

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXV, Number 178, 13 November 1991 — Spectrum Magic's greatest contribution  
[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

## Spectrum

### Magic's greatest contribution

By Daniel Krisch

When Magic Johnson announced his retirement from professional basketball last Thursday, little did he realize that he was, in essence, presiding over his own funeral. Magic might as well have been killed in an automobile accident for all the eulogizing that went on afterwards; Magic Johnson the basketball player might have retired, but Earvin Johnson the person is alive and well. Hard as it may be to believe, Magic now has the chance to do more for the fight against AIDS than he ever did for basketball.

What his story has exposed is how ignorant America still is on the subject of AIDS. Because of who he is, Magic can rid us of some of the misconceptions about the disease and can also wake up America to the danger it now faces. Although it would be wonderful to see Magic whip a blind, left-handed pass to a cutting James Worthy just one more time, I'll take the loss so that he can bring his talents to a more important endeavor.

What amazed me the most was all of the stereotypical attitudes

toward AIDS this has brought out. When Magic and his doctors made it clear that he acquired HIV as a result of a heterosexual relationship, they hopefully destroyed the notion that AIDS is a homosexual or drug-user's disease. Unfortunately, these are two very common perceptions. Listening to a call-in talk show on WFAN, I was astonished by the number of people who called in to say, "I hope this doesn't mean he's gay," or, "Do you think he's been doing drugs?" Because Magic has categorically stated that he is heterosexual, maybe mainstream America will realize that anyone can get HIV.

Doctors estimate that at least one million Americans are HIV positive and do not even know it. Yet people were calling in to WFAN on Friday to decry Magic's endorsement of condom use and his emphasis on safe sex. One man complained, "I can't believe Magic would encourage promiscuity like that." What this man and America still fail to understand is that there is a difference between encouraging promiscuity and emphasizing safe sex. Magic admitted how naive he had been to think that it could not hap-

pen to him. But HIV can infect anyone, famous or not, athlete or not, homosexual or not, drug user or not. This is the new reality, and it is time America faced up to it.

It is understandable that Magic's friends and fans would be saddened by his untimely retirement, but the atmosphere after Magic's press conference was akin to that at a funeral. This is symptomatic of the mistaken belief that people who are HIV-positive are nothing more than walking corpses. This is very far from the truth. People who test positive for the HIV-virus can, on the average, expect to have five to 10 more years before the disease really starts to affect them. (Magic kept joking to the press that he was going to be around bugging them for quite a while. Hopefully the press and the public will get the message.)

Magic has the ability to do wonderful things as a spokesman for the dangers of HIV. From a purely financial point of view, there is no end to the good he could do. While making an issue of money may

**Daniel Krisch is a Columbia College first-year student.**

seem crass at first, a cure for this disease will only be found through research, and that research is very costly. There are a lot of rich people who may have ignored this cause before but who will now flock to it because Magic is a standard-bearer. In addition, Magic has the visibility and charm to keep America's energy focused on this issue. The vibrant force of his personality will prevent mainstream America from forgetting about AIDS, or

from dismissing it as someone else's problem. Magic's type of drawing power is what the fight against AIDS has needed for a long time because people will listen to him simply because he is Magic.

Not too long ago Gary Trudeau wrote a series of Doonesbury cartoons in which one of the characters has AIDS. When the character is asked if he ever gets angry, he answers, "Not usually, but then I think that it took six years and 21,000 dead for Reagan to acknowledge that there was a problem, [and I get mad]." The struggle against AIDS has lacked a recognizable face for a long time, but now it has one of the most known and loved faces in the world.

Last Thursday night this basketball fan cried because one of his heroes was gone. But at the same time I knew that Magic was what AIDS sufferers everywhere badly needed because he will deal with the challenge of our nation's ignorance the same way he deals with everything else: he will overcome it with a smile.

