility, a code of ethics and a rulebook. These ethics and rules apply to all professionals, athlete or not. Even a comedian being heckled doesn't run out into the crowd and beat up the heckler(s). Unfortunately, Ron Artest, Stephen Jackson, Jermaine O'Neal, Ben Wallace, Anthony Johnson, Reggie Miller, Chauncey Billups, Elden Campbell and Derrick Coleman all violated the rules of professional basketball.

On November 16<sup>th</sup>, Charlie Sifford was inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame along with Isao Aoki, Tom Kite, and Marlene Stewart Streit. Charlie did not attain his Hall of Fame status by winning a designated number of PGA tour events, but rather for his lifetime achievement in the sport.

In 1961 Charlie became the first African American to play full time on the PGA tour. Charlie was 41 at the time. 1961. Not the best of times for African Americans in the United States. The PGA tour wasn't much better in its treatment toward African Americans – its rules delineated that participation was for Caucasians only.

Charlie endured plenty of things that would cause our blood to boil. Heckling, insults, and the "n" word are all obvious. On top of that, Charlie had to deal with things like:

- A caddie who would move his ball without his knowledge, such that he'd incur a penalty stroke;
- A caddie who would intentionally mis-club him or provide incorrect advice;
- An official mis-explaining a ruling such that he would incur a penalty stroke or two;
- A spectator who would pick up his ball causing Charlie to declare his ball lost;
- Fans spitting on him and making noise in his backswing.

Is your blood boiling yet?

Gary Player, who delivered Charlie's introduction at the World Golf Hall of Fame Induction, identified with some of Charlie's journey. Gary, from South Africa, endured a dumping of ice water by spectators who disagreed with his country's apartheid politics.

Charlie, like Gary, was always a professional. With his internal temperature rising, he never crossed the line, going beyond the ropes to fight it out with a fan. Nor did he quit. He maintained his composure and played on. For those of us entertaining a thousand swing thoughts flying around in our heads while we stand over our ball, Charlie's experiences evoke new meaning to the word "focus."

Charlie is an outstanding inductee and representative of the World Golf Hall of Fame. His poise and dignity are symbolic of the traditions and ethics embodied by the game. With his adrenaline flowing (or not), Charlie consistently conducted himself as a professional. He paved the way for other African Americans to play golf professionally (Charlie refers to Tiger Woods as his grandson) and serves as a role model to all of us.

Ron Artest, suspended for the entire NBA season, now has time to work on his rap career as well as his golf game. Seems like he and his cohorts could use a walk in Charlie's golf shoes and a little rub of the green. Golf is a game with rules based on safety of others, care of the course, and fairness. The Rules apply to professionals, amateurs, hackers, and beginners alike. Golf might help Ron and company gain some insight about being professional athletes and the relevant etiquette, on and off the court. *Turn Golf into Gold.*  
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