

Professional Athletes Should Not Be Viewed as Role Models

Ashley Brown argues in the following viewpoint that athletes should not be viewed as role models. In Brown's view, this is not because some athletes engage in unsportsmanlike or criminal behavior—most athletes, she writes, try to conduct themselves in a decent manner. Rather, Brown maintains that professional athletes are getting paid to play a game and are not as praiseworthy as people who have chosen professions which truly help others, such as teaching, firefighting, and nursing. Brown was a journalism student at Ohio State University at the time that she wrote this viewpoint.

The term "role model" is thrown around quite a bit in the world of professional sports.

Many athletes such as Eddie George, Peyton Manning and Derek Jeter have been deemed role models because of their stellar athletic ability and impressive on-camera conduct. But the public will never truly know how most athletes behave off-camera and it is for this reason that athletes cannot be role models.

Although the media reports both the public and private lives of professional athletes, what we learn about those athletes is, for the most part, what they want us to learn. With some obvious exceptions—Dennis Rodman and Mike Tyson—most players attempt to portray themselves in a positive light when in public.

But looks can be deceiving, as Kobe Bryant has so aptly demonstrated. I know, I know, I am tired of hearing about him too, but he provides a perfect example.

From Day One in the NBA, Bryant was given more press coverage than most pro athletes and was perceived to be a "good guy" because of his aptitude on the court and his quiet, polite demeanor off it.

Then Bryant was arrested and taken to court for alleged sexual assault. No one but he and the accuser know whether or not he is guilty, but everyone now knows that he is a cheater. The infamous purple diamond Bryant purchased for his wife shows that he is not above trying to buy forgiveness.

No matter the court verdict, Bryant already has proven that he is not of the high moral character many had once believed he was. He shows us that, no matter how much time the media may devote to a player, the public can never truly know him.

Another factor preventing athletes from becoming role models is the fact that they play a game for a living. I realize that pro athletes work incredibly hard for their success, and I am not denying them their due credit for that dedication.

Every season, they spend hours in the weight room and on the practice field. They continually break down tape and, no matter how good an athlete may be, he is always trying to improve his level of play.

Many spend days, even weeks, away from their families. Their job permeates every aspect of their lives, making it less of a job and more of a lifestyle.

I know that many of them do wonderful things for their communities. They give time and money to charities, visit sick children in the hospital or coach sports camps for area children. But hard work and philanthropy alone do not make someone a role model.

Everyone must remember that athletes are paid to play a game. They are not saving lives, and they are not making the world a better place on a daily basis. It could be argued that they are making the world better by providing entertainment for millions of people, but life would go on without sports. It would be different, but it would continue.

Others Deserve More Admiration

Life would be dramatically different if not for doctors, nurses, firemen, policemen, teachers and members of the military. I realize there are corrupt individuals in every profession, but, for the most part, those who have chosen to make their life's work helping others, are special and deserve the respect and admiration of others much more so than someone who plays a game for a living.

I do not dislike sports or the athletes who play them. In fact, sports have been a guiding force throughout my life, and I have spent countless hours playing and watching them. I am also not implying that all athletes are bad people—many deserve respect.

The bottom line is that athletes should not be role models. They can be admired for their hard work and dedication, but role models should come from within an individual's inner circle of family and friends.