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Time has come to forgive Michigan's Fab Five

ROD BEARD

Ann Arbor— Seeing Michigan honor three members of the Fab Five on Sunday was weird. Jalen Rose, Jimmy King and Ray Jackson stood at center court at Crisler Arena and received a standing ovation as they received Michigan jackets and plaques as honorees at the Legends Classic tournament.

There are so many memories of King's soaring dunks, or Jackson's defense, or Rose's deft shooting, and here they were in their late 30s, sporting suits and hints of gray hairs that serve as a reminder that 15 years have passed since Jackson and King played as seniors.

Noticeably absent were Chris Webber and Juwan Howard. Webber was the only one found to be directly attached to the Ed Martin scandal, but all five were punished, with all their records and accomplishments wiped from the record books. The absent Final Four banners from Crisler Arena embody Webber's legacy at the university — you know that you remember them, but you want to forget them and what they represent.

Forgetting might be asking too much, but it's time to forgive the Fab Five.

The NCAA sanctions in 2003 included a 10-year ban from associating with Webber. At the time, it seemed like an eternity, but time has a way of making people remember what they want to forget. Sunday's honor was a big step for both the university and the players in mending a painful relationship. While Rose and King, who still have ties to the area, have been to games recently, it was a rare trip back for Jackson

"Honestly, I feel like it's a long time coming. It's something we should have done a while back, but everything happens for a reason," Jackson said Sunday. "So I'm trying to embrace it now and build for the future. We're looking toward 2012, where we can all come back as a group and make an impact on the program and the university."

Howard, who still is in the NBA with the Miami Heat, had an off day before a home game against the Pacers on Monday night. In theory, he could have joined the trio at the ceremony, as well. Reports were that Howard said he wasn't aware of Sunday's tribute. When this was mentioned to Rose, he smiled and fired back, "He knew." Maybe the wounds aren't all healed.

Among Michigan alumni and fans, there still is a lot of animosity because of the stain the Martin scandal put on the school's reputation. Michigan is not a place for probation or NCAA sanctions, as exemplified in some of the calls for football coach Rich Rodriguez's job because of his transgressions. Still, as much as people have grouped the Fab Five together, there was nothing wrong with acknowledging the three Sunday.

"Coach (John) Beilein and the staff are reaching back. That's why we're here," King said. "We're continuing to do that, to build the bridge across the gap and to reconnect and make sure everything is right."

In some people's minds, things never will be right. The university and the basketball program still have not recovered from the sanctions levied by the NCAA — from an image standpoint, as well as a talent standpoint.

The cliché is that time heals all wounds. For some, it might just take more time.