



Earl Wilson

Athlete-Actor Rafer Johnson Lends Full Support to Kennedys

NEW YORK — Rafer Johnson is 6-4 and big all over. His feet stuck far out from under the small table at 21 as he delivered opinions on everybody from Joe Namath to Ted Kennedy.

Not too many years ago a Negro did not go into fashionable restaurants. Now he sat there speaking of being with Mrs. Ethel Kennedy the day that Teddy Kennedy's accident was reported.

"I was up there to the compound for the weekend," said the great athlete who was one of Bobby Kennedy's bodyguards when he was shot. "Mrs. Kennedy and I had flown down. We heard it on the car radio. There was no reaction. Everybody was quiet."

"I am unshaken in my feeling he should be president. He's got a good heart and that doesn't change. The Kennedys are the greatest family that ever lived in this country."

"When Bobby Kennedy decided to run for president, I was making good money doing a sports telecast. I felt that he had done so much for everybody, he deserved my support. They wouldn't give me a leave of absence at the station, so I quit my job. I feel the same about Ted Kennedy. They are all good people, chips off the same block."

Thirty-three now, down to 195 from the 210 he weighed when he won the world and Olympic decathlon championship in 1960, Johnson is now a working actor . . . working at it just as hard as he trained.

"I'm not hurtin' financially," he said. "I bought a couple mutual funds when they were hot. I can wait for the right film."

"I've done 15, maybe 20 films. It's now my profession. I've learned, I've studied. Maybe I'm just ready now."

He's happy with one called "Grigsby," a Western. "They're all mean people," he said. "It's my life against his." He's also done "The Games" (about the Olympics, playing a newscaster).

Non-drinker, non-smoker, and a bachelor, he nevertheless is fascinated by Joe Namath, who of course is also now an actor.

"I won't say what he does is right or wrong. It would be wrong for me. A 10-year-old kid asks me is it all right to drink and smoke and I'll not tell him it is. He'll say Joe Namath does it O.K. but I don't think Joe Namath would tell the kid to do it, either, to do what he does. But is Joe Namath a bad influence? No, I don't think he is."

Athletes have been becoming movie stars since Johnny Weissmuller, Buster Crabbe and Johnny Mack Brown. Other actors have griped about athletes, who aren't really actors, getting their jobs.

"It'll be the same now except it'll be Negro actors saying it," Rafer Johnson said, "about Negro athletes. I don't see it makes any difference, it means employment for a

lot of Negroes. And for myself, I want to do the same as when I was an athlete. I don't say I'm the best but there's nobody that's worked harder preparin' and that makes me feel like I'm the best. I can be pretty certain that I'm prepared and that means to me that I've got to win. That's how I train myself to think, anyway."

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Letters to the Editor

Disbelieves Kennedy

Editor, States-Item:

I cannot swallow Sen. Kennedy's tale of his accident. Had it been other than a Kennedy an autopsy and thorough investigation would have been made . . .

Had it been a less prominent man, he would have been put in jail and charged . . .

Mrs. Mary Moore

help before I blacked out.

Although I was miles from home and knew no one, this feeling of responsibility was there, which is why I find no excuse for Sen. Kennedy's behavior.

Mrs. Karen C. Niklaus

Kennedy's Behavior

Editor, States-Item:

Sen. Ted Kennedy, in my opinion, lacks the mature leadership and keen sense of responsibility to continue as a senator from Massachusetts. Having experienced a somewhat similar automobile accident in 1967, I feel that there was no reason why the senator could not report his accident immediately to the proper authorities.

In my accident, I had severe cuts on my legs and the beginning of a brain concussion, yet I forced myself to crawl up a 20-foot cliff in heavy rain, flag down a moving van and get to the nearest service station where I immediately phoned for