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Foul play

The Pistons aren't the only "bad boys." A referee should have blown a whistle on the Detroit media.

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Based on what's been reported, there are few reasons for believing that Isiah Thomas is involved in gambling. But, there are many reasons for wondering who's out to get him and why reporters cooperated with that source. There's also reason to wonder why Detroit news media opted for titillation with no regard to the damage the reports would do to Thomas — or even to their own credibility.

The strongest piece of the journalists' case against Thomas is that the basketball star's checks were subpoenaed as part of a federal investigation.

Incriminating?

The style of the story suggests *something* is going on. The audience was told that, through his lawyer, Thomas "admitted" to cashing checks at his friend's grocery store. In news lingo, subjects "admit" to some wrongdoing. Otherwise, they "say" or "tell reporters."



been fair to the subject of all this speculation.

It was thoughtful of Channel 2 to hold the story until after the last playoff game. But would this espoused concern for the team have evaporated if the station thought another newsroom would break the story before then?

And what did they get out of being first?

If Thomas is later implicated in the gambling scandal, Channel 2 can pat itself on the back for its perspicacity. If Thomas is not charged, news staffers can reassure themselves with platitudes such as “the story would probably have come out anyway,” or “celebrities learn to take such rumors in stride.”

Let’s take a look at what they didn’t tell the audience about that incriminating subpoena. Were Thomas’ checks scooped up in a broad net that took in a lot of others or was he singled out for investigation? It makes a difference.

If his checks were among others, who were those people? Other prominent locals? Neighbors? Everyone who had cashed checks over a certain amount? The only reason for reporters not sharing this information is that the situation looks more suspicious without it. Any source who would know about the subpoena would be likely to know its context. Or, if not, reporters could have let the audience know why that information was not available.

And what about that source? Who might that be? Journalists haven’t offered us any basis for identification, but we can guess.

It’s not unusual for law enforcement to “deputize” a news organization by using it to make a case. If journalists were cooperating with the FBI as it tests speculations, reporters might as well wear badges.

Perhaps the source is “someone close to the investigation” who just doesn’t much like Thomas. If so, then the reporter is helping someone else misuse his power and position.

It’s one thing to be the faucet for official leaks when the safety of the community or government operations are at stake. Isn’t this misuse of investigative information on the part of the source itself a story worthy of journalistic attention?

Or, perhaps, the source is a disgruntled acquaintance, close to Thomas rather than the investigation. (No one can seriously believe that a friend approached the reporter thinking that nationwide publicity was the way to help Isaiah.) If so, then journalists are letting personal vendettas get in the way of editorial judgment.

Even if reporters do eventually come forward with a solid story about Thomas, the audience may have a hard time believing it. The anti-media bias that has developed as a result of the speculative, premature story may be difficult to overcome.



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