

By DAN LEVY

# Donovan's 'black-on-black' crime

On Jan. 31, 2000, Baltimore Ravens All-Pro linebacker Ray Lewis was hanging out with friends at the Super Bowl.

He was in an altercation that led to the stabbing deaths of two men. Lewis was charged with murder, but plea-bargained his way to a misdemeanor by rolling over on the friends who supposedly did the stabbings.

THAT was black-on-black crime.

Six years and a day later, Donovan McNabb was interviewed by ESPN and reiterated a comment that his father made about ex-teammate and friend Terrell Owens. Papa McNabb called T.O.'s comments about his son "black-on-black crime."

He was defending his son, and he was mad. He said it, probably without thinking it out, and took a fair amount of heat for it. But when someone attacks your son, what do you do? You defend him, even to the point of calling a teammate a criminal. His comments were ridiculous but not inexplicable.

What is inexplicable is what Donovan McNabb said last week. The man too mature to get into it before the season with T.O., restraint that very well could have saved the Eagles season, decided to upstage the Super Bowl hype to take one last shot at his ex-pal.

It's ironic that last season, all the talk leading up to the big game was about T.O., and now, a year later, the big story of the day was about McNabb. Maybe he was jealous of all the attention T.O. got last year. Maybe jealous of all the attention T.O. has been getting in recent weeks from other teams in the NFL.

Maybe his millionaire lifestyle has skewed his outlook on the world to the point where what someone says about him can be considered black-on-black crime.

McNabb's skin is black, yes, but it's also very, very thin.

Perhaps the worst part of this is the fact that T.O. was responding to comments made by former All-Pro and good friend Michael Irvin. Irvin was talking about how he felt bad for Brett Favre because the Packers stink, and if Favre was on a team like the Eagles, they'd be undefeated.

Was it a backhanded comment on McNabb? Sure. And I'm also sure that T.O. loved it. A few days later, wunderkind reporter Graham Bensinger asked T.O. what he thought of Irvin's comments, and he agreed. He likes Brett Favre and thought the Eagles would be better with him.

And he was right. McNabb was playing hurt, and poorly at that. Favre, while clearly on the downside of his career, is a consensus Hall of Famer. Why wouldn't you want to play with him?

Leading up to the Super Bowl

last year, McNabb got tired of hearing all the T.O. comments to the point where he said, in effect, that he didn't care if T.O. was out there, the team thought they were good enough to win either way. He was wrong. Even with a heroic effort by Owens, McNabb was unable to get it done, and looked lost in losing. But his comments leading up to the game may have had the biggest effect on the Eagles franchise.

Terrell Owens has problems. He needs love. And he needs attention, attention and more attention. He felt disrespected by his quarterback leading up to the Super Bowl, and took that out on an entire city ready and willing to embrace him for a lifetime. Now people carry voodoo dolls with green 81 jerseys.

They hate T.O. because they wanted to love him, wanted T.O.

to be the next Allen Iverson or Reggie White. They wanted T.O. to be that person. Not McNabb.

Philadelphia hasn't fully embraced McNabb since draft day, when he was booed. McNabb's not a "Philly guy." Iverson is. He's tough, gritty, someone you can identify with. White, black, suburban or city, Iverson is someone you can feel proud to root for. McNabb is a good quarterback who does soup commercials.

And that's why Eagles fans are so mad. T.O. was going to be the legacy they tied themselves to. Going to be what Curt Schilling was for the Red Sox (and Diamondbacks — nice trade, Phillies!). T.O. was the savior. Now he's a pariah.

That wasn't good enough for McNabb. He got his city back. He's again the face of the franchise. But he's never going to be the face of the city. And it's comments like "black-on-black crime" that will make sure it stays that way. ★

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