One Hundred Black Men, Inc., Celebrates Founders Day at Columbia

On Dec. 16, the One Hundred Black Men, Inc., an organization dedicated to advancing and improving the lives of African Americans and other minorities, celebrated the 40th anniversary of its founding with a ceremony at Columbia. The annual event, dubbed Founders Day, pays tribute to the men who laid the foundation for the organization.

Above, left to right: Columbia President Lee C. Bollinger; founder Godfrey H. Murrain; founder and the first president of OHBM, Robert J. Mangum; founder and second president of OHBM, Cyril D. Tyson; board member Rep. Charles B. Rangel; sixth president of OHBM (and Tuskegee Airman), Roscoe C. Brown, Jr.; founder James Dumpson; seventh president of OHBM, Luther R. Gatling; OHBM member Glen Mccracken; the current president, Paul T. Williams, Jr. and Leslie Whyche, chair of the Founders Day committee.

Top right, from left: Roscoe C. Brown, Luther Gatling and Rep. Charles Rangel.

Right: Former New York City Mayor David N. Dinkins.

For more information, please visit www.100blackmen.org.

Jan Vecer Turns the Art of Predicting Sports Scores into a Science

BY COLIN MORRIS

As every coach, player and fan knows, professional sports have become a battleground in which psychology, technology and science play an increasingly important role. The sports community has especially focused on athlete psychology, turning-point scenarios and adaptive strategy to gain an edge. Thanks to the ingenuity of Jan Vecer, assistant professor in the Department of Statistics, the sports world may soon have a tool that can measure all of this crucial data—as well as statistically predict an outcome of a game with an accuracy never before achieved.

An avid tennis fan, Vecer developed the idea for a new program while watching the Wimbledon tournament. During the broadcast Vecer found himself at odds with the television commentators’ analyses. The match points deemed pivotal by the sportscasters made little sense from Vecer’s statistical perspective. To confirm his intuition, Vecer developed a statistical model capable of measuring the importance of individual points in predicting the outcome of a game, set and match. As the game progressed, the model could instantly recalculate the chances of an outcome with the television commentators’ analyses. The match points deemed pivotal by the sportscasters were made little sense from Vecer’s statistical perspective.

After successfully testing the invention, the collaborators realized their program could be even more useful if it took into account the psychological dimensions of a match. Because the program measures the point statistics through the narrative progression of the game, a player’s psychological approach could be quantified with a “signature.” This signature, displayed in the form of a graph in Vecer’s program, can reveal how a player planned and reacted to a particular situation—information of intense interest to coaches, players and all sporting types.

Vecer used Andy Roddick’s 2003 U.S. Open semifinal victory over David Nalbandian to illustrate how the program functions. He plugged the individual points into his program to generate a statistical portrait of the game. When Roddick faced a match point in the third set, Vecer’s program gave Roddick only a 1:20 chance to win the whole match. This signature, depicted in the player’s signature graph, makes this match so memorable, “The match itself was interesting in the way that Roddick had only 1:20 chance of winning the match—quite a rare event, which makes this match so memorable,” Vecer said.

Vecer and Mauriello are currently developing other ways to market the tennis match analysis tool as well as how to apply the technology to other sports.

The tennis program is one of many inventions Mauriello and his team have developed. S&TV works to identify and patent new inventions by the Columbia community. The group accepts proposals from students, faculty and staff. S&TV helps to steer clients through relations with industrial companies to license inventions and technology developed in Columbia laboratories. Through the Innovation Enhancement Fund, a pilot program, S&TV provides limited funding to faculty who have significant potential for advancing intellectual property with commercial value. For more information, go to www.columbia.edu.