

# Social media and sports



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Has social media's impact on the professional sports world been positive or negative? Social media has made a massive impact on our culture. One of the areas that has not been affected is professional sports. In today's world, professional sports teams and players from around the world use social media to connect with their global fan bases. Sports teams attempt to build a larger, stronger fan base by engaging fans through social media sites. Additionally, social media sites allow professional athletes to increase their marketability.

However, they can also severely damage their career, personal life, and their 'brand' if they do not handle their social media interactions with care (Van Schaik). Twitter and Facebook allow teams and players to be interactive and personal with fans. They can use these platforms to not only deliver basic team news updates, but to share information about autograph signings, charity events, or ticket specials too. One of the most important aspects of any sports team is that they have a loyal, growing fan base that feels like they are valued and appreciated. Therefore, these fans will stand by their team through thick and thin.

Social media provides the perfect opportunity for that. Sports teams and athletes are becoming more and more efficient at using social media to create a positive impact on their team and their fan's. One of the positive impacts of social media on professional sports is the ability to share news and information with fans through it. Social media websites are beginning to replace sports radio and cable networks as the dominant places to find the latest breaking sports news. It seems more and more sports fans are turning

to the internet for the latest sports news, updates, and information about their favorite teams or players.

More specifically, fans are utilizing social sites such as Facebook and Twitter. In fact, fans are 10 times more likely to check Facebook or Twitter for their sports news than sports radio. Also, an overwhelming 81% of fans prefer the Internet for their sports information over any other platform (Blakley). Fans just are checking social media before or after the games either. More than 80% of fans interact via social media while watching games (Altobelli). I can attest to these statistics because I am one of this growing majority. There are a few reasons I choose to use the Internet and social media for my sports news instead of sports radio or TV. First off, with social media and the Internet I am able to find information about my favorite player or team instantly. With TV or sports radio, you basically have to take the information as it is given. For example, ESPN chooses to focus on teams from major cities like New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago. Very rarely will I be able to find daily updates on an injured Minnesota Twins player by watching Sportscenter. Instead, I can click on over to the Minnesota Twin's Facebook page or Twitter and find daily injury updates. Another upside to social media in this situation is that it is up to the minute information.

Most sports radio shows or cable networks discuss what happened yesterday in the sports news world. Social media is constantly updating so there is a plethora of new information always streaming. Lastly, I prefer social media over the other forms of sports news because they are readily available to me. Sports radio and ESPN are not always as mobile as I would like. I am not able to take Sportscenter into the car with me. Also, I do not have a reliable

sports radio station to listen to in my area. At times I can get KFAN from the Twin Cities, but not on a consistent basis.

Therefore, any sports radio news updates come about once an hour and are quite brief. Additionally, I spend a lot of time at my girlfriend's cabin during the summer months. At her cabin, they only have a few basic local channels. ESPN is not available. As a result, I turn to social media and my cell phone for sports news. Rarely do I miss a beat because of the efficiency and accuracy of the social media websites. Social media has already made a giant impact on how sports information is shared with fans. It is only going to keep growing as technology spreads and more fans get familiar with smart phones and tablets.

Another way social media has affected the sports world is by bringing fans closer to the game. As a sports fan, I can agree that fans always want to feel closer to the game. That is why people still pay ridiculous ticket prices to attend ball games instead of watching them on TV in the comfort of their living room. Fans have an urge for that connection and closeness. They want to feel apart of the game. Social media sites provide teams and players the unique ability to directly connect with their fans. It used to be the closest you got to a favorite player was a post-game radio interview.

Now, you can follow them on Twitter and have rare insight into their everyday world. Players use sites like Facebook and Twitter to give fan's a behind the scenes look at what happens at home, in the locker room, and on the sidelines. Social media gives pro athletes the chance to interact and share data with fans in a way that was not possible in the past. Fans used to only know about a player from what they read in the paper or saw on TV

(Van Schaik) . Now, fans can find out what their favorite player ate for breakfast or what music they are listening to.

Fans have yearned for this kind of accessibility for years and now it is becoming a reality. I actually have friend's that make it a daily ritual to check their favorite player's Twitter. Actually, being able to follow players and coaches is probably the biggest reason why I created a Twitter in the first place. I love the inside look into their personal lives. It is very cool when you find out how much you do or do not have in common with them. One of the highlights of my Twitter career was when I tweeted Kevin Love after a Timberwolve's game and congratulated him on his performance and the team's win.

A few minutes later, I received what is called a " retweet" from Love basically saying thank you. I was blown away. It meant a lot to me to know that Kevin Love took thirty seconds out of his life to tell me, some nobody fan, thank you. It is almost as if social media has taken the place of autographs. Before, you wanted players' autographs, now you want players to say something back to you on Twitter (Blakley). Social media is a great way for athletes to communicate and engage with fans. It allows players and teams to share information with them before it has been filtered by the news media.

Twitter and Facebook have been instrumental in raising the profile of athletes in every sport. It allows them to give a personal perspective on all aspects of the competition, seemingly unhindered by various PR and marketing machines. While the majority of social media's impact on professional sports has been positive, there is definitely a negative side that

should be discussed. In the early age of social media, some sports leagues had trouble regulating player usage of it. People who grew up long before the Internet age govern most sports.

This creates a problem when they try to tackle the issues surrounding sports and social media (Westhenry). First off, there was the problem with players actually posting on Twitter immediately following and even during their games. League officials found social media to be a distraction to their player's. Accordingly, the NBA and NFL implemented policies that limited when players and staff could use social media. The NBA's policy bans the usage of social media from 45 minutes before tipoff until after the players have fulfilled their other media duties following the game.

The NFL stretched it to 90 minutes before and after games (Westhenry). The other major issue surrounding social media and sports is controlling what athletes post or say. Athletes are and should have the freedom to share their personal opinions and ideas through social media. In fact, it should be encouraged for them to do so. Like I've stated before, fans have a desire to feel connected with players and love that "uncensored" feeling. However, if not handled with care, social media has the potential to seriously damage a player's private life, athletic performance, and possibly their career.

All it takes is a split second of poor judgment and one senseless social media posting for a major incident to occur. Many athletes fail to remember the impact their social media activity can have. Others fall victim to the dangers of being provoked by obnoxious fans. When athletes dispose of their frustrations and anger online without thinking over the consequences, the results are rarely good (Van Schaik). While there are numerous examples of

this happening, I will only share a couple. To begin with, we can look at the case of Pittsburgh Steelers' running back Rashard Mendenhall.

He posted controversial comments on his Twitter following the death of Osama bin Laden that caused him to lose an endorsement contract. Mendenhall had previously stirred up a controversy when he posted his opinion about the 9/11 attacks (Westhenry). More recently, there was the case of San Antonio Spurs forward Stephen Jackson. He was fined \$25, 000 for threatening another NBA player via Twitter (" Jackson Fined for Tweet about Ibaka"). Countless athletes fail to learn from the lessons of others. It is frustrating to me as a fan to see player after player get in trouble for something they said on a social media site.

Many athletes fail to recognize the importance of their social media channels to their sponsors and their teams. Also, some seem to think that because they are using social media that it permits them to forgo traditional media protocol (Van Schaik). An athlete's words reach far beyond just their fans and followers. They impact colleagues, friends and their family. One foolish tweet can instantly turn into a scandal with the capability to damage the athlete, their team, and their sponsors (Van Schaik). A big component here is sponsors. Many sports superstars are actually brands in themselves.

They represent their team, league, city, fans and sponsors. It is important to note that while some of their income comes from their sports contract, a lot of their money comes from being a public figure (Van Schaik). Creating the wrong headlines and wrong type of publicity can cost an athlete not only thousands in fines, but millions of dollars in sponsorship money too. Every single athlete has to be aware of the social media pitfalls and consequences.

While many stars have been forgiven for their online troubles, the problem is that the commonness of such mistakes is growing.

If the trend continues, it will surely damage the positive impact that these communication platforms have had on professional sports (Westhenry). I feel that the best way for the sport's world to handle these issues is through education and guidelines. Social media is still in its infancy. Therefore, leagues and teams must educate their players on social media and how to use it. As social media becomes a larger part of everyday life for millions of people around the world, people will also become more educated about how social media works. This will help alleviate some of these issues (Westhenry).

Lastly, leagues and teams need to develop a social media code of conduct for their athletes. For example, if a player would get suspended for cursing or ranting at a team press conference, they should have the same consequences for a social media outburst. If they would get fined for complaining about officials to a TV camera, do the same if they complain about them on their Twitter (Westhenry). Like I stated before, the more athletes and sports teams use social media, the more educated they will become. With a little common sense, some education, and a few regulations, these negative social media issues will fade away.

Sport's fans love social media. This can be illustrated by the millions of followers athletes have on networking sites. Moreover, athletes themselves seem to truly love social media. It allows them a platform to step away from the normal interview cliches and really have some freedom in what they say. Sites like Twitter and Facebook allow fans to get to know their favorite athletes on a deeper, more personal level. The increasing use of social media



in the professional sports world can have a substantially positive impact on a player and an organization.