

Stand & deliver Stern

Say anything.

It is what Isiah Thomas did in his deposition, the one he now tells the Rev. Al Sharpton was "spliced." Actually, it was an excerpt, and Thomas' lawyers knew it was an excerpt, one taken from hours and hours of that deposition. And you don't play something like that in court without first presenting what you intend to play to the other side, and the judge.

As always, there is Thomas' version of things and what really happened, and what really happened in Judge Gerard Lynch's courtroom was that neither Thomas' lawyers, nor lawyers from Madison Square Garden, made any objection to the excerpts of that deposition that Anucha Browne Sanders' lawyers played in court.

Lawyers, oh by the way, are more than happy to release Thomas' entire videotaped deposition for the whole world to review. All they need is the approval of Thomas' lawyers, and the Garden's.

Say anything, and keep saying it. Every day Thomas keeps talking about this, how very, very innocent he is, every time he is asked another question. You wonder when Commissioner David Stern or James Dolan, wherever he is, is going to tell him to shut up. Or maybe nobody can do that because nobody ever has.

Here is Thomas before an exhibition game at the Garden the other night:

"Hopefully, we'll one day get our true story out."

It is the most preposterous version of all. Is he kidding? He had three weeks in federal court to get his "true" story out. Isiah Thomas had two law firms and five lawyers at the trial. The Garden and Dolan had three more law firms with so many lawyers that you needed a glossy game-night program to keep them straight.

Then there were the add-ons, the Garden shills who testified against Browne Sanders, the high-priced consultants, the investigators, all of them adding to Dolan's payroll the way Thomas constantly has since he got to town.

You would say that their side had more than ample opportunity to present the "truth." And nothing but.

What has David Stern done to this point? Danced like this is "Dancing with the Stars."

First Stern issued quotes that said nothing, acted as if this were still a case of "he said, she said" even though the jury clearly believed what she said. Now he blames the New York Times for saying that he planned no action against Thomas or Dolan or the Knicks, as he continued to travel through foreign countries spreading the gospel.

Now he says he wants to talk to his Board of Governors about this. Really? What does he expect them to say about another owner? Maybe at that meeting somebody will explain

to Stern that if he lets Dolan, the big boss of the Garden, get away with sexual harassment in his running of the Garden, then Stern, the big boss of the NBA, is no better running his league.

We can't find Dolan right now. Somebody better be able to find the NBA commissioner on this when he is done spanning the world. Already people are wondering how differently this would play out say, in the NFL, where Roger Goodell does not require focus groups to decide how to make the right call. Or what Bud Selig would have done if a baseball owner behaved the way Dolan did.

Stern cannot let this stand, not with Thomas, and especially not with Dolan. Thomas is the one getting the most attention right now because he is out there almost every day. Good. Sexual harassment is a terrible thing, and he got called on it, not by the media, but by a jury, in federal court, where a smile and a soft voice and speeches about a hard childhood finally didn't get him over.

But you know what is just as bad, maybe worse? Firing someone because they have opposed sexual harassment, because they have said something about it.

That is what Chuck Dolan's son Jimmy did.

"The anti-discrimination laws can't function properly if people believe they can get fired for making a complaint," Kevin Mintzer, one of Anucha Browne Sanders' lawyers, said on Friday. "The fact that the CEO

of a major public company was found personally responsible for that kind of retaliation is extraordinary."

Isiah Thomas, who started this, wants the truth to come out? There's his truth right there. Now David Stern has to do something about it.

If he doesn't, these guys beat a rap with him that they couldn't beat in court.

■ ■ ■

Despite all the questions in Yankeeville about Torre and A-Rod and Mo and Posada, the Mets have even more hard questions between the end of this season and the beginning of the next one.

Because this is the point where they have to make sure they don't mess up a good thing.

Because as bad as the Yankee ending was, the ending for the Mets was much, much worse, not just because of the historic lead they blew, but because for now that ending stops whatever momentum they had been building under Omar Minaya and Willie Randolph.

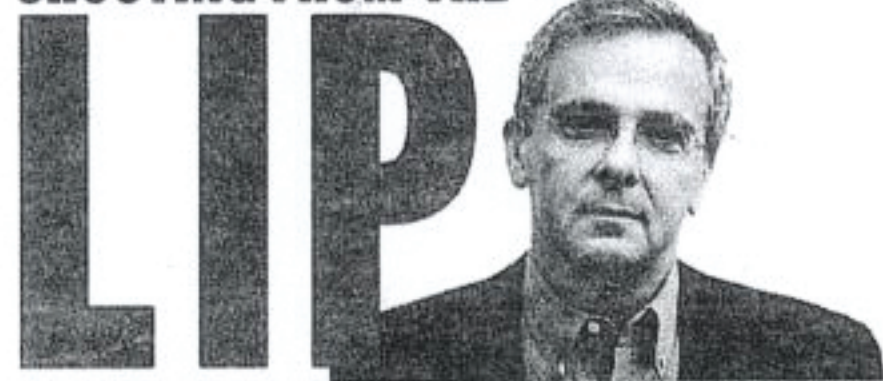
This was the latest example, but not the last, in sports of the old Tyson line, the one about everybody having a plan 'til they get hit.

The Mets got hit and had nothing and, after a record-setting year at the ticket windows, made their fans feel more let down than at any other time in the team's history.

And when the World Series is over, we will begin to see how they come back from that.

We will see how they answer their

SHOOTING FROM THE



BY MIKE LUPICA

own questions about starting pitching and Billy Wagner, about Paul Lo Duca and Carlos Delgado, about Lastings Milledge, about a bullpen that performed as well down the stretch as a bunch of guys from the old East Side Bar League.

They must ask hard questions about Jose Reyes most of all, who went from being called the most exciting young player in the game in the first half of the season to someone who belonged in a conga line after the All-Star break.

The Mets showed no heart down the stretch and there is no way of knowing what the last two weeks of the season will do to the collective heart of the team next season.

The Braves always used to come right back after another postseason disappointment.

The Yankees keep coming back. Will come back this time.

Now we see how the Mets do, after not even making the postseason.

It's no fun being Brian Cashman right now.

Minaya has more work to do.

And now, switching gears, just ever-so-slightly:

Is Fred Thompson, like, awake?

The last episode of "Curb Your Enthusiasm," the one with John McEnroe in it, was as funny as Larry David has ever given us.

Jim Dwyer's "About New York" column in the Times is always a wonderful read.

I give Coach Mangini another Yogi line this week, one he used once with Joe Torre when the Yankees got off to a slow start.

I asked No. 8 if he had any advice for Joe and he said, "Yeah, tell him to win some games."

No kidding, who needs Dr. Phil when you're dispensing self-help stuff like this?

Imagine what kind of press Tom Coughlin would have gotten over the last three weeks if he was warm and cuddly.

You have to say this about Tony Romo:

You don't need a program to know he's in the house.

Josh Beckett stands there and says, "See if you can hit this" in October the way Bob Gibson used to.

If given the chance over the next week or so, there is a certain Red Sox reliever who could, well, really put the "Gag" in Gagne.

Happy 82nd birthday this week to the great Elmore Leonard, who likes to say in his rules of writing that he leaves out the parts readers tend to skip.

And that if it sounds like writing, he re-writes it.

He has done a bit more than that over the past 50 years, as he has become one of the handful of American writers from his time who will be remembered.

I'd call him a national treasure, but he'd only make me re-write it.

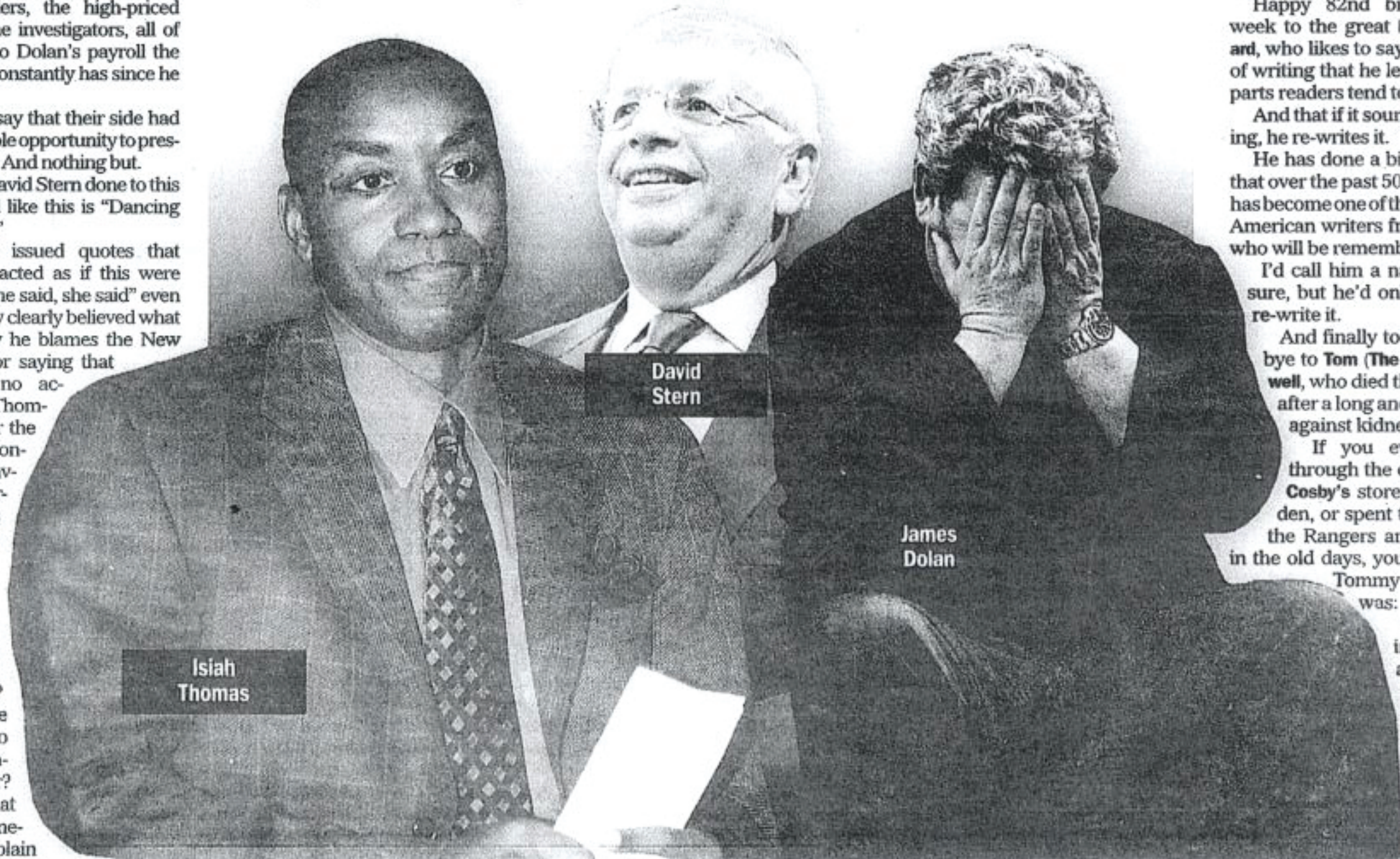
And finally today, a goodbye to Tom (The Bomb) Barnwell, who died the other day after a long and brave fight against kidney disease.

If you ever walked through the door at Mike Cosby's store at the Garden, or spent time around the Rangers and Islanders in the old days, you know who Tommy Barnwell was:

A friend in hockey, a friend in sports and to sports in our city.

One of the good guys.

He will be missed.



Isiah Thomas

David Stern

James Dolan