

The Amazing Pistol Pete

Long before Dr. J or Magic Johnson or Michael Jordan, there was Pistol Pete Maravich. He was a scrawny guard from Louisiana State University who treated the basketball court like a stage.

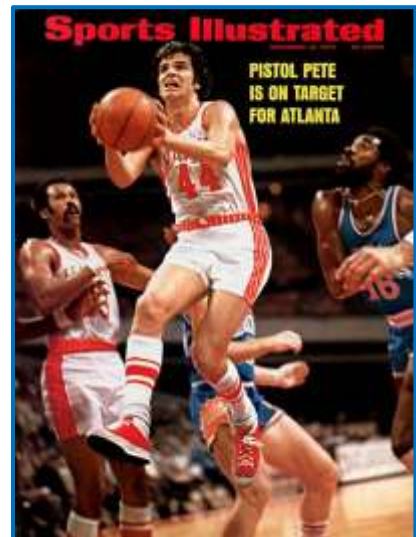
When Maravich came onto the court, the fans went wild. He turned a game into a show.

A three-time All-American, Maravich was the master of the behind-the-back, no-look pass. When he dribbled, it looked like the ball was connected to his hand. He set many records and averaged an amazing 44.2 points for his NCAA career – and that was before the 3-point shot and the shot clock. He remains the all-time leading NCAA Division 1 scorer with 3,667 points – despite being unable to play varsity as a freshman because of NCAA rules at that time. He was one of the youngest players ever inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.

Maravich wore his hair long and shaggy, and his socks always looked a few sizes too big. Although he was rail-thin, he appeared to be in fantastic physical shape. He never seemed to tire as he wowed fans and players alike with his street-ball style of play.

But just a few years removed from playing his grueling 70-plus game schedule, while participating in a pick-up basketball game in Pasadena, California, on Jan. 5, 1988, Maravich collapsed and died of a heart attack at the age of 40. An autopsy revealed that his death was due to an undiagnosed congenital heart defect. His last words were, “I’m really feeling good.”

Similarly, Flora (Flo) Hyman – a tall and powerful volleyball spiker, led the U.S. women’s team to a silver medal in the 1984 Olympics, but died of a heart attack a few years later at age 31. And in November 1995, at age 28, Russian pair skater Sergei Grinkov, winner of two Olympic gold medals with his partner and wife, Ekaterina Gordeeva, dropped to the ice during a practice session and died. He, too, had suffered a massive heart attack.



(more)

All three were world-class athletes, and all had the external appearance of exceptional physical health. Each, however, had unseen fatal heart problems. They appeared to be models of physical fitness, but their well-conditioned bodies masked serious sickness. Fellow athletes and their fans alike were shocked.

Stories such as these – pictures of perfect athleticism who tragically and suddenly drop dead of a heart attack at a relatively young age – confront us with a sobering truth: A person's physical appearance doesn't reflect the health of his or her heart.

Likewise, a person's spiritual appearance doesn't reflect the health of the heart.

In his book *Extreme Righteousness*, author Tom Hovestol said, "The religious world occasionally is stunned when someone perceived to be spiritually healthy is exposed as spiritually diseased. In truth, spiritual sickness often looks like fitness to the casual observer because we are trained to evaluate fitness by a set of standards that are superficial and faulty. Therefore, subtle symptoms of spiritual sickness, masked by commendable religious behavior, often are undetected."

Whatever our outside appearance may be, it's what we look like on the inside that matters. Scripture confirms it: *But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7 NKJV).*

And Jesus said: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8 ESV).*

How are we then to live? What are the markers of a spiritually healthy heart? The Bible tells us: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (Galatians 5:22 ESV).*

These are the qualities that should be displayed in our daily living.

– Beecher Hunter