

# [Athletes heroes engaging in violence, the message to](https://assignbuster.com/athletes-heroes-engaging-in-violence-the-message-to/)

Athletes and Domestic ViolenceA lady calls 911 and cries that her husband is beating her. She wants tofile a report, but then asks the dispatcher if it is going to be in the paperthe next day. When the dispatcher doesn’t reply, she changes her mind about thereport and hangs up (Cart).

The lady was Sun Bonds, wife of all-star SanFrancisco Giant, Barry Bonds. Like the wives of other famous players, she was avictim of spousal abuse. Athletes are praised as heroes for what they do on theplaying field, but what they do off the field is never mentioned. As adisappointed sports fan, I want to draw attention to the domestic violence casesthat involve athletes. Athletes have been abusing their spouses since sports were created, butnot until the OJ Simpson trial has domestic violence become “ the issue du jour.” When Simpson was arrested on New Years Day for beating his wife, none of thenewspapers reported it. When he pleaded no contest five months later, there wasa small brief in the second page of The Los Angeles Times’ Metro Section (Cart). In the last three years alone the list of the accused included Dante Bichette, Barry Bonds, John Daly, Scottie Pippen, Jose Conseco, Bobby Cox, Mike Tyson, Warren Moon, Michael Cooper, Darryl Strawberry, Duane Causwell, Olden Polynice, Robert Parish, and OJ Simpson( Callahan, Sports Ilustrated).

And these are onlythe pro athletes whose wives had the courage to report the violence. Madeline Popa, president of Nebraska National Organization for Womenstated, “ Athletes are role models to small children. Viewers worry about theviolence on television, but generally that is make- believe. When there arereal-life heroes engaging in violence, the message to young boys andgirls is, ‘ If you are a star athlete you can get away with things(qtd in L.

A. Times).'” There is an act of domestic violence every eighteen seconds in theUnited States. One in every three women will experience it, according to a studydone by The L. A. Times. Abuse is the number one cause of injury for women. Aboutsix million women are abused each year; four thousand are killed (Cart).

Although the sports world is not involved with all of these statistics, they arean important factor as to why the numbers are so high. The survey found that in1995 there were 252 incidents involving 345 active sports players. Another survey done by Sports Illustrated reveals that eight to twelvewomen a year are assaulted by their partners. More women die from abuse thanfrom car accidents and muggings combined. A study done by the University ofMassachusetts and Northeastern University revealed that out of 107 cases ofsexual assault reported in various universities, most of them involved malestudent-athletes although they only make up 3. 3% of the total male body(Callahan). This means that male student-athletes were six times more involvedthan males who were not student-athletes.

Despite these studies some people believe that sports does not have aproblem with the issue of domestic violence. Richard Lapchick, director of theCenter on the Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern University believes,” These exaggerations in studies do not discount that there is solid evidenceof a problem in sport” and “ Athletes are not necessarily more prone to domesticviolence than others (quoted from The L. A. Times and Sports Illustrated).” Marriah Burton Nelson, author of The Stronger Women Get, The More MenLike Football: Sexism and the American Culture of Sports, is one of the manypeople who disagree with Lapchick. She believes that sports create an aggressionfound in men who beat their wives.

She says, It is not the sport themselves, but the culture of the sports in whichmale athlete and coaches talk about women with contempt. The culture ofsports is a breeding ground. It begins with the little league coach saying,’you throw like a girl.’ This teaches boys to feel superior. Masculinity isdefined as aggression and dominance. In order to be a man you have to be ontop, to control, to dominate (qtd in L. A.

Times). Dr. Myriam Miedzian author of Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking the LinkBetween Masculinity and Violence, agrees with Nelson. He thinks, “ Athletes aretaught to hurt people. Empathy has been knocked out of them” (qtd in AmericanHealth).

Most coaches do not allow their players to have a real relationshipbecause they are afraid that a female influence will “ soften” a player. Theathletes are taught not to “ see the guy across the line as a human being, howcan they see women as human beings? As long as you rear boys to be tough, dominant, in charge, they simply won’t be prepared for contemporary women(Miedzian).” Most researchers agree that one of the main reasons athletes abuse theirspouses is because they have grown accustomed to the mistreatment of women whichsurrounds sports. “ Sports culture creates a negative attitude towards women, attitudes of superiority that could lead to violence,” says Michael Messner, associate professor of sociology at USC (qtd in L. A.

Times). Vance Johnson, a Denver Bronco wide receiver, admits that he did beat his first two wives. He blames his misconduct on himself and on the sports environment he livedin for teaching him that domestic violence is okay.

He writes, “ EverywhereI looked men abused women…All of the women were really battered andabused emotionally and physically.

It was just the way of life no one everdid anything about it (qtd in Vance pg 83).” Jackson Katz of the Center for the Study of Sports in Society states,” Athletes believe they are entitled to have women serve their needs. It’s partof being a man. It’s the cultural construction of masculinity.” “ Elite athleteslearn entitlement (L. A. Times).

“ It is this entitlement given by coaches and fans, who worship starsports figures, that allows an athlete to abuse his spouse without having tosuffer the consequences. This sends a message to girls that “ If they get hurt, nothing will happen to the perpetrator. Girls have to stand alone.(Popa)” Thisleaves women with a feeling of worthlessness. Athletes live with a different setof rules. Dr.

Tom House, a Major League Baseball coach as well as a psychologist, believes, Athletes aren’t bad people; they just don’t have life skills. Many ofthese players simply have no thermostats on their behavior mechanisms. Whenthey act out, they are seeking to find some balancing their environment, tosee how far they can go. And as long as they can put up good numbers onthe field, no one will create boundaries for them (qtd in American Health).

So what is being done to prevent domestic violence among athletes? Verylittle. The pro league still do not punish perpetrators for their actions. Butthey have created shelters and organized funds for victims of this problem. Menare now encouraged to see specialists to solve their problem.

Newspapers areprinting more articles of cases involving athletes. Now there are dailyreports of spousal abuse next to the box scores (I don’t know weather toconsider this good or bad). “ Many men particularly famous athletes, arebeing held accountable for behavior that was previously brushed aside (Cart).” Lawrence Phillips, a Heisman Trophy candidate last season, was suspendedfrom his football team because he was charged with spousal abuse. This was donea day after Phillips rushed for 206 yards and scored four touchdowns to give histeam the victory. His coach, Rick Osborne, was applauded for taking a stand. Things are definitely moving forward, but not at a quick enough pace.

Rita Smith, coordinator of National Coalition Against Domestic Violence thinks,” Professional sports needs to take a very definitive stand against violence likeit has with drugs(qtd in L. A. Times).” Alisa DelTufo, the founder of Sanctuaries for Families, a shelter forabused women, admits, “ Domestic Violence is a very difficult cycle for a womanto break (qtd in Sports Illustrated).” And the cycle of abuse is even harder tobreak in court for a wife of an athlete. “ The police often work hardercollecting autographs than evidence.

The media and the fans, including those onthe jury, tend to side with the icon over the iconoclast (Callahan).” When Sun Bonds finally decided to file a divorce, the judge, who wasa baseball fan, awarded her a sum of $7, 500 per month, which is half ofwhat she was supposed to receive. The biased judge then asked Bonds’ foran autograph. We live in a world where men express their manliness by demeaning women.

Where men are encouraged to act aggressive and dominant. Where men when asked,’what are they going to do?’ after they lost a game reply, ‘ I’m going home tobeat my wife (all-star, Charles Barkley).’ Unfortunately this is the reality welive in. Sport associations need to set rules and punishments for a player whoabuses his spouse. They can punish an athlete for using drugs, why can’t they dothe same for perpetrators of domestic violence? I think coaches shoulddiscourage the bad-mouthing of women that takes place in the locker room, andencourage them to see counselors. The fact is as soon as an athlete puts on hisuniform for the first time; he is viewed as a role model, whether he likes it ornot.

I agree that the recent attention means we are now taking domestic violencemore seriously, but the victims of abuse want solutions, not publicity. Works CitedCallahan, Gerry. “ Sports Dirty Secret.” Sports Illustrated July 31, 1995: pgs62-74. Cart, Julie. “ Sex ; Violence.

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