The State Of Professional Sports In Society

Christopher S. Stefan

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.shu.edu/theses

Recommended Citation
http://scholarship.shu.edu/theses/63
THE STATE OF PROFESSIONAL SPORTS IN SOCIETY

BY

CHRISTOPHER S. STEFAN

Thesis Advisor

Michael S. McGraw, Ph.D.

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communication
Seton Hall University

1998
The Same Principles Apply

It has often been said that athletics challenges the body, mind, and spirit. They bring out the best in people, because athletic competition engenders character, dedication, determination, awareness, self-confidence, cooperation, and sensitivity to self and others. Learning requires the same degree of energy and commitment as competitive sports and yields comparable benefits for the individual. Because of this, athletics and learning go hand in hand to help individual men and women discover and realize their true potential in life.

- James H. Zumberge
  Former University of Southern California President
  (Cited in The Edge, Ferguson, 1983, p.8-21)
# Table of Contents

Chapter I - **INTRODUCTION** ................................................................. 1
  Statement of the Problem .............................................................. 1
  Research Questions ........................................................................ 3
  Objectives ....................................................................................... 3
  Definition of Terms ........................................................................ 4
  Overview of Sports .......................................................................... 4
  The System ...................................................................................... 7
  Limitations ..................................................................................... 10

Chapter II - **THE INGREDIENTS TO SPORT** .................................... 11
  Background .................................................................................... 11
  The Community .............................................................................. 11
  The Fans ....................................................................................... 13

Chapter III - **THE PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE** ............................... 17
  Background .................................................................................... 17
  Today’s Professional Athlete By Definition .................................... 17
  In The Beginning ............................................................................ 22
  Crime, Sportsmanship & Punishment ........................................... 24
  Other Money Making Opportunities ............................................ 29

Chapter IV - **SPORTS = BIG BUSINESS** ....................................... 34
  Background .................................................................................... 34
  Salaries ......................................................................................... 34
  You, Me and the Average Fan ...................................................... 40
  The Media ..................................................................................... 42
  Take A Seat .................................................................................. 44
  Name It ......................................................................................... 45

Chapter V - **SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION** ............................. 50
  Summary ....................................................................................... 50
  Recommendation .......................................................................... 53
  Media Literacy Programs ............................................................. 53
  Develop and Maintain a No Tolerance Position ............................ 55
  Re-invent the “System” .................................................................. 57

REFERENCES ......................................................................................... 64

APPENDIXES ......................................................................................... 69
  Appendix A - Memoirs from Jerry Maguire’s Journal ................. 70
List Of Figures

Figure 1 - Average NBA Player Salaries from 1980 to 1997................................. 35
Figure 2 - Average NFL Player Salaries from 1982 to 1997................................. 36
Figure 3 - Average MLB Player Salaries from 1980 to 1997................................. 36
Figure 4 - Average NHL Player Salary from 1983 to 1987................................. 37
Figure 5 - Average Family Expenses By Sport............................................ 40
List Of Tables

Table 1 - Children's Preference for Athletes to Endorse Products ........................................... 19
Table 2 - Children's Preference for Celebrities to Endorse Products ........................................ 20
Table 3 - Examples of Aggressive Behavior Among Athletes ....................................................... 25
Table 4 - Players' Autograph Rates By Item .................................................................................. 32
Table 5 - Players' Personal Appearance Fees By Hour ................................................................ 33
Table 6 - Contract Breakdown By Year for NFL Player Deion Sanders ....................................... 39
Table 7 - Licensed Merchandise Revenue Broken Down By Sport .............................................. 41
Table 8 - Top 10 Naming Rights Deals ......................................................................................... 47
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Movies glorify it. Television breathes it. The public can't get enough of it.

As Wilfred Sheed (1995) states in *Why Sports Matter*, “Sports are among the greatest human pleasures and constitute one of America's biggest industries” (p.11). Our favorite pastimes have moved from being a subculture to becoming a major force in America's social and cultural landscape (Walsh, 1996). Paul Staudohar (1996), author of *Playing for Dollars*, describes sport as, “A world of myth and fantasy where contests are staged on green fields, polished hardwood courts, and gleaming ice rinks (that) reflect heroic deeds of forever youthful supermen” (p.190). Staudohar (1996) continues his description with, “Illuminated by fantasy, sport is a world of players unspoiled by corruption” (p.190). Why have we, as a society, become so fascinated with professional sports? Is it the spirit of competition? The incredible talent we feel so privileged to witness week in and week out? Or is it because we identify with professional sports as a mere reflection of the challenges we face in our own lives? According to Sheed (1995), “Sports, in its simplest form, are cycles of triumphs and failures, make-believe deaths and rebirths” (p.11).

Statement of the Problem

This “fantasy world” is not only viewed by adults, but by children as well. For this reason, the author believes something needs to be done about the state of professional sports in our society. When today's sports section reads like a police report, as it does so
often, action must be taken to protect the impressionable young minds of today's youth. We used to believe that athletes could be our heroes. So damaged is the reputation and the light of today's professional athlete that we have grown accustomed to thinking of athletes as egotistical, selfish, and greedy people. Staudohar (1996), asks the question that many of us would like to know, "How did sports slip from the age of innocence to the era of egoism" (p.190)? In an ESPNET Sportzone commentary on Why Athletes Fare Poorly In the Court of Public Opinion, Frank Deford (1997) states,

"So, you may not like it, but do not expect teams or leagues to fire players for the sort of personal misbehavior that would put any one of us on the unemployment line. Here's the irony: Years ago, we admired athletes for more than they deserve, and, by holding them to a higher standard, felt comfortable punishing them in Draconian terms whenever they let us down. Today, we assume athletes are human rubbish and so, since we expect nothing of them, we accuse them of their crimes. Either way, we have created a special class for those who play the games" [WWW document].

(URL http://espn.sportszone.com/editors/)

According to John Walsh, (cited in Tharp, Chetwynd, Brownlee, 1996), senior vice president and executive editor of the sports cable network ESPN, "Sports at their best can be bigger than the problems that swirl around them – the drug scandals, cheating incidents, college recruiting abuses, evidence of commercialism and greed, lingering gender and racial unfairness and even the false gods they promote" (p.31). The author believes that part of this problem stems from the star-struck public who all-to-often tend
to disregard the problems that surround these players and teams. Why? Because today's athletes aren't just athletes: they are celebrities and media sensations. They are self-inventing media characters. Bad behavior, never-ending scandals, and outrageous prices make us question the state of sports in our society today. Is it over exposure by the media or a true depiction of the medium that embodies the few thousand professional athletes that share in a lack of responsibility with which they govern their lives?

Research Questions

Who or what is at fault for taking professional sports to an all-time low on the scale of morality and ethics and what should be done to correct this problem? This study will explore this question by looking at the roles of the media, the players, and the system in which we (society) have created that governs professional sports as we know them.

The research complied for this study through a review of literature, will hopefully enable sports fans and non-sports fans alike to see their sports culture in a different light; a light that will hopefully change the way they look at their favorite pastime(s).

Objectives

To support this study, the author will weigh the positive and negative aspects that professional sports plays in our society. The objectives of this study are to look closely at the following areas to better understand the elements that help shape the world of sports: a) Sports the business, b) Today's professional athlete, and c) Key ingredients to professional sports. These elements, once understood, will enable the reader to determine if in fact professional sports needs a face lift in our society and in what area(s).
Definition of Terms

1. **Athlete** A person trained in exercises of physical strength, speed, and skill, especially one who participates or competes in games requiring agility and stamina.

2. **Community** A group of people living in the same place who are subject to the same laws and share something in common (interests, vocations, etc...)

3. **Fan** A person, who is carried away beyond reason by his feelings or beliefs towards something, in this case a sport.

4. **Media literacy** The ability to access, analyze, and evaluate—as well as communicate—messages.

5. **Sport** A game, contest or other pastime requiring some skill and usually a certain amount of physical exercise.

6. **System** An orderly group of facts, principles, or beliefs that are used together to accomplish a particular task.

Overview of Sports

Societies in all periods of history have needed some kind of public entertainment, and it has usually been provided by sports (Michener, 1983). The evolution of sports to what it has become today is an enigma in the minds of most experts. Although the rules and the elements of the sports have changed, the obligations of sports have not. This is reinforced by well-known author James A. Michener (1983), who states in his book, *Sports In America*, “Sports have the obligation to enhance the mental and physical health of both the individual participant and the general society” (p.24). According to Michener, sports should provide a spiritual catharsis, which cannot occur if participants
are overly dedicated to winning, or if spectators allow their partisanship to get out of hand (Michener, 1983). There’s absolutely nothing that brings this country together, that gets over language barriers, geographic barriers – whatever -- better than sports (Nemeth, Deacon, & Corelli, 1994). Sports have become very much a part of the American way of life. There’s no doubt about it, America loves its sports. As U.S. News & World Report writers Mike Tharp, Josh Chetwynd, and Shannon Brownlee (1996), wrote in their article titled “Sports crazy”!, “So powerful are the joy of sports, the allure of athletic contests and marketing of sports prowess, that a significant, madly attached segment of the population has formed itself into a ‘jock culture’ (p.33). Those inside it adore sports and think the country reaps splendid rewards from athletic competition; those outside it have significantly less respect for the role of sports in American society” (p.33).

Sports can provide tremendous opportunities for our society, especially in the form of competition. Perhaps Staudochar (1996) summed it up best when he said, “In a way, competition is life in microcosm” (p.3). Staudochar believed that there were needs met through participation in sports. “When sport is organized into games for competition, these events have the ability to satisfy such needs as achievement, affiliation, and self-esteem” (p.1). Sports can also stimulate health, comradeship and self-control. Sheed (1995) believes it is the nature of sports to teach. The author agrees with both Staudochar and Sheed, but believes that the single most important element that sports can provide each and every one of us is character building. Whether we are participants or spectators, we all are in a position to build upon our character in some way through sports. We can all build our character through the lessons that sports provide: winning, losing, teamwork, decision-making and discipline. Our experiences in sports
can easily translate into what we experience in our daily lives. Sports can make us happier and healthier people, in both mind and body.

When we look at our first experiences in sports or athletics, the majority of us look back to our youth. Whether it was in gym class or at a park, there was a sense of innocence and an invincible feeling that ran through us. We felt alive and loved the competition or the challenge that came with sports. When we were at bat, we stood in the batter's box like Mickey Mantle; if we were passing the football, we mirrored the form of Joe Montana; if we walked the curb we did so with the grace of Nadia Comaneci. We had dreams and aspirations to one day perform like these special individuals.

That was the joy of it all. When we were young, we never talked or dreamed about how much money we were going to make once we made it to the pros. We didn’t care because we played the games for enjoyment and only enjoyment. We never even noticed all the corporate signage that went around each and every stadium or ballpark. All we were concerned about was how far we were going to hit that ball, how far we were going to throw that pass, or how long we could walk that straight and narrow without falling off. Somewhere, somehow, our dreams of becoming a professional athlete got tarnished.

As a child, we never heard about labor disputes, players associations, sports agents, or collective bargaining agreements. We only saw the game for what it was: a game. We were free to play when we wanted and what we wanted. We could be whoever we wanted to be. Everyone knew the rules and everyone had fun. Unfortunately, times have changed.
The System

This “change” is mostly due to the way today’s youth are being socialized. Today, children are being introduced into highly organized sports at very early ages (Michener, 1976). Professional golfer Tiger Woods supposedly started golf at the ripe old age of 2 with the help from his father, Earl Woods. Today, Tiger is the most sought after golfer on the PGA tour by spectators and sponsors alone. The “system” for which we provide our children with is where we, as a society, are at fault. Sure competition at an early age for children is healthy; it helps builds character if it is done right. More times than not children are pushed into programs that obstruct their personal development. Staudohar (cited in WSJ, 1976) notes that although sport for youth is generally positive, more observers are expressing qualms about the excessive organization and competition found in youth leagues today (p.2-3). Michener believes what’s wrong with today’s support system is that these highly structured leagues are run by overly intense adults who are urged on by overly enthusiastic parents (Michener, 1983). He goes on to point out that, “Adults conducting children’s programs place too much stress on winning” (p.31). These types of parents are the ones who are depriving their children of the fundamentals of the sport for which they can develop healthier children, both mentally and physically.

Not enough people realize the importance of having a stable and properly run support system in place for our youth. Albert Bandura (cited in Bee, 1989), one of the major figures in the theoretical tradition of children’s character development believes that, “People are not equipped with inborn repertoires of behavior; they must learn them” (p.327). Bandura (cited in Bee, 1989), has argued that, “The full range of social
behaviors from competitiveness to nurturance is learned through modeling – by watching others perform those actions” (p.330). It is in our children’s early years that their character is built which will guide them for the rest of their adult lives. The author firmly believes that the poor displays of character so commonly seen today in the professional ranks are the results of a poorly run support system that these players were brought up in as children and young adults.

Staudohar (1996) reminds us that, “Sports teaches youngsters the importance of discipline, cooperation, and how to handle winning and losing gracefully” (p.3).

Staudohar (1996) also states that, “The heavy significance attached to winning creates feelings of inferiority when one loses and detracts from the joy of the sport” (p.3). If we teach our kids that winning is the only thing and everything else doesn’t matter, they will grow up with unrealistic expectations in many areas of their lives which will only lead to disappointment later on. Once children reach high school and beyond, it’s usually too late to develop the all-important foundation of their character. At that stage of their lives, unfortunately, children are looking at friends and other role models for guidance besides their parents and teachers.

Every year thousands of young men and women receive scholarships to play their favorite sport for colleges and universities all over this country. Universities understand the fact that they must provide public entertainment. Michener (1983) points out, “Few colleges or conferences are blameless in this strange perversion of the educational process, and any who might seek to terminate such abuses would find themselves besieged by their alumni who would argue that a boy (or girl) doesn’t need too much
book learning” (p.193). In the end, it’s not corrupt coaches who haul such boys to the
academic doors; it is the general public who insists upon it (Michener, 1983).

Michener (1983) reminds us that, “The statistical possibility of landing a paying
job in professional sports is bleak” (p.193). So why then, do so many thousands of kids,
year after year, go to bed with hopes of one day becoming a professional athlete? Aside
from the fame, fortune, and glamour, no one really knows. Staudohar (1996) is quick to
remind us that, “Youngsters who aspire to professional athletic careers, which can be
achieved only by tiny proportion, may neglect their education and other important aspects
of normal living” (p.3).

It’s been said that sports are a major contributor for our troubled youth or
for what’s wrong in our society. According to Tharp, Chetwynd, and Brownlee (1996),
“Inevitably, the commercialization of sports has prompted questions and criticism about
everything from the mega-salaries of sports stars to city-hopping by some franchises, to
outright cheating, college recruiting violations and illegal payments to collegians” (p.34)
Whether it’s on a high-school, college, or professional level in sports, little has been done
to alter or enhance the character of the young men and women who participate.

It seems only recently that sports have had a real image problem. Athletes from
figure skaters to basketball players have all had their share of well-publicized drug,
alcohol, and, or domestic problems over the years and have done their part in taking
sports and their fans to an all-time low. To ensure the survival of sports as we know
them, actions must be taken to raise the bar of tolerance. Staudohar (1996) points out that
the off-court antics and on-court tantrums have tainted professional sports and has called
into question the value of players as role models.
When we take a step back and look at what sports has become in today's society—the escalating player salaries, the drug abuse, the deterioration of our moral fabric, it's easy to see how they've lost the fundamental elements for which they were meant to provide. Somewhere, somehow, we've lost our way in sports.

Limitations

The primary limitation in this study is that there is a lack of secondary media sources on this particular subject. This may be due to the fact that only up until recently has the media made light of the escalating salaries and abusive behavior by professional athletes. There exists the other possibility that sports changes far too often for writers to publish works that will still remain relevant in the immediate future. Through the use of the internet and cable television, society has access to more information than ever before. These popular forms of media tend to report on a daily basis the latest developments in the world of sports.
CHAPTER II

THE INGREDIENTS TO SPORT

Background

The author believes that there are three ingredients that are essential to the survival of all professional sports: the community, the fans, and the athletes. Professional sports, as we know them, will not survive without all three and each is as equally important as the next. The community creates the players; the players create the sports; the fans keep the community and the sports in business. The author will look at each of these three ingredients in depth and the directions each needs to take to ensure the success and survival of professional sports.

The Community

The author states that the community is the first ingredient to sports. It is there, in the community, where an individual first learns the fundamentals of sports: teamwork, discipline, hard work, practice, winning, losing, and sportsmanship. Yet with all the positive attributes sports provides individuals with, one element that often gets overlooked is the monetary role sports play in the community’s economy. Pick up any newspaper or tune in to your favorite sports program and chances are you may mistake a good portion of it as a financial report. The underlying factor to the majority of these headlines is the direct economic impact the role of sports and its athletes have on their respective communities. These professional sports teams have the ability to generate substantial revenues for their host city. The Super Bowl alone has a direct impact of
more than $200 million to its host city! As Baron Pittenger (1995), former executive
director of the U.S. Olympic Committee points out, “The payrolls of the teams and jobs
created by their presence are of considerable value to the economy of the commonwealth,
let alone the dollars spent by fans from outside the area who travel to see the teams play”
(p.11).

Teams and their communities share a common goal: to attract. Team owners pay
mega-salaries to the Michael Jordans of the sports world because they know that by
having them on their teams it becomes a win-win situation for the community and their
team. Through ticket and concession sales, fans pump millions of dollars into the
community’s economy and strengthen the team financially. This money in turn
contributes to the community’s quality of life, which provides more opportunities for its
youth.

Most athletes that are successful have received a lot of support along the way
from members of their community, especially in the way of their family and teachers.
That is why it is so important that athletes retrace their roots and help-out in their
community, both directly and indirectly as role models. Some sports agents, like Leigh
Steinberg, require that all of his clients give something back to their respective
communities. By giving back, they strengthen the support system that made them great
and enables the community to continue to provide opportunities for others.

Staudohar (1996) makes the analogy that, “Professional sport is a golden goose
that feeds from a trough of monies supplied by the viewing public” (p.190). He suggests
the reason why the success of sports depends on a positive public image is because the
utilization of this service is based on the public’s need for entertainment rather than a
their biological need to sustain life. According to Staudohar (1996), "If sport wants a good public image, it has to earn it by presenting an example that is exemplary, not debilitating" (p.193).

The Fans

Gorman and Calhoun (1994), co-authors of the book, The Name of the Game, point out, "Sports may have begun more simply, as recreation, mostly for those who participated, with spectators being an afterthought, but that is history" (p.239). Sports has become an escape for most fans. It allows its spectators to let go of their everyday lives and attach themselves to something very personal. Edward Hirt (cited in Gorman & Calhoun, 1994), assistant professor of psychology at Indiana University supports this theory when he states, "As fans, we see our teams as extensions of ourselves, team success is personal success, and team failure is personal failure" (p.239). Although fans "feel" for their teams, Gorman and Calhoun (1994) remind us that, "Fans don't have the burden of performing well for big games, and aren't to blame when their team fails, yet when their team wins, everybody shares in the victory" (p.46). Fans and their devotion have been the primary cause of this great evolution, that is the commercialization of professional sports. It is their love for sports that has led to the creation of an entire industry. This love is called "Fan Equity." Gorman and Calhoun (1994) describe fan equity as, "The relentless emotional and physical investment that certain fans make in their teams; it gives those teams an added measure of strength to prosper and survive" (p.237).
Just like the nature of the sports has changed, so have the fans. Today, fans want to believe they matter, and they should. Gorman and Calhoun (1994) describe today's fans in the following passage:

"Fans are a special breed of consumer. They become attached to their favorite players and they are not shy in letting team owners know exactly how they feel. This element we call fan equity, strong and resilient and far-reaching as it is, can be destroyed. The mechanism for that destruction is already in place" (p.250).

In an article titled, "Big League Troubles," U.S. News & World Report writer Dan McGraw (1998) points out that, "Across America, more and more fans seem to be concluding that they matter less and less to the major sports leagues" (p.42). "Many of them are also disgusted by what they read in sports pages, which often resemble the financial section – if not a police blotter: A basketball player who says $103 million isn't enough pay; A football player who punches his pregnant girlfriend; Hockey players who trash their dorm room after the Olympics; A baseball player who claims he can't live on $1.6 million a year" (McGraw, 1998, p.42). As fans are exposed to more and more bad press in sports, whether it be athletic misconduct or excess materialism, it turns them off and destroys their fantasy. We must wonder if in fact winning ball games and championships is the single, most important goal it appears to be. Gorman and Calhoun (1994) warn us that, "If sports loses its fans, it becomes just another product being sold on the open market, and no sport can afford to abandon its unique status and join the soap merchants and car salesman" (p.251).

Staudohar (1996) supports this claim when he states, "Industries that produce goods and those that render services to the public tend to rise and fall in accordance with
the consumer image of the attractiveness and reliability of their performance” (p.190).

Fans are the customers to the business of sports and fan equity is any team’s most important asset (Gorman & Calhoun, 1994). Through fan equity, fans are not only connected with their team, but also with the products that sponsor the game.

It is a peculiar relationship, this connection between a fan and their team(s), but it’s safe to say that if it weren’t for the fans, there wouldn’t be any professional sports. The author believes that fans, derived from the word fanatics, are the most underestimated and powerful figures in the world of sports. Staudoah (1996) agrees when he says that, “Fan equity gives those teams an added measure of strength to prosper and survive” (p.237). There should exist a trade-off between players and their fans. Players owe it to their fans to sign an autograph or pose for a picture, afterall, it is the fans who are the ones that make the noise, fill the seats and pay their salaries. It is the fans who bought the team caps and spent half a month’s paycheck or more for season tickets. That is the essential point about sports that can never be forgotten: It is always personal (Gorman & Calhoun, 1994, p.92). Yes, for the people making the big decisions, the owners and the managing partners and the general managers, it is business (Gorman & Calhoun, 1994, p.92). Yes, for the athletes, coaches, and scouts, it is athletics and strategy (Gorman & Calhoun, 1994, p.92). But for the fans, the people who attend the games and tune in on the radio and television, who buy the products and carry the banners, it is personal (Gorman & Calhoun, 1994, p.92).

Owners, players and league officials alike have always been motivated by greed, the quick buck and self-aggrandizement, but the sports business is more competitive and impersonal today (Staudoah, 1996). They should never forget the importance of the fan
to the survival of their sport. For the survival of professional sports as we know them to continue, fans need to feel wanted. It is not a surprise to anyone how sports has become the big business it has. It is a very special business though, and a delicate one that survives and prospers because of the relentless attachment, even love, of fans (Gorman & Calhoun, 1994, p.251).
CHAPTER III
THE PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE

Background

What are professional athletes and what are their responsibilities? Some may argue that the professional athlete is nothing more than a fancy billboard, serving as a means of making sure the product-buying-public are parked in front on their television sets at every chance possible. Fans may argue that the athlete is nothing more than extensions of themselves. The professional athlete is the author’s final ingredient to the success of all sports.

Once again, the author wants to stress the importance of character as it pertains to the professional athlete. Not just any professional athlete makes a sport successful, but those that maintain the best character during their tenure make both the sport and their careers successful and worth remembering. Unfortunately, the fame, fortune and notoriety that comes with being a professional athlete doesn’t include a set of instructions on how to act and perform responsibly.

Today’s Professional Athlete by Definition

Today’s professional athletes are no longer just athletes. Today’s professional athletes are celebrities who achieve notoriety more for their media images and cupidity than for their playing skills and personal integrity (Staudohar, 1996). They are entertainers as much as they are athletes. Whether they’re in the movies or in the
recording studio, many of today’s professional athletes make up a large part of our pop culture.

The realm of sports now shares the same stage as Hollywood for fan attention and adoration. Each industry is filled with performers that are charismatic, fascinating and visible; good looks, muscular bodies and sexy images all seem to dominate. Similar to Hollywood, today’s professional athletes come from a generation that has allowed them to invent themselves and create a unique identity for the team and the league for which they play for. They are more flashy and boastful than the players that came before them. Another word to describe these players is greedy. Sheed (1995) points out that, “Today’s professional athlete uses World Championships not to build one another, but simply as a bargaining chip to raise their own price” (p.11). Sheed (1995) exemplifies this when he states that, “At first the deal used to be, ‘Give me the money and I’ll prove I’m the best’ (p.11). But this has degenerated into, ‘If I get the money, then I must be the best, and I don’t have to prove a thing’” (p.11). So seldom do we see displays of meekness in today’s athletics.

Through the use of television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet, we are able to know more about these celebrities than ever before. This media explosion puts today’s professional athlete under more scrutiny than at any other time in the history of professional sports. Part of the reason is due to the fact that the players are much more of a media sensation today than they were years ago.
An ESPN/Chilton poll asked respondents 12 years of age and older, to name their favorite athlete and who they would choose to endorse a product (Sports Business Daily, September 20, 1996). The results shown in Table 1 were as follows:

### Table 1

**Children’s Preference for Athletes to Endorse Products**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favorite Athlete</th>
<th>Top Pick To Endorse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Michael Jordan</td>
<td>1) Michael Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Emmitt Smith</td>
<td>2) Shaquille O’Neal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Troy Aikman</td>
<td>3) Troy Aikman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Joe Montana</td>
<td>4) Emmitt Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Cal Ripkin, Jr.</td>
<td>5) Joe Montana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Shaquille O’Neal</td>
<td>6) Cal Ripkin, Jr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Dan Marino</td>
<td>7) Magic Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Mike Tyson</td>
<td>8) Deion Sanders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Magic Johnson</td>
<td>9) Dan Marino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Dale Earnhardt</td>
<td>10) Steve Young</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(11,583 respondents) (10,916 respondents)

The premise of the previous survey was based only on sports. What if the respondents could name any star? In another ESPN Chilton Sports Poll 3,000 sports fans were asked to name their favorite celebrities. Respondents could name any athlete, movie star, TV personality, model, musician or politician. The favorites are shown in Table 2.
Table 2

Children’s Preference for Celebrities to Endorse Products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) None</td>
<td>1) None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Michael Jordan</td>
<td>2) Leonardo DiCaprio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Bill Clinton</td>
<td>3) Oprah Winfrey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Clint Eastwood</td>
<td>4) Bill Clinton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) A. Schwarzenegger</td>
<td>5) Michael Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Harrison Ford</td>
<td>6) Mel Gibson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Mel Gibson</td>
<td>7) Tom Cruise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Jack Nicholson</td>
<td>8) Harrison Ford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Bill Cosby</td>
<td>9) Rosie O’Donnell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Jerry Seinfeld</td>
<td>10) Brad Pitt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Respondents: 1,547)  
(Respondents: 1,452)

SOURCE: (Sports Business Daily, April 17, 1998)

With the exception of Michael Jordan, no other athlete appeared in either gender’s top 10 list of favorite celebrities. What does this tell us? We can assume that although researchers and authors may categorize athletes as celebrities, the general public may have a difficult time seeing them (the athletes) in this manner.

Sheed (1995) points out that, “The world is thus getting a mixed bag with the current American athlete, as it is with our values in general” (p.11). Somewhere along the way we have lost the friendship, real or imagined, that we once had with players and their teams (Lupica, 1996). We now come to realize that the sport changes the players before the players change the sport.

Today it’s hard to keep the faith in your favorite team, sport or player. It seems every week something disturbing is happening in the world of sports, something that goes way over the line. Are our professional athletes really this bad or do we, as a society,
over scrutinize their behavior because they’re constantly in the public eye? The author believes that society is fighting an entrenched culture, not just images and inflated egos. These are not problems limited to just the sports world and the problem is not just sport itself. Behind these athletes is an narrow-minded sports subculture for which they play in that accepts or condones the poor behavior that is so frequently witnessed today. When do professional athletes experience this negative transformation? When do they really start to believe they are above the rest of society?

To a certain extent, the author believes this negative transformation begins the moment these young players enter a big-time sports program whether it is on a collegiate or professional level. It is there that the preferential treatment begins and the athlete begins to develop a “god-complex”. Sheed (1995) believes, “The real problem, and it keeps coming back like a toothache, is that there is no such thing as moderation or cool judgement once you sign on for a big-time sports program” (p.11). No one teaches these young men and women, some as fresh out of high school, how to manage freedom and notoriety. The reason: no one cares. No one cares how old you are, where you came from, or what you think, they just want to see you perform. The success of the ball club is what all the owners, coaches, agents and league officials care about.

This adulation that comes with being a professional athlete leads guys and girls to believe they can get away with anything. These players become more detached from normal society and think that the rules that you and I abide by may not necessarily apply to them. The disdain for women imbedded in locker-room culture, the arrogance bred from the availability of ever-present groupies and the lenient way police, courts and teams treat abusive athletes all play significant roles (Falk, 1995). The “system” is to
blame and part of this system is the leagues which govern these athletes. It is the leagues that have allowed the rules of the games to be both ignored and stretched to the point that the game bears little resemblance to what it used to be.

The end result of irresponsible behavior among professional athletes is that each incident detracts from the real reasons fans turn to sports in the first place. As fans and a concerned society, we must remember not to focus too much on the athletes, for we may lose the context of these growing problems in our own lives. Until professional athletes take responsibility for their actions and accept the fact that being a celebrity doesn’t give them the right to act irresponsibly, this unacceptable behavior will most likely continue. The wrong messages conveyed by our athletic heroes are expressed not through the secret use of illegal substances but through flagrant violence and sociopathic abuse of other people, compounded by the attitude that their star status exempts them from accepted rules of conduct.

In The Beginning

Picture the following scenario: You’re an inner city high school or college kid with exceptional talent in basketball. Your family has been living on welfare as long as you can remember. All of your clothes are hand-me-downs from your relatives or items your mother bought at a resale shop. Your walks to and from school are through crime and drug infested neighborhoods where an occasional gunshot is not uncommon. After one of your games a man in a suit asks to meet with you. He tells you that you are good enough for the NBA and guarantees that you can be a sensation in the big leagues. You think the man is just joking until he has a limousine pick you and your parents up the next
day to take you to his office on Park Avenue in New York City. There he gives you and your parents some “bonus” money and promises you that there is more where that came from. He sells you on the fact that by next Spring’s NBA draft, you will be a multi-millionaire.

Sound too good to be true? It happens more often than you might think.

Seduced by big money and the promise of material wealth, young athletes all across the country are being enticed by the persuasive tactics of sports agents. How do you tell a young, up and coming athlete, who has known nothing but poverty in his life to turn away from lucrative offers and promises, and to pursue a degree instead? It’s next to impossible, but as a society we must be discerning in the way we protect the future of our young athletes and the integrity of the institutions for which they play for. Our “system” should provide student athletes with opportunities to live, learn, and succeed on high school and college grounds without being lured by the big money of professional sports. Society needs to teach our children that even as young people they can and will be looked at as role models. We must expect and demand higher standards of sportsmanship from the young people who represent our schools and communities.

Sure it is going to be difficult to tell an individual in the scenario above to walk away from the opportunity, but we have to at least try. What happens if we do not try? There are plenty of examples of which to look at in today’s sports to answer that question. Too often the young athletes who do make it to the professional ranks lack the maturity level needed to handle the success. Players that leave school early not only hurt the professional leagues by bringing in less-than-acceptable talent, but also hurt the quality of games in the college ranks as well. On balance, if you are running a league,
you would like to have players come in that are fully developed in their skills, both mentally and physically. If you look at all four of the major leagues: NFL, NBA, NHL, and MLB, none of them have young stars that are exhibiting anything close to the star power of the older athletes.

Crime, Sportsmanship and Punishment

With no intention to minimize the behavior of professional athletes today, if the behavior many of us complain about was just a matter of poor sportsmanship, the author believes that most of the critics could probably live with it. It is when the players’ actions fall under the category of “violent crimes” do we start to be seriously concerned.

In September, 1997, ESPN Sportszone took an in-depth look at crime in professional sports. “Sports Under Arrest” examined for 5 days why athletes get in trouble, the crimes they commit and what can be done about it. At the time the piece was written (September 1-5), there were 145 athletes and sports figures arrested in a total of 134 alleged crimes for the year so far (Farrey, 1997). In addition, there were 15 cases in which the courts settled crimes from previous years. As Tom Farrey (1997), ESPN Sportszone editor states, “…that means a new incident of athlete crime emerged once every two days -- and that does not include crimes that went unreported in the media. Also excluded were those that involved long-retired athletes (Baskerville Holmes’ murder-suicide), civil actions (Charles Barkley’s bar punch), administrative judgments (Mike Tyson’s bite) and violations of league drug policies that did not involve police.”
Findings in ESPN Sportszone’s study are listed in Table 3:

Table 3

**Examples of Aggressive Behavior Among Athletes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROBLEM</th>
<th>STATISTIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletes often took their aggression outside the game.</td>
<td>Half of the incidents cited had a violent in nature, whether they allegedly assaulted someone or used their physical force during the course of incident. (Farrey, 1997).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They were just as likely to attack women as men.</td>
<td>Half of the alleged violent crimes were perpetrated by males against women, usually in the form of domestic violence, sexual assaults or rapes. (Farrey, 1997).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance abuse remains a problem.</td>
<td>There were 36 incidents that involved drugs or alcohol, most often in cases related to marijuana possession or drunk driving. (Farrey, 1997).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many allegations were ultimately dismissed. And for those athletes and sports figures whose cases were resolved and did lead to a conviction, few of them went on to serve any jail time.

What about the athletes who commit violent acts or other heinous crimes while they are playing and being viewed by millions of spectators? How about Mike Tyson, for example, and his infamous ear-biting incident in the championship bout with Evander
Holyfield (Capozzi, 1997)? For his barbaric acts and poor sportsmanship, Tyson earned $30 million; more money than most people will ever make in a lifetime. The punishment? He was temporarily banned from boxing and is looking to be reinstated as this study is written.

When the legal system fails to justly discipline professional athletes for their wrong doings, it contributes to the athletes' inflated egos of being above the law and encourages them to continue their irresponsible behavior. Historically, athletes had no rights and were dealt with capriciously by star chamber justice. Today though, athletes seem to be afforded a job protection that those of us in other occupations will never have.

There are too many athletes who simply will not accept their responsibility to society. In some form or another we feel betrayed by athletes when they misbehave. It just does not seem fair that men and women so blessed to make a fortune in sports should not be held more accountable for their actions when they abuse what so many of us take as a privilege, rather than a mere profession. Yet this is what we have become accustomed to in this day and age, or is it?

How many times have we seen the clip of Roberto Alomar spitting in the face of umpire John Hirschbeck (Farrey, 1998a)? Probably more than we'd like. How many times have you seen the clip of Juan Marichal turning around in the batter's box and attacking John Roseboro with his bat (Farrey, 1998a)? Probably never. The reason? The Alomar episode happened just a few years ago and the Marichal incident took place in 1965. What do these two incidents have in common besides indecent acts of human tastelessness? They were both captured on television. Our memories are far too short,
the world we live in far too different, and the definition of fair play far too fluid, for any of us to say that sportsmanship has left and gone away (Farrey, 1998a). Poor sportsmanship has been around longer than we realize.

Farrey (1998a) reminds us that, “It wasn’t too long ago when there were no cable stations, no extended sports-highlight shows each night, and the Internet with its many sport sites was a mere gleam in the eye of some Defense Department engineer.” Today, however, poor sportsmanship has become a sign of the times due to the amount of coverage and analysis we put each incident through. This being said, maybe we’re not as worse off today as we were yesterday.

The next time you attend a professional sporting event, make an attempt to get to the arena early to watch the players prepare before their game. Players from opposing teams can often be found talking and joking around with, even hugging, each other, behavior that was taboo in previous generations (Farrey, 1998a). Farrey (1998a) believes, “There is definitely an increase in showmanship among athletes, a reflection of the growing notion that sports is entertainment. But many of the greatest athletes in history were individualistic as well, and even talked trash, although they didn’t call it that at the time. Back then, it passed as charisma” (Farrey, 1998a).

Farrey (1998b) points out that, “In today’s diverse world there is no longer any single definition of ‘sportsmanship’ that applies in the world of sports – but rather many definitions, each shaped by the nature of the sport, the relative pressure to win, the personality of the individual, and even the culture that the person springs from.” There is not only an obvious gap between what we preach to children and what we reward as adults in sportsmanship, but there is an even bigger gap between the sports themselves.
Look at professional soccer and football. If a player scores a goal in soccer it is the nature of the game to run and celebrate the score. In football however, the same celebration will cost your team at least a penalty if not more. Punch an opponent in hockey and you might get 5 minutes in the penalty box; do it in the NBA, and you’re out multiple games and lots of salary (Farrey, 1998b).

How much tolerance is there for sportsmanship in professional sports today? It might seem like an odd question to ask, considering fans’ regular complaints about athletes and coaches who spit at umpires, kick cameramen, talk trash, hang on the rim and chew on opponents’ ears (Farrey, 1998c). As much as the public yearns for role models, they crave their share of victories from their teams as well. In an ESPN SportsZone poll conducted on sportsmanship, just half of the 24,317 voters said that if they had to choose one, they would take winning over sportsmanship (Farrey, 1998c). This statistic, if it is a good representation of what society really thinks, is disturbing and, in a way, hypocritical. How can a society that is so fed up with the behavior of its athletes be so inclined to close its eyes to it all as long as their teams and players win? This is truly a clear depiction of how the system has failed in not only sports, but in society as well.

The legendary sportswriter Grantland Rice once wrote, “When the Great Scribe comes to write against your name, he marks not that you won or lost, but how you played the game” (cited in Garber, 1998b). But are those words, which have endured the better part of a century as a sporting ideal no longer true or is winning the only thing that matters in the ultra-competitive, high-dollar sports world (Garber, 1998b)? You be the judge.
Other Money Making Opportunities

The use of professional athletes as endorsers is a common practice in corporate America’s marketing and advertising strategy. Whether it is a soft drink, a vitamin supplement, or a baseball cap, sports figures are being used by companies to sell these and many other products to potential consumers.

The most common items for athletes to endorse these days are sneakers, apparel, and equipment related to their sport. Generally endorsement fees athletes collect can range anywhere between a few thousand and several million dollars per year depending on how high profile the athlete is and the term of the deal. Corporations who use athletes to endorse their products realize that they (athletes) are an extremely powerful way of sending messages, especially to the younger audiences. This practice may change real soon however. As society becomes more and more disgusted with the irresponsible actions of today’s professional athletes, these companies may start to look to other public figures to help endorse their products. Picking celebrities/athletes to endorse their products is a gamble for any company. When athletes are selected to endorse a company or product, companies find they don’t have much control over how the athlete performs on or off the field of play. In a world where sponsorship dollars mean big business, a player’s image on and off the field is vital to the them as well as to their sponsors.

In March of this year, CNN’s Nick Charles interviewed New Balance’s Global Marketing Vice President, Paul Heffernan. Heffernan declared that New Balance no longer uses athletes as endorsers. He goes on to state, “Our feeling is the hero of the New Balance company is our product... It’s very dangerous to have athletes build the
type of imagery that you want for your company” (Sports Business Daily, March 6, 1998, p.3).

Athletes, teams and coaches need to be aware of the damage controversy can cause and guard against it, fore the ruins of a shattered reputation leave little with which to build (Hessert, 1997a). A prime example is Golden State Warrior guard Latrell Sprewell. In December, 1997, Sprewell was accused of attacking his coach P.J. Carlesimo twice during a team practice while threatening to kill him. Sprewell received a 1-year suspension without pay, a terminated contract, and his primary endorsement – Converse sneakers and apparel – released him. Many believe that Sprewell got off easy and that this was just another case of athletes being treated above the law. Anywhere else in corporate America, where an employee attacks and threatens the life of their superior, that individual would most likely serve time in jail. Fast-forward 5 months. Latrell Sprewell files a lawsuit against his team and the NBA. He is seeking lost wages and damages stemming from what his lawyers allege as excessive discipline. Sprewell alleges that the team and league made several transgressions, including a violation of his civil rights, racial discrimination and violation of antitrust and unfair business practices statutes at the federal and state level, and is seeking $30 million in damages. What is wrong with this picture? This is only the most recent contribution to what is a growing trend toward unappealing sports today (Fresina, 1997). What one team, a league office and major corporation admitted by separating themselves from the volatile Sprewell was that there is a lot to be said for the marketability of character (Fresina, 1997).

Endorsements allow companies to use a combination of a certain player’s talent and image to attract customers. Compare Dennis Rodman and Tiger Woods for example.
The NBA is a more popular game as far as viewship when compared to the PGA's events, and yet Tiger is probably more of a master of his skill than Dennis Rodman is of his. As a company do you look for the athlete who has a more marketable and artistic image like Dennis Rodman or do you sign an up and coming athlete like Tiger Woods even though he's in a humdrum sport? Answer: You sign Tiger Woods before you sign Dennis Rodman. While Dennis Rodman's antics have allowed him to make $2 million a year in endorsements for Victoria's Secret and Oakley eyewear, charismatic Tiger Woods will walk away with over $60 million over 5 years from Titleist and NIKE (Hessert, 1997b).

Dennis Rodman may be the best rebounder in the game of basketball today, but talent alone doesn't bring about endorsement opportunities. As an athlete, your performance on and off the field will win fans and it will lose them; it will create sponsorship opportunities and it will lose some. Owners should be as concerned about their players' image as anyone because it is the players that create the image of their team and sport. If a team cannot keep its players out of trouble, sponsors will be quick to pull back their money, not just from the players but from the sport as well. After all, what sponsors are going to want a player in handcuffs to sell its products? As you can see the ball is the players' court, literally.

Bobby Hull (cited in Ferguson, 1983), longtime NHL left wing, once said, "Every professional athlete owes a debt of gratitude to the fans and management, and pays an installment every time he plays. He should never miss a payment" (p.8-2). Would it not be nice if every athlete shared the same philosophy today? Yet today it's different. It is
all about money, who has how much and who did what to get it. Enough is never enough in the world of sports, the monster must continually be fed.

One way athletes can make extra money on top of their salaries is through personal appearances. Whether it's an autograph session or speaking engagement, professional athletes stand to make a nice secondary income. Unlike the old days when athletes would sign autographs for free, today, any fan seeking the signature of his or her favorite player usually has to pay for it. How much? Autographs can range anywhere between $15 and $2,500, depending on the player and the item being signed. Table 4 provides a list of a few current and former baseball players and their going rate for their autographs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLAYER</th>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>PRICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cal Ripkin, Jr.</td>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>$180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reggie Jackson</td>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Thomas</td>
<td>Bat</td>
<td>$240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nolan Ryan</td>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>$90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken Griffey, Jr.</td>
<td>Bat</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let's take a look at the hourly rate of some current and former NFL players for personal appearances made during last year's Super Bowl parties. These figures can be found in Table 5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLAYER</th>
<th>TEAM</th>
<th>HOURLY RATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steve Young</td>
<td>San Francisco 49ers</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomer Esiason</td>
<td>Cincinnati Bengals</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howie Long</td>
<td>Oakland Raiders</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil O'Donnell</td>
<td>NY Jets</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Ham</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Steelers</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The author believes that these are perfect examples of how professional sports' moral distress is a case of a star-struck society that has left it's system unattended.

While booking an athlete for an appearance is usually a cost that is picked up by a corporation, it's still grossly obscene to charge exuberant amounts of money just for someone's signature. With the unconditional devotion and commitment fans give to their players and teams year after, players owe it to their supporters to be more fan-friendly and not just think of what they can make and do for themselves.
CHAPTER IV

SPORTS = BIG BUSINESS

Background

Sports is no longer a game, it is a business. According to John Simpson (1995), writer for the Memphis Business Journal, “It's not whether you win or lose anymore, it's whether you turn a profit. That's the reality of American team sports, like it or not” (p.34). Professional sports are no different than your ordinary consumer products company selling to the general public. Teams and leagues, just like companies, try to create an identity for their products. In the case of sports, it is the players and their teams that are the products consumers identify with. Therefore, the market value of sports is determined by what draws a crowd. Players’ salaries, ticket prices, new stadiums, television contracts, corporate sponsorship, luxury boxes, and team apparel are some of the areas in the realm of sports that are escalating beyond our imagination and control. A closer look at these areas is given to better understand the underlying business of professional sports.

Salaries

Gorman and Calhoun (1994) believe that, “No number in sports is more inflationary today than the salaries paid to athletes” (p.147). How do professional sports teams afford to pay such astronomical salaries year after year? Players salaries are determined by the economics of the sport; the healthier the sport, the more the players are paid. Television contracts, concession sales, parking fees, ticket sales, and so forth all add up to revenue for professional sports teams to use to pay for their players salaries.
It's very hard to determine what a player is worth. Is anyone worth $34 million a year? Evidently, the Chicago Bulls thought Michael Jordan was. Let us look at the rise in player salaries by the four major sports: NBA, NFL, MLB, and NHL.

**Figure 1. Average NBA Player Salaries from 1980 to 1997**

As noted in "Team Marketing Report" (cited in McGraw, 1998) and depicted in Figure 1, player salaries increased over 1500% - from 1980 to 1997 from $171,000 to $2,600,000 respectively (p.42).
Figure 2. **Average NFL Player Salaries from 1982 to 1997**

According to "Team Marketing Report" (cited in McGraw, 1998), player salaries increased over 475% - from 1982 to 1998 from $157,000 to $751,000 respectively (p.43).

Figure 3. **Average MLB Player Salaries from 1980 to 1997**

As noted in the "Team Marketing Report" (cited in McGraw, 1998) and depicted in Figure 3, player salaries increased over 475% - from 1980 to 1997 from $146,500 to $1,300,000 respectively (p.44).
Figure 4. **Average NHL Player Salary from 1983 to 1987**

As noted in “Team Marketing Report” (cited in McGraw, 1998) and cited in Figure 4, player salaries increased almost 900% - from 1983 to 1997 from $134,000 to $1,200,000 respectively (p.45).

Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 show that salaries for professional athletes have skyrocketed over the past 10 or more years. Some people may think that because these individuals are the greatest athletes in the world and the best at what they do, they deserve to be paid accordingly, after all, this country was founded on the premise that every man and woman has the right to pursue the free enterprise system. In our everyday lives, we all have the pursuit of money on our minds. Whether it is for the purpose of feeding our families or just plain survival, we are all on the never-ending quest for the all-mighty dollar. As in any job, employees should be paid based on their performance. If you’re the best at what you do you should be paid top dollar; if you’re production level is mediocre, you should be paid accordingly. How often do you hear negative comments about Michael Eisner,
CEO of the Walt Disney Company, and his $20 million per year salary? Why should the pay scale in professional sports be different than any other industry? It should not be this way, but it is. Athletes are merely exercising the same rights many of us have – the right to make a living. Having stated that, the author does not approve of the enormous amounts these athletes are demanding. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (1998), “In 1996, there were 99,627,000 households in the United States. The average income of those households was $35,492.” Of those households, only 3.5% of them made over $100,000. Case and point: athletes make more money than 97% of all the households in the United States.

So, what are athletes worth? Is Michael Jordan worth the $34,000,000 per year in salary he receives? There’s no doubt that Michael Jordan is the greatest player to ever play the game of basketball, but is he really worth that much money? Most people, including the author, can’t fathom what $34,000,000 really equates to.

Here’s an idea of what his previous contract of $25,000,000 equates to:

a) Assuming Michael Jordan averages 30 minutes per game, he will make $10,000 per minute or $300,000; b) Michael Jordan makes $7,415 per hour more than minimum wage; and c) If you were given a tenth of a penny for every dollar he made, you’d be living comfortable at $65,000 per year.

As the Michael Jordan endorsed Gatorade jingle goes, “If I could be like Mike.”

Every situation is different. In 1995, the press reported that Deion Sanders of the San Francisco 49ers signed a seven-year deal with the Dallas Cowboys worth $35,000,000 that included a $12,900,000 signing bonus. The initial reaction in the press was, “Nobody is worth that kind of money.” Michener (1983), clarifies this reaction
when he claims that, "Too often, the publicized salaries are illusionary or even fake" (p.195). Today it's quite common for these contracts to come with so many conditional clauses that the athlete has very little chance of fulfilling them (Michener, 1983). In the Deion Sanders situation, there's a good chance that he won't see all of his money either. His contract is broken down in Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>BASE</th>
<th>BONUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>$178,000</td>
<td>$1,857,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>$178,000</td>
<td>$1,857,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>$178,000</td>
<td>$1,857,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>$5,250,000</td>
<td>$1,857,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>$6,500,000</td>
<td>$1,857,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
<td>$1,857,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
<td>$1,857,143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deion Sanders will definitely receive his signing bonus of $12,900,000 but the rest of his contract is uncertain. The team always reserves the right to release based on inadequate performance, salary cap restrictions, or other conditional clauses within the contract.

It is true that while not all athletes make this much money, the author feels the majority are grossly overpaid. What does this say about our society when we hold higher regards for professional athletes than we do for our teachers and policemen? The author believes the system has failed.
You, Me and the Average Fan

Whether you are a couch-potato-fan or a die-hard-gotta-be-there-fan, the price to enjoy your favorite past-time has gotten more expensive. McGraw (1998) supports this statement when he says, “The sports leagues have long viewed fans as a bottomless money pit, but there are signs that fans are close to being tapped out” (p.42). As stated earlier in this study, the average income for a household in the United States is only $35,492 per year! Every year “Team Marketing Report” (1998), a trade publication that tracks sports economic trends, compiles and publishes a Fan Cost Index. The Fan Cost Index is an estimate of what a family of four will spend on tickets, parking, food, beverages and souvenirs while attending a game. For 1997 the information is as follows:

Expenses for a Family of Four

![Expenses for a Family of Four](image)

**Figure 5. Average Family Expenses By Sport.**

As shown in Figure 5, McGraw (1998) reports that, “The cost this year for a family of four to attend an NBA ($214.28), NFL ($221.17), or NHL ($228.39) game is now about 30% of the average household’s weekly earnings. MLB, with lower ticket prices because there are more games to charge for than the other sports costs the average family of four $114.8 for one game, about 16% of its weekly earnings” (p.43). Now some may say that this is a lot of money for a family of four. What are they buying that the outing costs so
much? The Fan Cost Index includes the prices of four average-priced tickets, two small beers, four small sodas, four hotdogs, parking, two game programs and two caps (Team Marketing Report, 1996, p.7).

Fan spending doesn’t stop there either. What about the licensed merchandise fans want: the jerseys, caps, T-shirts, key chain, and so forth. There’s a price fans pay to support their team or look the part of their favorite athlete. Table 7 shows fan spending as researched by The Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>League</th>
<th>'93</th>
<th>'94</th>
<th>'95</th>
<th>'96</th>
<th>'97</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MLB</td>
<td>$2.5B</td>
<td>$2.1B</td>
<td>$2.6B</td>
<td>$2.6B</td>
<td>$2.6B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBA</td>
<td>$2.1B</td>
<td>$2.5B</td>
<td>$2.6B</td>
<td>$2.6B</td>
<td>$2.6B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFL</td>
<td>$2.6B</td>
<td>$3.0B</td>
<td>$3.15B</td>
<td>$3.3B</td>
<td>$3.6B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHL</td>
<td>$800M</td>
<td>$1.0B</td>
<td>$1.0B</td>
<td>$1.0B</td>
<td>$1.2B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCAA</td>
<td>$1.95B</td>
<td>$2.0B</td>
<td>$2.1B</td>
<td>$2.1B</td>
<td>$2.0B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS:</strong></td>
<td><strong>$9.95B</strong></td>
<td><strong>$10.6B</strong></td>
<td><strong>$10.35B</strong></td>
<td><strong>$10.8B</strong></td>
<td><strong>$11.3B</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sports Business Daily, 1998)
The Media

Besides such personal ties, our national obsession with sports is closely connected to two other powerful social forces: the omnipresent media and the steroidal development of the entertainment business (Tharp, Chetwynd, Brownlee, 1996, p.33). In today's society, media is no longer a part of culture, it is culture. Whether it is television, radio, newspapers, magazines, or the internet, they are all trying to get our attention. As NBA Commissioner David Stern (cited in McGraw, 1998) points out, "The average sports fan is now a television fan, and they have more access to NBA games and other sports programming than ever before" (p.43). This is based on the fact that the self-described avid fan of sports spends, on average, as much as 37.6 hours a week consuming sports media while the self-described average fans spend about 21.9 hours per week (The Sports Marketing Letter, 1998). While fans may watch a lot of sports, the networks provide even more. The four major networks, NBC, ABC, CBS, and FOX, provide more than 2,000 hours of sports programming each year and this does not include all-sports networks like ESPN or direct satellite sports subscription services (McGraw, 1998). Today's sports fan has more choices than ever before. Yet despite the overwhelming number of options sports fans have to choose from for their viewing and listening entertainment, ratings for the professional sports leagues are on the decline. MLB is down 30% since 1987, the NBA 14%, the NFL 22%, and the NHL who only recently began national broadcasts are down as well (McGraw, 1998).

There is a price that these networks pay to broadcast these games. For example, McGraw (1998) states that, "The $17.6 billion NFL network TV rights fees to be paid by Fox, ABC/ESPN, and CBS over the next 8 years will come directly and indirectly from
the consumer” (p.45). How? McGraw (1998) explains that, “Fox and CBS are hitting up their affiliates for $30 million to $50 million per year for the cost of the NFL broadcast rights, which will lead to higher local advertising rates as TV stations try to make up the money” (p.45). ESPN recently told cable operators that it wants a 20% hike in cable fees to help cover the cost of its NFL contract, and cable operators are considering passing the costs to consumers by moving sports programming from expanded basic cable to a separately priced tier that would include other sports programmers besides ESPN (McGraw, 1998, p.45).

Besides the financial aspects, we should be concerned with the influence and impressions media, primarily television, is having on our society. Like no other time in history has sports been covered like they are today. The sport issues covered in today’s news broadcasts or local paper are much different than those written about decades ago, because the rules of reporting are different. It’s harder from anyone to cover anything up, especially when you are dealing with a parasitical press. All of this threatens that personal connection between fans and their teams and has amounted to a serious strain on the trust and devotion of fans (Gorman & Calhoun, 1994).

Media has always had the power to influence the minds of its viewers, young and old, with its messages. Too often the receivers of these messages assume that what is on television is what is in the real world. Staudohar (1996) believes that, “Viewing sport thus provides the raw material for dreams” (p.3). Unfortunately, television is not guided by conscience. To cover incidents whether they are right are wrong would be selective and biased in the world of reporting. Television, and all media in fact, have a tendency to sensationalize immoral and unethical situations in professional sports even when they
think they are acting on the side of righteousness. Today's media definitely gives people the sense that today's athletes have dramatically changed for the worse. It's the few unfortunate cases that we hear and, or read about each day that lead us to assume all athletes are like this. Staudehar (1996) suggests that, "If cynicism with fallen heroes is on the rise, it is largely because their failures are more visible. The intense light of the media has exposed their humanity and as players as little more than mercenaries with exceptional talents, which do not necessarily include emotional maturity" (p.190).

Take A Seat

In business, if you want something you have to pay what the market will bear. It's the fundamentals of economics: supply and demand. In sports it is no exception. Every year, the bar keeps getting raised higher and higher to meet the demands of the fans who want to see more of their favorites team, player, sports, and so forth. Fans want to see bigger, faster, stronger athletes, leaping higher, throwing further and hitting harder than ever before in the history of sports (Green, 1996). These fans also want the best seat in the house. This notion for the increased demand for sports can be best described in the emergence of Private Seating Licenses (PSL's).

PSL's represent a successful and increasingly popular new source of private capital available to professional sports franchises and governmental entities seeking to develop a new stadium (KPMG Peat Marwick LLP, 1996). For a fee between $250 to $7,500, fans are guaranteed the right and obligation to purchase season tickets and the ability to sell, trade or give-away these tickets without interference from the team or league as long as the team plays in that facility. In some cases, the license is valid for a
limited period of time, such as 10 years, and then must be renewed (KPMG Peat Marwick LLP, 1996). This is not the cost of the season tickets, just the “right” to hold them. This right can represent approximately 50% to 200% of a season ticket price. According to KPMG Peat Marwick’s Financial and Development Advisory, “PSL’s benefit the team in 2 ways: a) In an era where new facilities can cost well over $200 million, saving the franchise from having to ask the taxpayer for financing makes good public relations; b) The season ticket requirement helps buffer the franchise from sudden ticket sales slumps” (KPMG Peat Marwick LLP, 1996, p.9). How do PSL’s benefit the fan? The author finds the only thing beneficial to the general public is that those citizens who want a sports team in their city can pay for it while those who don’t will not have to carry the financial burden. According to David Cope (cited in Woellert, 1996), vice president of marketing for the Baltimore Ravens, “The whole thing is driven by fans. Fans control their own destiny. Market demands continue to increase” (p.28). The author feels that PSL’s will have a negative impact on season ticket holders. Why should fans, who for many years supported their team both financially and emotionally, be forced to pay between 50% and 200% of the cost for their season tickets for the so called right to be a holder?

Name It

Remember the Boston Garden and Candlestick Park? These were names that carried a mystique whenever they were mentioned. Today they’ve been replaced by the Fleet Center and Pacific Bell Park. What happened? KPMG Peat Marwick’s Financial and Development Advisory suggest that, “The commercialization of venue names is a
direct result of the convergence of sports and corporate America” (KPMG Peat Marwick LLP, 1996, p.3). As the economics of sports become increasingly more complex and demanding, sport franchise owners and facility operators must evaluate every potential revenue generating opportunity and have consequently targeted the “deep pockets” of corporations (KPMG Peat Marwick LLP, 1996, p.3). What do sports do for corporate America? Sports provides a wonderful means in which to attract new customers and keep old ones. It (sports) is also a medium for which corporations can target specific audiences for which they can match their products or services against. When fans see a relationship with their sport or team with a particular product or service, subconsciously this effects their purchasing behavior. They are loyal fans and accept anyone or anything that can support and reinforce the bond they share with their team. Hence, a venue’s name has become a highly valuable commodity for some corporations. Companies buying naming rights have tended to be in the airline, beer brewing or financial services industries (KPMG Peat Marwick LLP, 1996, p.11). In other industries, like the fiercely competitive technology sector, companies like Ericson Cellular, 3Com, and Corel have used stadium naming rights to separate themselves from the competition. KPMG Peat Marwick’s Financial and Development Advisory remind us that, “While inevitably there is initial resentment from sentimental fans who will never again see a game at ‘The Boston Garden’ or ‘Candlestick Park’, the idea of naming rights is now so firmly entrenched that most people understand the economic reality and consider the deals to be a common business practice”(p.11). “This is especially true when naming rights revenue defrays costs that, otherwise, taxpayers would most likely have to fund” (KPMG Peat Marwick LLP, 1996, p.11).
How much are companies willing to pay for a naming rights deal? Table 8 shows a list of the Top 10 Naming Rights Deals.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Total Contract</th>
<th>Avg Payment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MCI Telecommunications</td>
<td>MCI Center</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>10 yrs</td>
<td>$44,000,000</td>
<td>$4,400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continental Airlines</td>
<td>Continental Arena</td>
<td>E. Rutherford, NJ</td>
<td>12 yrs</td>
<td>$29,000,000</td>
<td>$2,416,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank One</td>
<td>Bank One Ballpark</td>
<td>Phoenix, AZ</td>
<td>30 yrs</td>
<td>$66,000,000</td>
<td>$2,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Bell</td>
<td>Pacific Bell Park</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>24 yrs</td>
<td>$50,000,000</td>
<td>$2,083,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller Brewing</td>
<td>Miller Park</td>
<td>Milwaukee, WI</td>
<td>20 yrs</td>
<td>$41,200,000</td>
<td>$2,060,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleet Financial Group</td>
<td>Fleet Center</td>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td>15 yrs</td>
<td>$30,000,000</td>
<td>$2,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Airlines</td>
<td>United Center</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>20 yrs</td>
<td>$36,000,000</td>
<td>$1,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepsi Co.</td>
<td>Pepsi Center</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
<td>20 yrs</td>
<td>$35,000,000</td>
<td>$1,750,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrowhead Water Corp.</td>
<td>Arrowhead Pond</td>
<td>Anaheim, CA</td>
<td>5 yrs</td>
<td>$7,500,000</td>
<td>$1,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molson Brewing Co.</td>
<td>Molson Center</td>
<td>Montreal, Canada</td>
<td>20 yrs</td>
<td>$30,000,000</td>
<td>$1,500,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: KPMG Peat Marwick LLP, 1996

The money put up by the sponsors listed in Table 8 is quite significant. These companies know the intrinsic value that goes with being a sponsor that is tied to a particular sport and team. The exposure and brand recognition they receive enhances their image as a major player in their industry, but just as importantly, it builds credibility. What the public fails to realize is that these companies don’t just get a stadium or arena named after them. There are elaborate packages created for the big brass of each of these companies. KPMG Peat Marwick’s Financial and Development Advisory uses the Pacific Bell/San Francisco Giants as a perfect example of how lucrative these deals can be. When Pacific Bell and the San Francisco Giants announced their new deal in April 1996, they called it a “comprehensive strategic alliance” that included not only the
naming rights but a joint venture to develop a learning center at the new ballpark; a program to donate 100 tickets to charity; a joint effort to develop on-line ticketing, interactive kiosks, in-seat food ordering; and a technology pavilion to highlight technological innovations by Pacific Bell (KPMG Peat Marwick LLP, 1996, p.11). It is very difficult to determine the return on investment for the huge sums of monies companies are willing to spend to be sponsors. Key Bank, which spends $1 million annually for the right to put its name on the Seattle Coliseum, has seen a 26% increase in unaided awareness recall in surveys (KPMG Peat Marwick LLP, 1996, p.10). Not a bad return on investment if just half of that developed into new business. What companies have to understand when considering becoming a title sponsor to a venue is that the name alone will not make it worth the investment. Sponsors attach themselves to teams to attract fans and support their team. It’s up to the companies to make something of their sponsorship and reinforce their message to the fans that they care, about them, their team, and most importantly, their community.

As you can see, now that sports has become the big business it is, winning is not the only thing that matters. Winning is but one element in a complex collection that contributes to the overall composition of sports (Gorman & Calhoun, 1994). This is illustrated by Gorman and Calhoun when they state, “As young fans are priced out of stadiums and arenas, as games are taken off the free airways and put on cable television, more and more fans are denied access to professional sports, and a fan base that would serve those sports well into the future is never built” (p.247). To summarize this section, Dr. Don Beck (cited in Horn, 1997), director of the National Values Center in Denton states, “The whole sports enterprise is a huge monster. On top of the pure game is
heaped all kinds of ancillary organizations. From the card business to the endorsements to the NIKES of the world to the media, the monster has to be fed.”

What we all must remember, especially the owners and players, is that the “monster” survives because the fans allow it. Staudohar (1996), supports this claim when he reminds us that, “Dollars spent to view sports are from discretionary incomes, which can be allocated among various competing sources in the marketplace” (p.190). This is what feeds this ever-growing monster.

It’s disheartening and harder to feel affection and any real connection to sports today, much more than it was 20 or 30 years ago. Apparently, there’s still interest and excitement in sports because the turnstiles keep clicking and the television ratings are holding steady. From merchandising to television coverage to player contracts, the goal of the game now is a dash for the cash (Nemeth, Deacon, Corelli, 1994, p.33).
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

Summary

Sports often reflect the pains, troubles and embarrassments of our society. In unusual ways, sports have turned a mirror on ourselves (Tharp, Chetwynd, Brownlee, 1996, p.30). The boundaries defining professional sports are becoming blurred and seem carelessly mingled into a shadowy kind of “moneyball” (Staudochar, 1996, p.198). This change is part of a general shift in American society, away from a sense of common identity rooted in tradition and toward emphasis on economic achievement based on individualism (Staudochar, 1996). It is time for all owners, commissioners, sports agents, and athletes alike to start thinking about protecting sports’ place in society and not just about their own high standard of living (Gorman & Calhoun, 1994). They all must learn that with freedom comes responsibility.

In sports there is usually always a winner and a loser. In the struggle for sports survival, we are all in a position to lose. The fact is, of the serious social problems confronting professional sports today, drug abuse, domestic violence, and other heinous crimes rank somewhere between faulty stadium plumbing and concessionary food quality on the priority scale of professional sports teams and leagues (Weider, 1998, p.54). It’s unfortunate, but true. Should professional sports as we know them fail, we will all be to blame for their fall, for we it was we who built the “system” for which to keep them in line.

Professional sports have really become style over substance and individual over team. They have become games of greed. Too many of today’s top sports officials and athletes are too greedy to see through the problems affecting their own games. Yet they
should be concerned. Poor sportsmanship, substance abuse, domestic violence, and so forth are all hurting the players’ performances and in turn are damaging the production and image of their team and themselves. These ambassadors to the game must understand and acknowledge that they are in unique and powerful positions to affect the lives of our everyone, especially children (Lapchick, 1997). As a society, we owe it to our young people to make the right decisions. Today children face more pressure than any other generation that came before. Drugs, sex, gangs, and violence are all inhibitors of their growth. The noble spirit of sports can be the antidote for many of these problems.

The author finds nothing wrong with the amount of focus Americans give to the spectacle of sports. We should continue to provide the public with sports entertainment. If we are going to continue to support professional sports in our society, especially at the level we have, we need to be proactive and responsible in educating and protecting our greatest commodity; our youth (Hessert, 1997,a). Today’s youth, just like yesterday’s, idolize and look up to so many professional sports figures, that it is ethically and morally incumbent on all sports officials to clean up their respective sports.

The sports heroes and heroines of today and yesterday represent some of the best of who we are and what we cherish (Tharp, Chetwynd, Brownlee, 1996). However, we should hold each and every professional athlete to the same standards as everyone else. Yet our expectations of athletes, professional as well as amateur, are set too high. The only things society should expect from these entertainers is a level of civility and common sense. Athletes should be regarded as role models only during the time they are on the field and only for that profession. During that game or event, let them be the
"role model athlete" for that particular sport. Once that horn sounds or that whistle blows, the game is over, find a new role model. How can a pro basketball player represent anything but a basketball player? The influential individuals like parents and teachers, who are closest to the public trust of young people, should be the role models. It is unfortunate that we have taken the responsibility of role model and placed it on an individual who scores a lot of touchdowns or hits a lot of home runs, but this is just what sports have become today.

The answer(s) to every single one of the problems professional sports is plagued with today comes from within our own society. Sheed (1995) believes, "It comes down to what society wants its games to do for it" (p.11). The challenge remains for professional sports to rekindle its love affair with the general public that it took so many years to build.

Gorman and Calhoun (1994) conclude that, "We must protect sports' place in our society (p.252). Let us hope that the force of fan equity can coexist with the forces of economics and keep sports as the favorite pastime for the American public for generations to come" (p.252). In the meantime, go ahead and love your favorite team and player, just don't expect it to love you back, at least not until you, the fan, get more respect.
Recommendation

It is getting late in the game, so they say, and the time is now for society to make its come back in professional sports. So, what is the plan? The author’s plan for revitalizing the decorum and decency in professional sports is made up of three parts: a) Media literacy programs, b) Develop and maintain a No Tolerance position, and c) Re-invent the “System”.

Media Literacy Programs

The author believes that sports have become vehicles of self-promotion and assertion for many of today’s athletes. Sheed (1995), agrees with the author when he states: “Thus we arrived at a breed of disciplined (and undisciplined) exhibitionists, affable egoists who like nothing better than to be photographed congratulating their teammates, or to be interviewed in the same capacity” (p.11). They taunt, dance, trash-talk or do whatever else they feel like doing to express their feelings or motivate their team. Unfortunately, most of these acts are inappropriate. This improper behavior carries over to the amateur levels and even onto the playgrounds at schools only to be copied by children. Sure the taunting and boasting makes for good theatre and highlights, but as responsible viewers we must redefine what “good theatre” is for sports.

Viewers give the media power and without them no media can survive. The bottom line is that the media should make better judgement in what it puts in front of its viewers. The media should have just as much concern, if not more, on the effect this is having on its audience.
ESPN anchorman Dan Patrick, while attending a panel discussion on
demonstrative behavior in sports and media was quoted as saying, "We (ESPN) are guilty
of showing gratuitous celebration, and I'm sure it leads to high-school kids wanting to do
it too. The whole thing about slitting your throat (and other self-glorifying gestures), we
shouldn't do that... If there's an honest, spontaneous celebration, great" (Sports Business

Kirsten Conover (1996), staff writer for The Christian Science Monitor, defines
media literacy as, "The ability to access, analyze, and evaluate – as well as communicate
– messages" (p.10). The free reign of media today makes it extremely difficult to redirect
those efforts in programming. This leaves us with one option: to educate and empower
our young people and ourselves through media literacy programs.

According to George Gerbner (cited in Conover, 1996), a dean emeritus at the
University of Pennsylvania, "The media literacy movement is predicated on the notion
that for the first time, children are born into a cultural environment that is no longer
established by the parent, the church, or the teacher; television tells them" (p.10). It is
estimated that students spend 1,500 hours a year in front of the TV and 1,100 hours in
school (Conover, 1996). One thousand five hundred hours is a lot of time to make
negative marks on impressionable young minds. Conover (1996) believes that, "Through
media literacy programs, teachers will aim to help students learn to be thoughtful
gatekeepers of their own consciousness in this Information Age." By building relevance
between what goes on in the classroom (education) and what goes on at home (television)
and in society (real life experiences), media literacy can be an asset for people of all ages
(Conover, 1996). The author believes that media literacy programs should be conducted
on all levels of education, from grammar schools through the college ranks. This way, young people are being educated through every developmental stage of their life. If we, as a society, can make a positive impression on the minds of our youth, especially early on, we set the foundation for a wiser nation.

What does this have to do with professional sports in society? Violence and poor sportsmanship have existed in sports throughout history. Too often this behavior is depicted and glorified on television leading children to think it is the norm. The more children see athletes getting away with irresponsible behavior, the more they emulate it. Through media literacy programs, children of all ages will learn to view the media through a more mature mindset. By teaching them what is right and what is wrong, what is real and what is fake, what is acceptable and what is not, we can help them make more responsible and educated decisions in their own lives. Let them learn to become role models themselves.

Develop and Maintain a No Tolerance Position

Solving the issue of wayward player behavior must start with a new set of rules, a new value system. Yet it does no good if the rules aren’t enforced. Sports leagues shouldn’t have to accept or condone behavior that would not be tolerated in any other segment of society, but it does. Players must learn to avoid circumstances and situations that can reflect badly on themselves as well as their organizations. They need to be productive people before they are productive players.

The author is a firm believer that players will not change their bad behavior until they suffer the consequences for their actions. While it’s true that many of today’s
professional athletes are still young adults with a lot of life's lessons still to be learned, this does not exonerate them of their actions. The best way to reach a player today, in the way that he or she will feel the most impact, is in the wallet. Sports writer Mike Lupica (1996) suggests, "The bigger the crime, the bigger the penalty; the more you make, the more you pay" (p.4). Sure this is being done today, but the fines are not severe enough. Case and point, you cannot fine a player who makes $3.5 million a year $10,000 and expect him or her to have learned their lesson. It is just not stringent enough.

Earlier in the year, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich proposed his own zero tolerance program for professional athletes. Gingrich proposed that all professional sports leagues, associations, and teams should automatically suspend any athlete who tests positive for illegal drugs for 1 year AND that this athlete be banned from his sport until he or she divulges their source of the drugs. Is Newt serious? If this is the case, one might assume that there will not be enough players to suit up two teams when you get there, of course, but that's the price you pay for meddling (Weider, 1998, p.54). Odds are, the professional sports industry's implementation of zero tolerance would be a blend of these two: the rule being routinely ignored but occasionally misapplied— to some expendable second-stringer testing positive for poppy seeds—resulting in a flurry of lawsuits and lots of material for Jay Leno (Weider, 1998, p.54).

Although the proposal looks good on paper, it doesn't hold much water. The author finds Gingrich's proposal a little too far-fetched to be taken seriously. One aspect the author likes is the fact that even members of government are opening their eyes and mouths to what has been a growing epidemic in our society. Maybe then will appropriate action be taken to rectify the problems.
Re-invent the “System”

Throughout this study, the author has made several references to the “system”. The system is the set of unwritten rules and laws that we as a society develop or allow to govern those actions and activities within it. The system within sports is in need of a dramatic turnaround and the first place it should start is at the youth level.

From the moment we introduce our children to sports, we need to emphasize sportsmanship as the number one priority – NOT winning. It is in sportsmanship that they will learn that sports is for fun and that misconduct will not be tolerated. Why sportsmanship? Garber (1998) believes it’s because, “Social scientists tell us that civility has taken a pounding in the broader arena of life, and that sports is merely a reflection of that larger venue”. Maybe if we can instill the proper habits of good sportsmanship into the next generation while they are still young and impressionable, these appropriate actions will carry over to other facets of their lives.

Re-inventing the system is not going to happen overnight or in 1 year or in 10 years. We may, however, see signs of improvement as the years progress. The entities that will have the most immediate impact on improving the system are the professional sports leagues. As these leagues look to improve their own image, they should start at their own youth level – their draft. As more and more young players enter the professional draft with hopes of making it to the big leagues, professional sports leagues must do their part in screening the athletes coming in. The draft is where owners look to make million dollar investments in fresh new talent, usually from the collegiate ranks, with hopes of making their team better. The leagues need to put more weight on their character analysis than ever before when they evaluate their potential candidates. Why?
Why would a team want to invest millions of dollars into an athlete when it's just a matter of time before the player is arrested or suspended for improper behavior? In their player evaluations, leagues should scrutinize a potential player's character as closely as his speed, strength and agility. The investigation should include searches into the individual's academic and criminal records, family history and class attendance. This will enable the leagues to get a more accurate profile of the field of participants entering the draft with the hopes of weeding out the potential problem makers.

While this would be great if the leagues would buy into it, talent will usually outweigh character in the majority of cases. A perfect example of this is former University of Nebraska football star Lawrence Phillips. In September, 1995, Phillips dragged his ex-girlfriend by her hair down three flights of stairs and banged her head against the wall. When he turned himself into the police 16 hours later, there was no need to take a mug shot as Phillips already had an arrest record that included two charges of injuring or destroying property, two assault charges, two charges of disturbing the peace, one charge for failure to appear in court and one driving under the influence charge (Diamond, 1996). Except for one of the disturbing-the-peace incidents, in which Phillips was found guilty and fined $50, ALL previous charges were dismissed (Diamond, 1996, p.4). The end result: a $5.6 million NFL contract with the St. Louis Rams. In the author's proposed system, Lawrence Phillips' football career would have ended in Nebraska where he would be spending the a good portion of his life behind bars.

Unfortunately, the teams and leagues were more interested in Phillips' talent than his character. Phillips has continued his run-ins with the law and has been waived by both the St. Louis Rams and Miami Dolphins.
Stressing the importance of sportsmanship and developing better character analyses for the major sports leagues are all steps in the right direction. Unfortunately, the results of those suggestions won’t be seen for many years should they ever be installed. The following is a list of suggestions the author feels could make an immediate impact on each and every league and produce instantaneous results:

1. **Mentor Programs.** Let retired former players serve as big brothers to rookie athletes and any other players who seek their council.

2. **Alcohol Programs.** Ban all alcohol products from locker rooms, chartered flights and stadium concessions. This would cut out the need for excess celebration as well as reduce fan misconduct.

3. **Family Programs.** Monthly informational meetings in each leagues’ cities for wives, parents, children and siblings. This would serve as a networking tool for players and their families as they learn to handle their unique lifestyle.

4. **Player Education.** A program to assist players interested in completing or extending their academic work. This would also include off-season internship programs to help athletes prepare for life after their sport.

5. **New Tax System.** A flat tax on the larger salaries of athletes, owners, actors, and so forth, which could not be touched or altered by government which would go directly to education, for books, classrooms, computers, and teacher’s salaries.

6. **Contract Clause.** It would be mandatory for players to have responsibility and morals clauses in their contracts with their team and sponsors (morality clauses).

7. **Orientation Program.** Every league should have a mandatory orientation program for its rookies and free agents. The purpose of these programs would be to educate drafted
rookies and free agents about the benefits and responsibilities that come with being a professional athlete. Topics should include drugs, steroids, alcohol, and public and media relations. There are tremendous pressures that coincide with being a professional athlete and the leagues need to take the necessary steps to protect their players and help them manage the unforeseen challenges that await them.

As the author mentioned earlier in this study, the survival of professional sports is in the hands of the spectators. Gorman and Calhoun (1994), remind us that, "These fans have been doing their part for decades now by pledging their devotion through good seasons and bad" (p.252). "It is little wonder that many fans have lost their appetite for the seemingly endless parade of superstars that the media-sports complex churns out" (Staudohar, 1996, p.198). The author believes Staudohar (1996) speaks for the fans when he states, "They (the fans) feel alienated because the games and players seem to be meant less for them and more for promoting of the business of sport as a haven for privileged participants" (p.198).

According to Staudohar (1996), "The future will not likely be one of unparalleled growth in professional sports. Many problems will persist and new ones will arise" (p.198). One thing we must not do is leave sports on autopilot, thinking that it fix itself, because it will not. This will only lead to more corruption later on. Instead, sports require intelligence and breadth of vision at every turn to be of any use at all (Sheed, 1995, p.11).

So many of us are mesmerized by the athletic achievements of men and women that we have created "superheroes" out of our professional athletes. As a young person, the author found it easy to become a true believer in his favorite sports teams and heroes.
Unfortunately, as the years have gone by, he has found it harder and harder to keep the faith with his favorite pastimes as more and more athletes display destructive behavior both on and off the field of play.

This field of play used to be sacred territory for the professional athlete. Not anymore, thanks to the never-ending pursuit of this intense and lightening quick media. But this is not a new phenomenon. Most likely the athletes of 20 or 30 years ago were doing similar things: gambling, extramarital affairs, drugs, and so forth. It is just that the media has never had an easier time reporting such cases. Regardless of the fact that the media is more intrusive today than it has been in the past, the wrongful acts are still wrong.

Are today’s arrests and suspensions of professional athletes an accurate depiction of professional sports today, or are they just a few bad apples? It doesn’t matter. The bottom line is that professional athletes have always been looked up to by people of all ages and they (athletes) have a responsibility to act accordingly. Professional sports and professional athletes need to act as the word implies, like professionals, demonstrating the highest level of sportsmanship in their respective games. Their (athletes) ultimate gift to the sports fan is a vision, a feel, an actual inspiration that is so rare and so highly developed that when these individuals cease playing, they leave a spiritual void that threatens the true believer’s subsequent appreciation of the game (Ryan, 1992).

It’s definitely not easy to play any sport, game after game, with the same level of intensity in front of thousands of screaming fans who, together with the media, will scrutinize you for days or weeks to come if you do something wrong. There are tremendous pressures that coincide with being a professional athlete and the leagues need
to take the necessary steps to protect their players and help them manage the unforeseen challenges that await them.

As professional sports evolve and the few, classy veterans retire, there will most likely be a "changing of the guard" across the leagues. These organizations will most likely continue to accept and attract the young athletes who are too socially and emotionally immature to handle the rigors of professional sports. It is just a matter of time before the leagues begin to reap what they sow.

Michener (1983), states that, "Even if, as some charge, the excesses of sports merely reflect the excesses of society, that is no justification" (p.32). Look at our language, for example, from 'three strike' laws in criminal sentencing to 'level playing fields' in trade to 'slam-dunks' in business deals, the impact of sports can be heard as easily as it can be seen (Tharp, Chetwynd, Brownlee, 1996, p.31). Whatever the academics may add or subtract, the sports lesson goes on like a machine that cannot be turned off, affecting the whole style of the society around it in ways that society may not even be aware of (Sheed, 1995, p.11).

Sports is many things to many people; a past time, a job, an escape, and even a business. Sheed (1995), states that, "(The) market value (of sport) is determined by what draws a crowd, and crowds are drawn by more than just skill" (p.11). "Unlike movies and other arts, games are never more commercial than when they are played exactly as they should be" (p.11).

As we move forward into our new millenium, let us look to the future with optimism that sports can cleanse itself of that which keeps it down. Michener (1976), warns us that, "One of the surest ways to kill a sport is to overexpose it, make it
mechanical, dilute the quality of its players, and extend its season arbitrarily” (p.24). “If sports become a drudgery, or a perverted competition, or a mere commercial enterprise, something is wrong” (p.414). As we can see from this study, there is a lot wrong with sports today. But remember, it is not a hopeless situation. It would be nice if the fans had a union of their own to remind players and management who matters most. Until that day comes, remember one thing, without the fan, there is no game.
References


URL http://nationalcounseling.com/timeout.html


URL http://espn.sportszone.com/editors...features/sportsmanship/garber.html

URL http://espn.sportszone.com/editors...features/sportsmanship/index4.html


URL http://sports.mediachallenge.com/hotcorner.dallas.html


Horn, B. (1997). Cowboy’s latest controversy feeds talk shows, tabloids,

Jerry Maguire Homepage. (1998, April 3). Jerry Maguire’s mission statement
[WWW document].
URL http://www.spe.sony.com/Pictures/SonyMovies/movies/jerrymaguire/index.html

licenses. p. 2, 3, 10, 11.


Lupica, M. (1996, October 27). One angry fan – 5 ways to better sports. USA
Today, p. 4


31, 195,

p. D-1.

Magazine, 107, p. 33.


NFL owners told to bargain on rules that involve safety (1976, July 26). Wall Street Journal, p. 25

Walsh, J. (Senior Vice President). (1996). New York: ESPN


Woellert, L. (1996). Selling rights to tickets helps many owners hit pay dirt,

Miami Hilton, I AM

It's 1 AM and this might be the bad pizza I had earlier talking, but I believe I have something to say. Or rather, I have something to say that I believe in. My father once said, "Get the bad news over with first. You be the one to say the tough stuff. Well here it goes. There is a cruel wind blowing through our business. We all feel it, and if we don't, perhaps we've forgotten how to feel. But here is the truth. We are less ourselves than we were when we started this organization.

Sports Management International (SMI) began as a small company. I was hired by Jack Scully in 1981, I was fresh out of college, I didn't even watch much sports. But a young man came to me, and his name was Bill Apodaca. He asked me to look at a contract he'd acquired to play football for the Atlanta Falcons. Before long I was overseeing the business of another member of the Falcons, and two baseball players. The nuances and the small miracles of professional sports would soon hook me – that was felt when a player you'd helped and represented made his stand in front of 54,000 people. And I remember the conversation Mr. Scully and I had by an elevator, standing next to one of the first agents in his company. "You and I are blessed," he said, "we do something that we love."
Tonight, I find those words guiding me back to an important place, and an
important truth. I care very much about the fact that I have learned to care less. Now our
company is one of the top three in this business, and we represent over a thousand
athletes. Over sixty agents work at our huge new office, and I still haven’t met all of you.
The business of sports has never been bigger, or tougher, or more written about. And we
are at the forefront. But when I wonder tonight, as we leave our 13th annual
conference...we’ve talked a lot and partied a lot over the last three days, but I dare say
that not one of us, our diet Pepsi’s and sheaths of paper in hand, have said what we really
think.

It is beyond the easy arguments waged against sports, and our business on the
editorial pages of the New York Times. It is beyond the huge salaries, the endorsements
all our clients now want because “I’m a better actor than Michael Jordan.” Beyond the
globalization and merchandization of the games. It’s more subtle than the baseball strike,
more about loyalty than the Colts moving to Indiana, the RAMS GOING TO St. Louis, or
the Cleveland Browns moving to...someplace. I’m talking about something they don’t
write about. I’m talking about something we don’t talk about.

We are losing our battle with all that is personal and real about our business.
Everyday I can look at a list of phone calls only partially returned. Driving home, I think
of what was not accomplished, instead of what was accomplished. The gnawing feeling
continues. That families are sitting waiting for a call from us, waiting to hear the word
on a contract, or a General Manager’s thoughts on an upcoming season. We are pushing
numbers around doing our best, but is there any real satisfaction in success without pride?
Is there any real satisfaction in a success that exists only when we push the messiness of
real human contact from our lives and minds? When we learn not to care enough about the very guy we promised the world to, just to get him to sign. Or to let it bother us that a hockey player’s son is worried about his dad getting that fifth concussion.

I have said “later” to most anything that required true sacrifice. Later I will visit the clients whose careers are over, but of course I promised to stay in touch. Later, later, later, later. It is too easy to say “later” because we believe our work to be too important to stop, minute to minute, for something that might interfere with success.

Sports management International, founded in 1981, was dedicated to the then-rock solid notion that athletes deserve a decent home with decent pay. Now of course we all know that we possess the job of the decade. Last year, when a poll of college students was taken, our occupation, Sports Agent or Sports Attorney ranked number two behind Rock Star. But rock stars, like sports stars, have limited time in the spotlight. Nobody likes an old lineman or an bald rock star. But sports representation can give you a career into your 80’s, like the original sports agent Dicky Fox, who died on his way to a Chicago Bulls playoff game in 1993. He died gloriously, right by the B gates, a happy man who had actually written a book called, A Happy Life. Taken by heart attack, he left a loving family, and a home next door to his first client. And we won’t talk about the two guys who stole his playoff tickets, right out of his pocket as he lay on the cool floor of the O’Hare airport. They were yanked from Dicky’s seats in the first quarter, and two guards kept the seats empty in tribute to him.

And to those young agents who never met him, Dicky Fox always said the same thing when asked for his secret. “The secret to this job”, he said, “is personal relationships.”
We are agents. To some, that brings with it the image of a Slickster. A Huckster. Someone profiting off the efforts of others... For many of those we’ve met and observed, that is what we are. I know an agent operating in this very state who regularly gets the phone numbers of college athletes by calling school offices and posing as a tutor who has lost their student’s contact number. He is often successful in acquiring athletes, but none for very long. Privately, an agent can be a father, a friend, an inspiring force in the life of a young man or woman. We are sometimes as important as priests or poets, but until we dedicate ourselves to worthier goals than getting an illegal phone number, we are poets of emptiness.

A man is the sum total of his experiences. And it is now that I am interested in shaping the experiences to come. What is the future of what we do? Give me a goal, and I will achieve it. That has been my secret design for most of my life.

How can we turn this job, in small but important ways, into a better representation of ourselves? Is it important to be a Person and not just a slave to the commerce of Professional Sport?

Recently I was asked by the son of a client, in so many words, “What do you stand for?” I was lost for an answer. At 14, I wasn’t lost for that answer. At 18, I wasn’t lost for that answer. At 35, I was blown away that I had no answer. I could only look at the face of 12 year-old boy, concerned about his dad, needing my help, just looking at me for the answer I didn’t have.
1:17 AM, Miami, Thoughts

Sports may never be the cute and simple thing that older men pine for. That ballpark in the cornfields of Fields of Dreams is, of course, a fantasy that lives in the mind. Sports is a huge operation, always was, but now that fact is no longer a secret that lives in the luxury boxes of ownership. The secret is out of the bag. Way, way out. Everyone knows that Sports is a machine. The Endorsement is now in danger of overshadowing the game. The commercials are often more interesting than the telecast. Money sits on the bench, right alongside the players. The players know, the owners always knew, the fans know. The machine has now moved into our homes.

The question is, how do we personalize the machine? It is a question we must now ask ourselves at S.M.I.

We deal with the future that is already here. Let's bring soul and character to what is already there.

Right now we are at the top of our game. Traditionally people do one thing at this point in their success. They try like hell to maintain what they did to get there. Their personal and intense road to success, their original inspiration (which is at the heart of every success) is now lost in the crisp green sheets of greater and greater amounts of fortune. But there is a problem with this stage in the success game. In doing this maintain-success cycle, they forget the original glimmer of passion that got them there.

And historically, no one ever successful ever pauses to think that they might tumble like everyone before them who forgot. The whole success cycle dooms the very thing that causes the success in the first place — it puts shutters on the windows of reality.
It makes us all forget that monetary success comes from something very pure. It comes from the desire to do well, to make life better, not just to do well with financial regularity.

Miami, 2:37 AM, Thoughts

I’m back. Just checked the messages at home, and sure enough one of them was a man I will call Client X. Client X was watching ESPN and he saw Athlete Y talking about the many many millions he has in contracts both in football, baseball and product representation. “Why aren’t I making what Athlete Y makes?” said my client. And the truth is obvious to everyone but Client X. Athlete Y is a superstar, and is more talented. But to tell this to Client X would be asking him to become an ex-client.

And so begins the game of flattery, of lip service, of doing everything possible to soothe and stroke. The tap-dance. Not only will Client X be a tap-dance, but there will be a tap-dance involved in explaining why I didn’t return the call and begin the tap-dance earlier. I know it is a tap-dance, and so does he.

But as I sit here in the darkness of this hotel room, the answer to the future is rather obvious. If the tap-dancing becomes less constant, less furious, less necessary, what will the result be? The result will be more honesty, more focus, fewer clients, but eventually the revenues will be the same. Because the day of honesty will create a machine more personalized, more truthful...

And now we get to the answer that Dicky Fox knew years ago. The answer is fewer clients. Less dancing. More truth. We must crack open the tightly clenched fist of commerce and give a little back for the greater good.

Forget the dance.
Focus.

Learn who these people are. That is the stuff of your relationship. That is what will matter. People always respond best to personal attention, it is the simplest and easiest truth to forget.

Let us be honest with ourselves.

Let us be honest with them.

4:45 AM, Miami, Thoughts

In a cynical world, we make people happy. We let them know that one athlete can make a difference. I propose also that we step up our concerns to build in non-profit areas of our contracts. It is something that we often talk about, sitting in those athletes’ living rooms, but often we let these factors slip away. How often have we advised clients to move to Florida, this very state, where taxes are lenient? Let us use the same sharp thinking not just to set up charity golf tournaments, but to help build schools in the communities where many of our finest athletes first found the inspiration that helped them onto greatness. If we don’t exercise the muscle of charity, one day it is dead. It doesn’t respond, it’s just a fiber in your body that serves no purpose. And the next thing that happens is the lack of depth that comes with financial prosperity. How many rich people have said this in our presence: “I thought I would feel better when I was rich, but I don’t.”

A life is not worth living if you are sleepwalking through it. Because that is what feels like death. That is what causes athletes to, out of despair, get drunk and wrap their cars around a pole. Or lash out at someone they love. It is the feeling of sleepwalking.
We cannot sleepwalk. It is time to not second-guess, to move forward, to make mistakes if we have to, but to do it with a greater good in mind.

Let us start a revolution that is not just about basketball shoes or official licensed merchandise. I am prepared to live for our cause. The cause is caring about each other. The secret to this job is personal relationships.

(Jerry Maguire Homepage, 1998)