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Great expectations

June 1, 1996 By Sean Strub

Magic Johnson's return to the NBA, more than any other single act, has focused the public's attention on the truth about survival with HIV. Slowly, the "death sentence" message fades as televised images of a vibrant, robust, proud athlete's on-court prowess is imprinted on the nation's HIV consciousness. Yet much of society -- including many misguided advocates of HIV and AIDS issues -- still views HIV as a starting point for a litany of rights and potential one no longer has. Foremost is the expectation of a long and healthy life. But almost as predominant is the belief that HIV means one can't work and love as fully as everyone else.

That may be changing as the public realizes that those with HIV, starting with Magic Johnson, are able to work and contribute to society for many, many years, if not for a normal lifespan.

But in other areas, we've got a long way to go. While the public finally is willing to recognize that we can work safely and productively, it still is not willing to accept our sexual relationships as safe and loving.

Two years ago, *POZ* featured the virile muscularity of Ty Ross, who is HIV positive, as our premiere cover story. Boy, did we get flack. "You shouldn't highlight the sexuality of a person with an infectious disease," one AIDS "activist" told me. "When we are seen as sexual beings, the sympathy factor goes away," another explained.

Today, the sexuality of HIV positive people remains just as volatile an issue. Mandatory testing, name reporting and contact tracing campaigns are on the rise, and our sexual behavior is increasingly criminalized. HIV prevention campaigns continue to be manipulated by antisex zealots. Our culture's unwillingness to recognize the reality of teen sexuality remains one of the major causes of the further spread of HIV.

I applaud Magic's very public return. He again demonstrates how the action of one can move mountains of deep-seated stereotypes. But I also applaud every person who is positive and is working hard, every day, to reclaim all the rights and expectations we deserve. Especially in the complicated realm of human sexuality.

As a segment of society, those of us with HIV have endured restrictions -- many with force of law -- of our rights to work, travel freely, have or adopt children, organize politically and love whom and

how we want. Too many people with HIV have fallen into the sad trap of believing the limited vision of those who would seek to restrict our lives, rather than the reality of freedom that is in our hearts and at our fingertips.

In the end, it is our capacity for love, courage and hope (all 100 percent renewable human resources) that will enable us to rise above any obstacle. There is no hatred beyond the healing of love. No ignorance beyond the enlightenment of education. No illness beyond the hope of cure.

Welcome back, Magic. And welcome to *POZ*!

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