

GUEST COLUMN

Mitch Henck: Can't we all just watch sports and get along?

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Time Magazine recently posed the question "Is truth dead?" on its cover. It was directed at President's Donald Trump's assertion that former President Barack Obama ordered wiretaps of Trump's phones at Trump Tower during the transition.

Time reporter Michael Scherer secured 20 minutes with the president to challenge him on his accusatory tweets as well as on past statements by Trump on millions of illegal voters, the alleged British involvement in wiretapping Trump, and of course, Trump's repeating the National Enquirer assertion that U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz's father was passing out leaflets with Lee Harvey Oswald in New Orleans.

As an online talk radio host, I've learned from my listeners in Wisconsin and from reading Facebook posts in Dane County that truth is not important. People care far more about pushing their ideological agenda than worrying about silly factoids.

My progressive listeners believe Trump is lying about Obama and the other issues mentioned by Time Magazine. My conservative listeners believe Trump and say he was vindicated by Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes when he said surveillance of Trump associates and *maybe* even Trump's conversations at Trump Tower were "intercepted" by U.S. intelligence officials.

The point is that facts don't matter much in partisan politics, just like they mean nothing in sports. If an official's call goes against the Badgers, it's a bad call. If the call goes against the other team, that makes it a good call. Very few people can separate themselves from the desired outcome.

When my callers or when Facebook chatters are backed into a corner and they're pulling for Trump, they say, "Yeah, but what about Hillary Clinton?" or "What about Bill Clinton?" or "What about Obama?"

Conservative callers would rail on President Obama for flying excessively to exotic locations to play golf. When I ask those same callers about Trump's flights to play golf on the weekend, they'll say he's gone to his resort to work.

Let's bring it home. If a Wisconsin State Journal reader agrees with an editorial writer, then the writer is fair and unbiased. It is only when the writer disagrees with the reader

that the writer is unfair and biased. That's simply because the reader isn't biased, he or she is just right.

My late mother was a liberal Democrat who watched MSNBC every night. I have conservative friends who only watch Fox.

Locally, it is a white progressive talking point to say that students of color in poor neighborhoods don't get enough parental support because mom is working *three* jobs. If I say, "But what if she doesn't?" They'll fire back, "Are you saying it never happens!"

Prominent local conservatives go on my show and say we have an achievement gap between white students and students of color because too many students of color are lacking supportive fathers. When I ask them, "So what if their father is in jail because he was captured in the war on drugs? Should we give up on the kid?" The conservative will say, "That's a cop out or that's an excuse."

That's when I point out that such a circumstance is not the kid's fault if dad is away at camp. We still should try to educate the youngster.

Let's take health care. Ask a conservative, "Do you think health care is a right?" "No, people should take care of themselves." But it's OK if they go to the emergency room when they're sick. I have never heard a conservative argue that the ER staffer should tell the poor person without insurance to "Go back in the street where you belong!"

When progressives are confronted with VA scandals in Arizona or here in Tomah where veterans died unnecessarily, they will say it was due to a lack of funding.

As you can tell, I'm getting a bit jaundiced. Thank God for basketball and the Final Four. A winning team brings progressives and conservatives together more than any speech by a politician. When an integrated USC football team crushed an all-white Alabama squad in 1970, that did more for civil rights than decades of protest. Alabama had its first black player in 1971.

Heck, I even think violence in the Middle East could be reduced by building more golf courses. There is plenty of sand, after all, and the oil could pay for one fine sprinkler system. Golf might lead to more divorces, but there would be less time for killing.

My Sunday morning message is to try and be kind to each other even when you disagree politically. Republicans can give Democrats credit for Social Security and Medicare. Democrats can give Republicans credit for signing the front of their paychecks -- so they can endorse the back.

Mitch is a Madison, Wisconsin based commentator, broadcaster and standup comic.

The Mitch Henck Show is broadcast live 8-11a.m. Monday-Friday at www.madisontalks.com.

Watch Mitch's Daily Video Blog, "Two Minutes with Mitch," weekdays at madison.com.

Contact Mitch at: mitch@madisontalks.com