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Sports and Professional Athletes Impact Our Youth

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Introduction

Athletes have always been a target for the spotlight, and have captured the admiration of millions of viewers and fans around the world. Regardless of the sport, every nation has some form of sport with athletes as heroes that win the hearts of millions of fans. The behavior and actions of these millionaire superstar athletes is under question as many of these ‘legends’ have egos larger than life and believe they are above the law and can literally get away with murder. Are these athletes really role models for the children and fans who aspire to accomplish goals of athleticism and stardom? There is no question that professional athletes work hard to acquire the skills that they use to perform on their respective court or field, but are their personal lives and behaviors off the field something that people should be scrupulously watching and monitoring?

Charles Barkley once stated in a Nike commercial long ago, "I am not a role model ... I am paid to wreak havoc on the basketball court. Parents should be role models. Just because I dunk a basketball doesn't mean I should raise your kids" (Smith). Parents are undoubtedly one of the primary role models for every child growing up (Markley). Parents should teach their children how to behave, what is good and what is bad, and the parents’ attitude and behavior is often reiterated by the child. The truth is that children do look up to athletes. Children idolize and emulate athletes despite their parents or the athlete claiming they do not want to be a role model. Professional athletes are in a position of influence with thousands of fans viewing their actions, and as a result children are going to model the behavior they observe in sports games and sports news television. Despite controversy of the whether professional athletes are role models to children, athletes can make an influence on kids, and
the current lack of respectable sports idols, coupled with a growing sports culture too concerned with winning, is negatively impacting some young athletes both mentally and physically. Before we continue to unpack the idea of athletes as role models for children, let us first look at the importance of sports for children and some of the obstacles that children face involving sports and professional athletes.

**Physical and Cultural Impact of Sport on Youth**

Sports play a very large role in society and people of all ages engage in different sport activities (Rimm). Young athletes across the world idolize and emulate many of the top professional athletes that dominate the various sports that a particular child participates in. Sports are considered to be a great way for children to develop work ethic, sportsmanship, a good character, and physical fitness. Research provides evidence that sport also provides psychological and social benefits along with personal growth and enjoyment (Wankel & Berger). However, there are possibilities that sport can have a negative impact on children if the activity, leadership, or organizational conditions of a sports program are not adequate (Wankel & Berger).

Many nations, especially the United States, face a growing problem of childhood obesity caused by the increase in sedentary lifestyle of children, and the poor dietary habits common in today’s culture. Merkel brings to light the fact that children between the ages of 8-18 spend an average of about 7.5 hours of “screen time” every day (Merkel). In order to
combat the sedentary lifestyle and obesity, public figures like Michelle Obama, celebrities, and programs, like the NFL’s Play 60, have promoted physical activity and exercise for children. The sedentary lifestyle of kids is a huge problem in the United States, and sports are a major outlet for children to stay active, and sports will continue to be an important tool to keep children moving and combat the cultural habits that have negatively impacted children and teenagers health. Some even claim that sport offers a bridge between social and economic gaps, bringing people together, and large businesses and corporations have corporate social responsibility (CSR) to use sports as a tool to improve and maintain a high quality of life for all people involved in the business (Smith and Westerbeek). Sports are widely popular across the world, and can be used to promote many good qualities and improve fitness, but they can also negatively impact children and teenagers.

Merkel brings to light some of these truths about the popularity of sport. In the United States over 45 million children and adolescents are involved in youth sports, and 75% of families with school-aged kids have at least one child playing in an organized sports program (Merkel). Most Americans do not need to be convinced about the popularity of sports in the United States, they just need to flip on the television or drive to the nearest park. The interesting research that is becoming apparent through recent studies is showing evidence of how beneficial youth sports really are for children, and if the mentality of winning at all costs is having a troublesome effect on the younger generations.

Joseph Doty’s research shows a negative relationship between athletes and character development. Doty conducted character tests on athletes and non-athletes and discovered that the athletes scored significantly lower on the character tests. Doty actually thinks the United
States of America is at a “crisis point” where it is not beneficial for kids to participate in competitive sports because it is detrimental to their character development. There are several other research articles that indicate the moral and ethical choices made by children decline when involved in competitive sports, but this will be discussed in further detail later.

On the contrary, sports can be very beneficial for kids if used as an outlet for children to relieve stress, maintain an active and healthy lifestyle, and to build friendships, discipline, and social interactions. In nations like the U.S.A., where obesity and a sedentary lifestyle are a growing concern, sports can provide a useful tool to combat these problems. A key factor in motivating kids to play sports is positive role models in professional sports and in the media. Many athletes and professional sports programs have foundations and charities focused on community service, education, and getting kids involved in playing and learning about sports. However, the great number of professional athletes that are getting into trouble with the law in today’s society could be making a negative impact on young children.

**Athletes in the Media**

Professional athletes are role models, because they are constantly in the eye of the public, and the media is always watching athletes on and off the field. The actions of our sports heroes on and off the field are things that fans take great delight in watching, and the media can go overboard with the coverage and filming of the personal lives and choices that these athletes make. However, each choice that a professional athlete makes can impact the impressionable children. Research supports that most adolescent boys look to sports stars as
role models, while adolescent girls look to music stars or celebrities (Bricheno & Thornton). The popularity of sports in today’s culture and the number of kids that look up to athletes and have dreams of becoming a professional athlete is very large. The important thing that professional athletes should understand is that their choices and actions are being watched by thousands of fans and they make an impact on people, especially children, for better or for worse.

Athletes need to practice good sportsmanship on the field to model good behavior for the children watching. However, with the media so scrupulously watching every move and action of professional athletes, I think people need to understand that athletes cannot be forced to live their lives up on a pedestal every moment of their personal life. The personal life of an athlete should not be monitored so closely, and we should not be so focused on every little thing our favorite athlete does off the field. Everyone is human, and mistakes are made throughout all of our lives. It isn’t fair that for sports fans to attack professional athletes for every mistake they make or for the media to constantly erupt whenever an athlete does something wrong. I do believe that athletes should conduct their behavior with good sportsmanship, honesty, and integrity when on the field. The children of the world should see their heroes practicing good sportsmanship on the field and playing with integrity. Cheap shots, trash talk, yelling and poor attitudes are traits we have seen in professional athletes for too long, and kids need to see athletes behaving like adults and treating one another with respect. The cultural impact of athletes behaving poorly and the win-at-all-costs mentality are things that are harming our society and raising our children this was is unacceptable. Athletes can make an impact on our children whether we want to call them a role model or not.
The popularity of sports in today’s culture and society was discussed earlier, but now let’s look at how some professional athletes had made positive impressions on their fans. Tim Tebow was one of the hottest topics in the NFL a few years ago, but since then his reputation and the excitement following him has died down along with his career as an NFL quarterback. He was such a controversial topic because of his steadfast Christian faith and who openly wore his religious beliefs on his sleeve. His courage and strong faith is definitely admirable. When Tebow was playing with the Florida Gators and also his brief career in the NFL, he was also active in his local community, went on mission trips to help the poor, and often preached about his faith to many listeners. “Whether they are serving the community, taking steroids, abusing their wife or selling drugs, Tebow believes every athlete is a role model. "Yes you are. You're just not a good one," said Tebow on an ESPN.com story” (Thompson). This is a very interesting point made in Thompson’s column, and it drives home the idea that athletes are in the spotlight of the media, and fans are watching their behavior, whether it is good or bad.

Tim Tebow is a stark contrast to many of the NFL’s players who regularly get into trouble with the law for various reasons. While there are many athletes in professional sports that have positive influences and acts good role models for children, there are also many athletes who get into trouble with the law for a variety of reasons and for some reason the news and media seems to give much more coverage to the troublemakers. This is where my concern for the younger sports viewers comes in. Athletes like Tiger Woods, Lance Armstrong, Adrian Peterson, Ray Rice, and so many others who made such a large impression in their respective sport and were well-renowned by millions of fans, have soiled their
reputations by abusing drugs, infidelity, violence, and other discouraging activities and crimes.

Tiger Woods is one of the greatest golfers to ever play the game. He has won 105 golf tournaments, and was the first to ever hold all four professional major tournaments at the same time (“Tiger Woods Biography”). In 2000, when Tiger won the British Open, he became the youngest player to ever win the career grand slam of professional major championships, and only the fifth to ever do so (“Tiger Woods Biography”). Tiger is also the youngest to ever win the Masters tournament at the age of 21 (“Tiger Woods Biography”). On top of all that he was the first Majors winner of African or Asian heritage (“Tiger Woods Biography”). Tiger Woods is truly one of the greatest to ever play the game of golf and one the most wealthiest and winningest golfers to date.

Tiger Woods has also helped his community in efforts outside the golf course by creating the Tiger Woods Foundation, and Tiger Woods Design (“Tiger Woods Biography”). His foundation aids in preparing under-privileged children to attend high school and college and to excel in their desired field. This is one of Tiger Woods most respectable and beneficial programs where he dedicates his time when away from the golf course. Tiger Woods Design creates and designs golf courses from Tiger’s diverse experience and knowledge with golf courses. All of Tigers efforts off the golf course and his great success in golfing made him one of the most popular and wealthy athletes ever, and he was a role model for so many adoring fans. It wasn’t until November 27, 2009 when Tigers fame and popularity came crashing down (Kozman 214). Tiger crashed his vehicle, and the news of his mistresses and sex life came flooding through the media once his wife learned of the adultery that was taking place.
place behind her back (Kozman 214). Tiger, once the most famous and successful golfer in history, became notorious for his sexual addictions and infidelity.

Following the uncovering of Tiger’s secret affairs and unfaithfulness, all of his sponsors had dropped him and he took an indefinite leave from golf (Kozman 214). Tiger gave a public apology in February of 2010, and finalized a divorce from his wife in August of 2010 (Kozman 214). The enormous fame and success of Tiger Woods now seem to live in the shadow of his notorious actions as an adulterer. The many young golfers that viewed Tiger Woods as a role model and a hero, quickly sought to find new professional golfers to follow and cheer on. When situations like this happen, the media goes crazy covering the juicy gossip and rumors that involve infidelity and drama, but the truth is that many people in Tiger’s family life and adoring fans were hurt and disappointed by what happened, and eventually his career would suffer as well. I do not commend what Tiger did, but I do think he should be remembered for his great success as a golfer. His actions in his personal life obviously are not honorable and have lost him a great number of fans and respect, but his accomplishments on the golf course are still exceptional. Tiger Woods may have failed to be a positive role model for many fans and children, but his personal life was constantly hassled by media and paparazzi. What Tiger did on the golf course, his work ethic, and his foundation that helps underprivileged students are all reputable things that can be admired. Also, we may be able to take away the message that everyone makes mistakes, but how we handle and own up to our mistakes can determine our character, and in this way professional athletes can show young fans to be honorable.
Lance Armstrong is another famous athlete who fell from the lofty status of a legendary hero and role model placed on him by the media. Armstrong was an international star, and the person that will pop into most people’s heads when speaking about professional cyclists. Armstrong is arguably most famous cyclist in the United States, if not the world. Armstrong won many international cycling competitions throughout his career, and he won seven consecutive Tour de France titles from 1990 to 2005 (“Lance Armstrong”). In October of 1996 Armstrong announced that he had testicular cancer, and this was an announcement that shocked the sports world and won Lance popularity among many fellow Americans and across the world (“Lance Armstrong”). Anyone who has had cancer, or known a loved-one with cancer could sympathize with what Armstrong was going through. The cancer spread throughout Lance’s body, reaching his abdomen, lungs, and lymph nodes, and eventually even his brain (“Lance Armstrong”). The doctors that found the tumors in his brain gave him a forty percent chance of survival (“Lance Armstrong”). Throughout his battle with cancer Lance underwent aggressive chemotherapy, a strict diet, and successful surgery removing the tumors from his brain, Armstrong was declared cancer-free in February of 1997 (“Lance Armstrong”). Armstrong’s inspiring story of overcoming his battle with cancer, and his devotion to return to cycling after surviving the cancer made him one of the most popular and inspirational athletes in the world. However, as we have seen countless times, the professional athletes we call heroes and role models always seem to prove to be human in the end.

In 2012 the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) brought formal charges against Armstrong for using performance enhancing drugs (PEDs) from 1999 to 2005, the seven years that Armstrong won 7 consecutive Tour de France titles (“Lance Armstrong”). The
USADA threatened to strip Armstrong of all of these titles (“Lance Armstrong”). Armstrong continually denied these charges that he used illegal drugs, but in August of 2012 he gave up his fight against the USADA claiming he was tired of dealing with the case (“Lance Armstrong”). The USADA stripped Lance of his seven Tour de France titles and banned him from cycling (“Lance Armstrong”). One of the world’s greatest athletes and role models suddenly was viewed with great disappointment and some even resentment. However, in January of 2013, Armstrong interviewed with Oprah Winfrey where he came clean and admitted to using illegal drugs (“Lance Armstrong”). Armstrong gave an apology during the interview saying “I am deeply flawed ... and I’m paying the price for it, and I think that’s okay. I deserve this”, and claiming that his reason for using the drugs and PEDs was driven by his “ruthless desire to win” (“Lance Armstrong”).

Lance Armstrong was one of the world’s most famous athlete’s and his battle with testicular cancer was inspirational. Now, his legacy as one of the greatest international cyclists will be tarnished, and his status as a good role model will forever be tainted. His “ruthless desire to win” only adds to the cultural viewpoint of winning is all that matters, and certainly does not give young kids the important message that sports are a good outlet to develop character, teamwork, and maintain a healthy lifestyle. The over-competitive nature seen in many professional athletes and sports teams is something that sells well for the media, but for the majority of the people and children, they need role models who teach kids to be healthy, happy, and practice good sportsmanship. The abuse of illegal drugs and performance enhancing drugs sends the wrong message to the young athletes in our society, and it is all too common in professional sports.
Athletes as Role Models

I now want to get back to the focus of athletes being role models in the public eye. Earlier I mentioned Charles Barkley and his statement, “I am not a role model”. Barkley believes that his ability and talents as an athlete do not require him to raise anyone else’s children or to be a role model to them (Smith). He believes that parents are the ones with the responsibility of raising a child and modeling for them acceptable behavior. I agree with Charles Barkley on parents being the first role model for their children and raising their own kids, but don’t athletes still steal the hearts of fans across the globe and have a position of influence in the public eye?

Michael Dobie wrote a column in September of 2014 on this exact issue of whether athletes should be role models. Dobie thinks that the idea of a professional athlete being a role model for young children is deplorable based on the actions we have observed from athletes over the past years, especially the abuse issues that have been recently uncovered in the NFL involving Ray Rice and Adrian Peterson. Footage of Ray Rice was uncovered showing him punch his girlfriend, now his wife, unconscious which resulted in his release from the Baltimore Ravens, and Adrian Peterson was discovered to have brutally beaten his child with a stick in his backyard. Accounts like these of Rice and Peterson, and many other unspeakable behaviors of professional athletes is reasoning for some people that athletes have no business in modeling good behavior for children. People often argue that these brutal athletes are paid to compete in sports, and their talent does not qualify them to be role models.
Dobie references Barkley’s 1993 Nike commercial and agrees that the athletic talent does not qualify the super star to be a role model for anyone’s child. Dobie makes a very interesting point that most children look to the athlete that dominates the field or court in the given sport, and kids look to superior talents as the quality to which they should model their own behavior. Children don’t look for ethical or moral qualities in the athletes they idolize; they really just look to how well they excel at their sport. For this reason Dobie thinks kids will always be let down by professional athletes. As Charles Barkley said, “Just because I dunk a basketball doesn’t mean I should raise your kids” (Smith). Specific athletes that captured the attention and hearts of many fans but eventually strayed from the straight and narrow road include Tiger Woods, Lance Armstrong, and many others (Dobie).

Dobie continues to drive home Barkley’s statement from his Nike commercial, “Parents should be role models”. There is no question with this statement. The book of Proverbs gives great parenting perspective in the statement, “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). Parents raise their children, it is undoubtedly their responsibility, but they are not the only people that can impact a child and guide them toward success. The comedian George Carlin comically said “If your kid needs a role model and you ain’t it, you’re both [in trouble]” (Dobie).

I personally agree with Dobie in a lot of ways. The people that usually make the best role models are our parents, teachers, and families. I know I personally have many family members, church friends, and other community leaders and neighbors that I have tried to model my life after. Dobie mentions that people such as teachers, family members, and generous community members who simple little acts of kindness usually are the common role
models in our everyday lives (Dobie). However, the sad reality is that many kids do not have these ideal role models, and are not always fortunate to have good neighbors, or even caring parents. That is why I think it is so important for athletes to be the role model underprivileged kids without any other leaders in their lives need, and to show them how to behave respectfully on and off the field. I believe that athletes have a great capacity to be role models to thousands of young children, and being in position of influence and in the public eye, I think that athletes ought to play a large role in guiding the youth of today to be healthy and happy, and to develop respectable qualities.

Another newspaper column in the Sun Journal by Adam Thompson takes the position that athletes should be role models. Thompson answers the question of “Are athletes role models” with an aggressive “Yes” and follows it up with a statement to the effect of athletes have a platform on national television in the spotlight, and are role models whether they like it or not (Thompson). Athletes are often multi-millionaires and have more monetary and financial freedom than most people dream of, and yet many of the act like “spoiled, prima donna princesses” (Thompson). Not every athlete can be perfect, because no one is, but when in the spotlight athletes should make an effort to be friendly, and behave respectfully (Thompson). They are paid millions of dollars; they should take the time to sign autographs, take picture with kids, be friendly to the fans and cameras, and present themselves with honor (Thompson). Fans may not always respond well to these athletes, and can often times be rude and instigate arguments with athletes, but athletes should show our youth to turn the other cheek, and teach kids how to forgive and how to succeed in what you are working towards despite what distractions pop up.
When millions of fans are paying money to go to see games, and buying their teams sports attire they are supporting the franchise and are ultimately the reason these sports teams are successful enough to pay their athletes with million dollar contracts. The fan base is the support system and the reason for the great success of leagues like the NFL, NBA, NHL, MLS, and MLB. Any athlete making millions of dollars is doing so thanks to the millions of supporting fans that spend their free time and money to spectate their favorite sports. An athlete’s job is to compete as entertainment for the fans. I personally think that an athlete whose financial success is largely due to the enormous fan base and the culture’s obsession with sports should spend some time setting a good example and creating good relationships with the community and young fans that have aspirations of playing sports competitively.

Others will argue that an athlete’s job is to compete at a professional level and win games. This is a valid argument and many athletes, including Charles Barkley, feel that an athlete’s job is to compete and win games. However, when on the court or field, athletes still have a responsibility to obey the rules, respect the officials, and compete fairly with opposing teams. Things like drug abuse, PEDs, taking cheap shots at the opponent, or arguing with the referee are things that athletes need to avoid when playing a sport at the professional level even if their sole job is to win. Athletes need to abide by the sport organizations rules and have good sportsmanship when doing their job, just like every worker and employee must abide by the rule of the employer or business. Professional athletes abiding by the rules and practicing good sportsmanship will set an example for younger athletes, and that is a part of their “job” as a professional athlete.
A very interesting survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation questioned children’s perception of professional athlete’s behavior. According to the study, telephone interviews with a randomly selected national sample of 1,500 children between the ages 10-17 years old, and discovered many kids imitate the behavior of famous athletes – the good and bad – both on and off the field (Kaiser Family Foundation). The study found that the majority of the children surveyed viewed professional athletes in a negative light (Zeimer). Forty percent of the children answered that professional athletes are often “cocky and arrogant”, and sixty percent believed athletes are obsessed with money (Zeimer). However, the large majority agreed that athletes have good work ethic and practice very hard to excel in their sport (Zeimer). This study aids in showing how kids are very attentive and absorb many things when watching their favorite sports program. The old saying that children are like sponges seems appropriate here. Kids that enjoy playing sports are observant of the actions and behaviors of athletes, and they can adopt these behaviors into their own playstyle and attitudes on the sport fields. An article by Kay Ireland from livestrong.com also comments on the results from the Kaiser Family Foundation’s survey and research. The majority of the kids surveyed in this study answered that it is normal for a professional athlete to yell at a referee, and also normal for most athletes to trash talk during the game (Ireland). Almost half of the kids surveyed believed that it is common for professional athletes to take cheap shots at opponents (Ireland). If kids think this kind of behavior is appropriate in professional sports, won’t they behave similarly when participating in their own little league programs?

The Kaiser Family Foundation survey suggests that children emulate athlete’s behavior on the field (Zeimer). The interesting thing found in this study is the possibility that children are mimicking the trash-talk, cheap shots, and unsportsman-like behavior that they
observed from professional athletes. If famous athletes rank second only to parents as people kids admire most according to those surveyed in the Kaiser Family Foundation study, then it is important to learn what exactly our kids are imitating from famous athletes who can often give good and bad lessons of sportsmanship to our children. The majority of kids will agree that it is never acceptable to be unsportsmanlike, but with the behavior seen by many of our professionals it isn’t uncommon to see children also yelling at referees or taking cheap shots at the youth level.

A few studies have even showed that competitive sports do not bring about sportsmanship in children and teenagers, but actually make kids more aggressive and less focused on good sportsmanship. Much of the research literature on this topic will argue on the definition of what character is, however, to spare the reader the argument of semantics, let’s take the U.S. Army’s seven traits that define a person of character: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honesty, integrity, and personal courage (Doty 3). Doty believes that sports do not “build character”, but that character can be taught and learned in a sport setting where coaches, parents, and administration have structured a program where the goal is to develop children’s character (Doty 6). A research article by Bredemier and Shields points out that with adequate coaching and leadership, and a program focus of developing character, sports and physical education can be a venue for developing character (Bredemeier and Shields). While it seems that developing character is a positive influence that can come from children playing sports, the character development seems dependent on the program and coaches and staff in the sports program.
There is also research showing negative effects on character as a direct result of sports. This is possibly due to the differences in a sports program that does not place priority on developing character, and could also be a result of the competitive “win at all costs” mentality that seems to be growing in our culture.

“Athletes, especially on team sports, tend to score lower on character tests (Krause & Priest, 1993; Beller & Stoll, 1995; Dunn & Dunn, 1999). George Sage (personal communication, May, 2004) believes that sport in America has reached a "crisis" point and that most athletes’ sports experiences are detrimental to their character development. The majority of the research reports that there is a negative relationship between participation in sports and character development (Krause & Priest, 1993; Dunn & Dunn, 1999; Silva, 1983; Beller & Stoll, 1995; Bredemeier & Shields, 1984a, 1984b; Bredemeier, 1995; Hahm, 1989)” (Doty 7).

Doty’s research was a comprehensive study that looked at many of the research articles mentioned above and found a large number of studies that evaluated athletes using character tests and found that sports often made a negative impact on the athlete’s character.

The Dunn and Dunn article written in 1999 looked at 171 young (M = 13.08 years) hockey players and concluded that the players are so focused on winning, that their moral choices often declined when trying to achieve a victory. Many other research articles mentioned in Doty’s article, “Sports Build Character”, have similar studies and research indicating that the mentality of an athlete often is consumed by winning the game that their character and moral choices are negatively affected. The “win-at-all-costs” is clearly a cultural ideal that could possibly be harming our society. With injuries in youth athletes
rising to about 3.5 million a year (Hyman), and character development from sport in question, we should question how we are teaching our children, and question what our role models are doing to our children, and who our children look up to.

Evidence and research suggest that the behavior of athlete on the field is emulated by young athletes in their own youth leagues (Kaiser Family Foundation). If kids are taking more cheap shots, trash talking more, and arguing referees due to the behavior of their role models in professional sports than the United States may truly be at a “crisis point” in sports as Joseph Doty suggests. The negative impacts of role models on children is clear in on-the-field behavior, but the positive effects of athletes motivating children to stay active, build social relationships, and to discipline their bodies and minds through foundations and charity programs is also evident. For both of these reasons athletes are role models and drives home the idea that athletes can make either a positive or negative impact on children based on their actions and behavior.

**Conclusion**

The importance of sports in today’s society is very significant, and the popularity of sports continues to grow. The mentality of winning at all costs, and the way many parents are forcing their kids to excel in athletics are harming many children. This is seen from the evidence of the increasing numbers of overuse injuries in children, and is often seen in major injuries when one sport athletes continue to grow out of adolescence. Parents need to teach their children about sportsmanship, fairness, and build their character, because I think that
parents are the first and most important role model for children. However, the professional athletes and sports teams have a huge influence on children and all sports fans. The reality is that not every child has good parents or leaders to follow, and professional athletes often can take the sport of a role model. Charles Barkley made a huge statement in his Nike commercial saying “I am not a role model”, and he captured many people’s attention despite whether they agree with him or not. The fact is that even with that commercial he made an impact on people’s thoughts and ideas. People heard what Barkley said and where influenced by him one way or another. Athletes are and continue to be people that we watch continually and we are interested in them for their great talents and hard work. However, the poor sportsmanship and bad behaviors displayed by some professional athletes gives children the wrong message of bad sportsmanship. Charles Barkley was wrong, athletes are role models. Athletes have the power to influence the young athletes of today’s culture, and whether athletes think they are acting as role models, or they think they are just doing their “job” as an athlete, they are impacting the behavior and practices in sports leagues of all competition levels down to the little leagues. Professional athletes have the power affect children’s behavior and attitude in sports, and it is their responsibility along with parents, teachers, and all role models, to safely teach the children of today to play sports in a healthy, fun, social, and safe manner.
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