



 [click to print this page](#)

Sad to say, but Young's problems were predictable

By Jason Whitlock

Jason Whitlock brings his edgy and thought-provoking style to FOXSports.com. Columnist for the Kansas City Star, he has won the National Journalism Award for Commentary for "his ability to seamlessly integrate sports and social commentary and to challenge widely held assumptions along the racial divide."

Updated: September 11, 2008, 11:55 AM EST

I'm going to do my best to avoid turning this into an I-told-you-so column.

But the truth is, I told you before the 2006 draft that Vince Young was [primed for NFL failure](#). He entered the league with an attitude, mindset and supporting cast totally unprepared to survive the pressure, challenge and responsibility that goes along with the most prestigious and difficult job in all of sports.

When I explained all of this in 2006, my naive and misguided critics called me an Uncle Tom. Yeah, they ripped me for attempting to issue a young black kid a warning about what awaited him in The League and the attitude he would need to cope and excel.

Some people foolishly think it's every black media member's job to assist in the mental and emotional crippling of black youth. We're supposed to blow rainbows up the asses of every black athlete who "makes it" and assure him/her that anyone who utters a word of criticism is a jealous bigot or irrational sellout.

So, no, I'm not surprised Vince Young tried to quit in the middle of Sunday's game after throwing a second interception and hearing boos from Titans fans frustrated by his inability to read a defense or throw accurately. I'm not all that shocked that two days later Jeff Fisher called the police and asked them to hunt down his inconsistent quarterback. I'm not surprised the Titans team psychologist is apparently worried that Vince Young is suffering depression.

And I'm really not surprised that Vince Young's mother told *The Tennessean* that her baby boy needs a little space and a lot of love and support.

The question is, when Young rebounds from his emotional abyss and recovers from his knee injury, what kind of love and support are we going to give him? Are the people who already love Young going to replant their heads in Young's rear end and their hands in his wallet? Or will a few people within Team Vince do the right thing and level with him about what he needs to do to make it in the NFL as a quarterback?

Vince Young, like a lot of young African-American men, desperately needs to hear the truth from the people who love him. Too often we pave the road to failure for black boys by believing the cure for bigotry and there is still plenty of bigotry in America is the ability to recognize it in (and blame it for) everything. That cure has more negative side effects than most of the drugs trumpeted by the pharmaceutical companies in television commercials. That cure serves as a convenient crutch, and turns a talent such as Vince Young into a quitter the moment adversity strikes. That cure helped land Michael Vick in jail.

Everyone told Vince Young and Michael Vick the NFL would be easy. They'd revolutionize the QB position with their legs, and they could pop bottles, roll with a posse and pretend to be Jay-Z in their spare time.

It just doesn't work. Not for Young or Vick. Not for Matt Leinart. Not for anyone who wants to star at the position and avoid the boo-birds.

No one revolutionizes the starting quarterback position. The position revolutionizes the person playing it. Just ask Donovan McNabb. He figured it out and changed his game. Over the objection of idiots, McNabb developed his skills as a pocket passer. He concentrated on becoming a student of the game. If he can stay healthy over the next three or four years, McNabb will surpass Warren Moon as the best black quarterback ever to play the game.

Unfortunately, there are still people, especially black people, who don't appreciate McNabb. They think he let "us" down by de-emphasizing his athleticism, and they criticize him for being cozy with his organization the way Peyton Manning is with the Colts and Brady is with the Patriots.

McNabb doesn't get to enjoy the luxury of being a company man the way other franchise QBs in their prime do.

But McNabb has never threatened to quit or asked out of a game because the Philly fans were too rough. McNabb understands that in some instances the scrutiny of a black quarterback might be a tad more intense than that of a white one. He also understands that the best way to combat it isn't whining. It's performance. It's work ethic. It's professionalism.

It's not a coincidence that McNabb comes from a supportive, two-parent household.

I bring that up not to castigate Vince Young and his mother. I don't even know the story of Young's upbringing.

I raise the issue to point out that in modern professional sports with the astronomical players' salaries ownership and management examine the upbringing of the athletes and factor that into their decision-making.

Vick's failure, Young's potential failure and the guaranteed money they were given will make ownership more reluctant to anoint another kid from the 'hood a franchise quarterback straight out of college.

It's not about color. It's about fitting the profile of someone who can handle all that goes along with being an NFL quarterback. If I'm an owner, I spend my quarterback dollars on young men who were raised by strong fathers. It wouldn't be an infallible system, but on average I bet I'd hit more winners than if I turned over the leadership of my team to a kid who isn't used to having a strong male authority figure.

As black people, we need to ask ourselves whether we are doing a good job preparing our boys for positions of immense leadership, responsibility and scrutiny.

You are going to get criticized playing quarterback. If your instinct is to dismiss the criticism as racist, maybe you shouldn't play the position. If you are surrounded by people who spend every waking minute telling you that you can do no wrong and that everyone who criticizes you is a bigot, then maybe you shouldn't play quarterback.

Talk to Whitlock

The position requires thick skin and genuine self-confidence. If you need four or five male groupies with you at all times, a half million dollars of jewelry around your neck and wrists and a dozen tattoos to feel confident, then maybe you should play wide receiver or start rapping.

The average NFL fan has no idea how much time a franchise spends working on self-esteem issues with a typical player. You think these guys are self-assured. Many of them are not. They self-medicate with booze, drugs, steroids, bling, women and attention-getting stunts such as name changes.

Remember when Terrell Owens' assistant claimed he had 25 million reasons to live? It was an accidental moment of clarity and honesty. Too many players have their whole sense of self-worth tied up in their contracts.

It doesn't take much to crack a man with no real identity, especially if he's grown accustomed to having all of his shortcomings rationalized.

You can e-mail Jason Whitlock at Ballstate68@aol.com.

...

Read this article at:

<http://msn.foxsports.com/nfl/story/8550254/Sad-to-say,-but-Young's-problems-were-predictable>

 [click to print this page](#)

© 2008 Fox Sports Interactive